



## *After Action Report*

### **Campaign of Salamanca, 1812**

The year 1812 is the turning point of the war. Both sides are well balanced but still with broad options, both in attack and defense. The French forces have been very powerful for the last year, but the Anglo-Allied army is getting stronger, now able to take the offensive.

#### **General Situation.**

Wellington has in hand an army of 55,000 men of very good quality, in the vicinity of Ciudad Rodrigo, which he controls. Hill has about 20,000 men to keep the southern door to Portugal, in Badajoz, which he also controls. And 15,000 Portuguese militia are also available.

The French situation is quite different. Three unequal armies are distributed over a very large area. Marmont and 50,000 men of the Army of the Portugal are around Salamanca; Soult and 50,000 men of the Army of the South occupy all of Andalusia in occupation mode; Joseph is in Madrid with the 12,000 men of the Army of the Centre.

#### **Plans and Roles**

Six excellent players divide up the troops. Beresford is created as a third player, starting without troops with Wellington, which leaves the possibility of creating a provisional corps if Wellington chooses to change the theater of operation. The player embodying Wellington is known for his offensive attitude, and the one playing Joseph to be a strategist much better than the original, with a non-negligible chance of really being obeyed by his marshals.

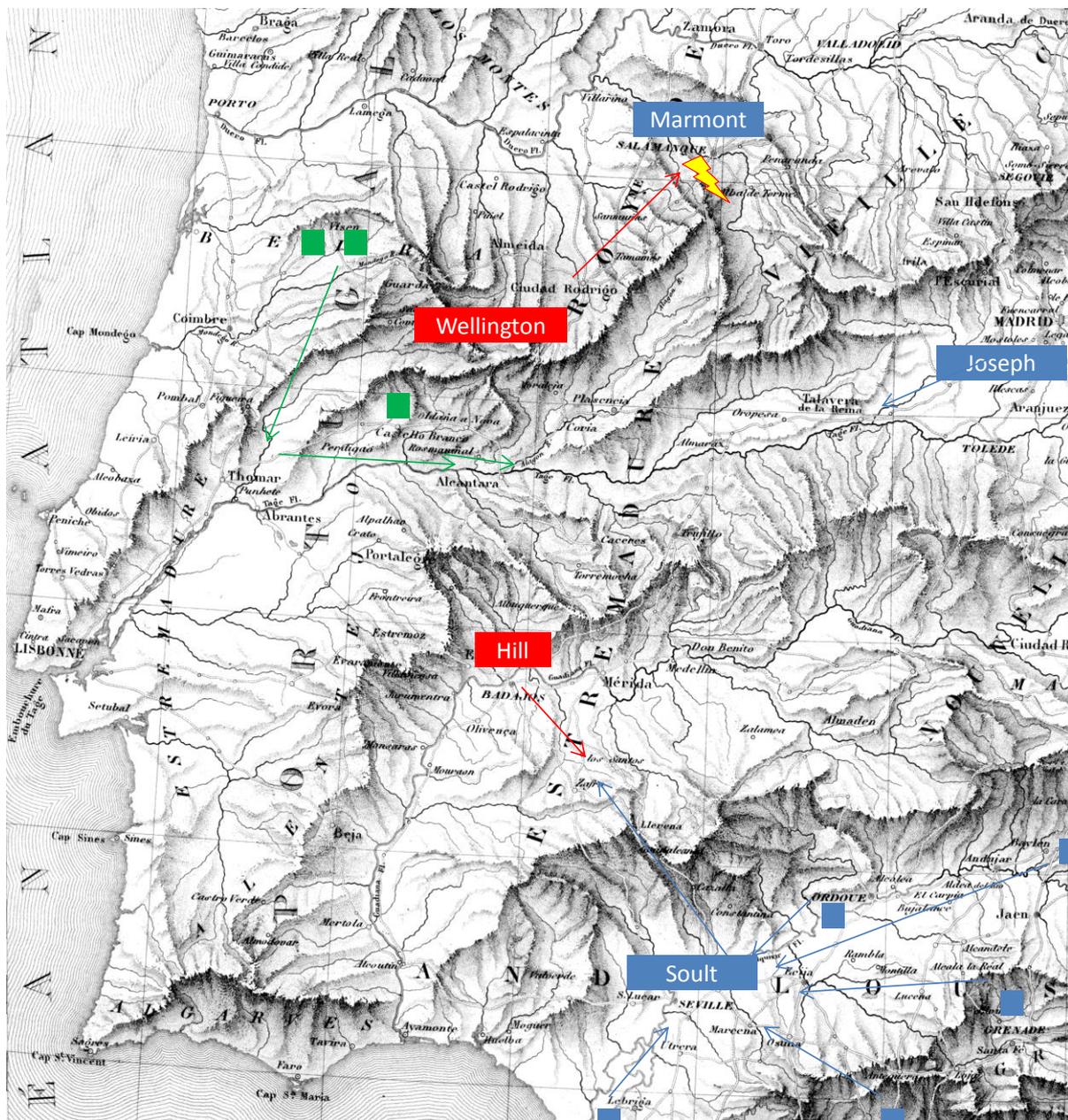
Victory conditions are either numerical: destroy a significant portion of the opposing army; or geographical: keep or occupy Lisbon as the first priority, and keep or take Seville, Valladolid or Madrid if Lisbon does not change hands.

The situation of the Anglo-Allied army promotes the offensive without waiting, being in a good position to neutralize Marmont before the French armies assemble. The Anglo-Allies have no chronic supply problem, and they hope that the Spanish guerrillas will provide information on the French forces. Therefore the plan is to attack Marmont and hold Soult in respect, the latter being widely disseminated and needing therefore some time before being a threat. To beat Marmont would also open the door to Valladolid, especially since Lisbon is reasonably secure (e.g., distance, line of Torres Vedras, presence of militia, accurate information to respond if Soult becomes very aggressive). The Anglo-Allied plan has some sense: the French are still formidable in 1812 and sufficiently separated to try to beat part of their forces before they can concentrate. On the three axes of possible penetration to Portugal, the Anglo-Allies lock two--Ciudad Rodrigo in the north and Badajoz in the south--and watch the central axis of Alcantara.

The French point of view is very different. They know that their armies can be beaten in detail and that the logistics are a nightmare. Their main objective is to bring together the three armies on the Tagus Valley (along the line Madrid, Talavera, Alcantara, Lisbon) without being beaten in detail, but to get there will require luck, as well as time to gather the supply convoys. The orders for Soult are to rally the Army of the South, threaten Badajoz then eventually march to Alcantara; those for Marmont are to probe Ciudad Rodrigo but to avoid challenging the Duke if he is not in a position of strength, then march towards the south if he is not attacked. King Joseph plans several weeks ahead: convoys coming from Madrid, siege train borrowed from the Suchet's Army of Aragon escorted by a strong Italian division, and call for reinforcements from the Army of the North. All the convoys must be heavily escorted, as well as essential messages (part of the French light cavalry will be entirely dedicated to this task). The French plan also has some sense, but to abandon Andalusia already gives the victory to the allies at Seville, condemning the French to take Lisbon, which would give them an automatic victory.

### Beyond the Theater of Operations

Several other factors outside the main theater of operations must also be taken into account. Two threats of an English landing in the north of the country and in the east in order to neutralize the reinforcements from the Army of the North and the Army of Aragon. King Joseph having (as historically) requested reinforcements to these two armies, the umpire must roll a die for each of these threats to find out not only if landings took place, but also the reaction of the two armies of the North and of Aragon, which at the time are extremely reluctant to comply with the King's orders. In this area a degree of improvisation was needed, and the umpire gave 4 chances in 6 as the probability of each of these two landings, and also 4 chances in 6 of a positive response to the King's request in the absence of landing. The umpire rolled 5 and 2 in the first throws, 3 and 3 in the second, which resulted in no landing in the north but Caffarelli is reluctant to send troops, releasing Thiebault's division, then garrisoning Burgos. Maitland actually landed in Alicante (scheduled for 25 June, originally), but Suchet keeps his sang-froid and agrees to send his siege train with an escort to Madrid. The King will receive minimum but significant reinforcements. The game of distances requires that he be informed by messenger a few days before the actual arrival, and not at the point where the dice are rolled.



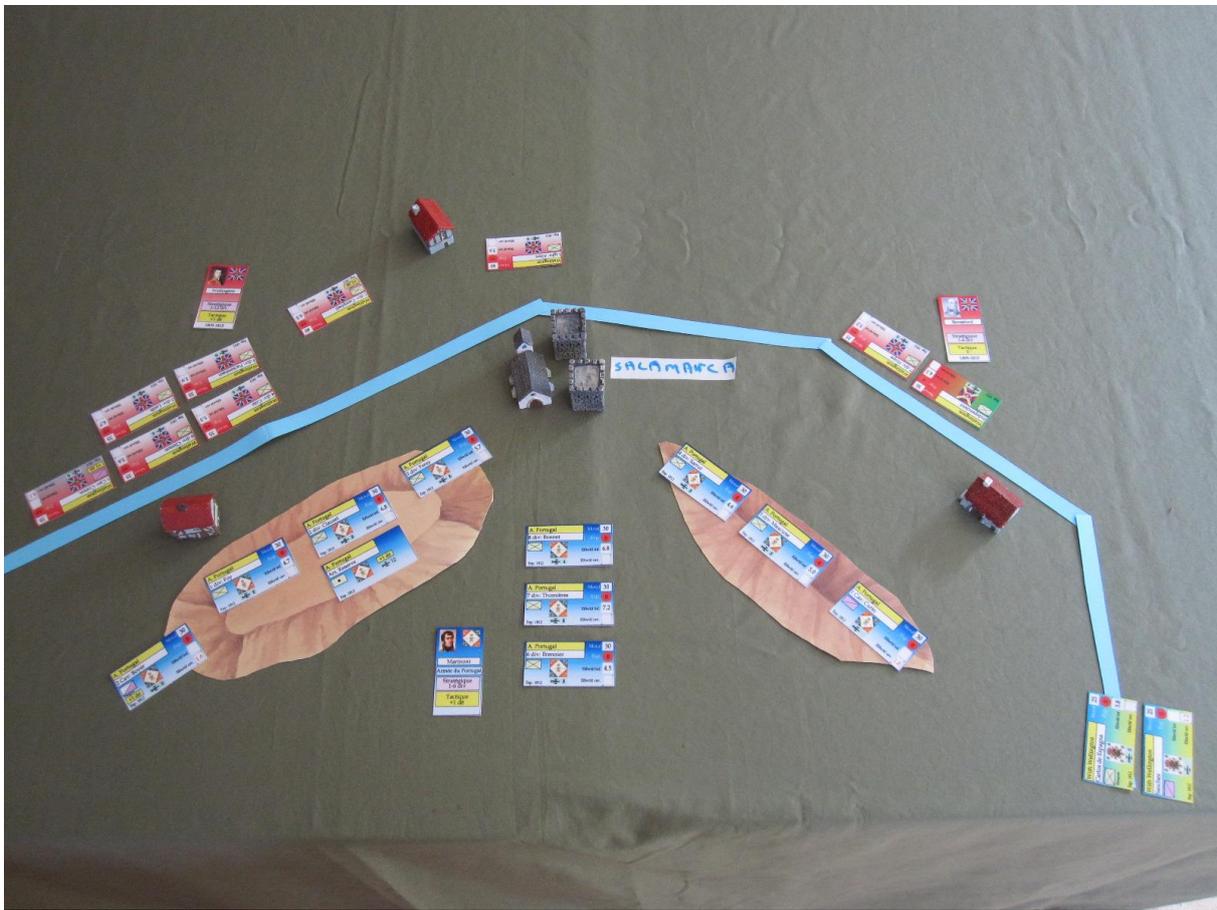
In 1812 the Spanish armies have not recovered yet from their defeats of the previous years, and are composed at that time of five "armies" of 8,000-20,000 men each. Without being real threats, they force the French to maintain important garrisons in occupied provinces. Although historically Wellington asked for the support of all the other armies at the beginning of his campaign, we will see that the vicissitudes of the main English army will

cool down the Spanish allies' impulses to action. These armies will nevertheless be taken into account in the fifth and final phase of this campaign.

### First Phase, June 1-6, Salamanca

Northern Theater: While Wellington assembles his army, he asked the corps of Portuguese militia to assemble at the level of Castello Branco and Alcantara to counter any attempted penetration through the central axis. He also asked a portion of the siege train captured at the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo to march on Almeida. He then marched to meet Marmont coming from Salamanca. Indeed, the later also marches to the southwest and the two armies meet at Tamames.

Combat of Tamames: June 3 around 1500, the two armies eventually gather, and the Anglo-Allies attack, engaging about 45,000 men in two waves. The French have an equivalent strength, of good quality, and no decision is achieved when the night falls in 2100. Each side has lost 3,000 to 4,000 men and no unit has broken morale. During the night Marshal Marmont retreats in the direction of Salamanca, a much stronger position, where he decides to let the Duke attack. June 5 in the evening, his army is prepared behind the river Tormes, on a line of hills and the city of Salamanca itself, which is significantly fortified. The battle of Salamanca starts early in the morning of June 6.



Battle of Salamanca: The 47,000 French face 56,000 Anglo-Allies. The Duke has sent his Spanish contingent to the left to cross the river, which is fordable in several places (we are in June, the water level is low) and decides to cross the River to force a decision. In retrospect this is a terrible mistake, but if Wellington had rid himself of Marmont's army at this point, the entire campaign would have taken a very different turn. Choosing carefully to avoid the heavy artillery that protects the forts of the city, the Anglo-Allies cross the river largely on the right, while threatening also through the left. Marmont used the additional time taken by Wellington to cross the river to reorganize his defense and pack the hills behind the city with a line of guns which would be difficult to approach, while he held off the threat on his right flank. Keeping a large reserve, Marmont saw his outnumbered cavalry yet decimate the English cavalry with the support of his guns. The infantry columns that were behind also rushed onto the guns, but without a frank result. At end of the day the Duke had to order a disengagement because of the scary loss rate and the inconclusive nature of this attack. Salamanca became a French victory, but

Marmont's exhausted army could not actively pursue the English, for whom some uncommitted divisions could cover the withdrawal.

When the next day the Duke reorganized his army, three divisions out of eight had totally disappeared, including the entire Spanish contingent, along with more than half of his cavalry. Not being actively pursued, the Anglo-Allied army could recover its lightly wounded and stragglers, but the bill was high. The French army is not much more proud, even for having won, because two divisions and a brigade of Dragoons have also disappeared, almost one-third of the total engaged.

Central Theater: The Army of the Centre in Madrid made its preparations to march towards Talavera then Almaraz but then the logistical trouble began. An army of this small size can feed on a D-type depot with a de facto consumption rate of 5% per day, which means that if it moves, it does not eat, and if it does not move, it feeds but does not replenish its stocks. The other solution is to 'eat' the depot to bring the 20,000 troops up to 100%, but destroying the depot. Hoping to benefit from the junction with another army which will have food, the King moves forward bravely in the direction of Almaraz.

Meanwhile Portuguese militia focus around Alcantara, a key passage between north and south.

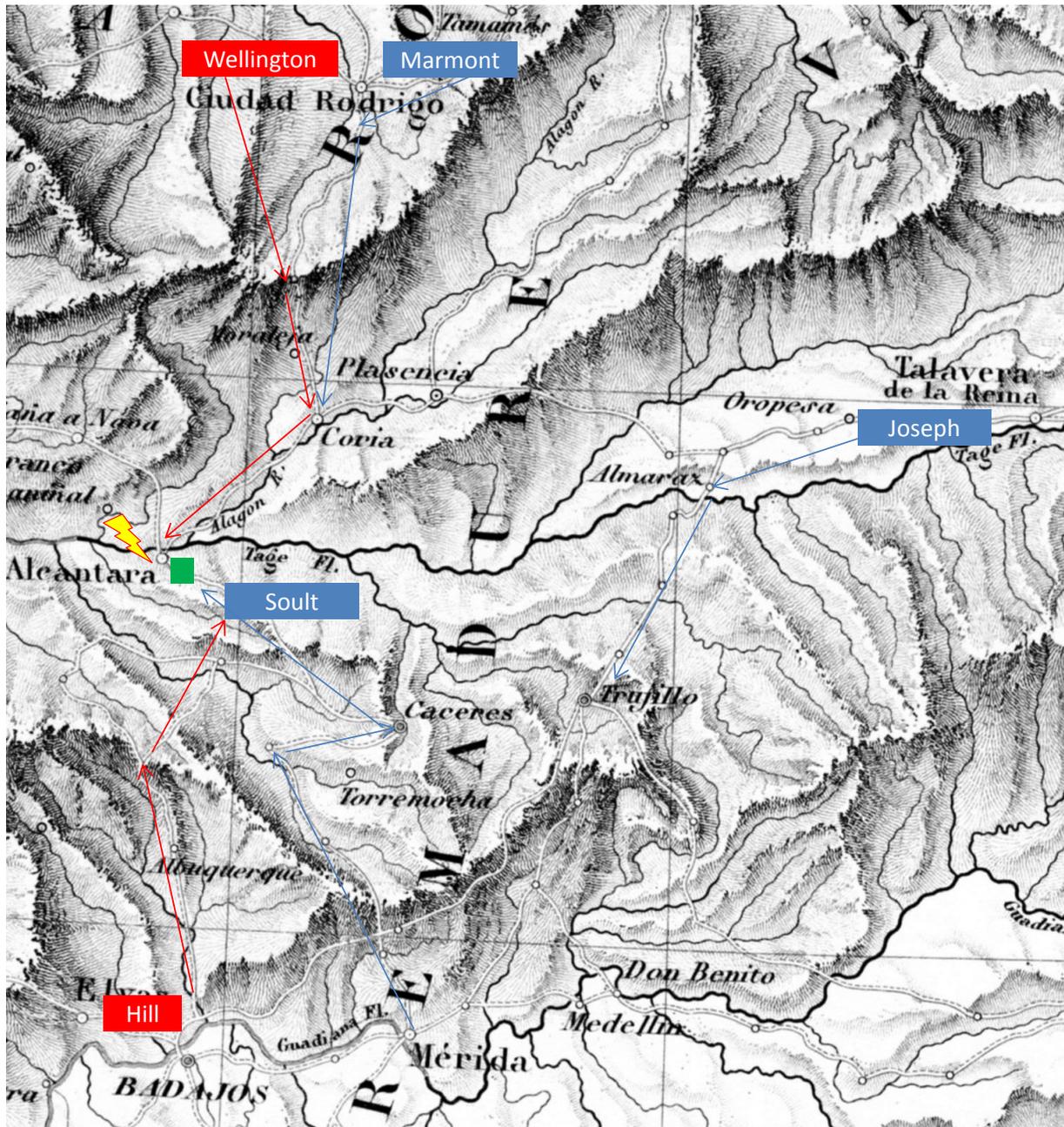
Southern Theater: Marshal Soult was spread over Andalusia, in occupation mode (Seville, Granada and Cordoba) or in battle formation (siege of Cádiz), and he needs almost 10 days to gather and have all of his army on the heights of Extremadura. He sends his orders and asks for his divisions to assemble in Seville, then he advances with two divisions and his cavalry (two divisions of dragoons and a light cavalry division) in the direction of Badajoz to observe the enemy. General Hill starts at Badajoz, and has the same idea, he pushes his 20,000 men in the direction of Seville and deploys in Zafra at the first sight of the French. On June 4, Hill has only 3,500 cavalry to oppose Soult's 7,000, the latter pushing a division of dragoons on each side to impair the Anglo-Allied deployment. The right division takes the direction of Los Santos and targets the back columns of Hill as they continue to arrive, a luminous skirmish which destroys Hill's convoy. Hill manages to restore the situation when all his troops arrive; Soult still has little infantry to force the decision. Soult also waits for three convoys of food (it has emptied Seville, a Type B depot, forming three convoys) which will slow him down but guarantee his supplies.

### **Second Phase, June 7-18, Alcantara**

North Theater: After the battle of Salamanca, the two armies will remain face to face for two days, time to recover fatigue, stragglers and lightly wounded. On the third day, Wellington begins to withdraw to Ciudad Rodrigo, monitored at a reasonable distance by Marmont, who is all excited by this (unexpected) victory. This movement of 80 kilometers will take three days, and on the evening of the third day, the English army deploys behind the city, which he still holds, on a line of hills at the foot of which flows the Águeda. He quickly adopts a set up typical of Wellington, a big division over the heights, flanked by cavalry, the rest of the army being behind out of sight.

Marmont is not stupid, he knows his opponent and won't make the mistake of attacking him, who is still superior in numbers and is now in a good defensive position. He waits.

Wellington then informed the umpire of his intention to move his army to the west, on the road to Almeida, then continue to the south once the first chain of hills are passed. His deployed division is in charge of deceiving the French on the real movements. It is here that the umpire must improvise: what are the chances that such an operation, well prepared beyond sight, will go unnoticed by the French? Marmont doesn't have much cavalry for probing the opponent but is a skilled tactician. The umpire gives Marmont 2 chances out of 6 to be deceived, a die to be rolled every day. On the June 12, When Wellington begins his movement, the umpire rolls a 5, and Marmont does not see the movement. On the June 13, a 6 is rolled; Marmont has no luck and still sees nothing. When finally on the June 14 he makes a good roll, Wellington is already far away. The Duke joins the main road to Mojaleja and continues his move to Alcantara, which he reaches in the night of June 17 to 18. Marmont has a more direct route; he reaches Coria on the evening of June 17, 50 km away. On the June 18, the two theaters join ...



#### Center and South Theaters:

The small army of King Joseph has quietly followed the road to Almaraz, then to Trujillo with the intention of joining Marshal Sout, whom he believes is coming in this direction.

Not at all! The boiling marshal, having finally gathered on June 10, pushes Hill's corps, half his size, in the direction of Badajoz. Hill retreats slowly, not willing to fight, up to the citadel and then he deploys behind. Sout assembles in front of Badajoz, tries to enter the city by a "coup de main" from his loyal Spaniards, which fails, and then decides to bypass the city to the east, and therefore marches on Merida. He then reads again the message King Joseph had sent him at the beginning of campaign, a long, detailed message, full of subtleties, ending with a future march of the three armies on Alcantara. *Future*. But the boiling marshal, rereading the message only remembers "bla, bla, bla, Alcantara, bla, bla, bla." Ah okay, so let's go to Alcantara right away, while the King awaits him 100 km to the east. Sout leaves two divisions commanded by d'Erlon at Mérida and marches on June 13 with everything else to the northwest, at the same time Wellington has also made Alcantara his point of concentration. The two avant-gardes, Sout and Wellington, arrive before the city on the evening of June 17, but the city is already held by the Portuguese, and the French cannot enter at night.

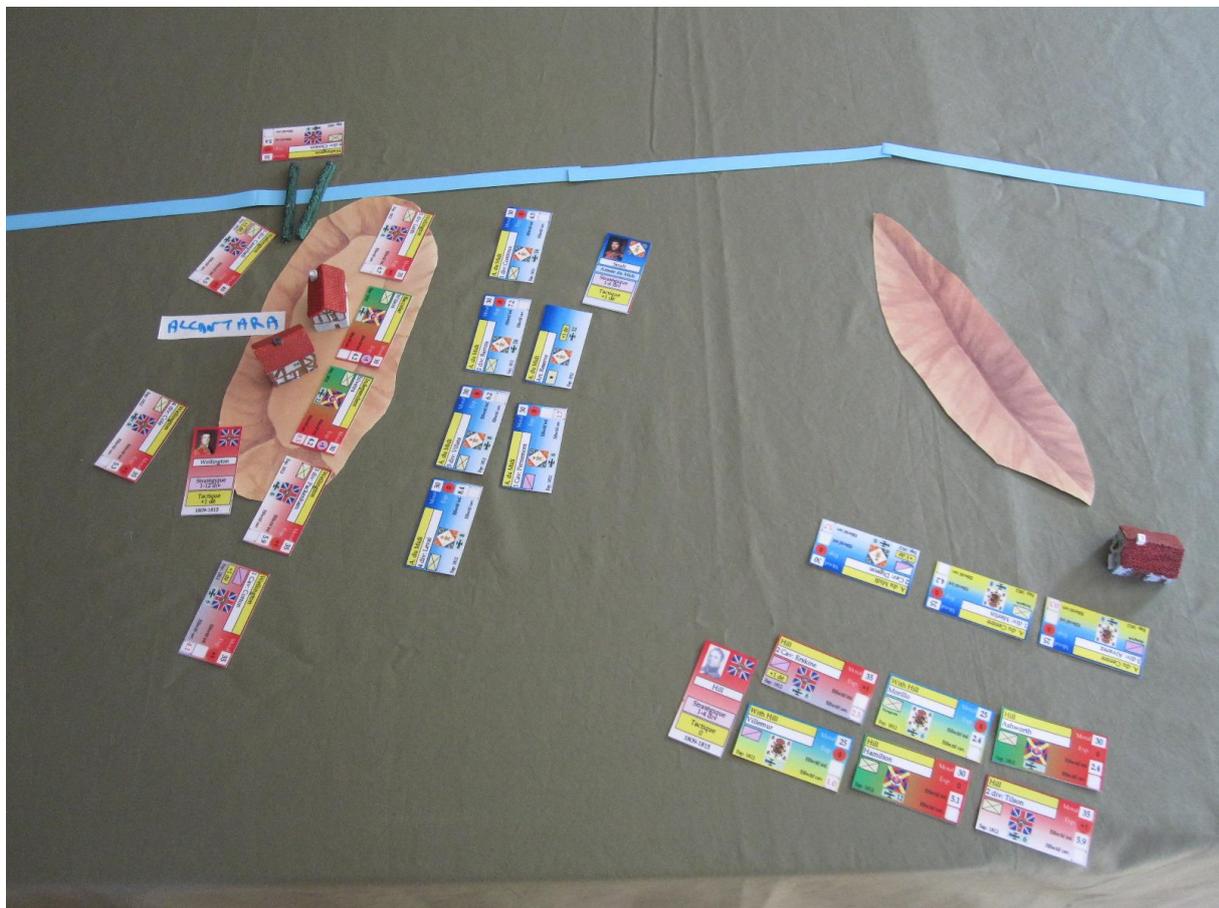
General Hill, 50 km from Mérida, receives on June 14 some information from Spanish guerrillas, who have noticed the French movement, and decides to march on a parallel road, slightly shorter, leading also to Alcantara.

On the morning of June 18, the city is held by Portuguese militias, while three British divisions have deployed during the night on each side while another is still on the bridge from the north bank of the Tagus River. Hill will also join the fight from the south, almost on Soult's back, who deploys his Spanish division and a division of dragoons in that direction. During the day, 43,000 French will face on two fronts 60,000 Anglo-Allies.

Once again the English attack, but this time things go differently. At midday Soult must declare a withdrawal, his flank being turned by Hill, and marches slowly to the east along the south bank of the Tagus River.

D'Erlon, who remained in Mérida with two divisions and light cavalry, learned about Hill's movement on June 15 and decided to march, on his own initiative, to join his boss in Alcantara. This unexpected move will save Soult from a complete rout, as he arrives at the end of the day in the plain of Alcantara. Soult must yet sacrifice one of his supply trains, which stops the pursuit as the winners loot it.

In the evening, the three English corps are assembled. Wellington asks Hill to pursue, observing Soult at a reasonable distance. Soult's Army of Andalusia is still a considerable force, approximately 45,000 men after the arrival of d'Erlon with fresh troops. This net victory partly negates the morale effect of Salamanca and allows the concentration of the allies.



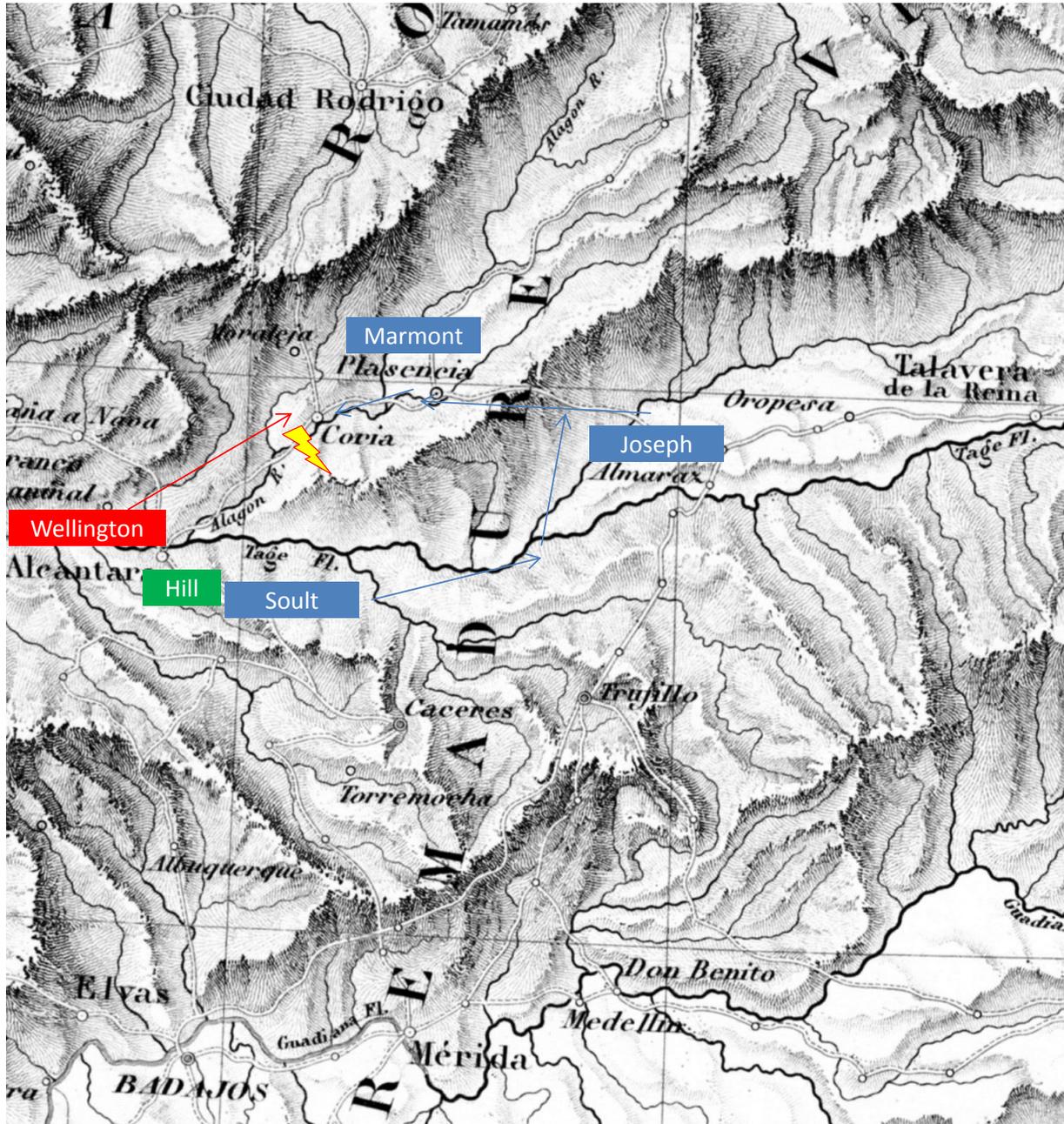
### **Third Phase, June 19-July 1, Coria**

For this phase, there is only one theater left, on the central axis from Lisbon to Madrid. Everything will turn around this axis—a long phase rich in movements, preparations and recoveries.

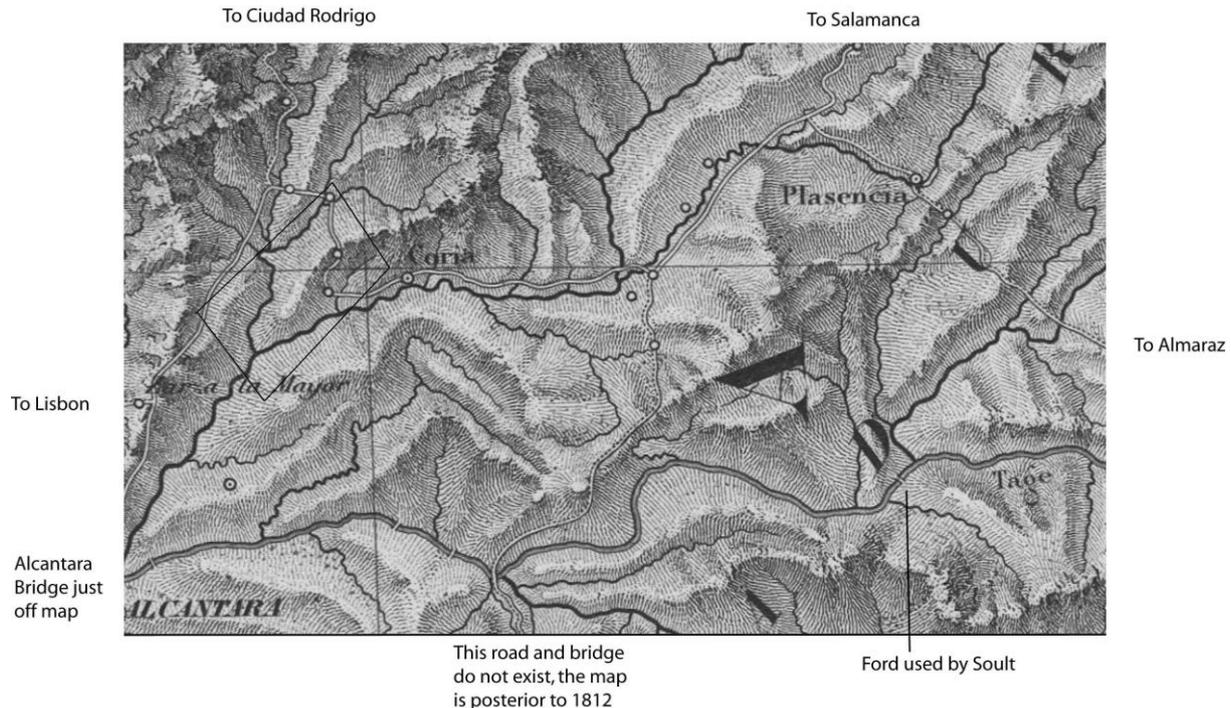
Wellington creates a provisional corps for Hill, including a good Portuguese division and some cavalry, with the mission of observing Soult. During this time, Wellington returns north of the Tagus River, blows the Alcantara bridge, deploys the Portuguese militia north of the bridge, and marches on Coria toward Marmont. Wellington knows he is a day behind him.

Meanwhile Marmont marched on Coria and awaits orders from the King before continuing alone his pursuit of Wellington. When Wellington approaches Coria, Marmont does not want to fight, and he retreats slowly in the direction of Plasencia. The King countermarches from Trujillo to Almaraz, waits for the siege train that he borrowed from Suchet, the division of Thiebault that he took from the Army of the North, asks for a new food convoy from Madrid escorted by the Italians of Suchet (which he will return to his owner), and completes his concentration at Plasencia.

Soult performs a long, slow march along the Tagus River while looking for a ford to join the north bank and the other two armies, always followed by Hill. Soult even makes a short 24-hour offensive back to Alcantara, just to make sure that the bridge has really been blown, and there he has a skirmish with Hill, who quickly withdraws to the south.



There are several fords on the Tagus River, whose slopes will soften eastward. Soult outmarches the Portuguese militia, who observe him from the other bank as he crosses with his dragoons, then all the rest of his army. He finally joins the King and Marmont on the road from Almaraz to Plasencia on June 23.



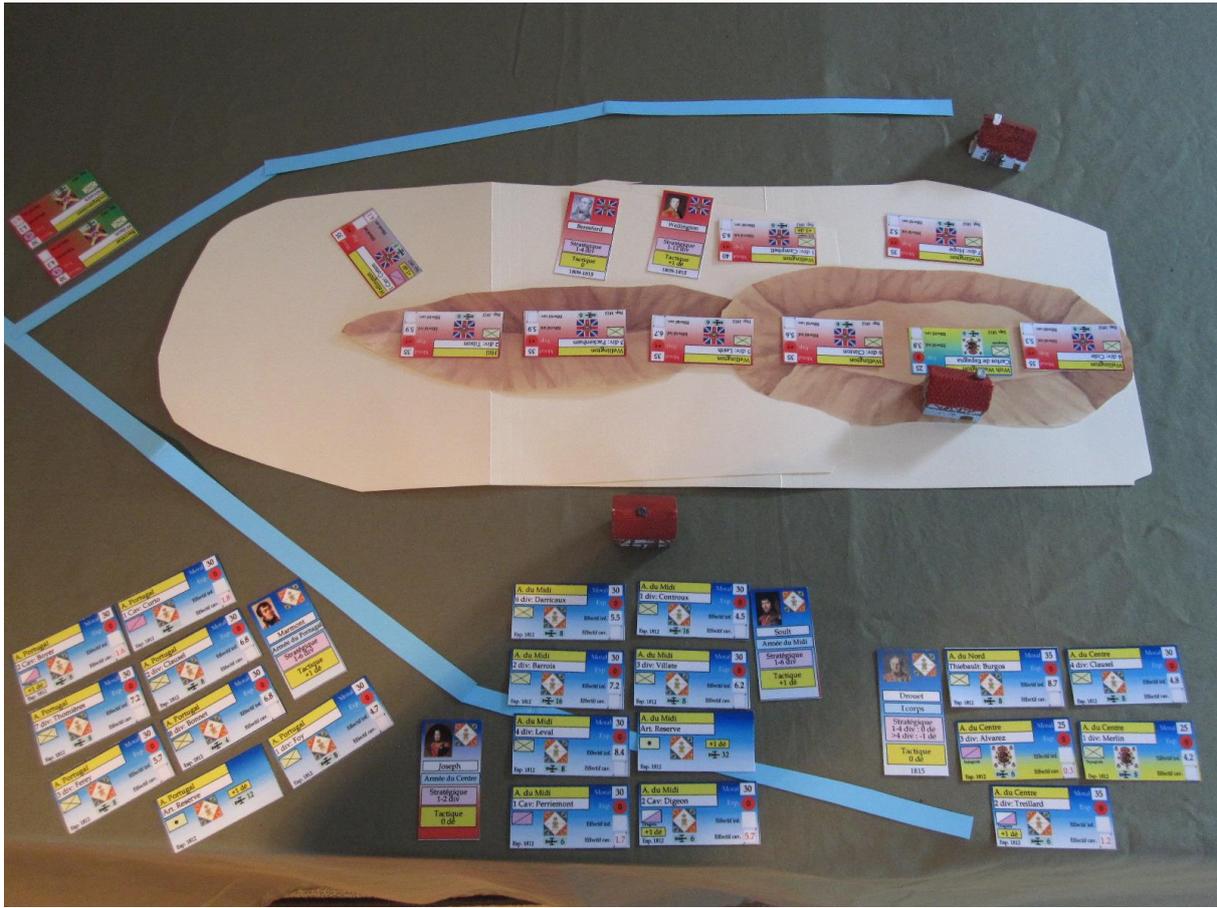
During the last days of June, Wellington knows what awaits him, he knows about the concentration of the French armies, he seeks a good defensive position, and finds it a few kilometers to the west of Coria, where the single road crosses a range of very steep hills topped by a long ridge. He brings reinforcements from Ciudad Rodrigo—his wounded, in friendly territory, have recovered faster than the French, in enemy territory--and part of the siege train from Almeida to create fortified strongholds on the ridge. And then he waits.

The French complete their concentration on June 29, occupy Coria on the 30th, and are ready to attack the English position on July 1. The King is worried about his supplies and actively works on it: Marmont had a new convoy coming from Salamanca escorted by the Thiebault division, Madrid provides a new convoy, and Soult saved two. The French armies now have six convoys; they can create three Type C depots, each of which can feed 30,000 men. In fact, the concentrated armies still muster, despite the two previous battles, 94,000 men and nearly 200 guns. Wellington can gather 65,000 men and 72 guns, but he is on an excellent defensive position.

**Battle of Coria:** King Joseph, to whom so far almost everyone listened, proposes to assault the English by the center while Marmont turns his right flank. His own army, now commanded by d'Erlon will form the reserve. The terrain Marmont is going to have to go through is horrible (spend some time on Google Map: the pictures of the ridge and the rivers Alagón and Arago are edifying); he will have to crawl under the fire of the English batteries.

The battle will last eight hours. Marmont will use five hours under enemy fire to reach the extreme right of the ridge and contact the enemy. During this time d'Erlon deploys on the right so that Soult can concentrate in the center. The three armies reach the top of the ridge at almost the same time, after already five hours of combat, five hours under fire. The numbers eventually prevail, and after eight hours Wellington sees his line pierced in three places, ready to be overwhelmed on his right. The French cavalry, massed in the rear and inactive so far, as the terrain does not suit its use, moves forward, which triggers the decision from the Duke to withdraw, a retreat which will be covered by the Portuguese militia that Wellington has recalled from the destroyed bridge of Alcántara at the beginning of the action. The losses are terrible for both sides, 18,000 French to 15,000 English. If he wanted to save his army the Duke had no alternative.

The French still have 13,000 fresh cavalry to fight the remaining 3,500 English. Based on the difficult terrain, the umpire decides that the pursuit will be half as effective as usual, but the odds will force the English to sacrifice half of their remaining cavalry to cover the retreat.



#### Fourth Phase, the Road to Lisbon

Coria is halfway between Lisbon and Madrid, still in Spain, and so Lisbon is still very far away. The sacrifice of the English cavalry and the slowness of the big French convoys will give air to the Anglo-Allied army that can take the direction of Lisbon. The French launch their cavalry in pursuit, but it is slowed by the terrain. Infantry needs to rest, then the three armies can begin their movement on Lisbon.

Wellington reaches the lines of Torres Vedras first, can rest and recover his morale. The lines were composed at that time of 126 redoubts with 427 guns, requiring 30,000 men to man. At this time only 12,000 men are available. Wellington arrives with 35,000 English infantrymen in five divisions, 10,000 Portuguese militiamen and 4,000 Portuguese regulars. The French eventually accumulate 85,000 men with 200 guns, a siege train, a strong cavalry that hides all movements before the lines, and good morale. Historically, two years earlier, Masséna had 55,000 men without siege train against 66,000 Anglo-Allies in the lines in addition to the garrison. Nothing comparable exists now, so the French are in the best condition to make the decision.

It is difficult to play the lines of Torres Vedras as a normal citadel, but if that were the case, the umpire gives one point for the fortifications, the French get one for the odds and one for a higher morale (the English were beaten a few days earlier), everything else being equal (supplies, guns, tactical value) and therefore the assault is allowed. It is also difficult to play this battle at normal scale, or with a game system for miniatures. However, you can change the expert system in the following way: a table of two meters on one meter simulates the 40 km of the lines of Torres Vedras, with a scale of one-half compared to the normal system. Turns are four hours, and losses are therefore doubled. Movement capabilities are normal (double surface and time scale).

The allied player makes his set up, including three 4,000-man divisions of Portuguese (two militia and one regular). He also allocates the regular units he wants in the first line. Practically the lines are crossable only in four places from west to east, where the roads are: Torres Vedras (the village), Sobral, Arruda and Alhandra. Then the French player makes his set up and the battle starts. The preponderance of French cavalry allows no information about this placement or the entry of reinforcements.



Indeed, with a purely academic purpose, four different battles have been tested by varying the setup and attitude of the Anglo-Allies. However, the French plan has always been the same: diversionary attack by d'Erlon on the east to attract the reserves, then two major attacks by Marmont and Soult at Torres Vedras and Sobral, respectively. For each major assault, the defense rolls three dice, +1 if a British unit is in the front line, possibly +1 for English guard. The attack rolls three dice, -1 for the fortifications, -1 for the terrain, but +2 for the odds usually, +1 for the tactical value, +1 for the artillery reserve. The cavalry is not counted when attacking fortifications. Using his very elaborate system of couriers Wellington has an instant knowledge (at this level) of what is happening and can react by sending reserves, which will move at normal speed.

*First Plan: Defense in depth.* A British division is allocated to Torres Vedras, one to Sobral, one at Alhandra, and Wellington remains in a central position in Pero Negro with the remaining two. The two blows of Soult and Marmont each have five French infantry divisions, three of them committed at the outset. In both cases, the Portuguese militia make a good fight for four hours, but must disengage to not break morale, leaving only the British division. The latter is reinforced in both sectors and can survive eight hours. In the evening, these two sectors break, while the French have been rotating their units during the day. The next morning, only two British divisions hold the second line, which will fall during the day as the odds become overwhelming.

*Second Plan: Stiff defense in first line.* Four British divisions are allocated to four crossing points, and the Guard also defends Sobral, a very likely point of attack. This time the two major points hold throughout the day in the first line, thanks to the excellent English morale. Yet the next morning, as nobody can receive reinforcements (everything was engaged), the entire first line breaks after four hours.

*Third Plan: Elastic defense in first line, reserve in a central position.* Only the militia is allocated in the first line; five British divisions are in a central position between the two lines. Wellington's counterattack on d'Erlon makes him break at midday. Meanwhile Soult and Marmont take the advantage on the Portuguese militias. In the evening, their two cavalry units rush between the lines and lock Wellington and his main army on the east coast of the peninsula. Attacked at two against one the next day in difficult terrain but without fortifications, he will be beaten during the day.

*Fourth Plan: Report on the second line of Torres Vedras.* The militia is in first line, the British divisions in the second line of fortifications. The militia breaks at midday, and the three French armies gather in the evening on the second line, held by the five British divisions. The next day, the small British army will fight all day against the three French armies, and eventually succumb in the evening.

The four plans lead to the same result. The deciding factors are the balance of power; the quality of the troops (average equal, the better for the British but less good for the militias); overwhelming cavalry hiding attacks and able to exploit the breakthrough; the linear nature of the defenses, which like all fortifications can only delay a determined enemy; the presence of reserves of concentrated artillery on the French side (Allied guns are spread over the entire line while Wellington lost half of his guns at Coria); an equal tactical value for the commanders (two French leaders at +1 cancelled by the low strategic value of Joseph against Wellington alone not able to use both his strategic and tactical values.

In all cases, the French can enter Lisbon, winning this short campaign. This does not prevent Wellington from re-embarking whatever he can from his fortified camp of Saint Julien, held by 2,000 excellent English sailors at the end of the peninsula beyond Lisbon, to rebuild in England and be back. But this is another story ...

#### **Fifth Phase, the “What if” in the “What if”: Revenge of Ocaña**

The behavior of the Spanish armies, which are not played by an independent player, had to be managed by the umpire. Wellington sent a message to the junta when he was certain that the three French armies were assembled against him, to enable them to resume the offensive. However, the energy of the Spanish generals evolved at the discretion of the victories and defeats. Everyone stopped after the defeat of Salamanca, resumed moving after the victory of Alcantara, but lost hope after Coria.

However, Hill sent into the South with his Portuguese division rallied Andalusia once freed from the French, took the garrison of Cádiz, was joined by the Spanish armies of Ballesteros and Murcia, and had all these people to converge on Madrid including the British and Sicilian reinforcements intended initially to the east coast.

The umpire alone had to handle this part not covered by the players, giving to the Spanish army an important inertia, far from being mobilized, wait for Campbell to be available at Alicante, and prepared a hypothetical battle in early August between Suchet covering Madrid with about 30,000 men of the Army of Aragon and the three Spanish armies and southern English army, 60,000 men of very uneven quality. This battle was fought with the system for miniatures of Age of Eagles, mostly to allow a player to use all of his numerous Spanish figures, saw a net victory of the allies in Ocaña, entering Madrid a few days later. But it was a short-lived victory, since King Joseph was at the time on his way back to Madrid with the army of Soult, his, and what he could retain from Marshall Suchet, while Marmont occupies Lisbon, making no doubt about his ability to return to Madrid. But again, this is another story ...

#### **Analysis and Conclusion**

The short campaign has the advantage of focusing on events that will make a side get the advantage. In this case, the Anglo-Allies must attack before the junction of the French armies; he knows the French are slowed by logistical problems and communications. Conversely, the French chose to assemble, but this is a terrible gamble to abandon Andalusia. If Lisbon is the price, it is a good calculation, but he is forced to take Lisbon, which is not an easy task.

In this campaign, both sides have made the right strategic choice, but Wellington has been embarking on an offensive battle in Salamanca. In contrast, Soult drove headlong into the trap of Alcantara. In both cases, the battle was not decisive, but Coria was. In retrospect, the conclusion of this campaign was logical, it is good to realize that in other circumstances, and with a good understanding on the part of the French marshals (disagreement and disobedience are very difficult to reproduce) the campaign of Spain in 1812 could finish otherwise.

But it's only a short campaign, for a few weeks in the middle of seven years of war, and affairs are far from over at this stage. However, the big brother would have been happy to learn that the French were in Lisbon at the time when he is far into the Russian steppes.