

# VIMEIRO 1808.

Ian Barstow, U.K.



General Junot 1771-1813

This article is a follow on to my feature on Rolica in FE14, and for those unfamiliar with the events prior to Vimeiro I would recommend a quick glance at that issue.

On August the 18th, 1808 following his defeat at Rolica General Delaborde rallied his division on General Junot's main force at Torres Vedras giving Junot an up to date and accurate account of Wellesley's army, although it should be borne in mind that Delaborde greatly exaggerated the losses he had inflicted on the British. Amongst Junot's force was Loison's division, which had of course been expected by both sides to attend Rolica. In fact whilst Rolica was under way Loison was only 15 miles away and within the sound of the guns, but like another Frenchman 7 years later chose to ignore them.

Junot was thus left with the lingering impression that Wellesley's men had taken a good hiding and that morale was subsequently low. He duly reorganised his troops into two infantry and one cavalry divisions under Loison, Delaborde and Margaron respectively. He furthermore retained a reserve of four converged grenadier battalions.

In the British camp, meanwhile, Wellesley was uncertain of where the French had gone but was expecting to contact Junot fairly shortly and he remained on the field of Rolica overnight awaiting reinforcements which were due by sea. These arrived the following morning and were ordered to disembark at Porto Novo where the Maceiro river met the coast and from where Wellesley could protect them by moving to Vimeiro, east of the landing.

Margaron's troopers reported this movement to Junot who mistakenly believed that the British were merely resupplying and despite already being slightly outnumbered he ordered his army to advance on the evening of August the 20th. By this time both Anstruther and Acland had landed their brigades and Sir Arthur had already made his mind up to attack Junot who he had finally located at Torres Vedras! Unfortunately at this point General Sir Harry Burrard arrived aboard a Royal Navy frigate and during an on board interview with Wellesley, his junior, he ordered the appalled Sir Arthur to halt in his tracks and await further reinforcements who bore with them another prize oaf, General Dalrymple who was to supersede Wellesley.

Inadvertently Burrard had done Wellesley a huge favour by allowing Junot to come onto him instead of vice versa and he compounded it by deciding to stay in comfort one more night on the frigate and leave the army to Wellesley.

Due to the comparative uselessness of the British scouting cavalry Wellesley had no idea Junot was advancing until the early hours of the 22nd August and he immediately ordered the Redcoats to stand to and expect a dawn attack. Conversely Junot, who had intended such an attack found his troops so disordered by the terrain that he ordered a halt prior to reaching Vimeiro so that they could form up and have a bite to eat.

Because he had been expecting to attack and not defend Wellesley's dispositions around Vimeiro were not ideal for defence. Two brigades were exposed on the Vimeiro Hill with the precious transport park to their rear. Apart from two further brigades on the Eastern Ridge the remainder were scattered over the Western Ridge. Junot himself intended an aggressive assault based on wrong information that the British northern flank extended for several miles. He thus intended to split the British in two and seize their landing area, forcing a capitulation. This necessitated a flank march across Wellesley's front but Junot was contemptuous of the British troops capacity to react to him.

Consequently the British general watched the French columns crossing his open flank to stop east of Vimeiro Hill except for Brennier's brigade which carried on to the north. Not for the last time a French commander seriously underestimated Wellesley's ability, for practically at once Sir Arthur gathered his opponent's plan and began to reposition his troops accordingly. Fane and Anstruther were to remain at Vimeiro with Hill on the Western Ridge. Trant and Crawford were dispatched north to cover Brennier's movements whilst the remaining brigades were deployed along the Eastern Ridge. For his part Junot saw part of the British manoeuvre and sent Solignac's brigade to reinforce Brennier. He then ordered Charlot and Thomieres to attack Vimeiro supported by only 7 guns, keeping the cavalry, grenadiers and remaining artillery as a reserve.

This attack went forward under much harassment from Fane's riflemen, pausing to reorder at the base of the slope and being met by a rather nasty volley at just under 100 yards. Whilst the columns halted, again the British rather unsportingly advanced to point blank range and gave them another taste of it. The French promptly routed back until rallied by Junot's reserve, losing all 7 guns in the process. Not satisfied, Junot determined to launch a second attack with Kellerman's and St Clair's grenadiers, reinforced with the two already battered line brigades. Regrettably, for Junot's chances of joining the Marshalate, this attack diverged and went in uncoordinated. St Clair's brigade contacted first attacking through the carnage of the first assault supported by Margaron's cavalry who kept the riflemen at a more respectable distance. However, once within musket range the grenadiers were unable to stay with the Redcoats whose fire drove them into the shelter of pine trees which littered the bottom of the slope. Kellerman meanwhile was advancing along a sunken road which would bring him into Vimeiro and onto the transport park. Realising this Anstruther moved the 2/43rd Foot



## BATAILLE de VIMEIRO

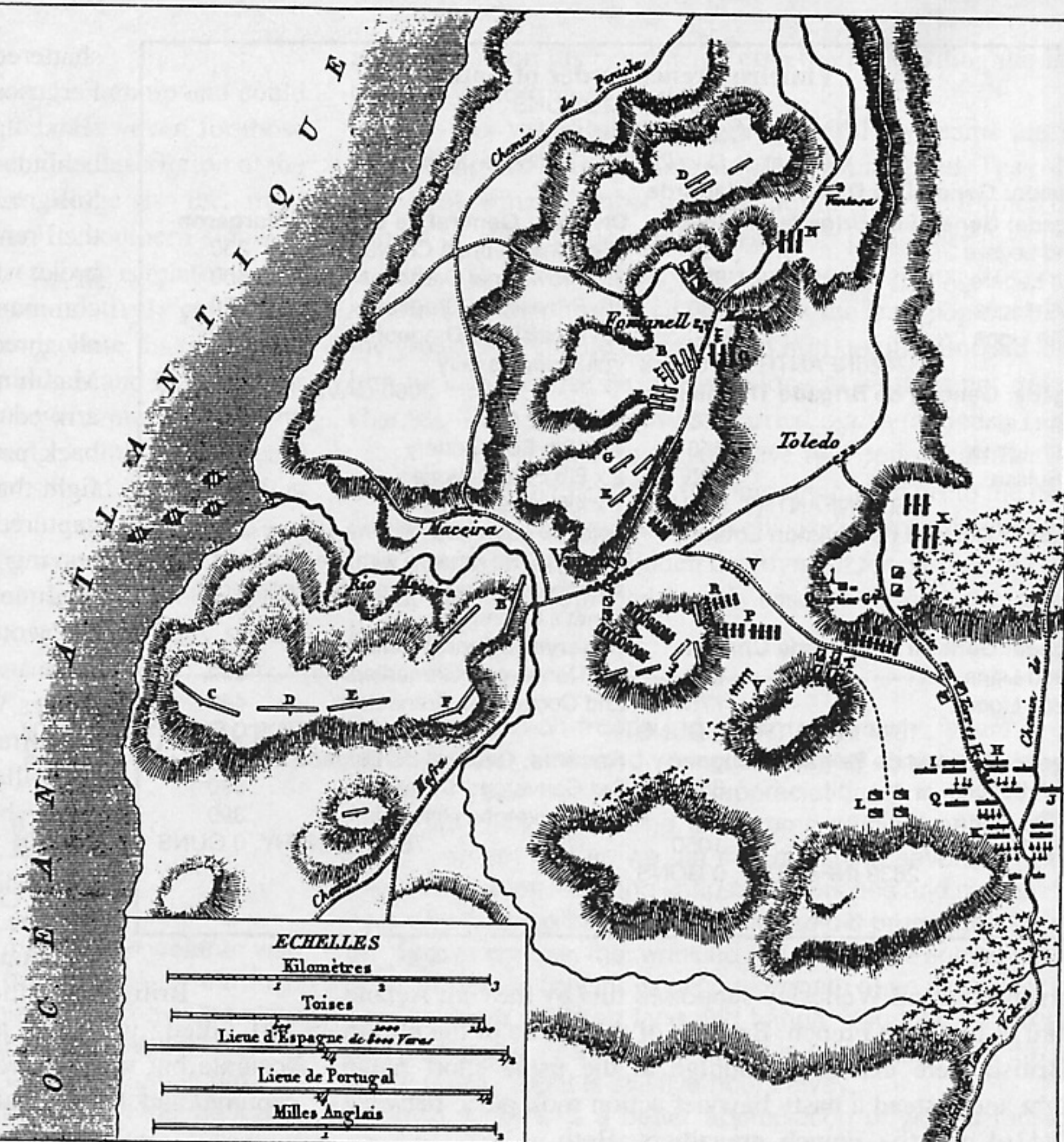
livrée le 21 Août 1808 entre l'armée Anglaise  
forte de 20,000 hommes environ et l'armée  
Française forte de 32000 hommes.

### ARMÉE ANGLAISE

- A Position de Vimere, Brig<sup>de</sup> Fines et Anstruther
- B Ferguson Major général.
- C Hill idem
- D Crauford id.
- E Acland Brigadier général.
- F Nightingale id.
- G Bowed id.

### ARMÉE FRANÇAISE

- H Position de l'armée Française le 21 août.
- I 1<sup>re</sup> Div<sup>on</sup> Général de Div<sup>on</sup>
- J 2<sup>e</sup> Div<sup>on</sup> Général de Div<sup>on</sup> Loison.
- K Réserve, Général de Div<sup>on</sup> Kellermann.
- L Div<sup>on</sup> de Cavalerie, Général Mageron.
- M Artillerie, le Général de Brigade Tixier.
- N 1<sup>re</sup> Brigade de la 1<sup>re</sup> Div<sup>on</sup> G<sup>ral</sup> Brenier.
- O 2<sup>e</sup> Brigade de la 2<sup>e</sup> Div<sup>on</sup> G<sup>ral</sup> Solignac.
- P 2<sup>e</sup> Brigade de la 1<sup>re</sup> Div<sup>on</sup> G<sup>ral</sup> Thomières.
- Q 2<sup>e</sup> Brigade de la 2<sup>e</sup> Div<sup>on</sup> G<sup>ral</sup> Charlaud.
- R 2<sup>e</sup> Rég<sup>on</sup> de Grenadiers de Ré<sup>on</sup> Colonel V<sup>on</sup> Clair.
- S 1<sup>re</sup> Rég<sup>on</sup> de Grenadiers de Ré<sup>on</sup> Colonel Maréchal.
- T Cavalerie du Général Mageron
- U 8<sup>e</sup> de Dragons, Colonel Contant
- V Artillerie commandée par les Colonels Foy et Prost.
- X Position des Brigades Brenier et Solignac dans leur mouvement de retraite.



Exclusively manufactured  
in England by

**Wargames**  
South

Large SSAE or 2 IRC for full details to  
24, Cricketers Close,  
Ockley,  
Surrey.  
RH5 5BA.  
Tel: 0306 627796

\*\*\* Mail Order Only \*\*\*

We also stock 15mm/25mm medieval flags, Skytrex 200 vehicles and Langton ships

# AB Figures for Wargamers & Collectors

## The ultimate 15mm Napoleonic

**NEW - French Staff Set (6 Figures),  
French Cavalry Generals (2 Figures),  
French A.D.C.s (6 Figures)**

also available

**10mm Franco-Prussian War**

**NEW - French & Prussian Artillery & Mitrailleuse**

**NEW - 10mm Vehicles**

T34/85



### Vimeiro French Order of Battle

12694 MEN, 26 GUNS

Commander in Chief:

General de Division Jean Andoche Junot

#### Division: General de Division Delaborde

##### Brigade: General de Brigade Brennier

3/2nd Legere 856  
3/4th Legere 826  
1/70th Ligne 780  
2/70th Ligne 780

3242 INFANTRY, 0 GUNS

##### Brigade: General de Brigade Thomieres

1/86th Ligne 650  
2/86th Ligne 650  
4th Suisse 200

1500 INFANTRY, 0 GUNS

#### Division: General de Division Loison

##### Brigade: General de Brigade Charlot

3/32nd Ligne 619  
3/82nd Ligne 775

1394 INFANTRY, 0 GUNS

##### Brigade: General de Brigade Solignac

3/12th Legere 838  
3/15th Legere 950  
3/58th Ligne 1050

2838 INFANTRY, 0 GUNS

#### Division: General de Division Margaron

26th Chasseurs a Cheval 230  
3rd Provisional Dragoons 560  
4th Provisional Dragoons 550  
5th Provisional Dragoons 620  
Volunteer Cavalry 100

2060 CAVALRY, 0 GUNS

#### Artillery:

1 x 12lb Foot Battery (6 guns)  
2 x 8lb Foot Batteries (8 guns)  
1 x 4lb Horse Battery (4 guns)

Total 26 guns. NOTE: The 12pdrs should stay with the reserve with the rest split amongst the brigades either evenly or at Junot's discretion.

#### Reserve: General Kellerman

1st Converged Grenadiers 440  
2nd Converged Grenadiers 440

880 INFANTRY, 0 GUNS

#### Reserve: General de Brigade St. Clair

3rd Converged Grenadiers 390  
4th Converged Grenadiers 390

780 INFANTRY, 0 GUNS

shattered when three British brigades, those of Ferguson, Bowe and Nightingall decided to stand up from where they had been lying - behind the crest and directly in front of Solignac. The first volley practically annihilated the French skirmish screen and the second one broke the whole brigade, wounding its commander in the process. In the ensuing rout all three of Solignac's guns were captured. Marching to the sound of the fighting Brennier arrived to the surprise of the British who rallied back preparing for another fight. In the short fight that followed Brennier was wounded and captured and his brigade quickly retreated, leaving their artillery to the British once again. As Junot began to retreat Wellesley learnt from the wounded Brennier how spent the French were and he decided to advance at once to take Torres Vedras. Unfortunately this was not to be as Burrard stepped in and ordered an immediate halt, allegedly because of poor supply but more likely because he was a complete idiot. The French thus escaped unpursued, much to Wellesley's disgust. If he thought that was bad then he did not know what was to follow with the Convention of Cintra...

to prevent this and Wellesley supported this by moving Acland forward to flank the French. Because of the nature of the terrain the British were unable to indulge in the usual short range firefight and instead a nasty bayonet action took place between the 2/43rd and the French grenadiers. Both sides lost in excess of 100 men before the grenadiers had taken enough and retired gracefully. Seeing this Wellesley launched his meagre cavalry in pursuit, the 20th Light Dragoons doing much damage to the grenadiers before going out of control and getting mauled in turn by Margaron's dragoons. The Portuguese cavalry who were to have supported this decided that retreating grenadiers looked like too much of a handful and they retired instead.

At this moment Burrard arrived but somewhat surprisingly allowed Wellesley to retain battlefield command. Perhaps he was confused by seeing so many troops actually fighting.

What befell the two brigades sent at intervals north, you may be asking. Brennier, in the lead followed the road rather than crossing the stream near Toledo where ordered as he considered the terrain unsuitable for artillery. Not so Solignac, who crossed further on where the going was easier and thus inadvertently went into action before Brennier. Advancing on the farm of Ventosa all Solignac could see was a thin skirmish screen and accordingly his three screened battalions advanced towards them with some confidence. This charming illusion was

British casualties in the battle were between 706 and 720 killed, wounded and missing. French figures are less accurate but were between 1500 and 2000 killed, wounded or captured and 15 guns taken.

### Vimeiro British Order of Battle

20846 MEN, 18 GUNS

Commander in Chief:

General Sir Arthur Wellesley

#### Brigade (1st): Major General Hill

1/5th Foot 1067  
1/9th Foot 865  
1/38th Foot 1072  
Half Battery 6lb Foot Artillery 4

3004 INFANTRY, 4 GUNS

#### Brigade (2nd): Major General Ferguson

1/36th Foot 665  
1/40th Foot 1042  
1/71st Foot 1015

2722 INFANTRY, 0 GUNS

#### Brigade (3rd): Brigadier General Nightingall

29th Foot 716  
1/82nd Foot 1020

1736 INFANTRY, 0 GUNS

#### Brigade (4th): Brigadier General Bowes

1/6th Foot 943  
1/32nd Foot 1060

2003 INFANTRY, 0 GUNS

#### Brigade (5th): Brigadier General Crawford

1/45th Foot 743  
1/91st Foot 1031

1774 INFANTRY, 0 GUNS

#### Brigade (6th): Brigadier General Fane

1/50th Foot 1063  
2/95th Foot 408  
5/60th Foot 987  
9lb Foot Battery 6

2458 INFANTRY, 6 GUNS

#### Brigade (7th): Brigadier General Anstruther

2/9th Foot 724  
2/43rd Foot 811  
2/52nd Foot 735  
97th Foot 782  
6lb Foot Battery 6

3052 INFANTRY, 6 GUNS

#### Brigade (8th): Brigadier General Acland

2nd Foot 822  
20th Foot 451  
1/95th Foot 225  
Half Battery 6lb Foot Artillery 2

1498 INFANTRY, 2 GUNS

#### Brigade: Colonel Trant

6th Cazadores 562  
12th Portuguese Line 504  
21st Portuguese Line 504  
24th Portuguese Line 504

2074 INFANTRY, 0 GUNS

#### Cavalry:

20th Light Dragoons 267  
Portuguese Dragoons 258

525 CAVALRY, 0 GUNS



## WARGAMING VIMEIRO.

Unlike Rolica, this battle is more broken up and could in theory be fought in two separate sections. However, for those who like me prefer their battles whole here is a description of the salient terrain features. The Western Ridge is the most complicated terrain piece, being steep on its southern side and practically impassable to the West, whilst the top is relatively flat and open. The Eastern Ridge in contrast is relatively gentle and should prove less difficult for troops to negotiate. Its top is also flat. Vimeiro Hill is lower than the two ridges and has a proper crest line. At the foot of its eastern slope is a pine wood. The River Maceira can be crossed only at bridges, unlike the stream which is fully fordable. All the villages should be regarded as small with stone buildings.

Wellesley's objective should be to prevent the French reaching the landing beach in his rear and preferably not to allow his army to be split. Junot's objective is to split Wellesley's army

and drive in on his beachhead, effectively denuding the British of supply and forcing a surrender.

As with Rolica, the British artillery teams are in an awful state and should move at infantry line speed. They should take treble time to limber up once unlimbered. No formed troops should be allowed through the transport park other than in road column. At 1200 Sir Harry Burrard should appear, (the umpire should keep this from Wellesley) pick the least popular bloke in the group (this should be kept from him) to play Burrard and tell him he can do what he wants as long as he does not order any charges. Then have his orders carried out to the letter.

As for the French you have two options. Either a fully historical deployment with Brennier marching off to the north or allow the French player to see Wellesley's dispositions and make up a plan for himself. Hidden deployment for parts of the British might well be employed in this case to confuse the dastardly French!

## OH, FOR THE LIFE OF A SOLDIER

Richard Moore, U.K.

We had been in the country for one month. The weather was still very warm, as it had been over 100 degrees. In the high plains to the east, I had slept out some nights, gazing at the stars in the clear sky, seeing the long streak of the Milky Way, listening to the small night sounds around me. I lay on my greatcoat, my Baker rifle alongside, and gathered the memory of the night and the passed day into my mind as you would drink from a flask of cool water in the desert.

That day, I had advanced up a very steep slope from a valley base, up a road so dusty that after a short march it had so clogged our mouths and noses that we could hardly speak. The soldiers had been behind me in a open column, as we expected no resistance. The cliffs began to close in on our flanks, making us into a tighter formation. Suddenly, we saw enemy cavalry and had to move fast. We advanced at the pas de charge into the narrow gorge, and a few rifle bullets killed or wounded some of our men. After that, it became unclear - a volley of shots from a height riddled us with bullets - evidently the enemy had riflemen in a good numbers, at that range a musket would miss nine times out of ten; and then it happened - a strange smoking, hissing nightmare of flame and noise - dropping from the sky onto our heads and exploding, sending our soldiers into paroxysms of terror and fear at the unknown means the enemy were using to kill us, to blind and burn us, to slap us flat in a sticky red smear on the mountainside. In a moment, we were taking to our heels and running screaming back the way we had come.

A reminiscence from a war memoir. A remnant of a novel? Fact or fiction?

Actually, everything and all at once. The scene as described happened, but over two days not one, and in parts very far apart in time - and sometimes more than once! It is, of course, a scene from a film, "Sharpe's Enemy" made in the southern Crimea in August, 1993. The French soldiers were really Ukrainian Army conscripts, and the riflemen the same, and the "smoking nightmare" our reconstructed Congreve rockets. I trained the soldiers to become for the purposes of our project, 'Napoleonic' soldiers of four nationalities, British, French, Spanish and Portuguese. One of the understandings we came to was that I'd never ask them to do anything I wasn't prepared to do myself. Hence, the attack on the stronghold of Adrados, held by the

British, by French troops led by an officer who bears a strong resemblance to me, and who meets a very sticky end....

What you'll not get a full appreciation of in the film is the hours spent by us training to become efficient period soldiers. You'll also not feel as we did that marching several times up a very steep slope, carrying knapsack, pouches and musket in that heat dries you up in short order like an old prune. You don't see the sweaty armpits, the wrinkled red noses, the lightheadedness of sunstroke, or feel the tingling aftermath of an exploding rocket head on your exposed face and hands. You long for water, but there isn't any. The truck crying it is broken down in the valley somewhere. Night is still five hours away. ...

What I got was a better appreciation of what it must have been like to serve during the Napoleonic era. Re-enactment in England is admirable but in my long period of service with the Napoleonic Association and visits to other societies, you don't often see members suffer, and when you do, never for longer than a few minutes. In two terms of service with the Sharpe Film Company, I've learned a lot about what it is like to suffer. ...

If service with them was unique. I could, after our first trip out to the Ukraine, fully appreciate what Sir John Moore and Sir Arthur Wellesley must have gone through when dealing with the political scene in Spain or Portugal in 1808/9. Local government in the Southern Crimea must have been very similar to the Juntas of that time, if the help and assistance we got was any example and evidence. Transport was a nightmare. Food was a challenge - obtaining it and cooking it. Our cooks deserved General Service Medals - or V.C.s! The terrain was very hard and unforgiving, the weather at times horrendous. It all blended together into a marvellous adventure where I had only to close my eyes and obscure the modern buildings and vehicles to be back in the year 1809, marching with 'Wellington' through Spain. The lines of tents, the horses, the guns, long columns of marching soldiers, high mountains, sweeping valleys, - endless plains - I saw romance in every sight, every minute, every day.

I am a long-term member of the Napoleonic Association's 95th. Rifles, and a researcher on the Peninsular War and Waterloo Campaign for as long as I can remember. Add to that my love of muzzle loading made me an ideal candidate to act as Military & Technical Adviser to the film company. In a few short weeks, after training the principal actors to use flintlock rifles and act as British rifleman in a training area near London, I was asked to accompany the film crew to the Crimea to continue to advise and assist with the making of the films. After a gruelling five months, we returned footsore, weary, sick and chastened but successful. In 1993, we were to go back to make three more films in the series. This time it would not be a bridgehead, but a