

A year and a half after the 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1808 uprising, and in spite of heavy defeats, the Spanish armies were still holding out against Napoleon's troops with the support of their British and Portuguese allies. The *Ejército de la Izquierda* (Army of the Left), commanded by the Duke Del Parque and stationed in Ciudad Rodrigo, was one of these armies. Its main threat was the 6th French Army Corps which, with General Marchand at its head, controlled the city of Salamanca.

Marchand and the Duke Del Parque were fated to meet on the battlefield. This happened for the first time on 18<sup>th</sup> October,1809, at Tamames, a day which ended in victory for the Spanish.

After a month of manoeuvres and counter-manoeuvres by both armies through the territories of León and Castile, the *Ejército de la Izquierda* ended up retreating from Medina del Campo to Alba de Tormes where, on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1809, the French took their revenge for the humiliating defeat at Tamames.

On this day the Duke Del Parque made the mistake of allowing his exhausted and hungry army to be divided on either side of the Alba de Tormes bridge. General Kellermann, who commanded the rear of the French army, boldly seized the opportunity and unleashed his cavalry on the Spanish infantry, who were cut off from the rest of the army on the right bank of the Tormes and therefore without the support of cavalry and artillery. Hussars, dragoons and chasseurs à cheval tore into the Spanish infantry. In spite of the inevitable Spanish defeat, the *División de Vanguardia* and three battalions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division managed to form a square on high ground, repel several charges from the French horsemen and save themselves by crossing the bridge. This is remembered as one of the most heroic deeds by a Spanish army during the Peninsular War and for which General Mendizábal was awarded the title of Count of Cuadro de Alba de Tormes.



1.- Troops of the Royal Artillery Corps and the Navarra Infantry regiment in front of the Anunciación de Nuestra Señora Monastery.

2.- A soldier of the elite company of the French 3rd Hussars at full charge.

3.- Battle of Alba de Tormes (28th November 1809)- The division of the Spanish Army on either side of the bridge was the main cause of the defeat suffered during the engagement.

4.- After the battle many Spanish prisoners were executed because they were not considered by the French to be legitimate soldiers but rebel minions against the government of the King Joseph Bonaparte.









The bridge at Alba de Tormes witnessed two humiliating retreats during the Peninsular War. The first was by a French army on 23rd July 1812 - the day after its defeat at the Battle of Salamanca - as it headed in the direction of Peñaranda de Bracamonte, seeking aid from another army, led by King Joseph Bonaparte, which arrived too late.

During the second retreat, that which had been the cat in July turned into a mouse on 14th November 1812, when British troops blew up an arch of the bridge and the allied army ended up retreating to Portugal.

However, neither the bridge nor the castle was left undefended, because Lieutenant Colonel José de Miranda y Cabezón was ordered to defend both against the three French armies converging on Alba in pursuit of the allies.

Miranda and his three hundred men of the Monterrey and Voluntarios de Ribero regiments held out for ten days, rejecting all offers of surrender. The French had no choice but to cross the river Tormes at the Éjeme and Galisancho fords, with all the difficulties that this entailed after several days of heavy rain. On the night of 24th June, Spanish troops left the castle and managed to evade the French by marching for a month until they reached their homeland in Galicia.









1.- The route followed by the Spanish troops after the evacuation of the Alba de Tormes castle to avoid capture by the French.

- 2.- Lieutenant Colonel José de Miranda y Cabezón.
- 3.- Grenadier of the Monterrey Regiment.
- 4.- Retreat of the French Army following the defeat at the Battle of Salamanca.





