

Soult launched an attack on Palavea on the 15th of January. This proved unsuccessful, and the French positions fell into British hands during the counter-attack.

On the 16th of January, Soult launched his main attack in the centre of the battle field, the village of Elviña. Moore was in Coruña when he heard the sounds of cannonfire. Mounting his horse, he galloped towards the front. Soult focused his attack on the centre, but also attempted to penetrate the area of Palavea once again. Simultaneously, he approached from the other flank, sending a strong force of troops, including cavalry, through the Monelos, in an attempt to threaten the British position.

The centre of the field was occupied by the 50th Regiment (West Kent) under the command of Majors Napier and Stanhope. When the British Light Infantry were forced to evacuate the village due to pressure by the French forces, Napier and Stanhope led the 50th Foot in a bayonet charge that allowed them retake the village, and advance towards the heights of Peñasqueado. Here, they were faced with the French artillery. However, from this



The French Troops in the Elviña Battle. Hipólite Lecomte's painting.

point on, and for the remainder of the battle, the village of Elviña remained in British hands.

Meanwhile, movements along the Monelos Stream were detected and a British counterattack destroyed the French forces, providing them with no other option than to retreat, pursued by the British.



The British army's rearguard during the retreat of Corunna. Painting by J.B. Beadle.

The British reserve, under Beresford, awaited orders to begin the encirclement of the French forces and surround them, trapping Soult's forces in a confined area.

Moore fought all over the battlefield, wherever the gunfire was at its most intense he would appear, like a flash of lightning, on horseback and, after assessing the situation and dispatching orders to his officers, would once again disappear in a cloud of smoke. Seeing that the 50th Foot and the 42nd Highlands needed support in Elviña, he sent the 1st Foot Guards to their aid. At that moment, a shard of cannon ball struck his left shoulder, knocking him from his horse. His staff officers didn't initially realise he had been hurt, as he hadn't cried out nor given any indication of being injured. However, on seeing the condition of his shoulder, they became aware of the gravity of his injuries. Some of the soldiers from the 42nd Regiment and the Foot Guards wrapped him in a blanket and carried him to Coruña. Command of the British forces fell to General Baird, but he was also wounded and was having had one of his arms amputated, so responsibility was passed into the hands of General Hope. Hope decided to consolidate the battle, and not proceed with the offensive approach, as Moore would have done had he not been wounded.

All of Soult's attacks were defeated, with the French losing ground and suffering many more casualties, and the village of Elviña remaining in hands of the British. At nightfall, the troops ceased fire and the lines consolidated. Hope took advantage of this time to evacuate the forces as Moore had planned, leaving bonfires along the battle lines so that Soult would believe the English were still in position, waiting to resume the battle. Moore died during the night and was buried in a bulwark of the walls of Coruña, those closest to the battlefield.

The British forces managed to board the waiting transports before the French became aware that they had left the battlefield. The following morning, the French realised that they had been duped by the English escape, but the Moore's army were already on their journey toward Coruña.



General Sir John Moore's death. Period engraving.



Corunna and Elviña's surroundings. The battle scene sketched by R. K. Portes, on the morning where the "Zapateira" powder barrels exploded.

Moore achieved his strategic and military objective, Napoleon was forced to change his plans to invade Portugal and dominate Argentina, so as to contain the threat of the British in the North of Spain. In addition, the orders given to Soult in Astorga, to destroy the English forces before they reached the sea were unsuccessful; the English defeating the French in all encounters during the retreat to Coruña and the Battle of Elviña, teaching the French a valuable lesson, a lesson which would be repeated in the future when this force returned to the Peninsula under the orders of General Wellesley (future Duke of Wellington). Napoleon's propaganda could not accept news of defeat, or acknowledge that his Imperial power be thwarted. As it was, therefore, necessary to cover up the truth of the debacle at Baylen, Napoleon invented a tale of victory for the French. However, history revealed that the real victory belonged to Moore, who managed to keep his force intact, save them from destruction and, in so doing, ensure that these men were able to return to Spain the following year to, once more, take up the battle.

Some time after Waterloo, Wellington confessed to his secretary, Fitzroy-Somerset, that without Moore's contribution, Napoleon's defeat would never have been possible.



General Moore's Mausoleum, in San Carlos Garden.

The re-enactment of the battle

Oleg Sokolov (Soul) Translation from Russian language by M. A. Martin Mas

The 2004 historical recreation of the battle of La Corunna was the third time it has been performed in the city. On each of these occasions, I have had the honour of commanding the French forces, where it has been my responsibility to play the role of Marshal Soul.

I well remember the small, almost symbolic number that represented our force in 1999 and the scale to which the event had grown in 2002 until finally, in 2004, we managed to bring together almost one thousand re-enactors. This has brought it into the same league as historical reconstructions like the ones I have become accustomed to on the battlefield of Borodino.

In general, our force was made up of some excellent contingent's. Especially commendable for their uniformity was that of the Guards who joined us from France, and the 18th and 46th Regiments de Ligne from Russia. The contingent's that joined us from Italy, although a little lacking in the quality of their uniforms more than compensated with their fine military drill and musketry skills. Of course, as always, there were those who chose to model the more unorthodox uniforms.

My only complaint was that, for a number of reasons, there was a scarcity of cavalry. At Borodino, for example, there would normally be between 100 to 150 horses for the 200 to 250 riders wishing to be mounted. Unfortunately, here in Portugal there were very few cavalry troopers, with a mere twenty mounted riders on our side and not many more on the opposing side.

To command a force made up of soldiers from all over the world is not a simple task. Some spoke French, others Russian and yet others, Spanish. Therefore, I selected three aides, one French, one Spanish and the third a Pole who was fluent in Russian. With their immeasurable assistance, I was able to successfully complete my task and direct the mass of my multinational force.

I fell in love with the 'battlefield' because of its ample size and beauty. A wonderful layout was planned, and followed, that almost perfectly imitated the scale of the Elviña village and giving the spectators an unprecedented view. That said, I feel I should comment on one aspect that I found somewhat surprising and one on which we will, perhaps, beg to differ. I felt that the 'village' was located too close to the public, with the English forces



Marshal Soul unsuccessfully inviting the Royal Artillery of Emigrés to return to the service of France.



(Above left and above right) The most popular exponent of Napoleon's heavy cavalry is no doubt the Cuirassiers. These pictures show us a private of the 3rd of Cuirassiers. This regiment didn't fight in Spain but was utilized in Austerlitz, Jena, Heilsberg, Friedland, Eckmuhl, Essling, Wagram, Moskowa, Dresden, Leipzig, Champaubert, Fleures and Waterloo.

(Center left) Close view of the belt plate with the grenade insignia common to all the French heavy cavalry.



(Below left) A wonderful close view of of the portmanteau. This usually had the regimental number in white, however, the 6th and the 11th Cuirassiers regiments showed the grenade insignia in the same colour instead of the regimental number. On the blanket and covering the leather saddle there was a white sheepskin, embroidered with cloth triangles in the same regimental colour, called "wolf's teeth".



(Above right and above left) The cuirasse in the photograph is an original item, owned by the North American re-enactor José Torres. It is the pattern used between 1809 and 1815. This pattern was more elongated, heavier and more rounded at the bottom edge of the breast plate than the previous patterns.

(Below right) The cuirassier helmet was slightly different depending on each regiment, due to the different manufacturers and suppliers. Therefore its height, inclination of the crest, and ornaments varied from one unit to another.

