

The Napoleon Series

Marengo: Kellermann's Charge and the Forgotten Brigade

By [T. E. Crowdy](#)

When night fell on the battlefield of Marengo, the commander-in-chief of the French Army of the Reserve, Alex Berthier told the 29-year old General of Brigade Francois Étienne Kellermann he should go to headquarters. No doubt, he said, the First Consul would wish to congratulate Kellermann on his excellent conduct in the battle, in particular his charge in support of Desaix's counterattack. Kellermann agreed. In Kellermann's mind, his charge had won the battle. Not just that. Throughout the morning and during the retreat in particular, his small brigade of heavy cavalry, and some 'regiments' of dragoons (in truth just a few hundred men), had manfully withstood the Austrian onslaught. Son of a famous general (the so-called Victor of Valmy), Kellermann supposed he would be lauded for his conduct. He believed he would receive a battlefield promotion to full general of division. His conduct in the battle merited it.

Of course, we know the sequel. That same night, Napoleon Bonaparte's thoughts were preoccupied by the death of Desaix. We should fully believe the accounts of the First Consul's valet and secretary, both of whom talk of the remorse felt by the First Consul at not being able to share the moment of victory with Desaix, the general who orchestrated the evening counterattack. When Kellermann came before Bonaparte, it is said the latter received him somewhat coldly: "You made a pretty good charge," he said. In the next breath Bonaparte turned to Bessières, who led the magnificent guard cavalry that had launched a ferocious charge at the end of the battle, crushing the last Austrian resistance and scattering the Hapsburg army, which became a mob of terrorised fugitives, trying to retreat across a river. To Bessières the First Consul said: "Bessières, the guard is covered in glory!"

Kellermann interpreted this, and the subsequent lack of promotion, as a snub. After the battle he wrote to Lasalle: 'Can you believe it, my friend, that Bonaparte did not make me a general of division, I who placed the crown on his head!' The letter was intercepted by Monsieur Delaforest, Director of Post, who made the contents known to the First Consul.

As for the charge itself, the details are well enough known. Desaix arrived on the battlefield with his division sometime after 4 pm. There was a period of about an hour while the army reorganised. During this time he deployed his first brigade to the south of the main Alessandria-Tortona road, in front of the village of San Giuliano. This brigade (composed of the 9th Light Infantry) was taken forward by General Jean Boudet, with the instruction to buy the second brigade some time to deploy and to do something which might inspire the French troops who were in retreat. Boudet went forward, somewhere beyond the village of Cascinagrossa until it encountered the head of an Austrian column which was following the French rearguard. Commanded by the Austrian Generalmajor St Julien, this column was composed of the infantry regiment IR 11 Wallis, two brigades of grenadiers (Lattermann and Weidenfeld) and the 9th Lichtenstein Light Dragoons Regiment. With this column was the Austrian Chief of Staff, Anton Zach and the General Adjutant, Josef Radetzky. The column had been instructed by the Austrian commander-in-chief, Michael Melas, to pursue the French as far as San Giuliano and from there to harass the French as they attempted to retreat across the Scrivia torrent on the eastern edge of the battlefield. When Boudet encountered the head of this column, he deployed his skirmishers. They attacked the head of the column, opening a devastating fire on IR 11 Wallis and causing it to break off and rally behind Lattermann's grenadier brigade.

Meanwhile Desaix had been in conference with the First Consul. Various options were considered, but Bonaparte wanted one last throw of the dice - one more attack. With his second brigade deploying north of the road, Desaix concentrated all the remaining French artillery to its front and instructed the bombardment of the Austrian column. Desaix then ordered Boudet to withdraw the first brigade back into line with the rest of the army.

Hard pressed by Lattermann's grenadiers, Boudet was concerned a withdrawal might compromise his skirmishers. He ordered the Ninth to retire slowly and galloped off to find Desaix. Making his report, Boudet explained the difficult position he found himself in. Desaix resolved to attack. He instructed Boudet to rejoin his second brigade and to lead the attack there; meanwhile Desaix would lead the charge at the head of the Ninth. One final instruction was given. Desaix ordered his ADC Savary to find the First Consul and to request a cavalry charge on the flank of the Austrian column.

When Lattermann's grenadiers perceived the 9th Light Infantry falling back, they surged forward. But then the French light infantrymen stopped, turned about, and launched a bayonet charge on the Austrians. At the same time, there was a volley of artillery fire from some French guns on the road. A split second later, Kellermann's cavalry brigade thundered into the flank of the Austrian column. Reeling from the artillery fire, assailed by French bayonets at the front, and being hacked at by cavalrymen from behind, the Austrians surrendered in large numbers.

This combination of blows is known to us as one of the finest all-arms attacks of the Napoleonic Wars. The fact Desaix was killed in the midst of the action serves only to enhance its iconic status. In an instant, this most dramatic of reversals saw the tide of battle return to the French.

The above is all standard fare. It is the narrative more-or-less set down in the bulletin the night after the battle. It is essentially true, but at the same time very simplistic – conveniently so. It is a good story told by an expert storyteller. There is tension, heroism and sacrifice. But now, more than two hundred years later, do we accept the standard fare and move on, or do we probe into the mechanics of the battle and seek a fuller explanation of events?

To retain a lively narrative, Bonaparte cut an entire episode from the battle. From a storyteller's point of view, I can understand why he did it. Much the same happens in many movies today – a seemingly important plot point is sliced from the final edit of the movie, because the producers feel it slows the overall pace. But in our 'Director's Cut' of the battle, we can restore this missing scene.

Rewind. The 9th Light Infantry are sent forward and engage IR 11 Wallis. Desaix joined Bonaparte in conference. While these well-established events were being played out, the second brigade, commanded by General of Brigade Louis Charles Guénand, deployed to the north of the main road. This was somewhere in front of San Giuliano, probably level with the farm today called Vigna Santa.

Guénand's brigade was composed of five infantry battalions from the 30th and 59th Line (one battalion of the 30th was serving with the Army of Italy at the time). It is possible a sixth battalion was formed from the amalgamated grenadier companies, but this is unconfirmed. A little known fact, but confirmed by the after-action reports of General Monnier and Guénand, was the addition of two infantry battalions from Monnier's division to Guénand's brigade. These two battalions had been left in reserve at San Giuliano earlier in the battle. They joined Guénand's right – thus his force was composed of seven or eight fresh battalions – perhaps 3,500-4,000 men.

Guénand deployed his brigade 'in columns by echelon, mixed with some deployed battalions'. In front of this brigade Desaix placed all the artillery he could find. This included eight guns

from Boudet's division (two mighty 12-pounders, four 8-pounders and two 6-inch howitzers), five guns which had survived the morning battle (including three manned by the Consular Guard), and five more which had come up from the rear in time for the evening battle.

Eighteen guns and up to eight fresh battalions: this was a formidable force. But what happened to it? It hardly figures in any history of the battle. It is as if it marched off into thin air.

In my research on the battle of Marengo I discovered several letters written by Guénand to General Dumas. They included a copy of a letter sent by Guénand to the First Consul soon after the battle. Inexplicably, these letters were omitted from the classic French work on Marengo – de Cugnac's *Campagne de l'armée de Réserve en 1800*. How they were missed I do not know. They are bound in the same folder as Boudet's campaign journal – a document which de Cugnac extensively quotes from. In addition to these documents, Guénand's after-battle report still exists. It was not copied by de Cugnac, because it is not held in the French War Archives, rather in the personal papers of General Dupont, the French chief of staff at Marengo – latterly disgraced after his capitulation at Bailen in 1808. Although I have been unable to track down Dupont's papers (presumed still to be in family ownership), the document was published in Titeux's monumental study on Dupont *Le Général Dupont, une erreur historique*.

When you discover new primary source documents, it is a double edge sword. At first comes the jubilation at having uncovered new evidence – new stories. But then follows the terrible complexity of trying to weave new evidence into the accepted narrative. It has taken me years to understand the implications of Guénand's evidence. Only by applying the logic of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes have I finally unravelled it: 'Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.'

Let me outline Guénand's version of events. He arrived on the battlefield and was unimpressed. The state of the army was such he was forced to march through fields – the road being blocked with retreating soldiers and the impedimenta of an army in flight. Guénand, was then forty-four years old - a career officer who had been suspended for much of the Revolutionary Wars because he was a noble. He deployed his brigade north of the road as directed. Before long his soldiers came under heavy artillery fire. Lannes had previously complained about being under constant artillery fire during the retreat, and so presumably these same guns now turned their fire on Guénand's brigade as Lannes and Victor's troops fell back. Every instant one saw files of soldiers being cut down.

Many of Guénand's soldiers were conscripts seeing a pitched battle for the first time. As the bullets rained down on them, the soldiers became impatient. They wanted to attack. The French artillery returned fire, but Guénand says they were out-gunned. His post-action report states the Austrians had fifty guns – perfectly served and dealing 'devastation on all the line'.

We should consider the position of the Austrian army at this moment. We have discussed the Austrian column on the main road – composed of St Julian, Lattermann, Weidenfeld and some light dragoons. To the north was a second Austrian column led by FML Ott. This column had threatened to outflank the French right throughout the battle. It had seen off attacks by Monnier's division and the Consular Guard infantry, and was now marching parallel with the Austrians on the main road. In the centre tradition has it that the remnants of the troops who had lead the morning assault on Marengo formed something of a line under Field Marshal Lieutenant Kaim. Exhausted, this line probably lagged back slightly from the two columns on its flanks. Ahead of Kaim appears to have been a line of guns and skirmishers – volunteers who followed the French rearguard while the various columns were formed.

Guénand pressed Desaix and Bonaparte for the order to attack. When Bonaparte said: 'Order the attack', Guénand formed his brigade into columns and charged into the vineyard before

him. The Austrians there were overturned at bayonet point and within a few minutes of the attack, the rate of Austrian artillery fire began to slacken. One hundred paces into the vines Guénand was struck by a ball in the right groin. Luckily for Guénand the ball struck against some coins which took the force of the impact, and were flattened and bent. As he recovered from the pain of a heavy bruise, Boudet arrived. The general of division had been sent by Desaix to lead Guénand's brigade while he led the attack of the 9th Light against Lattermann's grenadiers.

After some fierce fighting, Guénand's brigade broke out of the vines into the open plain where they reformed their earlier formation - in columns by echelon with a few battalions deployed. At this point Guénand writes he was a quarter of a league (approx. 1 km) ahead of the rest of the line, forming a salient in the enemy line. In other words he was extending into the space between the Austrian column on the main road, and Ott's column to the north. Guénand says he took fire on both his flanks, as the Austrians had occupied some houses with infantry and guns. In front of him the Austrians formed their cavalry in 'the finest battle order'. These came to charge him several times without success. Guénand admits he hesitated for a few seconds as he entered the plain. Happy his right flank was protected by Monnier's two battalions, he was concerned his left flank was 'up in the air' as the 9th Light were still engaged with the grenadiers. But Boudet urged Guénand to push on and continue the drive forwards. Desaix had given Boudet specific instructions to pierce the enemy centre and to push forward rapidly to separate the two Austrian wings. So Guénand resumed the advance, now half a league (2 km) ahead of the French line.

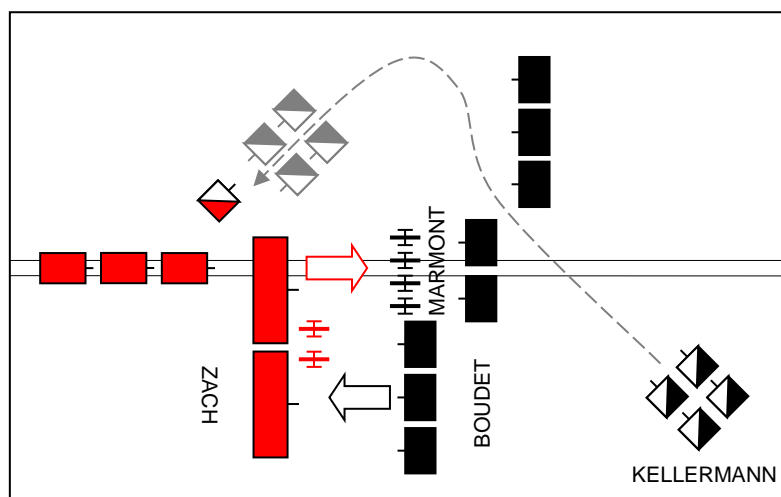
The next part of Guénand's account is very important. According to Guénand it could only have been *after* his brigade had surged forward that Desaix ordered the cavalry charge onto the left flank of the grenadiers fighting the 9th Light. In his note to General Dumas, Guénand states it was his 'audacious drive which alone determined Kellermann's attack on the left flank of Zach's corps.'

We need to reflect on this statement for a moment because I believe it is very important.

Guénand's various accounts clearly state he made his attack before Desaix charged with the 9th Light and before Kellermann attacked the left wing of the Austrian column. This changes our understanding of the attack quite significantly. Let us demonstrate ...

The Classic Interpretation

Let us look at how Desaix's attack is portrayed in Chandler's *Campaigns of Napoleon*. This is based on the classic interpretation of events.



According to Chandler, the sequence of events is the left of the French echelon comes into contact with the Austrians and opens a volley fire. This halts the Austrians and throws back the lead Austrian regiment. Marmont then opens fire with artillery. Chandler states the right of the French echelon then advances and opens a volley fire (against what, I am uncertain), and then Kellermann charges the Austrian left.

There is some truth in the sequence described, except Chandler wrongly implies Guénand's brigade (right of the echelon) attacks the same column as the 9th Light. There is also a discrepancy in his diagrams – in his first, Kellermann is shown coming through Guénand's brigade (as above), and in the second, it is shown starting from the right of Guénand. Indeed, Kellermann's route past or through Guénand is perplexing and I will return to this subject below.

We must remember, Chandler's intention as a military historian is to explain simply the tactics which made the French army successful, and on a wider note, illustrate to students of military history the benefits of combined, all-arms attacks. While no doubt very clear in terms of explaining high-level principles of military theory, it is overly simplistic as a piece of history.

Kellermann's Accounts

Before drawing any conclusions we should now review what Kellermann wrote about his charge. Does he throw any light on Guénand's movements?

First we must declare Kellermann's later writings are tinged with a sense of bitterness at his lack of promotion, and any insinuation he was not sole architect of his charge. He objected strongly to the memoirs of Savary, Duke of Rovigo, then an ADC to Desaix at the battle. Savary explained how Desaix requested cavalry support. Savary went to the First Consul who directed him to Kellermann's brigade. At first Kellermann asked Savary to find someone else to make the charge. His heavy cavalry brigade was down to 150 horses and they had been in near constant action the whole day. Savary advised Kellermann to rally some dragoons to this command and at that point left the scene. Kellermann was angry that Savary's memoirs attributed the inspiration for the charge to Desaix. There was an ugly spat between the two men over this issue – one which was largely academic. Yes, Desaix had requested cavalry support. Yes, Kellermann decided actual the moment of the charge. One suspects the argument was more a clash of personalities and political outlooks than it was about military history.

As is often the case, the first report is often the one least influenced by outside forces (indeed, possibly the most accurate French account of Marengo is the one written by Berthier at 9 o'clock in the evening, just as the battle was drawing to a close). Kellermann's after action report, dated 15 June states:

'Arriving level with Desaix's division, the brigade of the 6th, 2nd and 20th Cavalry, then reduced to 150 horses, was united with a platoon of the 1st and two squadrons of the 8th Dragoons. I formed them in a single line, following Desaix's division, at 200 fathoms to the right of the road. I noticed that the infantry which was marching on the left of the road to Marengo, level with Cascinagrossa, was beginning to give way, and that the enemy grenadiers were charging it at the run. I thought there was not a moment to lose, and that a prompt movement could bring victory back to our standards. I stopped the line, I ordered: "Platoons left and forward!" The 2nd and 20th Cavalry found themselves at the head of the column which rushed with impetuosity on the flank of the Austrian grenadiers at the moment when they had just made a discharge. The movement was decisive; the column was annihilated in a moment. Three battalions of grenadiers and the entire regiment of Wallis, all were sabred or taken; Citizen Le Riche,

cavalier with the 2nd Regiment, took prisoner the general chief of the staff; six flags, four pieces of cannon were taken.'

Prior to the arrival of Desaix's corps, Kellermann had been acting as a rear-guard to the debris of Victor's corps, retreating along the main road. Once he had passed Desaix's troops, he reinforced his command with the addition some the dragoons (the dragoon commander, Brigadier General Champeaux was dead by this point of the battle). Having formed these troopers into a single line, Kellermann said he followed Desaix's division 400 metres to the right (north) of the road. With Monnier's two battalions included, Guénand may have occupied a frontage of 600-800 metres. If Kellermann was 400 metres from the road, he would have been somewhere behind the middle of Guénand's brigade. This is important. Kellermann was *behind* Guénand's brigade.

In his 1828 account of the battle, *Réfutation de M. le duc de Rovigo ou La Vérité sur la bataille de Marengo* - a rebuttal to claims made in the memoirs of Savary - Kellermann changes his account somewhat. His force becomes larger: now 300 troopers from the 2nd and 20th Cavalry, with 150-200 dragoons. Guénand's brigade completely vanishes from the account. Desaix's corps is on the left of the road, and Kellermann is on the right of the road. The enemy skirmishers are pushed back as far as Cascinagrossa and it is at that point Desaix meets the main body of Austrians. Then an interesting detail on page 12 of this pamphlet: Kellermann says he is masked by the vines which are suspended from mulberry trees (the traditional method of growing vines in that part of Italy). This conceals him from the Austrians as he draws level with Desaix's troops south of the road.

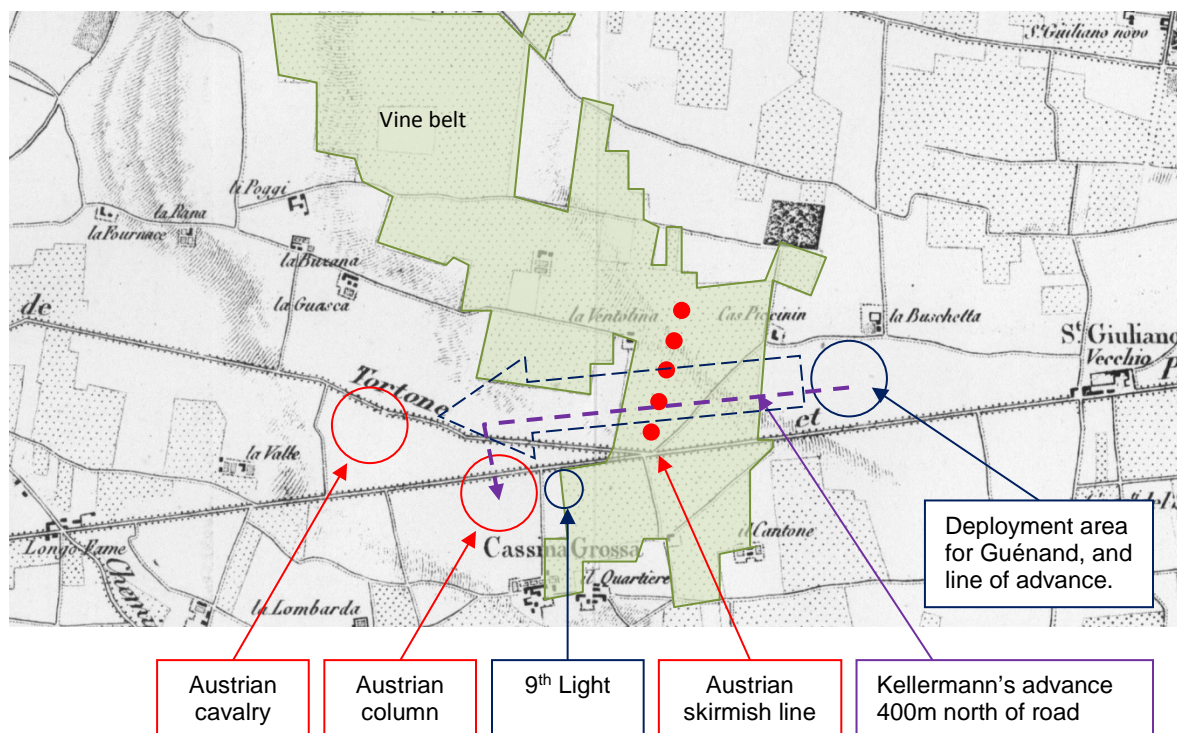
In 1834 Kellermann returned to the battle in an article for the *Journal Anecdotique et Biographique de l'Empire et de la Grande Armée*. This time Kellermann receives orders from the First Consul, delivered by Savary to march level with the corps of Desaix and to support this offensive movement if required. Kellermann's command has now increased to 400 heavy cavalry, with 200-300 dragoons. At around 6 pm, the skirmishers of the Wallis regiment are thrown back on Cascina Grossa and there Desaix meets Lattermann's grenadiers. Kellermann again finds himself masked by the vines.

Finally, de Cugnac cites another account by Kellermann, this time made in 1803. In it he states his troops were already in column at the point of the charge because of the difficulties they experienced marching in line through the vines.

The reason I am putting so much focus on these accounts is because of the location. Kellermann is 400 metres north of the road, in a vineyard. The Austrian skirmishers are then driven back to Cascina Grossa. Compare the similarities of this to Guénand's accounts, which explain his first attack is against Austrian infantry and artillery in the vineyards. Guénand then breaks out of the vines and hesitates, and at this point he can see Desaix and Lattermann about to come to grips on his left.

Using contemporary maps, we can now pinpoint exactly where this action is taking place. The 1810 map reproduced by de Cugnac helps us enormously.

We know Guénand deployed in front of San Giuliano (i.e. to the west of it) and that in front of him was a belt of vines (highlighted in green below). We know from Kellermann that the 9th Light was engaged with the grenadiers somewhere level with Cascinagrossa (Cassina Grossa on the French map). We also know that Kellermann was only 400 metres to the north of the road when following Guénand's brigade. When Guénand drew level with Desaix, we know he was at the point where one exited the vines and entered the open plain. The following detail of the map should make the location of Desaix attack extremely clear.



Now the mechanics of the battle start to become clear. For the accounts of Kellermann and Guénand to work, they must first pass through this belt of vines to appear in the plain, level with Cascinagrossa.

As Kellermann exited the vines, one can see what a tempting target the exposed Austrian flank would have made – and at a distance of only 400 metres away, one can imagine charging horses covering this space in less than a minute. Unloaded and distracted from having fired at the 9th Light, Lattermann's grenadiers would have had no time to make preparation to receive this charge.

So what is actually new in all this?

1. 'Where?' The battle has moved 3km west from San Giuliano to Cascinagrossa. That is not an inconsequential distance. It is like describing an incident at the Tower of London which actually occurred at Charing Cross Station.
2. Kellermann was able to make such a bold charge, because his exposed right flank was screened from the Austrian cavalry by Guénand's brigade.

This second point is the key issue here. In his notes sent to General Dumas in 1801, Guénand describes a conversation he had with Kellermann in the weeks after the battle:

'Kellermann agreed himself at Milan, in being amazed that I had not been promoted, like him, on the battlefield; that without the impetuosity and success of my attack he could never have made the cavalry charge.'

Unless Guénand had cleared the infantry and artillery from the vines, Kellermann would unlikely have got his horsemen through them and into a position to charge the Austrian flank. If Kellermann had not been preceded by Guénand, on seeing 1,200 Austrian dragoons lined up in battle order, would Kellermann have executed such a bold charge, knowing he faced an

immediate counter-charge? That is to speculate, but I would argue, however bold, Kellermann was not imprudent.

Marmont's Account

There is one final element to consider in all this. One of key components of this all arms attack was the French battery assembled in front of Guénand's brigade. Coignet describes how the guns were located in the intervals between the half-brigades, but very little detail is provided on this battery except in the memoirs of Marmont, the commander of the artillery in the Army of the Reserve:

'It was about five o'clock, and the division Boudet, on which rested our safety and our hopes, had not arrived. Finally, shortly after it joined us. General Desaix preceded it by a few moments, and joined the First Consul. He found the affair in this annoying state and had a poor opinion of it. We held on horseback a sort of council which I attended; he told the First Consul: "There must be a lively artillery fire imposed on the enemy, before attempting a new charge; otherwise it will not succeed: it is thus, general, that loses one battles. We absolutely need a good cannonade."

'I told him I was going to establish a battery with the five pieces still intact and by joining five pieces left on Scrvia, and newly arrived, and, furthermore, the eight pieces of his division, I had a battery of eighteen pieces. "That's good," Desaix told me; "See, my dear Marmont, some cannons, some cannons, and make the best possible use of them." Eighteen pieces were soon put in battery. They occupied the right half of the front of the army, so much this front was reduced. The pieces on the left were to the right of the road to San-Giuliano.'

So far, so good. We can picture the eighteen guns covering Guénand's front. No guns were placed in front of the 9th Light, which by this time would already have carried itself forward as described at the beginning of this account. Marmont continues:

'A lively and sudden fire caused at first some hesitation to the enemy, and then stopped him. Meanwhile, the division Boudet formed, partly in column of attack by battalion, and partly deployed. When the moment had come, the first consul passed along it, and electrified it by his presence and some words: after approximately twenty minutes of this artillery fire, the army went forward. My battery was soon overtaken, and I gave the order to follow the movement. I made my pieces turnabout to march, but I had difficulty achieving this. The gunners fired, in spite of me, through the large intervals of our small battalions.'

The above paragraph is interesting. Guénand had several battalions deployed into line, but these formed column when the order to advance through the vines was given. There were considerable gaps between the columns. As they advanced through the line of Marmont's battery towards the vines, it must have been terrifying for the many conscripts in Guénand's brigade to have the Austrian artillery firing at them from in front, while Marmont's gunners fired from behind them, through the intervals between their battalions in reply. It appears that Marmont had to ride from gun to gun, instructing the gunners to cease firing and to advance in support of Guénand.

'Finally the general movement had successively become established piece by piece, and I had arrived at the left near the road where there were three guns, two 8-pounders, and a howitzer served by gunners of the Guard of the Consuls; by means of threats, I put them to movement, and the horses were as harnessed to the pieces, to the gun carriages, to make the about-turn, when suddenly I saw in front of me and to the left the Thirtieth Half-Brigade in disorder and in flight. I promptly put the three guns put

back into battery and loaded with canister; but I waited to open fire. I perceived at fifty paces from the Thirtieth, in the middle of the thick smoke and dust, a mass in good order; at first I believed it French, soon I recognized that it was the head of a large column of Austrian grenadiers.'

This passage is perplexing. Marmont is near the road, and looking in front and to the left. If the 30th Line had indeed fallen back in disorder, surely Marmont would have been looking to his right? No one else mentions anything about the 30th Line giving way – quite the opposite. Boudet and Guénand are full of nothing but praise for the regiment. Marmont admits there is thick smoke and dust and so giving him the benefit of the doubt, I believe he made an error. If anyone, these troops in disordered flight must have come from the 9th Light Infantry – a subject I will return to. Continuing with the piece:

'We had time to fire on them four shots of canister with our three guns, and, right after that, Kellermann, with four hundred horses, the remains of his brigade, passed in front of my pieces, and made a strong charge on the left flank of the enemy column, which laid down its arms. If the charge had been made three minutes later, our pieces would have been taken or withdrawn; and perhaps, not being under the influence of the surprise caused by the rounds of canister, the enemy column would have better received the cavalry. It would maybe have been the same there if the charge had preceded the salvo; thus it was needed this precise combination to assure a success so complete, and, it is necessary to say it, un hoped-for. Never had fortune intervened in a more decisive way; never had a general showed more *coup d'œil*, more vigour and presence of mind than Kellermann in this circumstance. Three thousand Austrian grenadiers, at the head of which was General Zach, quartermaster general, the real leader of the army, were cut down or taken. This reserve of the army had been put in movement just as our new resistance had required a new effort. Two thousand Austrian cavalymen, placed at half-range of a canon, saw all this disorder without trying to remedy it. By charging the four hundred French horses, they could have easily retaken their prisoners and repaired everything; their inactivity covered their commander with shame.

Let us unpick this. Marmont helps us confirm Guénand began his advance before Kellermann's charge. The guard artillery by the road has not advanced with the rest of the battery, so this again indicates Kellermann's charge comes in behind Guénand.

As for his opinion on the Austrian cavalry, did Marmont really see two thousand enemy cavalry through the thick smoke, the dust, the vines hanging from Mulberry trees and the crops on the plain, and over the heads of Guénand's troops? Or did he learn about it after the battle?

The most puzzling piece of Marmont's account is the claim about the 30th Line. Employing our Holmesian powers of deduction let us re-examine the facts as we know them:

1. Marmont saw soldiers to his front and left running away, closely followed by a column of Austrian grenadiers.
2. Kellermann saw the 9th Light in what he interpreted as a moment of retreat with the Austrian grenadiers closely following them.
3. The 9th Light were awarded the title 'Incomparable' for their conduct at the battle. Numerous witnesses talk of the 9th Light charging the grenadiers at the same moment Kellermann's horsemen strike.
4. Desaix had previously instructed Boudet to make the 9th Light fall back in line with the rest of the army. Boudet agreed but was concerned about the skirmishers he had deployed ahead of this half-brigade.
5. Boudet states Desaix went to halt the 9th Light and to launch them in attack. He later attributes the capture of so many prisoners and guns to this half-brigade.

What are we to deduce from this?

Having meditated on this conundrum for years, my conclusion focuses on the skirmishers in front of the 9th Light. There must have been at least several hundred of them deployed in front of the Ninth. When Desaix told the half-brigade to turn about and charge the Austrians, what did the skirmishers do? With the Austrian grenadiers racing at them from one side, and their companions lowering bayonets for a charge from the other side, what choice could they make? By and large, skirmishers never stood to receive a charge from formed troops. They would run and clear the front of the unit they were protecting. Did Marmont see a crowd of French skirmishers running out of the way through the thick smoke and dust? Given the 9th Light's reputation for excellence, did Marmont wrongly attribute this apparent act of flight to the 30th Line? Did Kellermann witness this same rapid movement near the road, followed swiftly by a general, simultaneous discharge by Lattermann's grenadiers, the 9th Light and Marmont's three guns?

Conclusion

This attack retains its status as one of the classic moments of the Napoleonic Wars. It is the moment where Napoleon's reputation as the greatest captain of the age is cemented. It is the foundation stone of the First Empire.

So why did Guénand end up on the cutting room floor when the accounts of the battle were produced?

Guénand believed he had not done enough immediately after the battle to promote his actions. He wrote to the First Consul saying he regretted not going to headquarters immediately after the battle, and admitted it had been a mistake to remain with his young conscripts, bivouacked on the field of battle rather than lobbying for a slice of the glory. He was an older general, with a conservative mind-set, and was unused to blatant self-promotion.

But I believe there is actually a more complex reason Guénand does not figure so prominently. For the purposes of a bulletin, Napoleon focused on the climatic episode of Desaix's attack and Kellermann's charge. Guénand was simply part of the overall French counterattack. Why pick out his troops over those of Lannes or Victor?

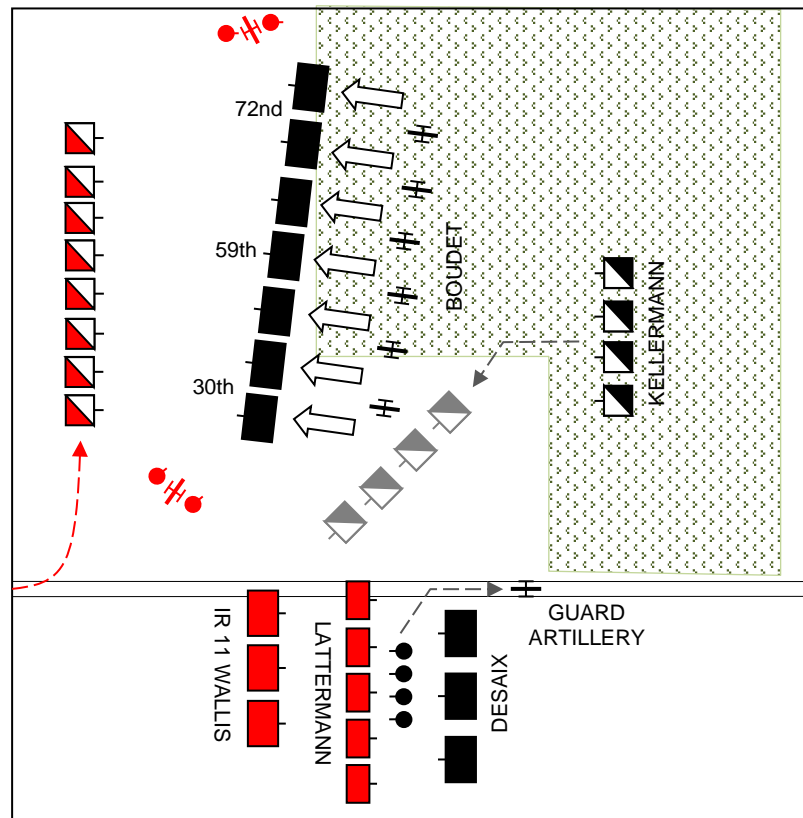
When it came to writing a more detailed account of the battle, Guénand also missed out. The history of Marengo was famously rewritten several times. In his analysis of the battle, Napoleon explained the victory by something we know as the 'Castelceriolo pivot'. Napoleon would not admit his army had been forced into retreat; instead he described the army making a change of front, creating an oblique line from the village of Castelceriolo to San Giuliano. This airbrushing of history would make an interesting article in itself, but for now we should focus on the impact of this over-rationalisation of the battle on poor Guénand.

In the official history, the French were not in retreat, and Guénand did not therefore need to make his forceful drive diagonally across the field to divide the Austrian wings. Nor could Guénand have been supported by elements of Monnier's division, because, the official history tells us, Monnier's men were then at Castelceriolo, manfully holding out against the Austrians (a complete nonsense).

Monnier was also airbrushed out of the story, because he later voted against Napoleon becoming emperor. His division was now commanded by one of his brigade commanders, Carra-St-Cyr (whose own account of the battle makes it clear he abandoned Castelceriolo and retreated for an hour and a quarter).

So, in order to preserve the central narrative of the official account, Guénand's heroic attack had to be sacrificed for the greater good. By the time this account was published in 1805, Guénand had already been dead two years, having died prematurely on 9 May 1803. With Desaix killed in the battle, and Boudet dying in 1809, plus his chief of staff, Dalton being killed in 1801, there was no one left to tell this story at the end of the wars; no one left to correct the mistake. Until now.

So to conclude, drawing together all the elements, how should we re-draw Chandler's classic plan?



The new sequence is as follows: The 9th Light have been engaged with the Austrian column on the main road, slowing their advance and causing IR 11 Wallis to retreat. Guénand's brigade deploys north of the road. A battery of 18 guns are assembled and fire against up to 50 Austrian pieces in the vineyards.

For twenty minutes the two sides pound one another. Guénand is given the order to attack. His columns pass through the line of guns and drive into the vineyards, pushing the Austrian skirmish line back. Marmont orders the guns to follow Guénand's advance. Entering the plain beyond the vines, Guénand finds himself facing a large body of enemy cavalry, with the 9th Light on his left. Meanwhile Desaix has arrived at the 9th Light. He requests cavalry support. Kellermann moves forward into the vines following Guénand.

To the south of the main road the 9th Light and Lattermann's grenadiers surge towards each other. The 9th Light's skirmishers run to clear the front. There is a colossal discharge. Three guns on the road open fire at the grenadiers from close range. At that same moment, Kellermann breaks into the plain and sees the open flank of the Austrians. Screened from the Austrian cavalry by Guénand's brigade, he turns to the left and charges, arriving moments

after the last artillery discharge. Within seconds his horses are flying through the Austrian column.

This version of events best accommodates all the known accounts.

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About the Author

Terry Crowdy began researching the battle of Marengo in 1997 in order to produce a regimental history of the 9th Light Infantry Regiment (published as *Incomparable* by Osprey Publishing in 2011). Sharing research with David Hollins, author of the Osprey Campaign Series *Marengo 1800: Napoleon's Day of Fate*, the author has extensive knowledge of the battle. In June 2018 Pen & Sword will publish Crowdy's *Marengo: the Battle that Placed the*

Crown on Napoleon's Head. This full account of the battle examines all available sources on the battle, French, Austrian and Italian.

Born in London in 1970, Terry Crowdy grew up in the Medway Towns where he lives today. He has written numerous books on the Napoleonic Wars and espionage history. A Member of the Institution of Fire Engineers, and the Society of Authors, he is the Fire and Emergency Planning Adviser for Historic Royal Palaces.

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Placed on the Napoleon Series: June 2018