

## The Napoleon Series

### The Campaign of 1814: Chapter 18, Part VI

By: Maurice Weil

Translated by: [Greg Gorsuch](#)

# THE CAMPAIGN OF 1814

(after the documents of the imperial and royal archives of Vienna)

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## THE ALLIED CAVALRY

DURING THE CAMPAIGN OF 1814

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### CHAPTER XVIII.

OPERATIONS OF THE ALLIED ARMIES FROM 25 MARCH 1814 IN THE MORNING  
UNTIL THE END OF THE CAMPAIGN.

FÈRE-CHAMPINOISE. -- SAINT-DIZIER. --PARIS.

**Affair of armed peasants against the column of Prince Biron of Courland in Les Paroches.** --The appearance of the troops of Durutte was enough to persuade the peasants of Lorraine to take up arms again and force Prince Biron of Courland out of Nancy on the 24<sup>th</sup>.<sup>1</sup>

To ensure, in any event, the possession of a crossing on the Meuse and prevent the French scouts from communicating with the generals Durutte and Duvignau, Winzingerode had, immediately after the battle of Saint-Dizier, sent to Biron the order to retreat from Naives on Saint-Mihiel, firmly guard the bridges of the Meuse and to oppose the sorties of the garrison of Verdun. While Biron was performing this movement with some of his detachment, bands of armed peasants, supported by some troops who sortied from Verdun, tried to bar the way to the wooded defile of Les Paroches, that he had neglected to occupy. It took nothing less than the intervention of the garrison of Saint-Mihiel and the Russian cavalry of Yuzefovich that Biron had temporarily lifted from the blockade of Metz, to pave the way. All baggage of the Russians and those of the two Prussian battalions remained in the hands of the peasants.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Composition of the detachments under the command of General Prince Biron of Courland (headquarters, Nancy): 4 companies of jäger, five battalions of reserves, six battalions of convalescents, 7 cavalry squadrons, a mounted battery and 12 pieces of different calibers.

Those troops were providing, in late March the garrison of Nancy, Toul, Commercy, Void, Ligny and Saint-Mihiel.

<sup>2</sup>LECZYNSKI, *History of the 19<sup>th</sup> Prussian Infantry Regiment*.

But while Biron was already considering the possibility of a retirement from Nancy to Deux-Ponts,<sup>3</sup> while Lorraine and Barrois were only awaiting a signal and the appearance of the French cavalry to support it,<sup>4</sup> Oudinot had to take the opinion of the retrograde motion that the marshals had virtually imposed on the Emperor and which necessarily entailed retirement. Knowing full well that he would not be able to retake from the Chief of Staff the dispositions that the Marshal regarded rightly as harmful, the Duke of Reggio regretfully obeyed and moved to march from the 28<sup>th</sup> in the morning.<sup>5</sup>

**Operations of the cavalry of Piré on Langres.** --The news sent by Piré was no less full of promise than that collected and transmitted by Oudinot. On the side of Langres as beside Bar-le-Duc, one was expecting that an order, a signal, for a little support to arm and rise up. The inhabitants of Montigny (on the road to Neufchâteau) had already a few days earlier, seized a convoy of a hundred oxen and its escort and the day before they had taken twenty Württemberg cavalymen they had sent to Piré. It had been heard in the city of Langres that it expected the appearance of his squadrons to massacre the garrison of from 1000 to 1200 men and General Count de Raigecourt seemed determined to fall back on Vesoul as soon as he finished assembling his equipment. The country folk, to ten leagues round had already started to meet in detachments. A certain number of them, mounted on taken horses, roamed quickly among all the points occupied by the Allies, and cast terror in their path. And Piré,<sup>6</sup> added in the dispatch he sent to the Chief of Staff, 27 March at 3:30:

"I am assailed by farmers who ask me for powder and weapons to march against the enemy. Nothing would be so easy as to establish than an insurgency throughout the Bassigny and I am sure that this movement would spread quickly and communicate immediately to the Lorraine, Alsace, Franche-Comté and Burgundy. I propose that the Emperor sound the tocsin at a fixed hour and day in all towns of the Haute-Marne. We will march on Langres and Vesoul." But while Piré conceived and prepared the project, while he was deploying to push on the Vosges, he was sent from Saint-Dizier, at 11 o'clock in the evening the order to return to Montier-en-Der to cover the right flank of the army, to continue from there on Brienne and send news to Doulevant "where the army will either be at Brienne or about Bar-sur-Aube."<sup>7</sup>

**Measures taken by the Allies to protect their rear.** --While recognizing that we cannot, even now, assess the likely possible consequences of the implementation of the bold plan which Napoleon had given up only because of the resistance and discouragement of his lieutenants, it however suffices to summarize the precautions taken here by the Allies to get an idea of the fears inspired by the possibility of a general rising, the terror that the appearance of Piré and Oudinot had thrown in the rear of the Allies, to ask whether that reaching in a two-day march from Paris, the rulers and the Generalissimo would not, at the news of the arrival of the Emperor at Chaumont or Bar-le-Duc, waive their projects against the capital to turn against him.

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<sup>3</sup>*Mémoires de Langeron.*

<sup>4</sup>Oudinot in writing to the Chief of Staff from Saint-Dizier, 28 March, said: "It is incomprehensible we do not take advantage of the spirit of the peasants of Lorraine and Barrois. Do not cool the heat of this people who breathe only vengeance." (*Archives of the War.*)

<sup>5</sup>Chief of Staff to Oudinot, St. Dizier, 27 March, 11 o'clock in the evening: "According to information, the enemy presses us to Paris, which His Majesty decided to get closer to by major marches. Leave tomorrow, the 28<sup>th</sup>, in the day, to return to Saint-Dizier and follow our movements on Vassy and Doulevant." (*Archive of the War.*)

<sup>6</sup>General Piré to the Chief of Staff, Chaumont, 27 March, 3:30 in the evening. (*Archives of the War.*)

<sup>7</sup>Chief of Staff to Piré, Saint-Dizier, 27 March, 11 o'clock in the evening. (*Archives of the War.*)

What is undeniable is that at Dijon, where the Emperor of Austria had come to seek refuge and where the Feldzeugmeister Duka tried to organize the defensive lines of communication, it was believed Langres irrevocably lost.<sup>8</sup> One had done everything to hasten the march of reinforcements on the way, concern grew by the hour. Since 25 March, Maurice Liechtenstein, coming from Troyes with his light division, had to establish his main body at Chanceaux, had detached four of his squadrons to Courban and to Châtillon-sur-Seine because of the fear of the appearance on that side of General Allix posted in Auxerre.<sup>9</sup> The Württemberg reinforcements, under the command of General von Spitzemberg had, since that time, retreated from Bar-sur-Aube, now occupied by the Hanrion Division, on Dijon where the hussars of Blankenstein<sup>10</sup> had stopped with two Austrian batteries. All the equipment that had been made to file from Chaumont and from Langres was ordered to go park at Montbéliard. The artillery reserves was still currently in Vesoul, Montbéliard and Altkirch. The alarm had spread to Besançon. The Franche-Comte was agitated and took up arms, and Alois Liechtenstein, who commanded the troops in charge of the blockade of the town, had sent to Champlitte and to Vesoul parties responsible for providing him news of the Allied Great Army. At the same time he had put Salins in a state of defense and directed to Étalans the equipment of his corps and his artillery reserve on Pontarlier.

At Vesoul, Russian General Ertel hastily armed the sickly and convalescents; he urged for the arrival in all haste of the Russian detachments staggered over the road from Basil and stopped at Vesoul the grand dukes Nicolas and Michel and prevented them from joining the army, he was so afraid of seeing them captured by armed peasants. General Mecscery, who was to join the Army of the South with contingents of troops from the German Confederation had been ordered to come to reinforce Ertel in Vesoul and adjust his course so as to get there on 5 April at the latest.<sup>11</sup> Another battalion of reinforcements (Württemberg troops) was directed to continue from Basel on Dijon whose garrison was to be reinforced on 30 March by a column of 1250 men. He also increased by 1400 men the number of troops under the command of the Bavarian General von Zellern, besieging Huningue. Finally, he called to Dijon the Austrian brigade of cuirassiers of Major General Kuttalek<sup>12</sup> and they were directed to the General Baron

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<sup>8</sup>General Count of Raigecourt to Feldzeugmeister Duka, Langres, 27 March, evening. (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, III, 484, y.)

In this dispatch, Raigecourt reports to the Feldzeugmeister the concerns that caused him this situation: "In the evening at 5 o'clock," he wrote among other things, "the French cavalry appeared on the left of Langres on the height of Perrancey. Another column of cavalry appeared on the road to Chaumont, near Hermes. A third column, coming by Montigny-le-Roi, has advanced to within cannon shot of the town. It consists of six squadrons. I will keep the garrison under arms all night."

<sup>9</sup>Maurice Liechtenstein to Feldzeugmeister Duka, Chanceaux, 27 March. (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, III, 484 1/2 h.):

"All is quiet in front of me," he wrote on that date. "The enemy does not move to Auxerre. My patrols sent to Semur, Nogent and Tonnerre, have seen nothing. The enemy has a few vedettes in Bricon and on the road from Châtillon to Bar-sur-Aube."

<sup>10</sup>The hussars of Blankenstein, 7 1/2 squadrons strong, had, since 16 March, received orders to join the Great Army and had, according to the calculations of the Crown Prince of Hesse-Homburg, to arrive in Dijon on 24 March.

Crown Prince of Hesse-Homburg to Schwarzenberg, Mâcon, 16 March. (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, III, 297.)

<sup>11</sup>While Mecscery arrived the 1<sup>st</sup> of April at Basil, one had thought him so serious for the blockade of Besançon that he found the order sent from Alois Liechtenstein for three of his battalions, which arrived under this city 6 April. The remainder of the detachment that General Mecscery made follow from Basil, not only went on Vesoul, but on Lyon.

<sup>12</sup>"I have sent," wrote the Crown Prince of Hesse-Homburg to Schwarzenberg, "from Vienna, 27 March (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, III, 471), "General Kuttalek with two regiments of heavy cavalry who is to rejoin the Great Army."

Gollner, who had just left Ulm and Memmingen at the head of 14 reserve battalions, to accelerate his movement on Basel.<sup>13</sup>

**28 March. --Movements and positions of the army of Napoleon.** --The Captain unfortunately flinched before the Sovereign and the dynastic interests had definitely outweighed military considerations.<sup>14</sup> The die was cast and the 28<sup>th</sup> in the morning, while the outposts of Swichow reported to the commander of Vitry the retirement of the French cavalry, the army of the Emperor started his four columns advancing on Paris. Two columns formed by cavalry, one, that of Piré, was to return to Langres and Chaumont; the other consisting of the cavalry of the Guard under the command of Sebastiani was ordered to cross the Marne by ford near Saint-Dizier at 7 o'clock in the morning and push through Vassy and Montier-en-Der on Brienne. Ney, leaving at 6 o'clock in the morning with the infantry of the Guard which was the third column, was to go on Vassy and Montier-en-Der. Finally, the fourth column (the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Corps) was to be joined by the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps of Oudinot returning from Bar-le-Duc, and form the rear guard of the imperial army.<sup>15</sup>

While the army was committed at a horrible time, on cross roads, where to pass artillery, numerous caissons had to be abandoned, whose teams served to strengthen those pieces, the farmers brought to the Emperor, about to leave Saint-Dizier, the persons they had captured between Nancy and Langres and among whom was, among others, the Baron of Weissenberg, Austrian Ambassador to London.<sup>16</sup>

The Emperor was not the man to let such an incident pass without trying to take advantage of it. He held breakfast with the ambassador, conferred at length with him, caused the release of the persons who accompanied him and charged him with a confidential mission for the Emperor of Austria. But the diplomat, first going to the Allied headquarters, did not join the Emperor Francis until a time when everything was irrevocably over. Anyway besides, even offering to accept the conditions of the Allies, the Emperor could not have gotten anything.

A few moments after the departure of Weissenberg and his companions, the Emperor, leaving himself also from Saint-Dizier, arrived in the afternoon at Doulevant and found there an emissary from La Vallette, carrying an encrypted note indicating "the intrigues of foreign supporters," stressing the need for the immediate return of the Emperor to his capital "that his presence alone can save" and ending with the words: "There is not a moment lose."<sup>17</sup>

But the roads were not safe, and Napoleon could not be exposed to being captured by Allied scouts. Moreover, if his presence was essential for Paris, it was no less necessary to the army without which he could not undertake anything and that only he was able to adjust and accelerate the march. Despite his impatience and anxiety, it was necessary for him to stay at Doulevant, to spend the night of the 28<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> in the same place where he had stopped, still full of hopeful illusions, the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>.

On the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup>, the different corps of his army occupied the following positions: the Guard (infantry and cavalry) reached the points indicated by the orders of movement: the cavalry of Maurin, stopped by the night, could

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<sup>13</sup>Report of Feldzeugmeister Duka to Prince Schwarzenberg, Dijon, 31 March and 7 April. (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*)

<sup>14</sup>Reflecting later at St. Helena on the mistakes he had made during the campaign of 1814, Napoleon exclaimed repeatedly, "If I had been the son of an emperor, the second of my dynasty, instead of being the first, no power could have knocked me off the throne."

<sup>15</sup>Chief of Staff to Drouot, Ney, Defiance, Macdonald; Saint-Dizier, night of 27 to 28 March. (*Archives of the War.*)

<sup>16</sup>FAIN, (*Manuscript of 1814*), claims that at Vitrolles one of the number of characters taken by peasants had escaped the punishment he deserved by donning the livery of a domestic of the Austrian ambassador.

<sup>17</sup>FAIN, (*Manuscript of 1814*).

not reach Brienne and had stopped at Morvilliers. Behind it, Saint-Germain had settled his cavalry in Nully at the junction of the routes to Bar-sur-Aube, Brienne, Colombey and Montier-en-Der.<sup>18</sup>

Macdonald had personally left the heights of Valcourt around 5 o'clock, when at the arrival of Oudinot with the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps. He left for the protection of the troops of Oudinot, the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps of Cavalry in echelon to Hallignicourt, Héricourt and Éclaron. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps occupied Champgerbeau and Attancourt; the 11<sup>th</sup>, Éclaron, Allichamps and Louvemont. The headquarters of the Duke of Tarente was at Vassy.<sup>19</sup>

The 7<sup>th</sup> Corps had settled for the night in Saint-Dizier. The Rottembourg Division occupied there the suburb of Vitry on the road; one of the brigades of Leval was at the entrance of the city on the road to Bar, the other on the road of Vassy, the third was in the city. Trelliard, posted with his cavalry in Valcourt and Héricourt, watched the Marne and Vitry road. All the troops of the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps were to resume on the 29<sup>th</sup>, at 4 o'clock in the morning, their march on Doulevant. In reporting his movements to the Chief of Staff, Oudinot could not help but express once again all his regrets that the orders had caused him in having had to comply. "Let me tell you," he wrote, "it is incomprehensible that in this instance one does not take advantage of the momentum of the peasants of the Lorraine and Barrois to create a diversion with opportunities that will never return, if one allows the ardor of the people to cool, who breathe only for vengeance."<sup>20</sup>

Piré, to whom the Chief of Staff had sent at 3:30 the order to come cover the left of the army on the 29<sup>th</sup>, between Bar-sur-Aube and Colombey-les-Deux-Églises, was still ignorant on the 28<sup>th</sup> at 8 o'clock in the evening, the direction taken and was preparing to return from Vignory on Chaumont where he expected to await instructions from the Chief of Staff. In the dispatch he sent in the evening to the Chief of Staff, he insisted again on the fermentation which prevailed in the Bassigny and Barrois.<sup>21</sup>

**Fears of the Allies for Langres.** --On the rear of the Allies, the change of direction in the march of the French columns had not gone without notice; but the emotion produced by the movements of Piré, fears caused by the spontaneity, the violence and intensity of the national uprising were not nearly calmed.

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<sup>18</sup>Maurin to the Chief of Staff, Morvilliers, 28 March, 8 o'clock in the evening, and Saint-Germain to the Chief of Staff, Nully, 8 o'clock, evening. (*Archives of the War.*)

<sup>19</sup>Macdonald to the Chief of Staff, Valcourt, 28 March, 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and Vassy, 8 o'clock in the evening, and Molitor to the Duke of Tarente, Le Buisson, 28 March, evening. (*Ibid.*)

<sup>20</sup>Oudinot to the Chief of Staff, Saint-Dizier, 23 March, evening. (*Archives of the War.*)

<sup>21</sup>Piré to the Chief of Staff, Vignory, 28 March, 8 o'clock, evening. (*Ibid.*)

Piré was so unprepared for the possibility of a move to Paris, he believed so strongly on continued operations in the rear, he had written on 28 March, from Vignory through his officier d'ordnance to the prefect of the Haute-Marne the following letter, intercepted by Allied cavalry currently in *K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, IV, 309 b.:

"Mr. Prefect, M. the General Baron Piré charges me with the honor to inform you of the new successes of His Majesty yesterday, the outcome of which was 25 cannons taken."

"His Majesty will tonight have his imperial district at Vassy, perhaps already in Doulevant. You should therefore expect to have in your walls after tomorrow."

"Therefore, take all necessary measures. You can take with less fear the supposition that an enemy patrol came to enter Chaumont, it could only become masters of what you have intended, failing transportation."

"The general asked me to inform you also that if he does not return tonight to Chaumont, he will be there tomorrow morning."

The dispatches sent by Wieland and Raigecourt to Duka, the instructions sent by the Feldzeugmeister to these officers, all bear the imprint of the worries and concerns that one would only be rid of after the fall of Paris.

A 6:30 in the morning, Colonel Wieland, posted at Saint-Michel (about four leagues south of Langres on the road to Dijon), wrote to Duka<sup>22</sup> that he had been informed by Major Bereny, established since the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup> beside of Saint-Geômes, of the presence troops of enemy cavalry that would be appearing around Langres mainly to the west of the town where everything had remained quiet. He even wrote to Duka that Major Count Auteuil, of the light horse of Rosenberg, informed him from Percey-le-Pautel, near Longeau that Count Raigecourt, decided to shut himself up in Langres, placing under his command the two squadrons of light horse and a Russian cavalry squadron which Wieland had prescribed to push forward if nothing happened again. Later, in a second dispatch, Wieland told Duka:<sup>23</sup> "My patrol found no trace of the enemy, and General Count de Raigecourt informs me that all is quiet around Langres."

Wieland announced at the same time the arrival of a party of 60 horses belonging to the light division of Maurice Liechtenstein and, coming from Chanceaux, was pulled back to the squadron posted at Saint-Geômes. This party, under Captain von Oenhausen, had not met with French troops in his path; but on the way he had been harassed by armed peasants.<sup>24</sup> At the moment when, after contacting Oenhausen, Raigecourt wrote to Duka, he already knew that the cavalry of Piré had evacuated Chaumont at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. He also sent word that, according to the words of a prisoner, Napoleon had been in person at Bar sur Aube and Colombey and "he had pushed on Rolampont the three squadrons of Count Auteuil with orders sent to this party from towards Nogent-le-Roi, Montigny and Chaumont."<sup>25</sup>

**Affair of armed peasants in Fayl-Billot.** --The same day the people Fayl-Billot had attacked an artillery convoy of eighteen carriages and a large convoy of baggage and seized the two convoys after a lively fight after which the commandant posted at Fayl-Billot had to evacuate the village. Raigecourt had sent a cavalry party that netted him the confirmation of these facts, but which had been followed throughout its course, on the outward and return journeys, by gunshots of peasant snipers in the woods through which pass the road from Langres to Fayl-Billot. "A small detachment," added Raigecourt,<sup>26</sup> "cannot go to Fayl-Billot, I will send tomorrow 300 infantry and 60 cavalry with orders to disperse these bands and restore communications. Another party will scour the country between Chaumont and Fayl-Billot."

One was a little less anxious beside Tonnerre and Auxerre. Detachments, belonging to the light division of Maurice Liechtenstein, had been able to return from Tonnerre to Saint-Florentin without incident. Nevertheless they feared the consequences of the presence of Allix at Auxerre. "General Allix," wrote Prince Maurice Liechtenstein, organizes from Auxerre the peasant insurrection that form in bands near the villages and scout to the front with vedettes."<sup>27</sup>

**Winzingerode returns to Saint-Dizier.** --Arrived at Châlons on the night of 27 to 28 March, Winzingerode had made his junction with Tettenborn. Noticing the 28<sup>th</sup> in the morning the change of the march of the French columns, he had left Châlons to return with Tettenborn to Saint-Dizier where Chernishev joined them a few hours later, on the

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<sup>22</sup>Colonel Wieland to Feldzeugmeister Duka, Saint-Michel. 28 March, 6:30 in the morning. (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, III, 484 c.)

<sup>23</sup>Colonel Wieland to Feldzeugmeister Duka, Saint-Michael, 28 March. (*Ibid.*, III, 484 d.)

<sup>24</sup>General Count Raigecourt to Feldzeugmeister Duka, Langres, 28 March, evening. (*Ibid.*, III, 484 z.)

<sup>25</sup> General Count Raigecourt to Feldzeugmeister Duka, Langres, 28 March, evening. (*Ibid.*, III, 484 z.)

<sup>26</sup>General Count Raigecourt to Feldzeugmeister Duka, Langres, 30 March. (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, III, 309 s.)

<sup>27</sup>Prince Maurice Liechtenstein to Feldzeugmeister Duka, Chanceaux, 28 March, (*Ibid.*, III, 484 n.)

night of the 28<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>. This general officer, concealing his movement to the French cavalry, had fallen back from Pougy towards Trannes and had left at Trannes, Soulaines and Sommevoire posts responsible for observing the movements of the French.

Despite the words of prisoners and stragglers picked up by the Cossacks of Chernishev, the Russian generals could hardly believe the march of the Emperor on Troyes. "Napoleon," wrote Martens,<sup>28</sup> "presumably goes towards Sézanne and Montmirail to fall on the army of Prince Schwarzenberg." And he added: "General Tettenborn thinks that General Winzingerode will head for this reason to Épernay to approach the army of Your Excellency." And he ended his dispatch with the words: "It is certain that Napoleon has turned back with all his army from the march on Provins."

**Observations on the position of the Allied armies and the Schwarzenberg movement orders for the day of 28 March.** --The 27<sup>th</sup> in the evening, when the Emperor, yielding to the advice of his marshals, changed his original resolutions and was returning from Vitry on Saint-Dizier, the two large masses of the Allies, marching towards the Marne by the roads of Coulommiers and La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, reached with their advanced guard: the Great Army, near Crécy; the Army of Silesia, Trilport and Meaux. The news arriving in the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup> at the general headquarters even though was vague enough. It was assumed, was more inclined to think that in addition, after the battle of Saint-Dizier, Napoleon renouncing a continued movement over the Vosges and Metz, would return to Paris; but it was not however the route he had followed. It was hoped to be certain on this so serious and so important point that one eagerly awaited the reports of Winzingerode, of Tettenborn, of Chernishev, Kaisarov and Soslavin. One wondered if, starting from Vitry and in passing through Fère-Champenoise and Sézanne, the Emperor would not try to join with the Allies and take them in the rear. There also was concern to learn that leaving from Vitry the 27<sup>th</sup>, still pushing the same evening and continuing until Sompuis and continuing from there on Nogent-sur-Seine, the Emperor would seek, and perhaps even succeed in bringing in three forced marches all his army the 30<sup>th</sup> to Fontainebleau. It was thought that in this case he would not fail to precede his troops, and the Generalissimo, as sovereigns, was already concerned this should be done in this case the 29<sup>th</sup> at night, just at the time arrangements were being made to attack Paris, one would receive the news of Napoleon's arrival in the capital where his presence would have changed everything.

The operations of the Emperor could still have for them a real serious nature, if Napoleon would have taken the path of Sézanne and Coulommiers. The 28<sup>th</sup> indeed, the Allies lacked adequate resources and measures prepared in advance, would be forced to focus their masses to allow them to cross successively the Marne, and that day, the army of the Emperor could at most be already near Sézanne. The news of Napoleon's approach was to happen in this case at the headquarters of the Allies at the time, due to their defective provisions, their troops were necessarily stacked in a corner of the Marne, when it would be forced to lose a day to repair this fault. In these conditions it was difficult to continue operations against Paris. One would have to resign themselves to fight a great battle and it looked even more likely resolved to fall back on the Aisne that Soissons that still stood and was so vigorously defended against Bülow did not seem nearly come to an end. We can claim rightly that the fall of the Emperor was brought by a moment of weakness, discouragement which he gave to his arrival at Vitry the 27<sup>th</sup>, through the fault he committed, first asking, and then following the timid advice of the Marshals, instead of relying as always on his own judgement, his activity, his genius.

The concern of the Allies, their hesitation justified this time by the absence of positive news, are all undeniable evidence. We cannot therefore blame the Generalissimo for a very natural caution in such circumstances. We must instead recognize that he showed a great tact and real intelligence by establishing in the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup>, the disposition governing the movement of 28 March, by deciding to continue, without rushing, however, the march on Paris and taking precautions, exaggerated perhaps, but necessary if one would have had to counter the various contingencies that could happen and that it was important more than ever to hold account if one did not want to expose themselves to compromise at the last moment the final result.

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<sup>28</sup>Winzingerode to the Emperor Alexander, Châlons, 28 March (*Journal of Received Pieces*, n° 600), and Martens to Field Marshal Blücher, Château-Thierry, 29 March. (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, III, 493).

**Movements and positions of the VI<sup>th</sup> Corps and the guards and reserves.** --That was why one had stopped the V<sup>th</sup> Corps between Chailly and La Ferté-Gaucher and for this reason also that, by the disposition sent from the Coulommiers headquarters on the 28<sup>th</sup> at midnight, they were content to push to Meaux the two columns formed by the corps of the Great Army. The right column (the VI<sup>th</sup> Corps, the Austrian grenadiers and guards and reserves) should follow the road of Lagny up to Couilly and take from there by the right to go by Nanteuil to Meaux. The baggage of the army and the park of Russian reserve artillery were ordered to march by the same road of that column, while the IV<sup>th</sup> Corps would stop on its arrival in Couilly and that the III<sup>rd</sup> Corps by filing by Coulommiers, would establish itself at Mouroux. Both corps were to await further orders on these positions.

Wrede remained in Chailly to cover the march of the parks and baggage. It was thought useful to reinforce him by the Austrian brigade of General Schaffer and make him responsible for sending on Provins and on Sézanne parties having the mission to give him news about the movements of the enemy.

The Generalissimo, communicating to Blücher this disposition, requested the Field Marshal to reserve for the Great Army one of the two bridges of Trilport.<sup>29</sup>

Making this suggestion, in relating to this, Gneisenau had, moreover, informed the headquarters of the Great Army, that the Army of Silesia would finish crossing the Marne at Trilport in the morning and that in leaving at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, one could have the two bridges. Also, instead of continuing to march by Crécy on Lagny, the Allied Great Army turned back by Nanteuil on Meaux, where the two armies would effect a junction. From the moment it was decided to make this detour, especially useless, moreover, as one had sent a Württemberg cavalry regiment to Lagny ordered to repair the bridge, one should have quickly pushed the cavalry of the VI<sup>th</sup> Corps on Meaux, charged with seizing the Marne stone bridge and quickly put in a state of readiness the bridge over the canal of the Ourcq that the French had cut the 27<sup>th</sup> in the evening, by falling back on this city from Trilport.

Instead of proceeding in this way, believing fully in the promises of Gneisenau and the 28<sup>th</sup>, at 7 o'clock in the morning, the Generalissimo sent to the various corps of the right column the order to march from Nanteuil, not on Meaux, but Trilport on, cross the Marne and go encamp on the right bank of the river Crégy, north of Meaux. But the Army of Silesia had not completed its crossing at the time fixed by Gneisenau and about 3 in the afternoon, Barclay de Tolly wrote from Quincy to the Generalissimo that given the advanced hour of the day he believed it wiser and more prudent to keep his troops on the left bank of the Marne. Accordingly, the 28<sup>th</sup> in the evening, the VI<sup>th</sup> Corps stopped in Nanteuil; the guards and reserves with Barclay de Tolly, at Meaux.<sup>30</sup>

**Movements and positions of the III<sup>rd</sup> and IV<sup>th</sup> Corps.** --The left column had hardly done more than the right one. At 12:30 in the afternoon the III<sup>rd</sup> Corps had not yet been able to leave the camp of Saint-Pierre-en-Veuve; the Coulommiers road was so packed with wagons and army convoys that Feldzeugmeister Gyulay resigned himself to gain Mouroux by the crossing from Vaux and from Coubertin. Arriving at this point where he had orders to stop until further notice, he formed his battalions in mass on both sides of the road. At 6 o'clock in the evening, having received no news from headquarters, he quartered his troops on both banks of the Grand Morin at Pommeuse Faremoutiers, La Celle-sur-Morin, Voisins, Boussois and Giremoutiers.

The IV<sup>th</sup> Corps, for its part, stopped in Couilly, Pont-aux-Dames and Saint-Germain-les-Couilly.<sup>31</sup>

Instead of going to Meaux, the general headquarters remained with the sovereigns in Quincy.

**Position and movement of the V<sup>th</sup> Corps.** --In the V<sup>th</sup> Corps, the cavalry formed the rear guard in La Ferté-Gaucher, covering hence the position of the infantry in Chailly; but the Schaeffer Brigade, which had orders to reinforce Wrede, had been unable to join him and did not reach Chailly until the 28<sup>th</sup> in the evening. "The roads,"

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<sup>29</sup>STÄRKE, Eintheilung und Tagesbegebenheiten der Haupt-Armee im Monate März. (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, III, 1.)

<sup>30</sup>STÄRKE, Eintheilung und Tagesbegebenheiten der Haupt-Armee im Monate März. (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, III, 1.)

<sup>31</sup>STÄRKE, Eintheilung und Tagesbegebenheiten der Haupt-Armee im Monate März. (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, III, 1.)

wrote Wrede, "are always congested by convoys, parks and baggage, and Chailly as well as the surrounding villages were completely looted so we no longer find any resources."<sup>32</sup>

**Considerations on the movements of the Allied Great Army.** --The Allied Great Army was consequently employed all day of the 28<sup>th</sup> to concentrate on Meaux. While taking account of the fears inspired by the possibility of the appearance of the Emperor in their rear, while noting that they were also somewhat reassured by the headquarters of the Army of Silesia, since Gneisenau had pushed the prudence to write to Radetzky to propose, "in the case of the approach of the Emperor, offering him battle on the plateau that extends between the Ferté-sous-Jouarre and Montmirail,"<sup>33</sup> it is impossible to justify the slow movements of the Allies, to approve in general, the arrangements for the day of the 28<sup>th</sup>. Even assuming at the same time, that we had not further accentuated the march on Paris before knowing exactly what to make on the operations of the Emperor, we never the less cannot explained why they took no measure to deal with congested roads. By even fearing an attack by the Emperor, one should have sought first to clear the ground, to unblock the roads. Instead of stubbornly filing both armies by the only two bridges at Trilport one should have, from the 27<sup>th</sup>, directed the pontoon bridges from Coulommiers on Lagny, to establish crossings and avoid locking up all the Allied Great Army in the loop that forms the Marne near Meaux, a loop where, in case of attack, it would have been forced into the river and the Ourcq canal where the French had cut the bridges behind them.

By operating in this way, the Allies not only lost a day of marching, they were still exposed to danger without any benefit of compensation.

**Retreat of the Marshals.** --In addition, one had almost completely neglected to follow the Marshals.

Ilovaysky,<sup>34</sup> relieved by Seslavin in Provins, had set out to reach Pahlen, and Seslavin only watched, without being able to worry about, the retreat of the Marshals from Provins on Nangis. Freed in their movements, the Marshals had had moved from Nangis, the Duke of Trévisé on Guignes, where he arrived at 10 o'clock in the evening, the Duke of Raguse on Melun, where he entered at 7 o'clock in the evening. On the order of Clarke and as they had also proposed, the two Marshals intended to return to Paris the next day and effect a junction at the bridge of Charenton the 29<sup>th</sup> in the afternoon.<sup>35</sup> Souham alone remained on the Seine at Nogent and Bray, to ensure by the left bank of the river communications with the Emperor.

As Kaiserov had been left at Arcis-sur-Aube since the 26<sup>th</sup> with orders to monitor the movement of the Emperor had felt obliged to stay with his Cossacks between the Seine and the Aube, in falling back on the Marne with the all the cavalry of the great army, they had made it impossible to delay the march of the Marshals and menace them in the plains of Brie, so favorable for the use of the cavalry, the march of troops harassed with fatigue and of a strength so doubtful that their leaders sought above all to avoid any kind of commitment before taking their line of operations on Paris and received ammunition that they almost completely lacked.<sup>36</sup> The irrational use of the Allied cavalry had

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<sup>32</sup>TAXIS, Tagebuch (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, XIII, 32); Wrede to Prince Schwarzenberg, Chailly, 28 March (*Ibid.*, III, 480), and Schwarzenberg to the Emperor of Austria, Quincy, 28 March (*Ibid.*, III, 480).

<sup>33</sup>Gneisenau to Radetzky, La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, 27 March, evening.

<sup>34</sup>Ilovaysky XII to Prince Volkonsky, 28 March, Report. (*Journal of Received Pieces*, n° 583.)

<sup>35</sup>Mortier to the Minister, Guignes, 28 March, 10 o'clock in the evening and Marmont to the Minister, Melun, 28 March, 9 o'clock. (*Archives of the War.*)

In this letter, the Duke of Ragusa continues to charge his colleague: "I would," he wrote, "be in Meaux and Lagny with the Duke of Trévisé, and it would be without the absurd and ridiculous march we made on Provins." The Marshal had certainly forgotten this dispatch, when writing his *Memoirs*, in which he raved, instead, on *the beautiful position of Provins*.

<sup>36</sup>Marmont to the Minister, Melun, 28 March, evening. (*Archives of the War.*)

resulted in forced errors, fears and ignorance of the command, so that Seslavin could not communicate until the 28<sup>th</sup> in the evening the direction followed by the Marshals.

**March of the columns of the Army of Silesia. --Combats of Claye and of Villeparisis.** --As for the I<sup>st</sup> and II<sup>nd</sup> Corps of the Army of Silesia, the vanguard of Katzler had resumed on the 28<sup>th</sup> at the break of day, its movement towards Meaux. At 7 o'clock in the morning on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lifeguard Hussars, supported by a battalion of infantry forming the tip of the vanguard, debouched from Meaux and engaged on the road Claye following the French rearguard of General Vincent. They sought above all to accelerate the movement, it was eager to finish and get to Paris and, as one no longer expected to find in the way the least resistance, it had so completely divested itself of ordinary prudence that the Prussian advanced guard, marching without scouts, came upon unexpectedly at the entrance of Claye against the troops of Compans. That general, reinforced by troops from Paris, had cleverly taken advantage of the terrain and made an excellent position behind Claye. He had left in front of the city a few squadrons, falling back at the approach of the Prussians, evacuated immediately Claye where hussars engaged them afterwards.

Claye<sup>37</sup> consists of a long road climbing up the hill and forming, at about the middle of the city, quite a pronounced bend. Only two side streets lead to the main street. At the very entrance of Claye a road, leaving the city and heading south, heading to the farm of Voisins, can be reached by crossing the Beuvronne on a bridge. The city of Claye at the time was deserted, closed houses, abandoned by the residents who had barricaded them.

On the order of Katzler the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion of East Prussian fusiliers followed in turn the hussars. "An aide de camp of Lieutenant Colonel von Klüx had given me the order to immediately enter the village and cross it by myself preceded by skirmishers charged with scouting ahead," Captain von Besserer said in his report on the combat Claye, who acted in the interim as commander of the battalion of fusiliers. "I followed as a result, my skirmishers at a distance, with my battalion marching in column by section. At this time, a second officer, sent by Lieutenant Colonel von Klüx, ordered me to push forward without delay and send to my left a company, to occupy on the road to Voisins, the bridge of the Beuvronne. I conformed to this order, while my skirmishers continued to follow our hussars. The curves, described by the main road, prevented me to see what was happening in front of me, and I kept marching by section. Once in the village, I marched along with my men on the right side of the street, while General von Katzler, with his officers, marched on the opposite side. One had just given me the order to halt, when the hussars returned to us in disorder and at a gallop. Here's what happened. The scouts, after searching Claye, had left from town, had settled in the alley from the last houses and had exchanged a few shots with French vedettes, while the hussars, having discovered nothing in front Claye, had continued forward."

"Arrived at a hundred meters away from the last houses, they came up unexpectedly against the French cuirassiers and Polish lancers who skillfully ambushed and hidden by one of the road turns, surprised them and brought them on Claye after slashing the skirmishers."<sup>38</sup> Lieutenant von Oelsnitz, who commanded the skirmishers and was taken by the French, completes in his report the information relating to this episode of the fighting at Claye. "We had," he said,<sup>39</sup> "in safely crossing the main street of Claye, all was quiet. We barely heard a few isolated shots from fusils. The aide de camp pushed us forward, when suddenly I saw General von Katzler coming and thirty hussars galloping, saber in hand, in full flight, and we shouted: Hold! Hold! Behind them appeared immediately cuirassiers, chasseurs, Polish lancers. Before there was any time for me to make sense of this, I was already knocked down, slashed, taken and my men slashed like me, had to lay down their arms."

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<sup>37</sup>VON OELSNITZ, *History of the Prussian 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment*.

<sup>38</sup>Captain von Besserer, Report on the combat of Claye. (*History of the Prussian 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment*.)

<sup>39</sup>Lieutenant VON OELSNITZ, Report on the combat of Claye. (*Idem*.)

The French cavalry tried in turn to debouch from Claye; but was stopped and taken back by the Prussian hussars, which pursued them onto the road of Villeparisis and again arrived in time to deliver a number of fusiliers, who joined their battalion returned to Claye after the retirement of the French cavalry.<sup>40</sup>

The rest of the vanguard of Katzler stopped at his command before entering Claye and Katzler waited to debouch from the city for the arrival of generals Yorck and Kleist and the bulk of the II<sup>nd</sup> Corps. The same configuration of the terrain prevented the Prussian generals from reconnoitering the position of Compans, whose troops occupied the woods of Claye, the farm of Grosbois, the copses, east of this farm and, a little further back, Montzaigle, which served as the small redoubt of the position, and where the general had posted his main body. The Prussian generals, who could not see more than the few skirmishers which adorned the edge of the small wood south of the road, determined to seize the heights that rose to their left, threaten the right of Compans and prepare the attack they planned to direct on the front of the position.

As soon as Prince Augustus of Prussia, at the head of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Brigades (generals von Klüx and von Pirch I) had crossed the defile of Claye following the advanced guard of Katzler and reserve cavalry of Zieten, Yorck pushed Colonel von Lettow, with the infantry of Katzler, to the heights that rise south of the road and charged Zieten to accentuate with the uhlans of Brandenburg and Silesia, the flanking movement against the right the French. Stunned at the stubborn resistance also unexpected that Katzler had met, Yorck, always prudent, had simultaneously sent one of his officers beg the Field Marshal to cross the vanguard of the corps of Langeron north of Claye, to direct by Messy and Saint-Mesmes on Mory, and charge it with turning the wood of Saint-Denis, bordering the highway and extending north of Montzaigle and Villeparisis.

Meanwhile, Colonel von Lettow pushed forward with two fusilier battalions (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of West Prussia) obliged the French tirailleurs to retreat to the hills of Montzaigle that Prince Augustus of Prussia was about to turn with the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade (von Klüx). The 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade (von Pirch I) continued its movement, parallel to the road.

Before the substantial deployment of Prussian forces, Compans had brought the bulk of his tirailleurs on Montzaigle and had left only a few observation posts at the farm of Grosbois. The battalions of Colonel von Lettow, preceding the bulk of the advanced guard, behind which were the troops of Prince Augustus of Prussia, had closely followed the French tirailleurs until the moment General Compans resolved to attempt an offensive reply. Debouching abruptly from Montzaigle with his infantry, he managed to momentarily chase the Prussians from the small wood and then fell back to the woods of Claye, located east of Villeparisis. But while the counter attack of Compans succeeded against the Prussian lines, the left of the vanguard, supported by the cavalry of Zieten, arrived on the right of the French position by Le Pin, and the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, completing its flanking movement, reached around Montzaigle. The 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade was left in columns, on both sides of the highway where it was hidden behind a fold in the ground. Its skirmishers held the northern part of the small wood and the artillery, supported by some squadrons and an infantry battalion, began to counter fire against the French batteries in position before Villeparisis and whose well-directed fire inflicted serious losses to the supporters of the Prussian artillery. Threatened on his right, General Compans then decided to abandon the Gros-Bois farm and the wood of Claye, as the 10<sup>th</sup> Prussian Brigade immediately tucked the edge, and the bulk of its forces took up a position in Villeparisis; his left had supported by the farm at Morfondé, his right at Montzaigle, which had been firmly entrenched and whose buildings formed a kind of fortress. Some tirailleurs lined the vineyards and groves of the hills towards Le Pin. "As the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade arrived on the heights of Montzaigle," said Prince Augustus of Prussia in his report, "three battalions under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel von Klüx already occupied the heights and the adjacent woods. The enemy was hanging onto Montzaigle and the nearest copses of this farm."

"As the direct attack of Montzaigle would have cost a lot of people, I ordered the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade to push strongly forward towards Villeparisis, to threaten the lines of retreat of the enemy."

Prince Augustus perhaps intentionally forgets to remember that the attempts to take Montzaigle by force had failed and had cost the Prussians not a few people. The commander of a battalion of fusiliers, Major von Hundt, and one

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<sup>40</sup>The affair of Claye and Villeparisis cost the Prussian fusiliers 16 dead, 58 wounded, including 1 officer, and 114 prisoners, including one officer. (VON OELSPLITZ, Report on the combat Claye.)

of Kleist's aides, Major von Watzdorf, died the next day from injuries received during the attack. The French left Montzaigle and retreated to Villeparisis, when the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, accelerated to the pas de charge, began to debouch on their right and threaten their retirement. The skirmishers of General von Klüx pushed behind them, into the valley, and General von Kleist, stopping the brigade on the heights, placed in position in a battery of six pounders and half a horse battery that he charged with bombarding the French infantry and the cavalry posted in the valley of Villeparisis. The cavalry of Zieten established themselves to the left of the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, while the advanced guard of Katzler went beyond Montzaigle and the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade moved by the highway against Villeparisis. But the brigade went there in the evening, after the departure of Compans who, bringing most of his small detachment to Bondy, only left behind his rearguard of cavalry stationed with General Vincent at Vert-Galant.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Report of Prince Augustus of Prussia on the Battle of Claye, 28 March. (*Kriegsgeschichtliche Einzelschriften*); GURETZKY-CORNITZ, *History of the 1<sup>st</sup> Uhlan Regiment of Brandenburg*, n° 3; *History of the Prussian 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment*; Report of Lieutenant von Wedelstädt; HAGEN, *History of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Dragoons of Neumark*; SCHNEIDAWIND, *Prinz Wilhelm von Preussen in den Kriegen seiner Zeit*; VON WEDELL, *History of the Prussian 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment*; Compans to Clarke, Vert-Galant, 29 March, 8 o'clock in the morning, and Operations of General Vincent from 19 to 28 March. (*Archives of the War.*)