

The Napoleon Series

The Campaign of 1814: Chapter 18, Part IX

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THE CAMPAIGN OF 1814

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

THE ALLIED CAVALRY

DURING THE CAMPAIGN OF 1814

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.

Observations on the situation of the troops for the attack and defense, 30 March at 6 o'clock in the morning.

--Before studying in detail the battle of Paris, engaged without coordination and sustained without direction, the battle in which the defense took the offensive to try to repair the inconceivable faults committed on the 29th, it is essential to take a quick glance at the situation of the two armies when the first cannon shot fired at Pantin gave the signal for action which was to decide the fate of France. A happy coincidence, the eccentric direction given the day before to the Army of Silesia, the delay in the transmission of orders given to Captain von Reichenbach, the separation of all but a single corps of the Allied Great Army on the front of the attack would not only allow the defense to regain *in extremis* a small portion of the time lost by giving it the opportunity to get some of its troops to the positions where they should have been the day before, but it ensured, during the early hours of the morning, an unexpected superiority. On one side, as the other, mistakes had been made by abandoning Pantin and Romainville; but little time had been gained by General Compans, whose infantry had bivouacked on the hillock of Beauregard, in reaching the plateau of Romainville. Moreover the troops of Marmont had only a little way to go to move from Malassise and from Bagnolet to the center position, to effect their junction with Compans, to strongly establish on the plateau and prevent the Russians from debouching from Pantin. The left wing of the defense alone was stripped of troops. The cavalry of Vincent had received, it is true, the order to leave the vicinity of La Chapelle; but it was at 10 o'clock only that one could be expected to debouch to the left of the division of Michel the column heads of Marshal Mortier, responsible for the defending that part of the battlefield extending from the channel of Ourcq to Montmartre.

On their side, the Allies would have barely met a semblance of resistance if, as required by the disposition, their right wing (Army of Silesia) had been able to enter the line between 5 and 6 o'clock in the morning.

Without stressing again the fact that the movement orders had not yet arrived at the headquarters of the Army of Silesia, it would have been necessary to take into account the actual time required to move to this front since the corps were staggered from Le Bourget and Le Grand Drancy up to Aulnay-les-Bondy and Villepinte.

One had regulated with little more reason the movements of corps belonging to the Great Army. One had been left unduly troubled by the dispatch, however unlikely, of Colonel von Swichow. One really had believed for some time that Napoleon and his army arrived on the evening of the 28th in Sézanne, and for that reason one had immobilized 30,000 men, represented by the corps of Wrede and of Sacken. Even assuming momentarily one could give credence to the dispatch of the commander of Vitry, it seems however that it would have been more logical to let the corps of Sacken continue its movement after the Army of Silesia. Whatever happened and since in case of an attack in the rear of the Great Army it was proposed to cut and raise the bridges of the Marne, it was on the other hand, unnecessary and contrary to the true principles stop the Vth Corps. One could have taken advantage of the delay experienced by the IIIrd Corps in crossing the Marne, a delay that allowed it to get close to Paris in the afternoon of the 30th, to entrust the guard of the rear and protection of the bridges, trains and parks and given the corps of Sacken and Wrede orders to march along the right bank of the Ourcq and come and form as quickly as possible to the right of the VIth Corps, while the 47,000 men of the Army of Silesia could had overwhelmed Montmartre by the west and have managed to get into Paris almost without resistance. While seeking to bring a solution by arms to what was wanted to be prompt and immediate, one was not only deprived of the help of more than 30,000 men, but the arrangements were so singular that the Allies were only going to oppose Marmont and to Compans from 6 to 7 o'clock in the morning, with the 2,000 men forming the 14th Division (General Helfreich), then from 7 to 11 o'clock, the twelve thousand men of the VIth Corps, reinforced by the 2nd Division of Cuirassiers General Kretov.

Combats of Pantin and Romainville. --The general situation was far from being unfavorable to the defense, when the Russian General Helfreich engaged at Pantin with the tirailleurs of the division of Boyer de Rébeval, supported and encircled on the left side of road of Allemagne by the Michel Division. Meanwhile, Compans and Ledru des Essarts were advancing from Prés-Saint-Gervais to Romainville, while the column heads of Marmont debouched from Bagnolet and began to climb the plateau slopes.

While they were in a fire fight at Pantin, the Emperor Alexander, after giving his final instructions to Count Nesselrode and Colonel Orlov, his aide de camp, rode to approach the battlefield and sent to Prince Eugene of Württemberg the order to support, with the 2nd Corps of infantry and the cuirassiers of Kretov, the division of General Helfreich.

Although the Helfreich Division had succeeded in preventing the soldiers of Boyer entering Pantin and had even forced it to fall back on the brigade of Secrétant (Michel Division), Prince Eugene of Württemberg had recognized the impossibility of not only debouching from Pantin, since the valley was swept by the crossfire of the positional batteries of Rouvroy, the buttes of Beauregard and of Près-Saint-Gervais, but even to remain in the village if he could not make himself master, first of Romainville, then Près-Saint-Gervais. He had also noticed that the columns of French troops quickly moved on Romainville where they had controlled all the plain and dominated the road to Meaux. It was less a matter of strengthening the 14th Division engaged in Pantin than to anticipate the French in Romainville and maintain it at all costs until the entry into line of the guards and reserves and the corps of the left wing. Also Prince Eugene of Württemberg, rather than comply with the orders he had received, ordered General Prince Shakhovskiy to occupy Romainville without delay with the 3rd Infantry Division, and ordered General Pyshnitsky, who had taken position at the foot of the heights of Romainville, to support General Helfreich and drive the French from the edge of Pantin. While General Pyshnitsky accomplished without much trouble the function which the Prince had ordered, the cuirassiers of Kretov, which did not know what to do at the moment, massed in reserve behind Pantin. The Prince was also quick to realize the resolution he had thought it necessary to take on his own authority and had addressed to General D'Auvray, Chief of Staff of the VIth Corps, with a request to forward it to Barclay, the following note written in French: "Romainville is the key to this terrain and it must be occupied; a bloody battle awaits the IInd Corps (sic). It is dedicated. It is not the first time. I hope for a speedy rescue. Eugene."¹ Despite this, Rayevskiy was to inform the commander of the Russian 2nd Corps that "complying with the orders he had received," he was to move with the 5th Infantry Division (Mezentsev) and the light cavalry of Pahlen

¹Journal of the 2nd Infantry Corps. (*Topographical Archives*, n° 47344.)

more left in the direction of Bagnolet and Montreuil. But Barclay de Tolly, more free to act than General Rayevsky had approved the resolution taken by the Prince and was quick to announce that the grenadiers were setting out to support him. So he was to stand firm until the arrival of these reinforcements, until the entry into the line of the Mezentsev Division; this was much more difficult as the two divisions of the 2nd Corps, one was indispensable in Pantin and the other, barely enough to keep Romainville and prevent the Chabert Brigade, supported by the division of Ledru des Essarts, from debouching from the wood of Romainville and pushing towards the village.

From 7 to 9 o'clock in the morning, the two divisions of the Russian 2nd Corps and the 14th Division (Helfreich), although sorely tested by the fire of the French who put over 1500 of their men out of action, however, managed to retain Pantin and keep at Romainville, the possession of which was even more important for the Allies as the loss of this village would have prevented the 5th Infantry Division (General Mezentsev) to complete its motion on Bagnolet. The King of Prussia, accompanied by his two son, had arrived in the meantime on the battlefield and was joined moments later by the Emperor of Russia and the Generalissimo. One already knew at that time that the Army of Silesia could not commit at the time set by the disposition and that the corps under the command of the Crown Prince of Württemberg would come into the line on the 30th in the afternoon.

These considerations persuaded the sovereigns and the Generalissimo to approve the measures taken by Barclay who, having sent the Russian grenadiers the order to go support the 2nd Corps, commanded the brigade of Prussian and Baden Guards to move on Pantin and the Russian Guards to mass in front of Noisy-le-Sec. Moreover, to prevent the French to use all their available forces near Romainville, Barclay had invited General Langeron to start his movement toward Montmartre.² Finally, hastened to reinforce Prince Eugene of Württemberg by the only troops we had on hand, the 3rd Brigade (General Vlasov) of the Mezentsev Division that came with the 23rd and 24th Eiger Regiments to battle formations to the left of the Shakhovsky Division.²

Despite this reinforcement, the situation of Russian troops was all the more critical as while Mezentsev marched on Bagnolet and Pahlen with his cavalry on Montreuil, the infantry of Marmont advanced rapidly through the valley of Bagnolet and was soon to give a hand to the troops of Compans and Ledru, established in the wood of Romainville. Indeed, while on the side of Romainville, Compans and Ledru foiled all attempts of Prince Eugene, while Boyer de Rébeval and Michel, supported by the positional batteries, covered and crushed with their fire the defenders of Pantin, Vincent had settled with his cavalry in Belleville, the Lagrange Division, the head of Marmont's column, debouched from the valley of Bagnolet at the level of the wood of Romainville, was joined to the right of the troops of Compans and Ledru and deployed immediately to mount on the road to Belleville in Romainville. The Arrighi Division which followed, was ordered to extend to the right of Lagrange and settle on the plateau of Malassise. The Duke of Padoue then covered Bagnolet and was connected to the cavalry formed in two lines extending in front of Charonne from L'Épine to La Pissotte. The third division of the Marshal, the Ricard Division, placed in the general reserve in Bruyères Park, and the artillery of the corps went to be placed battery on the hillock of the Tourelles.

As soon as these movements were executed and that the troops of the 6th Corps had finished their deployment, the Duke of Raguse took the offensive all along the line. Compans and Ledru advanced again on the plateau; to their left, General Boyer de Rébeval supported their attack, and his tirailleurs, alongside the flanks of the plateau pushed on Pantin; to their right the divisions of Lagrange and Arrighi also moved forward. Favored by the terrain and skillfully taking advantage of this shelter, the tirailleurs of the Young Guard arrived, despite the charges of cuirassiers of Kretov, to snatch the first houses of Pantin from the division of Helfreich.³ On the plateau Prince Eugene of Württemberg had to completely abandon the woods and fall back under the walls of the park of Romainville. To the right of the Marmont the division of Arrighi managed to momentarily stop the movement of the eight battalions of the division of Mezentsev in march on Montreuil and on Bagnolet.

² Journal of the 2nd Infantry Corps. (*Topographical Archives*, n° 47344), and Journal of Barclay de Tolly (*Ibid.*, n° 29188).

³Major General Roth and all the senior officers of the 26th Eiger Regiment were wounded and put out of action during the attack. (Journal of Barclay de Tolly; *Topographical Archives*, n° 29188.)

To the left of Marmont, Mortier had debouched on the plain and occupied positions on the right bank of the Ourcq canal.

Joined between ten and eleven o'clock in the morning by the brigade of eiger of General Vlasov, Prince Eugene of Württemberg, who had already recognized the impossibility of seizing the plateau by a frontal attack, sent to General Pyshnitsky the order to execute, with part of his division stationed on the side of Pantin, an attack against the left of the troops of Ledru and of Compans who pressed him close to Romainville. Despite the difficulties involved in such a movement and increasingly sharp attacks that the brigade of Secrétant, supported by the Curial Division, directed on Pantin, General Pyshnitsky ordered the 4th and 34th Eiger Regiments to climb the slopes of the plateau and fall on the left flank of the tirailleurs of the infantry division of Boyer de Rébeval. These two regiments, climbing the slopes, surprised by their unexpected attack, the troops of Boyer, making them waiver and even forcing the troops of Compans to give ground, to abandon the wood of Romainville and to retreat to Les Prés-Saint-Gervais before a renewed attack executed by the division of Shakhovsky and the eiger of General Vlasov. Supported by some fresh troops, the French had recovered quickly. Despite this Compans had to resign themselves to evacuate the wood of Romainville. But the two regiments of Russian eiger lost in this engagement, their colonels and most of their men. As to the Volyn Regiment which, without having received the order and on the direct initiative of its leader, had moved to Pantin on the rear of the troops of Boyer, it was almost completely destroyed and its debris had managed with great difficulty to regain Pantin.

Entry into the line of the first troops of the Army of Silesia. --It was then a little past 11 o'clock; on one side or the other there was yet no substantial progress, no serious advantage won. They fought as skirmishers, without restraint, without direction from Pantin to Romainville, when Barclay, who from Romainville had followed the vicissitudes of the disastrous battle in which the Volyn Regiment was committed, sent Prince Eugene of Württemberg the order to go to Pantin and provide a true account of the situation of 4th and 14th Divisions. The Prince had barely arrived in this village, when he finally heard in the plain and on his right the first guns of the Army of Silesia. These were, firstly, General Emanuel,⁴ who opened fire on the side of Aubervilliers, and secondly the horse artillery of the advanced guard of General von Katzler trying to silence the battery of Rouvroy.

Immediately after receiving the movement orders that had reached them at 8 o'clock, Yorck and Kleist had prescribed to their advanced guard to move on Pantin and to restore the canal bridge. The 1st and 2nd Corps preceded by the two batteries of 12 pounders of the 1st Corps had orders to follow the vanguard. The reserve cavalry of Zieten and the reserve artillery of the two corps brought up the rear. All baggage and convoys had to stop in Aulnay and park there. The Russian infantry of Vorontsov leaving from Villepinte, served as a reserve for both corps and also followed the route from the Petits-Ponts. Having no good map, the two generals had advanced to the banks of the Ourcq canal, had reconnoitered under the fire of the French artillery the French position and ordered Katzler⁵ to open fire with his two horse batteries and cross the bridges of the canal with the corps fusiliers and 2nd Fusiliers of East Prussia. Upon arrival on the left bank of the canal, these troops had orders to occupy the farm of Rouvroy and disengage the regiments of the 14th Division (Helfreich) exhausted by four hours of fighting.

Entry into the line of the Russian grenadiers and brigade of the Prussian Guard. --A few moments later, about noon, Prince Eugene of Württemberg received from Barclay de Tolly a dispatch announcing that the first Grenadier Division (General Choglokov) was about to arrive in Romainville, the brigade of Colonel von Alvensleben formed by the Prussian and Baden guards approached Pantin and that the 2nd Grenadier Division (Lieutenant General

⁴Composition of the Russian vanguard of General Emanuel: 10th, 12th, 22nd and 38th Regiments of Foot Eiger; Kiev Regiment of Dragoons, Mounted Eiger Regiment of Livonia, Cossack regiments of the Don: Selivanov II and Grekov XXI; a horse battery (regular artillery) and 3 pieces of horse artillery of the Don Cossacks. (Operational Journal of General Emanuel.)

⁵The advanced guard of Katzler consisted of six infantry battalions, two companies of jäger, 2 companies of schützen under the command of Lieutenant Colonel von Lettow; 4 cavalry regiments (2nd Bodyguard Hussars, hussars of Brandenburg, hussars of Silesia and dragoons of Neumark), under the command of Colonel von Blücher, and 2 horse batteries.

Paskevich) was directed on his order, from Bondy to Montreuil to reinforce the attacks from the left and support the division of Mezentsev.⁶

Prince Eugene of Württemberg, now reassured about the fate of his right and knowing that General Helfreich could be immediately relieved and supported by the troops of Colonel von Alvensleben, ordered General Pyshnitsky to move with the rest of his division to the lower part of Près-Saint-Gervais, to survey the village by some skirmishers and veer to the left to connect the slopes of the Romainville plateau to the right of the Shakhovsky Division. He prescribed at the same time General Choglokov, whose division had been under his command, to occupy the wood of Romainville by two of his brigades. Before leaving for Pantin to remount the plateau, Prince Eugene of Württemberg also ordered General Helfreich to temporarily settle for possession of Pantin and stay on the defensive until he himself succeeded to first to lead the wood of Romainville, and to seize the Près-Saint-Gervais and Bruyères park. He had simultaneously sent to Colonel von Alvensleben order to massage his brigade covered behind Pantin and wait on that subsequent instructions.

Taking of Montreuil by the Mezentsev Division and a division of Russian grenadiers. --The general situation had also changed in favor of the Russians when, a little after noon, Prince Eugene of Württemberg joined on the plateau and in the wood of Romainville most of the troops under his command. Generals Rayevsky and Gorchakov, informed of the approach of reinforcements formed by the grenadier division of Paskevich, had placed in the offensive four regiments of the division of Mezentsev (5th Division) which, covered and scouted on their left by the cavalry of Pahlen, drove from Montreuil the few troops that the Duke of Padoue had established there. Immediately after taking Montreuil, Pahlen had separated from General Mezentsev; contained with part of his people, the cavalry of Bordesoulle who dared neither charge nor harass, he had surveyed the Château de Vincennes by a few parties and had directed most of his corps on Charonne. To his right, Mezentsev and Gorchakov were charged to snatch from Duke of Padoue the plateau of Malassise and the village of Bagnolet. Compelled by the same conformation of the land to remain in observation in front of Charonne, that he was not able to take with only his cavalry, Pahlen was soon receiving orders not to attempt anything before being joined and strengthened by the Crown Prince of Württemberg.

Prince Eugene of Württemberg attacks Les Prés-Saint-Gervais and the park of Bruyères. --The progress that Mezentsev had just made on the side of Montreuil, the arrival of the bulk of the 4th Division (Pyshnitsky) south of Pantin, the entry into the line of the grenadiers of Choglokov on same plateau of Romainville, had persuaded Prince Eugene Württemberg to undertake without delay the simultaneous attack Les Prés-Saint-Gervais and the park of Bruyères. His right-hand column, the Pyshnitsky Division, had as its objective the village of Saint-Gervais-Prés. The left, formed by the Shakhovsky Division, Vlasov Brigade and the brigade of grenadiers of Knyazhnin, and that he directed in person, moved on the park of Bruyères. That of the center, including the other two brigades of the division of grenadiers of General Choglokov, held on the second line and would, after chasing the brigade of Chabert from the wood of Romainville Chabert brigade which had taken flight, cooperate to attack Près-Saint-Gervais. Threatened more seriously than ever on his front and on his left, the Duke of Raguse tried a supreme effort and urged his last troops available to maintain its positions. The division of Ledru des Essarts was ordered to leave Les Prés-Saint-Gervais and move rapidly to strengthen Compans and Chabert Brigade that the Russians of Pyshnitsky and Choglokov were about to chase from the wood of Romainville. During its march, this division came against the troops of Pyshnitsky and threw them on the slopes of the plateau towards Pantin; but, taken in the flank by the grenadiers of Choglokov, they had to withdraw like the brigade of Chabert and took position between the park of Bruyères and Les Prés-Saint-Gervais. The left column of Prince Eugene of Württemberg had also gained ground: the eiger of Vlasov followed by the grenadiers of Knyazhnin, had pushed to the foot of the wall of Bruyères Park that the troops of General Lagrange continued to strongly defend against a numerically superior enemy and despite their leader, General Fournier, having been made hors de combat.

After being thrown down from the plateau by General Ledru des Essarts, the division of Pyshnitsky began with skirting the plateau; it was then moved to Les Prés-Saint-Gervais and had quickly pushed its skirmishers against this

⁶The two divisions of Russian grenadiers and the brigade of Prussian and Baden Guard formed a total of about 13,600 men.

village only occupied by two battalions of the division of Boyer Rébeval. Strongly pushed by the Russians who began to enter the village, these two battalions were already about to be overwhelmed and abandon their position when the Marshal was supported by 400 men led by Colonel Fabvier, his aide de camp. This officer was successful, not only in disengaging the battalions of Boyer, but managing to throw back the Russians on their support that the prolonged and converging fire of the French artillery forced soon to seek shelter behind the dead angles formed by the plateau slopes.

For the second time since the beginning of the battle, the Prince Eugene of Württemberg had been obliged to break off the fight. Having gone elsewhere, moments later, Barclay de Tolly receive orders to avoid for the time being all serious commitment and simply skirmish with the advanced troops of Marmont. It was now past noon. One had managed to take from the defense Montreuil, the possession of which was of no great importance, and the wood of Romainville. Until about two in the afternoon, everything was reduced on the plateau to a simple fusillade interspersed with a few cannon shots and a few isolated raids executed, some by the Russian infantry, others by the cuirassier brigade of General Stahl (Kretov Division).⁷ From either side, one took advantage of this kind of truce; the side of the attack, to rally and re-form the regiments almost entirely deployed as skirmishers and mostly mixed together; on the side of the defense to restore order in the line, try to resist further attacks and prepare to stand further back on the front Prés-Saint-Gervais--Belleville--Charonne.

Continuation of the fight of Pantin. --While Prince Eugene of Württemberg had vainly tried for the second time to snatch from the Duke of Raguse the plateau of Romainville, Les Prés-Saint-Gervais and the park of Bruyères, fighting had continued fiercely in Pantin. At noon, when the brigade of Prussian and Baden Guards stopped east of Pantin, General Helfreich had not a single man in reserve; his 1200 men, deployed as skirmishers, painfully resisting the efforts of the French who continued to occupy the entire western part of the village. Supported by the pieces in position at the entrance of the village and by the converging fire from two established batteries, one on the heights of Prés-Saint-Gervais, the other in the same valley not far from the canal of Ourcq behind the farm of Rouvroy, the generals Boyer de Rébeval, Michel and Curial were preparing to strengthen the Secrétant Brigade and their column heads were barely 600 meters from the entrance. Prince Eugene of Württemberg, who led the fight since morning, had recognized that the French would be inevitably forced to abandon Pantin as soon as one had succeeded in flushing out the plateau and taking Les-Prés-Saint-Gervais; but on the other hand, it would be almost impossible to debouch from the village and move to the valley as the French artillery there would converge its fire. Wanting to avoid unnecessary loss, he consequently ordered General Helfreich to refrain from any offensive demonstration, but keep Pantin at all costs. It was at about this time that the Prussian Guard came behind Pantin. This brigade had not fired a shot since the beginning of the campaign. Officers and soldiers were burning with a desire to fight and made it known. From the point where he had moved to reconnoiter the field, Colonel von Alvensleben had seen the French reserves heading on Pantin. The temptation was too strong and, regardless of the instructions left by Prince Eugene, Alvensleben, encouraged also by Grand Duke Constantine and the Russian General Roth,⁸ ordered Lieutenant Colonel von Block to cross Pantin with two battalions of the advanced guard⁹ and immediately reinforce the Russians. As soon as he reached the first houses of Pantin, Lieutenant Colonel von Block deployed to his right his skirmishers who united with the vanguard of Katzler established on the right bank of the canal, while Alvensleben gave that of Lieutenant Colonel von Müffling the order to serve as support to the troops of Lieutenant Colonel von Block and settling in the village entrance with two battalions, one Prussian and one of Baden, and two guns. At the same time Alvensleben was taking a position with the other four battalions of the Prussian Guard and five guns north of Pantin.

⁷Journal of Operations of Barclay de Tolly and Operations of the Russian 2nd Infantry Corps (*Topographical Archives*, nos 29188 and 47344); Journal of Boyer de Rébeval (*Archives of the War*), and Journal of Fabvier.

⁸ The Grand Duke Constantine would, they say, ask Colonel von Alvensleben to move forward. On the other hand, it appears certain that during the reconnaissance to which he proceeded, Alvensleben crossed with the Russian General Roth, who was being carried to the ambulance and shouted: "Hurry, Colonel! otherwise Pantin will become another Probstheida."

⁹Fusilier Battalion of the 1st Regiment of the Guard and the 1st Battalion of the 2nd Regiment of the Guard.

Debouching impetuously from the village, Lieutenant Colonel von Block charged with the bayonet three French battalions who were trying to enter Pantin following the Russians and forced them to retreat to their main body occupying the space between Les Maisonnettes and the channel and their right resting on Les Prés-Saint-Gervais. Driven by the example of their officers, two Prussian battalions, although being met by a murderous fire, tried in vain to take Les Maisonnettes. Crushed by the projectiles of the French artillery, decimated by the fire of the infantry, threatened on their flanks by the Bigarré Brigade (Curial Division), they soon had to fall back on Pantin only followed by some skirmishers, which far from attacking the village, confined themselves to monitor the surroundings and the exit. Like all premature and isolated movements, the bold attempt of Colonel von Block had only brought results quite out of proportion to the considerable losses suffered by his little column. They had, indeed, disengaged the Russians of Helfreich, snatched from the troops of General Secrétant some houses where it would have been difficult to maintain for long; but the two battalions, reduced to 150 men, had left more than three quarters of their effectives on the field. All the officers of the Fusiliers of the 1st Regiment of the Guard, with the exception of one slightly injured captain, were disabled. At one o'clock in the afternoon, Colonel von Alvensleben, fearing to compromise unnecessarily the entire brigade by successively engaging battalions established in the northwest debouchment of Pantin, gave up the offensive and merely instructed his artillery to counter fire against the French batteries and stop the tirailleurs.

The Army of Silesia enters the line shortly after 11 o'clock in the morning. --While the two battalions of the Prussian Guard foolishly and unnecessarily tried to debouch from Pantin, the Army of Silesia had finally come closer to the battlefield and deployed the right of the front of attack. The advanced guard of Katzler had, we have already taken the time to say, arrived about 11 o'clock at the Grand Drancy, to the level of Pantin, and was deployed on the right bank of the canal, a short distance from the point where the route of Petits-Ponts leads to the canal bridge. Its horse artillery, reinforced first by two batteries of 12 pounders and a battery of 6 and some howitzers, had taken position between the channel and the route of Petits-Ponts and had spread gradually up slightly away from the road to Lille. But the artillery battle had not turned in favor of the Prussians who, far from succeeding in extinguishing the fire of the defense, had already had, instead, several pieces taken out, when the division of General von Horn, the column head of the Ist Corps began to appear on the road of Petits-Ponts.

Of all corps of the Army of Silesia, the corps of Langeron, established at Bourget, had been from the day before the nearest to Paris and had, according to the disposition of Blücher, formed the right column of Army of Silesia. As soon as the Russian general had heard the cannon next to Pantin, he had, without waiting for orders from headquarters, put his corps in motion in the direction of La Villette and prescribed to General Emanuel who commanded his vanguard to take Aubervilliers.¹⁰ A little after 10 o'clock General Emanuel had, as we have already said, started the attack on the village. But in the meantime, Langeron had received the disposition of Blücher and complied with orders directing him to invest Saint-Denis, having had to detach against this fortified town General Kaptsevich with the 9th and 10th Infantry Corps. About two hours later, when he recognized that taking this position would cost quite too much, when one was convinced of the impossibility of attempting such an operation, Langeron was authorized to recall the bulk of his infantry and to leave before Saint-Denis General Kornilov with two infantry regiments and the cavalry regiment of Dorpat.

These different direction changes naturally had delayed the march of the right column and it had lost so much time that it really came into the line after the two Prussian corps of Yorck and Kleist. These corps had indeed gone beyond Le Grand Drancy around 11 o'clock, arriving between noon and one o'clock at the level of Pantin. General von Katzler had taken advantage of the approach of the Ist and IInd Corps and the arrival of the Horn Division to execute the order that Yorck had given him two hours before, when he proceeded to reconnoiter the position and which, without support, he could not comply with until then. Two of his battalions moved at a run towards the canal

¹⁰According to the journal of march and operations of Generals Langeron and Emanuel, the Russian advanced guard would have occupied Aubervilliers from the 29th in the evening. There is an obvious mistake, but explainable. It was, in effect, no doubt that brigade of Robert (Michel Division) was established on 30th in the morning at Aubervilliers and abandoned the village after one o'clock in the afternoon. It is possible, however, that the Russians have nevertheless penetrated the 29th, towards evening, into Aubervilliers, before the arrival of the Robert Brigade. But the French reoccupied the village in the night and found nobody there.

bridge that already was guarded by some skirmishers of the Prussian Guard, crossed without stopping and took at bayonet the farm of Rouvroy.

But the General tried less to push forward as the crossfire of French batteries continued to sweep the plain and the occupation of Rouvroy coincided with the retirement from Pantin of the debris of two battalions of the Prussian Guard so wildly launched by Colonel von Block against Les Maisonnettes and Les Prés-Saint-Gervais. More careful than Colonel von Alvensleben, General von Katzler sheltered his people at Rouvroy and waited a decisive move on the plateau to report forward.

About one o'clock in the afternoon Yorck, Kleist and Langeron received from the headquarters of the Army of Silesia further instructions. The division of Prince William of Prussia (Ist Corps) had to deploy, his right to the route from Lille by Senlis, his left along the canal and supporting the front of Katzler. The Horn Division and the divisions of the IInd Corps, veering right, were turned towards La Villette and La Chapelle as soon as the Russians of General Emanuel had taken Aubervilliers. They had the task of occupying the corps of Mortier on its front and thus facilitate the attack of Montmartre. Under these new instructions the bulk of the corps of Langeron should extend to its right in the Saint-Denis plain and cross the channel whose work had barely begun. General Kornilov was solely responsible for the attack on Saint-Denis; General Kapsewitsch with the 10th Corps and the rest of the 9th Corps, received orders to move from Aubervilliers on Montmartre, while General Rudzevich, who formed the right of Langeron with the 8th corps, march on the Montmartre road to Saint-Ouen. Finally, General Rudzevich would throw on his extreme right a flying column into the Bois de Boulogne and charge another detachment to survey Batignolles. The two Prussian corps immediately executed the previous movements under this disposition. The Horn Division and the IInd Corps (Kleist) left the road of the Petits-Ponts up to the side road leading from Bobigny to Aubervilliers; the Horn Division, bypassing the village, came to deploy southwest of Aubervilliers, its right to the Saint-Denis canal to connect with that side with the corps of Langeron; Kleist's corps came into battle formation east of the village where Emanuel had driven out about one o'clock a detachment of the brigade of Robert. The cavalry of Zieten crossed the Saint-Denis canal and formed for battle, its left resting on the channel, the right to the road to La Chapelle. A battery of 12 pounders attached to the Horn Division, had tried in vain to establish itself in front of that position. Strongly bombarded by the artillery from La Villette and La Chapelle it soon had to give up the fight and go into the village of Aubervilliers. It managed to open fire after the entry into the line of the batteries of the IInd Corps. The Russians of the Vorontsov corps were later to fill the gap between the left of the IInd Corps and the right of Prince William of Prussia.

The brigade of the Prussian Guard tries for the second time to debouch from Pantin. --Taking of Les Maisonnettes. --In the impossibility of leaving the plateau of Romainville before the corps of the Army of Silesia were not entered into the line, Prince Eugene of Württemberg had instructed his aide de camp Helldorff to go to Pantin and invite Alvensleben to remain there until further notice on the defensive. But in the meantime, the Prussian colonel had obtained from Barclay de Tolly permission to try about at 2 o'clock a second attack with his entire brigade he formed for this purpose in two columns. Lieutenant Colonel von Müffling, who remained hitherto in reserve behind Pantin, debouched from the village with the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Regiment of the Prussian Guard and the battalion of the Baden Guard, swerved immediately to the right and, continuing his march in column, rejoined the skirmishers which edged the space between the last houses of Pantin, Le Rouvroy and canal. The other column, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel von Witzleben, passed south of Pantin and took up combat formation when it came into the plain. The fusilier battalion of the 2nd Regiment of the Guard was deployed in the first line in front of the two battalions of grenadiers of the 1st Regiment of the Guard to which the Jäger Battalion of the Guard used as reserve. These two columns, supported in the center by the remnants of the two battalions of Lieutenant Colonel von Block, arrived almost simultaneously up to the western edge of Pantin, had just started their offensive movement at the moment when Helldorff¹¹ brought to their leader the order by which the Prince Eugene of Württemberg proposed to avoid unnecessary losses.

¹¹General von Helldorff, then aide de camp of Prince Eugene, gives in the book he published on the life of his former general (*Aus dem Leben des Kaiserlich russischen Generals der Infanterie Prinzen Eugen von Württemberg*) curious and interesting details on the mission he had been charged with. Helldorff tells that arriving near the head of the right column and taking Lieutenant Colonel von Müffling for Colonel von Alvensleben, he had communicated to him, in excellent German, the Prince's orders; the Prussian officer replied: "I do not understand a word of Russian. It is therefore impossible for me to understand what you mean." Helldorff, despite all his efforts, did not reach or obtain another answer or even to know where he would meet Alvensleben. It follows, moreover, from a

When the Prussian Guard began its attack, the French occupied before it the following positions: A large battery based on the height of Près-Saint-Gervais cannonading on one hand, the troops of Prince Eugene of Württemberg and wood Romainville, and sweeping, on the other, the plain of Pantin. The French skirmishers lined the slopes of the plateau and kept at bay the few Russian companies who sheltered, either behind hedges and walls of the gardens or in the few houses located at the foot of height. Two masses of infantry, one belonging to the division of Boyer de Rébeval, the other formed by the brigade of Secrétant, were deployed to the right and left of the road to Pantin enfiladed by 4 pieces of 6 in position on the highway. A battery of 10 pieces of 12 established near the canal behind Rouvroy crossed its fire with the artillery of the plateau. The French reserves were: the one sheltered behind Les Maissonnettes, the other, those who belonged to the division of Curial, gathering in formation on the right bank of the Ourcq Canal.

Undeterred by the crossfire of the French artillery, the Prussian Guard had continued to move resolutely forward. The French troops awaited on their side, their attack firmly footed and executed their first salvo in command when the Prussians had arrived at a hundred paces. But their misdirected fire produced no effect. The Prussian infantry, charging with bayonets, broke the French battalions which, despite the efforts of their leaders, soon retired in disorder to the gates of Paris, abandoning the four guns in the roadway to the column of Lieutenant Colonel von Witzleben.

A charge attempted by two French cavalry squadrons came crashing against the bayonets of the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Regiment of the Guard, and Alvensleben profited from this advantage to cover his left against an attack from the heights by pushing to the side of Les Maissonnettes and establishing in the few farms that were between the road and the hills. At the same time he asked Barclay de Tolly to send to him some cavalry squadrons and to occupy with some troops the village of Pantin where he could not leave anyone.

To the right Lieutenant Colonel von Müffling had pushed the French towards the Ourcq Canal, taking the 10 pieces that armed the battery behind the Rouvroy, took 4 cannons sent to support and occupied the houses that stood along the canal of Ourcq.

Despite taking Les Maissonnettes, despite the capture of the battery of artillery in the plain and although Colonel von Alvensleben had placed in position 6 pieces between the Les Maissonnettes and the channel, the prolonged and crossing fire from the French batteries posted on height Prés-Saint-Gervais (hillock of Beauregard) and on the right bank of the Ourcq Canal was still so violent and so deadly that the Prussian artillery was soon silenced after having two of its pieces dismounted. It was then slightly more than 2 o'clock. The fighting had almost stopped on the Romainville plateau, and Colonel von Alvensleben, recognizing the impossibility to take fuller advantage of his advantages, stopped his forward movement. He simply held on to the positions he had conquered until the progress of the Army of Silesia and Prince Eugene would allow him to resume the offensive.

Temporary cessation of combat. --Position of the Allied troops a little after 1 o'clock. --Surprised at the tenacity of resistance to which the Allies were far from expecting, Barclay de Tolly, before going to the sovereigns and the Generalissimo, had renewed a little after 1 o'clock, the order to stop completely any offensive movement, strongly bombard the French positions and take advantage of this respite to reform the corps whose various units engaged in succession and almost all deployed as skirmishers, were mixed and confused. In the center Prince Eugene of Württemberg, with his first line (Vlasov Brigade and division of Shakhovsky) bordered the Bruyères Park; the grenadiers of Choglokov and the cuirassiers of Kretoev formed the second line established in the wood of

conversation that Helldorff and Müffling exchanged later, that Müffling, like other officers of the Prussian Guard, had decided to turn a deaf ear to allow the brigade to take a part serious in a war action before the end of the campaign. Helldorff, traversing Pantin, after leaving Lieutenant-Colonel von Müffling finally joined Alvensleben. But the Prussian columns were already in motion, and Helldorff after unsuccessfully tried to persuade him to bring his people to Pantin, hastened to join Prince Eugene of Württemberg, who he found himself near the park of Bruyères where, to ensure the rallying of his skirmishers, the Prince was advancing the cuirassiers of Stahl. Helldorff told him he could not persuade Colonel von Alvensleben to abandon the attack of Les Maissonnettes. (HELLDORFF, *Aus dem Leben der Generals des Kaiserlich russischen der Infanterie Prinzen Eugen von Württemberg*, III, 67, 69.)

Romainville. To the right of Prince Eugene of Württemberg, the division of Pyschnitsky stood at the foot of the height and sheltered against the fire of the batteries of Prés-Saint-Gervais, connecting, the rightmost side of Pantin, to the troops of General Helfreich. The brigade of the Prussian Guard was about to give up the continuation of its attacks and stood between the Les Maisonnettes, Le Rouvroy and the canal of Ourcq. On the other side of the canal, the Army of Silesia completed its deployment under the protection of artillery. To the left, Rayevsky with the infantry of Mezentsev and the cavalry of Pahlen, waited in front of Montreuil either for the progress of Prince Eugene against Les Prés-Saint-Gervais, or the arrival of the grenadiers of Paskevich or an order of Barclay to cover Bagnolet and Belleville. The 1st Division of Russian Grenadiers and part of the cavalry of the Russian Guard were in reserve behind the center forward of Romainville, while that the 2nd Division of Russian Grenadiers moved obliquely to the left to reinforce, beside Montreuil Rayevsky and Gorchakov.

Attitude of King Joseph. --Since morning Joseph had settled with Clarke and Hulin on the hill of the Cinq-Moulins. From this observatory, he could see the movements of the Army of Silesia, but was unable to follow the events of the fierce battle that was going to center on the plateau of Romainville. Concealing the best he could his concerns under the mask of an indifferent composure, trying to share with those around him confidence that he never had, he still affected not to believe in the seriousness of the situation, to doubt the presence in Paris of the bulk of the Allied armies. However, he had twice called his wife in the morning to leave the capital and go join the Empress and sent General Allent, Chief of Staff of the National Guard, to Mortier to ask if he could not detach some of his troops to reinforce positions Marmont.

Arrival of Peyre at Montmartre. --Around noon the arrival at Montmartre of an architect, Engineer of the City, Captain of Sappers Peyre came to dispel the remaining illusions of the Lieutenant of the Emperor. Either because, and this is what seems most likely, he had been sent the night before by General Hulin in reconnaissance towards Pantin, or whether as other documents would have one believe, he had been charged to meet a Russian negotiator that the commander of the grand guard had refused to receive, what is certain is that Peyre had been captured with the gendarme who accompanied him by a Cossack patrol and taken to Noisy-le-Sec. After unsuccessfully trying to gain recognition as a parliamentarian, he managed only the 30th in the morning, to be driven to the general headquarters at Bondy. Interrogated by Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, he was introduced by the officer to the Emperor Alexander, who, desiring above all to obtain the surrender of Paris, talked with him for over half an hour.

At 8:30, Peyre had returned from Bondy, carrying a packet of proclamations of Schwarzenberg. Alexander had also instructed to announce to King Joseph that "the Allies, despite having brought all their forces to Paris, were none the less willing to parlay to prevent the sacking and looting of the capital." Furthermore, Peyre had not left Bondy alone; he was given to accompany and to convey to the King Joseph as a parliamentarian, the proposals of the Allies, an aide of the Czar, the Colonel Orlov. "Go," said Alexander to Peyre, "the fate of your city is in your hands,"¹² and addressing Colonel Orlov, he added: "Go. I give you the power to suspend the fire wherever you see fit. I authorize you, without liability, to stop the most decisive attacks and the victory itself to prevent and check a disaster. Paris, deprived of misguided defenders and its great man, cannot resist. I am convinced. But by giving me the strength and victory, God wanted me to do use that, to give peace and rest to the world. If this peace, we can get without spilling more blood, the better. If not, we will do what is necessary and fight, because, willingly or by force, either in battle formation or on parade, on the rubble or in palaces, it is necessary that Europe sleeps this very day in Paris."¹³

Colonel Orlov, accompanied by Colonel Diékoff, aide de camp of the Tsarevich and two trumpeters, Peyre and his gendarme came to Pantin in the heat of battle supported by Helfreich. Having reached the line of skirmishers, Orlov made the fire on the Russian line cease and called the parliamentarian. On the French side an officer moved in front of Orlov who had stopped between the two lines. But before he could join Colonel Orlov, the French tirailleurs began again to fire while a score of chasseurs à cheval, charged the parliamentarians trying to take them and came to be caught in Pantin. A second attempt of Orlov had no more success.¹⁴ Meanwhile, Peyre had disappeared after

¹²Letter of Peyre, 2 April 1814.

¹³Journal of Michael Fedorovich Orlov. (*Topographical Archives*, n° 47246, original text in French).

¹⁴ Journal of Michael Fedorovich Orlov. (*Topographical Archives*, n° 47246.)

exchanging, according to Orlov, a few words with the French officer and went as fast as he could to the Staff, Place Vendome. No longer finding General Hulin, he ended up joining King Joseph on Montmartre.

King Joseph leaves Paris and authorizes the Marshals to surrender. --Brought immediately to the King whom he handed the package of proclamations, Peyre told him what he had seen, and he repeated the words addressed by Alexander to Colonel Orlov.

If doubt was no longer possible, the perplexity of Joseph was not diminished. Not daring to take upon himself as heavy a responsibility as that of the defense to the death which alone could give the Emperor time to arrive, he hastened to take the advice of Clarke, of Hulin, of the personages present at Montmartre and, without even thinking to inquire more accurately the situation of the Marshals, on the face of battle, he resolved to leave Paris immediately. Before leaving from Montmartre though, Joseph had appointed two of his aides de camp to give the Marshals the following letter, dated at Montmartre 12:15, "If Monsieur Marshal Duke of Raguse and Monsieur Marshal Mortier cannot take more, they are allowed to enter into negotiations with Prince Schwarzenberg and the Emperor of Russia that are before them."¹⁵

While Joseph, ministers and senior officials fled on Rambouillet, the young troops of the Marshals took advantage of the respite that had been left them by Barclay de Tolly to reform, and even Marmont himself despaired so little he had just sent to Montmartre, where he no longer found Joseph, his aide de camp, Colonel Fabvier, to say that if the rest of the line was not in worse condition, he hoped to prolong resistance until night.

Placed on the Napoleon Series: January 2017

¹⁵*Memoirs of King Joseph*, X, 23. 24. —Marmont, in his *Memoirs*, dates this memorandum from 10:15 that Peyre was again within Paris. Marmont received therefore the note, carried by the General Stoltz, un little after 1 o'clock. It isn't absolutely certain that Joseph sent at the same hour the same memorandum to Mortier, because the Duke of Trévisé was unaware of the departure of the King and only received the communication of the note at 5 o'clock.