

The Napoleon Series

The Campaign of 1814: Chapter 18, Part XIV

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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 AUSTRIAN ARMY OF THE SOUTH, FROM 3 MARCH 1814 TO THE END OF THE CAMPAIGN.

Last movements of the flying corps of Geismar. --Geismar, having returned to Cuvilly on the morning of the 2 April, had recommenced his operations on his own account, and had pushed as far as Pont-Sainte-Maxence. Delayed on this point by the rupture of the stone bridge, of which the French had blown up an arch, he nevertheless succeeded in crossing the Oise in the night of the 3rd to the 4th. Moving along the course of the river the Russian colonel arrived on the 4th towards noon at Chantilly, where he seized the clothing warehouse of the Polish lancers' regiment of the Guard. Continuing the same day to Beaumont-sur-Oise he hastened to have the bridge repaired. On the 5th the flying corps entered Pontoise, and on the same day, Geismar sent one of his detachments to occupy Meulan, that the few French troops were there evacuated at his approach. On the 6th, after leaving posts at Pontoise, then at Poissy, where he had crossed the Seine, he arrived at Saint-Germain, where his partisans were encamped in the garden of the château. On the morning of the 7th, the flying corps was reinforced by two battalions of infantry; but his operations were now finished, and on the morning of the 9th Geismar was ordered to begin his retirement immediately, and to proceed by way of Saint-Denis to Luzarches.¹

¹Tagebuch des Streifcorps unter Befehle des Kaiserlichen russischen Obersten von Geismar während dem Feldzuge von 1814 von dem 13^{ten} Februar zum 11^{ten} April (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, IV, 178.)

If we summarize in a few lines the operations of the flying corps, it will be seen that Colonel Geismar had, with a handful of horsemen and far from any support troops, crossed from Leuze to Saint-Germain-en-Laye nearly 800 kilometers and that in the period between 14 February and 11 April he had actually marched for twenty-five days and delivered nine battles. The flying corps had sometimes been in motion for six consecutive days without being able to take rest. He had frequently traveled distances ranging between 50 and 65 kilometers and performed many night marches in horrible weather. During the days of the halt, the Colonel had constantly made reconnaissance for more than 20 kilometers in front of the point where the bulk of his body had stopped.

In short, the flying corps of Geismar had appeared in the nine departments of the Lys, the Escaut, the Pas-de-Calais, the Nord, the Somme, the Aisne, the Oise, Seine and Seine-et-Oise. Without having most of the bridges at his disposal, Geismar had passed in his raid the Escaut, the Lys, the Somme, the Aire, the Oise, and the Seine. He had managed to slip between the fortified places of Lille, Ypres, Aire, Saint-Venant, Arras, Amiens, Abbeville, Hesdin, Péronne, Ham, Saint-Quentin, La Fère and Compiègne. In the open country he had the upper hand against the bodies which had tried to bar the way; he had made numerous prisoners, sent the conscripts back to their homes, set free the Allied prisoners, and rendered services by removing and occupying Messines, Bailleul, Cassel, Hazebrouck, Saint-Pol, Doullens, Arras, Roye, Noyon, Chauny, Saint-Quentin, Clermont, Montdidier. He had failed, it is true, in his attacks by force against Cassel and Compiègne; but he had suppressed the insurrection, prevented the levy en masse in the north of France, taken 118 cannon, a large quantity of arms, ammunition, baggage, carriages, equipment and one of the payroll boxes of the army.

The raid executed by Colonel Geismar thus shows once again how a well-trained, well-composed cavalry corps commanded by an energetic, prudent and skilful leader can, even in the heart of a hostile country, do harm to the enemy. Not having any concern for his communications, appearing here and now, operating far beyond the sphere of action of the army, spreading terror in areas that believed they had nothing to fear, contradicting the organization and the march of reserves, destroying stores of arms and provisions, levying contributions, dispersing armed assemblies, such flying corps will always exert an incalculable action on the minds of the populations.

Movements and positions of the French corps. --While the Emperor was reviewing in the court of the Cheval-Blanc the divisions of Friant and Henrion which had arrived the day before at Fontainebleau, and revived by his words the ardor of his soldiers, on whom his presence again produced its effect, Berthier had sent to Ney the order to bring his troops in the afternoon from Essonnes and to encamp them there in the villages; to Drouot, to take a position on the evening of the 8th, between Pringy and Tilly, with the divisions of Friant and Henrion, and to the artillery of the Guard. The great headquarters was to come and settle at the château of Tilly.²

Macdonald had accelerated his march as much as he could given the exhaustion of his men and horses. On the evening of the 3rd, the 2nd and 11th Corps were at Montereau; the 5th Cavalry Corps at Noisy-le-Sec and La Ville-Saint-Jacques; Oudinot and the 6th Cavalry Corps were in the neighborhood of Villeneuve-la-Guyard, less the

From Luzarches, where he had halted on the evening of the 9th, Geismar went to Senlis on the 10th. As he had been ordered to watch the Oise, he established posts at Beaumont, Creil, Pont-Sainte-Maxence and Verberie. On 11 April, Geismar, passing through Creil and Clermont, continued his movement on Montdidier, where he arrived on the 13th, and stayed on the 14th and 15th of April. On the 16th he was at Ham and on the 17th at Saint-Quentin. The Saxon hussars were directed from there on the Meuse to join the 3rd Corps of the Confederation (Duke of Saxe-Weimar). The Cossacks quartered Saint-Quentin until they were ordered to cross the Rhine again.

²Chief of Staff to Ney and Drouot; Fontainebleau, 3 April, 3 o'clock in the morning. (Records of Berthier, *Archives of the War*).

The troops of Ney were cantoned at La Rochette, Dammarie, Chailly-en-Bière, Villers-en-Bière, Pringy, Montgermont, Perthes, Cély and Fleury-en-Bière. Ney had also been ordered to collect on the morning of the 4th the Lefol Division, which the Emperor wished to review, west of the road to the Château de Tilly, in front of the Château des Bordes and Moulignon. (Ney to the Chief of Staff, Fontainebleau, 3 April, and orders of Ney for 4 April, *Archives of the War*.)

brigade of Chasse which was left, half at Sens, half at Pont-sur-Yonne, awaiting the arrival of General Allix.³ The march had proceeded without incident, except a hurrah attempted at Malay-le-Vicomte, half a league from Sens, by the Cossacks of Benckendorff, detached from the corps of Chernishev,⁴ which had taken further south towards Villeneuve-le-Roi.

By prescribing to Macdonald, in his dispatch of the morning of the 3rd, to accelerate his march on Fontainebleau, the Chief of Staff had added these words: "It is possible that we will be fighting." Thus, while announcing from Cannes on the evening of the 3rd, his arrival at Fontainebleau the next day, the Marshal thought it his duty to tell the Chief of Staff that "his troops would not be able to fight. Men and horses are exhausted. It will hardly be possible to use artillery horses. Nothing on the other hand, there is no food. The columns which preceded us have taken everything away."⁵

Negotiations with Marmont. --The conduct of Talleyrand, and the occult negotiations commenced on his orders by M. de Montessuy, were, moreover, the last blow to the projects and hopes of the Emperor, rendering useless the efforts, the fatigues, and the privations imposed on the corps of Macdonald, Molitor, Oudinot, and Gérard. Without scruples as to the choice of means, resolved to do everything possible to ensure the immediate and definitive triumph of the cause which served so well his interests and his resentments, guided by the profound knowledge of the character of men that his long relations with them had enabled him to study for nearly ten years, the Prince of Bénévent had resolved to complete, with the aid of M. de Montessuy, the underground work which he had undertaken on the evening of the battle of Paris. The visit he had made to the Duke of Raguse on the evening of the 31st, and the special conversation he had managed to meet with the Marshal in his town house in the Rue Paradis-Poissonniere, had sufficed to show him the way to follow to achieve his ends. As soon as he had been able to convince himself of the ill-concealed dissatisfaction, the crumpled and insatiable vanity, the weakness of the character of Marmont, he had only had one thought: to find the man whom his past, his intelligence, his personal situation, his previous relations with the marshal, his engagements with the characters who had prepared the Restoration, made it possible to fulfill the delicate and confidential mission which it was urgent to entrust to him. The choice of Talleyrand was settled on a former aide-de-camp of Marmont, M. de Montessuy, who, having left the army, had embarked on industry, and had embraced with ardor, the same terms employed by Marmont in his *Memoirs*, "the ideas of which all the heads were then filled in Paris."

Montessuy did not need to demonstrate the truth to the Marshal. So, when he arrived in Essonnes, he brought only the copy of the act of deposition, and some letters from Schwarzenberg, General Dessolles, and Pasquier.⁶ Talleyrand, always prudent, and almost certain of coming to his ends with the Duke of Raguse, whose weaknesses he had discovered, had been careful to entrust to Montessuy other letters destined to the principal lieutenants of the Emperor, one of which, *inter alia*, was written to Macdonald by his former friend, General Beurnonville and bearing

³ Macdonald to Oudinot, Pont-sur-Yonne, and to the Chief of Staff, 4 April. (*Ibid.*)

⁴While in his dispatch to the Chief of Staff, the Duke of Tarente asserts that only about thirty men were lost at Malay-le-Vicomte, and that General Lhéritier avenged this loss, Benckendorff claims, the affair was much more serious. "At half a league from Sens," he said in his book *Of Cossacks*, "I had to cross a village with only a narrow passage, and to the left of which, two hundred paces from the road, a hamlet was occupied by a hundred infantrymen. As the ground was uneven and cut up from the vineyards, I called a halt for the regiment of Sisoyev at the entrance of the village, and marched with the Giroff Regiment, broken by six, against the French cavalry, which formed four squadrons staggered between the hamlet to the gate of Sens, with intervals of about twenty paces. The leading squadron received us with a general discharge of carbines, and seeing the assurance of my troop turned their bridle. The reserves had been awkwardly placed far away. The squadrons folded one after the other before the rapid movements of the Giroff Regiment, and retired in disorder into the town with a loss of many killed and 230 prisoners including 4 officers. If we had been more numerous or if the regiment of Sisoyev had been closer to us, it is probable that nothing could have escaped us."

⁵Chief of Staff to at Macdonald, Fontainebleau, 3 April (Records of Berthier), and Macdonald to the Chief of Staff, Cannes, 3 April, 7 o'clock in the evening. (*Archives of the War.*)

⁶MARMONT, *Memoirs*, vol. VI, book XX.

an inaccurate address,⁷ was to be opened and read by Marmont before being delivered the following day to his real addressee upon his arrival at Fontainebleau. The verbal news given by Montessuy to Marmont, his exhortations, his promises, the flatteries which he lavished on the pride and vanity of the Marshal, the personal influence which he had preserved over the spirit of his former chief, triumphed over his last hesitations.

When Montessuy left Essonne, the Duke of Raguse was irrevocably compromised. That the envoy of Talleyrand had only carried off a verbal promise, or that he had snatched from the Duke of Raguse his written adherence to a draft convention, as Bogdanovich asserts, in support of which he wrote a letter written by Montessuy to Schwarzenberg, and dated from Petit-Bourg on 3 April, it was nevertheless certain that the Marshal, instead of remaining deaf to the proposals made to him, had from that moment consented to enter into negotiations with the Generalissimo. On the evening of the 3rd, in fact, or at the latest on the night of the 3rd to 4th, Marmont informed Schwarzenberg⁸ of the conditions which he demanded to abandon his post, to uncover the Essonne line, and to deliver to the Allies the road to Fontainebleau. The Marshal, it is true, has since asserted in his *Memoirs* (V. IV, Bk. xx. Correspondence) that the *guarantee*, made by the Generalissimo, was antedated to protect the officers and soldiers of the 6th Corps, but unfortunately for him he forgot the formal denial of these assertions that come from the orders of Schwarzenberg and Barclay de Tolly for the day of April 4th.

4 April. --Orders of Schwarzenberg and Barclay de Tolly. --The order given by the Generalissimo to the Allied Great Army begins with these words: "The enemy's corps of Marshal Marmont, passing by Juvisy, will march by the high road to Fresnes-les-Rungis where it will make soup before resuming its movement in the direction indicated to it by the Provisional Government."

"As soon as night falls, the IIIrd, IVth, Vth, and VIth Corps of the Allied Great Army must, therefore, be ready to parry any eventuality. It will be the same with the Army of Silesia."

"Two regiments of cavalry of the Vth Corps will escort as far as Fresnes the French corps which two regiments of the Russian reserve cavalry will accompany from this point as far as Versailles. Both for this reason and because of the state of the minds at Versailles, this city will have to be strongly occupied by the Allied troops."

The instructions given by Barclay de Tolly to the Army of Silesia are still more formal and more categorical: "Marshal Marmont, having promised *to pass on to our side* this evening with his 10,000 man strong corps, will proceed by Fresnes on Versailles. It might happen that Napoleon, informed of the projects of Marshal Marmont, will want to take advantage of it to attempt a night attack against our left wing. It is therefore important that the corps commanders keep their troops ready to march until they have been positively informed that the French corps has succeeded in carrying out its movement without encumbrance and has crossed our lines."

⁷This letter was addressed to *Marshal Macdonald, Duke of Raguse*.

⁸In reply to the verbal communications and then to the letter by which the Duke of Raguse undertook to leave with his troops, the army of the Emperor Napoleon as soon as the Generalissimo had accepted and guaranteed in writing the conditions laid down by the Marshal, Schwarzenberg had at once caused to be drafted and delivered to Marmont the following convention:

"I, Charles, Prince of Schwarzenberg, Marshal and Commander-in-Chief of the Allied armies, guaranteed to all the French troops, who, in consequence of the decree of the Senate of April 1st, will leave the flags of Napoleon Bonaparte, that they can retire in Normandy freely under the command of their respective chiefs, with arms, baggage, and ammunition, as friendly troops of the Allied Powers, with the same military honors and honors which the Allied troops owe each other."

"That if, as a result of this movement, the events of the war brought Napoleon Bonaparte's person into the hands of the allied powers, his life and liberty would be secured in a space of land and in a country circumscribed by the choice Allied Powers and the French Government."

"At my head-quarters at Chevilly, 4 April 1814."

Barclay had consequently determined the positions which his corps would have to occupy if the Emperor decided to execute the coup de main, which the Russian general seemed to dread.

Vorontsov, sent to Morangis, would have served as a reserve for Rayevsky, established on the plateau of Juvisy. The bulk of this corps had to be arranged so as to be able to support the movements of Langeron. This general officer, whose corps was destined to furnish the heights of Longjumeau, was to await the order or to go to the left in support of Vorontsov and Rayevsky, or to take the offensive by overflowing and turning the position of Fleury-Mérogis.

In case the French army had decided upon a movement on Ris and Juvisy, the advanced guard of Langeron, under the command of Vasilchikov, was charged with acting with his cavalry against the left flank of the French columns; the infantry of this vanguard, stationed on the left bank of the Orge, would secure communications with the main body. As to the two Prussian corps of Yorck and Kleist, as soon as the cannon was heard, they were to receive the order either to leave Longjumeau on the right and to come to support the left wing, or to debouch by La Ville-du-Bois and Fleury-Mérogis on the left flank and the rear of the French corps. The dispositions of Barclay also provided for the case where, at the same time that he was directing a serious attack on the left of the Allies, the Emperor would create a demonstration against the advanced guards of Langeron and Yorck, and the one in which he could throw himself on the Army of Silesia. Finally, Barclay had pushed prudence so far as to point out to his corps commanders the conduct which they would have to take, supposing that the Emperor succeeded in penetrating in the direction of Versailles, even to fix the very place where they should stand even if one of these different hypotheses were to be realized.

Orders of Napoleon. --While these grave events were preparing for Essonnes, far from suspecting this of his Marshals, of whom he thought himself the safest because he had never ceased to fill them with favors and benefits, a special friendship, negotiated with the Generalissimo of the Allied armies and the Provisional Government, the Emperor waited only for the entry of the troops of Macdonald and Oudinot to resume his operations. He knew at that moment that their head of column would arrive in the morning of the 4th at Fontainebleau, and that the tail formed by the 7th corps would be there the 5th at the latest. Now able to act with forces of a respectable strength, the Emperor was determined to bring by arms the solution which had been refused to the efforts and diplomacy of Caulaincourt.

The orders sent by the Chief of Staff on the morning of 4 April leave no doubt on this subject.

The 2nd corps (General Gérard) was to be established on the evening of the 4th between Pringy and Boissise; the 11th corps (Molitor), from Chailly-en-Beer to Villers-en-Bière; the 7th corps (Oudinot) at Fontainebleau; the 5th and 6th Cavalry Corps along the Ecolle (now the École), from Saint Germain to Boissise.⁹

In the morning of the 4th, these first instructions underwent some slight modifications. Sebastiani was ordered to send to Fontainebleau the division Lefebvre-Desnouettes. General Defrance was to go to La Ferte-Alais, push parties on Étampes and Malesherbes, and then occupy the latter town by one of his brigades. Oudinot, instead of sending infantry to Nemours, was to give Moret 500 horses and 2 cannons to guard the bridge, and place the bulk of the 7th Corps near Fontainebleau on the road to Nemours. At the same time the Duke of Reggio was informed that Trelliard, instead of going to the Ecolle, would march with the 6th Corps of Cavalry on the road from Fontainebleau to Nemours towards Bourron, and occupy Nemours; that the 11th Corps would remain on its positions at Chailly and Villers, and that the 2nd Corps, while settling in front of Fontainebleau on the road to Corbeil, would send one of its divisions to Ury and Chapelle-la-Reine on the route from Fontainebleau to Malesherbes.¹⁰

⁹Chief of Staff to Macdonald, Fontainebleau, 4 April. (Records of Berthier, *Archives of the War*.)

¹⁰Chief of Staff to General Sebastiani, General Defrance, Marshal Oudinot, Fontainebleau, 4 April (Records of Berthier, *Archives of the War*); *Correspondance*, n° 21554, and Belliard to the Chief of Staff (Correspondence of Belliard, *Archives of the War*.)

Belliard had been instructed to determine the locations of the 5th and 6th Cavalry Corps, which were not to mix with the Guard. From the reports he sent on the 4th to the Chief of Staff, it appears that the Guards of Honor went to Fontenay-le-Vicomte and Ballancourt, General Roussel to Mennecey, Bordesoulle to Essonnes, Piré to Montceaux,

The Emperor gives to Caulaincourt, Ney, and Macdonald his abdication in favor of the King of Rome. --As on the previous day, the Emperor had insisted on passing in review the troops who had just arrived at Fontainebleau, and were about to return to Marmont and Mortier in a position on the Essonne. As on the previous day, his presence and his words had aroused the enthusiasm and ardor of the officers and soldiers, had made them forget the privations endured, the fatigues sustained during these forced marches. Satisfied with the welcome he had received and the spirit of the troops, the Emperor had just retired to his cabinet to give his last instructions to the Chief of Staff and the Duke of Vicence, when he was followed by the Marshals Ney, Lefebvre, Oudinot and Macdonald.

It would not be possible to insist on the nature of this conference, on the sad or threatening, embarrassed or comminatory attitude of the Marshals, whose discouragement and weariness contrasted with the confidence and ardor of the officers and soldiers. Without ascertaining what was in reality the long and painful scene which took place in Napoleon's cabinet, it suffices to note that, painfully impressed by the manifestation of feelings which he had not expected to find in his old companions, in spite of all the remarks which he had made during the last campaigns, the Emperor, after having dismissed the Marshals, drew up with his own hand the act by which he sacrificed himself, and "declared himself ready to descend from the throne, to leave France for the good of the country, inseparable from the rights of his son, those of the regency of the Empress, and the maintenance of the laws of the Empire."

A few hours later, Caulaincourt, Ney, and Macdonald received, with the last instructions of Napoleon, to carry this act to Paris, to pass through Essonne, and to communicate to Marmont that the Emperor, always indulgent to his former aide de camp, left the power of accompanying them, or of seeing whether it would be more useful to remain at the head of his army corps.¹¹

Movements of Allied cavalry and detached corps. --Due to the morale and material situation of the two adversaries, the day of the 4th of April, the last, strictly speaking, of the campaign, could only present and presented but little interest from the point of view of military operations .

However great and natural his impatience, notwithstanding his desire to attempt a desperate blow, indispensable to try to escape from a position so critical that nothing could either aggravate or compromise him, Napoleon still needed 24 hours at least to dispose of all its scarce resources. For their part, the Allies did not care to rush events and to cast lots by armed measures, at the hazards of a battle, for a solution which they were more and more certain to obtain without risk, without danger, less glorious, but safer means. Everything, therefore, was limited, on the side of the Allies, to some reconnaissances of cavalry, and some movements of detached corps.

On the extreme right of the Allies a party of uhlans of Brandenburg and the 2nd regiment of Lifeguard Hussars pushed a point towards Chartres and picked up a number of stragglers and isolated.¹²

Chernishev, leaving to Winzingerode and Tettenborn the task of capturing Sens and opposing General Allix, had crossed the Loing near Soups, and had arrived at noon at Malesherbes without having encountered anything on the way of his approach. A convoy of artillery, escorted by 600 to 700 men, had just left the town and embarked on the road to Orléans. Charging and overwhelming them with the Cossacks of Schiroff, of Sisoyev and of Vlasov III, the escort who did not even have time to form the square, Chernishev seized 22 guns. The interrogation of the prisoners having informed him that another convoy of artillery had filed on the road to Pithiviers, the Russian general pushed

Saint Germain to Saint-Germain-sur-Ecolle; that the 5th Cavalry Corps (Milhaud) went to Bréau, Orgenoy and Saint-Sauveur-sur-Ecolle, the 6th Cavalry Corps to Perthes, Cély and Fleury.

In the order which Marshal Ney had given to Lefol on the morning of the 4th, he said to this general: "If the Emperor has not arrived at midday for the review, you will establish your headquarters with mine at Ponthierry, your first brigade at Ponthierry, Auvernaux, Moulignon, Les Bordes and Boissise-le-Roi; the 2nd at Montgermont, Pringy, Vauve, Bréau and Saint-Sauveur-sur-Ecolle. (Ney, Orders to Lefol, 4 April; *Archives of the War*.)

¹¹FAIN, *Manuscript of 1814*.

¹²GURETZKY-CORNITZ, *History of the 1st Regiment of Uhlans of Brandenburg*, n° 3.

on to that city, which he took again that same evening, though he could not succeed in catching up with the convoy.

As the alert was given and he found himself too exposed, Chernishev evacuated Pithiviers in the night and proceeded to Étampes.¹³

Winzingerode was approaching Sens, where the Cossacks of Tettenborn occupied the suburbs. After vain attempts to penetrate by force into the city, they had contented themselves with throwing a few shells in the hope of intimidating the population, and of compelling the garrison to capitulate.

On the right bank of the Seine, Seslavin, stationed at Guignes with his main body, observed by detachments the course of the river between Melun and Montereau and the course of the Yonne from that city to Pont-sur-Yonne. He occupied the suburb of Montereau,¹⁴ but had not ventured to attempt anything against the city itself, "which," he said, "still contains enough enemy infantry and cavalry." He concluded his dispatch in these terms: "The troubles among the peasants have not yet ceased. In several villages we see Cossack corpses, and the small parties are almost always stopped and massacred."¹⁵

Affair of Melun. --Kaisarov, whose outposts had been, the day before, in view of Melun, had attacked the town, and after a short engagement had dislodged the National Guards and the few cavalymen of General Chanez. As he wrote to the Generalissimo at 11 o'clock in the evening, "he had succeeded in occupying the whole city, and in breaking the last bridge which joined the left bank to the island which he defended with his artillery and his skirmishers."¹⁶ Tending to give little importance to an operation which had hardly presented any difficulties, Kaisarov assessed "1500 infantrymen stationed in the city and 1200 horses established on the left bank of the Seine, French troops that, he had," he said, "hunted down with grenades on the road to Fontainebleau." But if we leave aside this deliberate exaggeration, and believe that it was necessary to make use of the services rendered by his Cossacks, Kaisarov, whom it was not thought proper to make known the started negotiations and the actions of the Provisional Government, appreciated very clearly and logically his military situation. In the first of his two dispatches, that which he had addressed to Toll, he said to him: "I am not certain that the enemy will not attempt to retake the town tomorrow. I will do my best to defend the bridge, but it would be necessary to send infantry there."¹⁷ Returning again to this subject in the report he sent at 11 o'clock in the evening to Schwarzenberg, he wrote to him: "This bridge being the only one where Bonaparte can make an attempt on Paris by the right bank, it is probable that it will not be abandoned by him and in any case I will build in the night a fleche on the right side of the

¹³Report of Chernishev to the Emperor of Russia, Pithiviers, 23 March/4 April (*Journal of Received Pieces*, n° 663); Toll to Field-Marshal Lieutenant Count Radetzky, Paris, 6 April (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, IV, 68).

General Rigau, detached by General Trelliard with his brigade, and arrived at Nemours on the 4th, informed his general on the 4th at ten o'clock that a column of Russian cavalry 2,000 horses strong was the 3rd at Souppes, which it had plundered. That column had passed, on the 4th, at 7 o'clock in the morning, the Loing by ford, and set out for Puiseaux. (*Archives of the War.*)

¹⁴ Toll to Radetzky, Paris, 6 April. (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, IV, 68.)

¹⁵Major-General Seslavin to General-Lieutenant Sabaneyev, Guignes, 23 March/4 April (*Journal of Received Pieces*, n° 648), and Major-General Seslavin to the General Count Toll, Guignes, 5 April (translation in French sent by Toll to Radetzky and mentioned in the dispatch of 6 April; *K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, IV, 68 a).

¹⁶Kaisarov to Prince Schwarzenberg, Melun, 4 April, 11 o'clock in the evening. (Original in French, *K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, IV, 41.)

The Russian general had already announced, a few hours earlier, to the Generalissimo, through Toll (original dispatch in French, *Ibid.*, IV, 686), "that he had occupied Melun by assault, defeated the bridge and planted his cannons on half of the great bridge."

¹⁷Kaisarov to General Lieutenant Count de Toll, Melun, 4 April. (Original in French, *K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, IV, 68 b.)

city which will not permit rebuilding of the bridge for a long time. The position of this edge is so beautiful that it is to be regretted not to have infantry here."¹⁸

It is fair to admit that Kaisarov, posted alone on the right bank of the Seine, informed by the picket he held near Corbeil of the existence of a large gathering of French troops of all arms on the heights of Essonnes, had good reasons for insisting on the importance of Melun and for demanding the immediate dispatch of some infantry. The fears of Kaisarov were all the more justified because the French headquarters were preoccupied with what was happening on the side of Melun, and at 7 o'clock in the evening the Chief of Staff sent Molitor the order to leave, a quarter of an hour after the receipt of his dispatch, two battalions and six cannons, which were to go at all speed to Melun, where, he said, there had been firing since five o'clock in the evening. "If the National Guard who defended the bridge has withdrawn," added the Chief of Staff,¹⁹ "you will have to re-attack and you will establish a strong cannonade to prevent the enemy from working at the bridge during the night. General Maurin with his cavalry is near Melun. Let the infantry and the artillery march at an accelerated pace."

The Chief of Staff had at the same time informed Maurin of the orders he gave to Molitor, posted at Chailly, and insisted on the importance which the Emperor attached to the possession of Melun.²⁰

Departure of the Marshals and Caulaincourt to Paris. --The defection of the 6th Corps. --While the last gunshots of the country were being exchanged at Melun, Caulaincourt, Ney, and Macdonald had left Fontainebleau, passed by Ponthierry a little after 4 o'clock,²¹ and had stopped at about five o'clock at Essonnes in order to inform Marmont of the events and to make known to him the intentions of the Emperor. Although the Duke of Raguse had used the whole day to anticipate and prepare successively his generals, with the exception, however, of General Lucotte, the news brought to him by the commissioners, the offer of this abdication, conditional, it is true, but which thwarted his plans, the very confidence which the Emperor displayed in leaving him free, or joining the commissaries, or remaining at the head of his army corps, plunged him, at first, into a deep perplexity. But time was pressing. One had to take sides. And as the three commissioners, all devoted to the Emperor, hoped still to serve the cause of their sovereign by joining the Marshal, the Duke of Raguse, who was fortunate in being able to withdraw from his troops, the material execution of the criminal commitments which he regretted having taken, perhaps thinking that he had done enough by handing over the command to General Souham and requiring him not to undertake any movement until his return, Caulaincourt, Ney and Macdonald. He did not even think of asking at Fontainebleau and to await at Essonnes the powers prepared for him, and which alone could accredit him to the sovereigns. At 6 o'clock the Emperor's commissioners, accompanied by Marmont, left Essonnes and went to the headquarters of Schwarzenberg to take the necessary safe-passages. Before leaving his headquarters, Marmont nevertheless had time to commit another fault. He had announced to his lieutenants the conditional abdication of Napoleon, and had ordered them to carry it by the way of the order to the knowledge of the soldiers whom he wished, before going away, to finish detaching from the Emperor.

A few hours later the arrival of the order enjoining the marshals and the principal generals to proceed at ten o'clock in the evening to the Palais de Fontainebleau,²² and requiring them to take the necessary measures to return to their posts before the day, finally the apparition of Gourgaud, charged by the Emperor to bring to Fontainebleau the Duke of Raguse or the general officer who succeeded him, precipitated the catastrophe which Marmont flattered himself with having conjured by the instructions left to Souham at his departure for Paris. Shortly before midnight, the troops of the 6th Corps, not knowing where they were led, simply believing that they were going to occupy new

¹⁸Kaisarov to Prince Schwarzenberg, Melun, 4 April, 11 o'clock in the evening. (Original in French, *K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, IV, 41.)

¹⁹Chief of Staff to General Molitor, 4 April, 7 o'clock evening. (Records of Berthier, *Archives of the War.*)

²⁰Chief of Staff to General Maurin, 4 April. (*Id. in ibid.*)

²¹Belliard, writing to Sebastiani at 5 o'clock in the evening, said to him: "I have not yet received any orders or news. I have just been informed that the dukes of Vicence and Tarente passed half an hour ago at Ponthierry, on their way to Paris. There is some evidence that they are in negotiations." (*Archives of the War.*)

²²*Correspondence*, n° 21553, and Records of Berthier (*Archives of the War.*)

positions, set out, with the exception of the division of Lucotte, who wasn't informed of this movement, and crossed the Essonne. They were deceived by leaders who, concerned solely with a personal situation which they believed to be threatened, were thinking only of putting their people out of danger, misled by the very precautions taken during the lifting of the camp, the soldiers of the 6th Corps had not noticed, in the midst of the darkness, that the lines of the Allies had been opened to give them passage. When day dawned, the evil was irreparable. Surrounded and escorted by the Allied cavalry, the regiments of the 6th Corps had to continue, willingly or unwillingly, their route from Fresnes to Versailles. Neither the fury and the clamor of the soldiers, nor the rage of the desperate officers for forfeiting military honor and violating their oaths, nor attempts to leave Versailles and try to gain Rambouillet, nothing could change. The personal intervention of Marmont personal intervention triumphed over the last scruples of his soldiers; his words were given once more to his officers, and the 6th Corps, calm but gloomy and sad, took the road to Mantes on the 5th.

Due to the nature of this work, we do not wish to insist on the negotiations which preceded the defection of Essonnes, on the causes which motivated or precipitated it, nor to dwell upon the influence which the departure of the 6th Corps exercised over the outcome of the negotiations entrusted to Caulaincourt, Ney, and Macdonald, on the fall of the Emperor, on the very fate of France.

But while we are careful not to judge the acts of the Duke of Raguse, it is impossible for us not to notice that when a man experiences so much the need to defend himself and to explain his conduct, it is, most of the time, very close to accusing himself and to confessing his own guilt. Marmont, moreover, had no accuser more severe than himself, and the following sentences, which we extract from the *Memoirs* of the Marshal (V. VI, book XX, page 256), contain not the justification which, he pretends to furnish, but the very condemnation which he has unconsciously drawn out of his hand, the judgment which, in spite of himself, he has addressed to his own conduct: "It is easy for a man of honor to fulfill his duty when it is all outlined; but it is cruel to live in times when one can and where one must ask oneself: where is the duty? And I have seen these times; they are those of my time! Three times in my life I have been placed in the presence of this difficulty. Happy are those who live under the rule of a regular government, or who, placed in an obscure situation, have escaped this cruel ordeal! Let them refrain from blaming: they cannot be judges of a state of things unknown to them! "

What could be added to these melancholy words, more melancholy and more melancholy still in the mouth of a soldier! One of our greatest writers, M. Cuvillier-Fleury, has, moreover, undertaken to do justice to the inconceivable pretensions of the marshal: "Marmont," said M. Cuvillier-Fleury, "in appraising the *Memoirs* of the Duke of Raguse, who, is not only the monument but the triumph of pride, Marmont is a glorious exclusive and intolerant. Pride is his faith and his worship. He is a lover of himself, an idolatrous breaker of images."

The judgment, so just and severe, borne by M. Cuvillier-Fleury, is indeed the only excuse that can be made in favor of the Marshal. If the Emperor himself, always indulgent to his former aide-de-camp, has forgiven the man who caused his fall and pushed the indulgence to say of him at Saint Helena: "His feelings are better than his heart is better than his memory is worth," history and public opinion can never absolve it.

Far from wishing to dwell longer on the lamentable defection of Essonnes, far from seeking to establish the share of responsibility which falls on those who have been unpardonably wrong to listen to the Marshal's proposals, to respect and execute his engagements, we shall add only one word. It seems to us that the memory and the example of Dumouriez should have sufficed to stop Marmont, to prevent him from betraying his sovereign and his country, to forfeit military honor. But, as Montesquieu said, *there are examples that are worse than crimes!* And, unfortunately for France, the Duke of Raguse was to find imitators who, either by abandoning their troops on the eve of a decisive battle, or by subordinating the interests of their army to political intrigues, have, like him, to their duty as soldiers, and, like him, consummated the loss of the country they had sworn to defend!

At Fontainebleau the events of Essonnes were not yet known, even though they were already known in Paris. The announcement of the movement of the 6th Corps had thwarted Macdonald's generous efforts, altered definitively the policy and intentions of the Allies, cut short the last hesitations of the Emperor Alexander, hitherto still undecided. The cause of the empire was definitely lost. There could no longer be any question of having a conditional abdication accepted in favor of the King of Rome, and the restoration of the Bourbons was henceforth inevitable and imminent.

5 April. --Orders of Schwarzenberg. --Although he had never doubted the success of the negotiations conducted by M. de Montessuy, although he thought he had a right to rely on the formal execution of the agreement concluded between Marmont and himself, the Prince de Schwarzenberg, fearing, nevertheless, one of those bold and desperate blows to be anticipated with the Emperor, had again insisted, on the 4th of April at 9.30 in the evening, on the instructions he had given in the morning. In his disposition for the 5th, he returned once more to the necessity of occupying and holding the plateau covered by the Yvette and the Orge, and renewed to the Army of Silesia the order of securing the road to Orléans, to take the offensive if Napoleon deigned an attack against the plateau of Juvisy, Savigny, and Morangis, and in this case to come and threaten the left and the rear of the French army. The Allied Great Army was ordered to maneuver in the same manner in case the French should make as an objective the positions of the Army of Silesia.

First steps taken by the Emperor on the night of 4-5 April. --All these recommendations were superfluous. The unexpected march of events had obliged the Emperor to modify his resolutions. Although he had never believed in the success of the negotiations with which he had entrusted his plenipotentiaries, he had all the more readily consented to this last attempt at conciliation, as, as we have said, he needed this day of the 5th to have everyone available at hand, to review the corps of Oudinot and awaken its enthusiasm. In anticipation of a probable refusal, a new break in negotiations, he wanted to be ready to try even the impossible. But the bad news succeeded each other with frightful rapidity. He had just received a letter from General Lucotte announcing the ordering of the 6th Corps of his abdication and hearing the account of Gourgaud of his return to Essonnes when a few officers who had managed to escape from the column of Souham, at its exit from Essonnes, brought the official notice of the defection of the 6th Corps. Doubt was no longer possible, and the Emperor immediately gave Belliard the order to "take with him the squadrons which he would find under his hand, and go and furnish the positions discovered by the departure of the troops of Marmont, at the arrival of Mortier, who was to retake the outposts and occupy the line of the Essonne."²³ At the same time he ordered General Lefol (of Ney's corps) to march on Soisy-sur-Ecolle, in order to block the way for the infantry and Allied cavalry, whose passage had been reported at La Ferte-Alais and who could head to this point.²⁴

Like Schwarzenberg, the Emperor recommended being on the alert. "It is possible," said he, "that the enemy should attack." Then, overcoming his emotion and mastering the feelings which oppressed him, after having addressed to his army the order of the day,²⁵ in which he eloquently exposed to his companions in arms the grave events of Essonnes and Paris, he past in review for the last time troops of the 7th

Corps, who arrived in the morning at Fontainebleau, welcoming him with the same enthusiasm as in the days of his greatest power, only after his most brilliant victories.

But from that moment Napoleon had made up his mind. Unable to march on Paris at the head of such a weak army, he had decided to proceed towards the Loire. Nevertheless, not wishing to take a final resolution until after the return of the plenipotentiaries or the arrival of a letter announcing the rejection of his proposals, he confined himself, in the course of the afternoon, to bring back his Guard from Tilly to Fontainebleau.

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²³Chief of Staff to Mortier, 5 April, 3 o'clock in the morning. (Records of Berthier, *Archives of the War*.)

²⁴Chief of Staff to General Lefol, 5 April, 3 o'clock in the morning. (*Ibid.*)

²⁵*Correspondence*, n° 21557.