

# The Napoleon Series

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

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# THE CAMPAIGN OF 1814

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

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## THE ALLIED CAVALRY

DURING THE CAMPAIGN OF 1814

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### CHAPTER XVIII.

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

**Position of the Allied troops of the first-line.** --If, from on the French side, everything had been reduced to the corrections of position indicated by the orders of the Emperor, the Allied troops had made but little movement. They had, however, somewhat approached the French positions. Vasilchikov had ordered General Emanuel to pass La Ferté-Alais, to cross the Essonne with part of his cavalry, and to reconnoiter in the direction of Fontainebleau. The line of the Prussian outposts extended from Arpajon to Limours, but their points and their parties scoured the country in front of them and spread over the whole region between Étampes, Dourdan, Rambouillet and Montfort-l'Amaury.

The Crown Prince of Württemberg, who had caused the Cossacks of Kaiserov to be relieved at Melun by two battalions and a half-battery of the III<sup>rd</sup> Corps, had brought the advanced guard of the IV<sup>th</sup> Corps from the Essonne, where it came up against the outposts of Mortier. But instead of engaging, Prince Adam of Württemberg and General Lucotte agreed to suspend the hostilities and to resume them only after prior notice.

Pahlen had made a similar agreement with the commander of the French outposts established before his cavalrymen.

Allix, who had refused, and the proclamations sent by Tettenborn, and the interview which the Russian general had

demanding of him, had driven the Cossacks from the suburbs of Sens, and continued to occupy Auxerre, Joigny, Villeneuve-le-Roi, Sens and Pont-sur-Yonne.<sup>1</sup>

Winzingerode and Tettenborn occupied Sens only when General Allix had been ordered to evacuate the line of the Yonne.

**The Emperor gives the 5<sup>th</sup> of April the orders to retreat towards the Loire.** --During this time the Emperor ordered the movement to be established for the 6<sup>th</sup>. The Guard was to leave on the 6<sup>th</sup> at 6 o'clock in the morning, the other corps at corresponding hours, to march on Pithiviers by Malesherbes. The corps of Mortier was in charge of forming the rearguard. The movement, if it had been executed, was regulated in such a manner that Fontainebleau remained occupied during the day of the 6<sup>th</sup>, and that the head of the vanguard reached Pithiviers<sup>2</sup> the same day.

But all the orders relative to this movement were called back without, however, the correspondence of the Chief of Staff giving the reason for this revocation.

**Return of the plenipotentiaries to Fontainebleau.** --On the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> of April the plenipotentiaries were back at Fontainebleau; but Ney and Macdonald had stopped on their way to sign a 48-hour armistice at Chailly, with Prince of Schwarzenberg, during which the French and Allied troops were to remain stationary on their positions. Caulaincourt had preceded them to Fontainebleau. Truly devoted to his sovereign, he had undertaken to report to the Emperor on the rejection of the proposals which, with the help of Ney and Macdonald, he had hoped to have the Czar accept, and to which Alexander himself appeared sufficiently disposed to acquiesce, when the defection of the VI<sup>th</sup> Corps had come to furnish the Provisional Government and Talleyrand with an unanswerable argument which decided the fate of France and allowed the intrigue to create, with the aid of treason, a solution which the Emperor of Russia had never desired, to the restoration of a dynasty which the Czar did not think capable of governing the new France.

It would be idle and superfluous to try to go back to the factors of morale, to the political considerations which, after the return of the three plenipotentiaries and especially after the last interview with his Marshals on the morning of 6 April, the Emperor renounced the execution of the movement towards the Loire. We shall therefore confine ourselves to summarizing the principal events which marked the last days of the Emperor's stay at Fontainebleau, the manifestations which marked the stages of his journey, the incidents which enabled him to give an exact account of the spirit of the populations .

**6 April 1814. --Armistice of 48 hours. --Proclamation of Louis XVIII. --The Emperor agrees to abdicate.** -- On the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, having vainly appealed to the friendship, to the devotion of those whom he had filled with honor and gorged with riches, yielding to the weariness and discouragement of the Marshals,<sup>3</sup> Napoleon consented to the last sacrifice. As early as the evening before, Marshal Ney had foreseen this solution and wrote to Talleyrand: "The Emperor appears to be resigned and to consent to abdication entirely and without restriction. It is tomorrow morning, I hope, that he will himself give me the formal and authentic act." And at the moment when Ney verbally confirmed the news of the abdication, at the moment when the Senate proclaimed Louis XVIII, the French army was informed that the Duke of Vicence, the Prince of La Moskowa, and the Duke of Tarente had signed an armistice of 48 hours during which each was to remain in his positions.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>General Allix to the Minister of War. Sens, 5 April, 4 o'clock in the evening. (*Archives of the War.*)

<sup>2</sup>Movement Orders for the 6<sup>th</sup> of April; Chief of Staff to Trelliard, Piré, Saint-Germain, Milhaud, Defrance, Gérard, Lefol, Maurin, Oudinot and Mortier, 5 April, 11 o'clock in the evening (Records of Berthier, *Archives of the War*) and *Correspondence*, n° 21556.

<sup>3</sup>"Napoleon told me a few days ago," wrote Colonel Campbell, commissioner of the British government on the island, from the Isle of Elba on 27 May 1814, "that he regretted not having left behind his marshals without using them in the last campaign; for they were tired of war. He regretted not having taken younger leaders by drawing them from the other generals and colonels. He says that this was one of the causes of his ruin."

<sup>4</sup>6 April 1814. (*Archives of the War.*)

**Last sortie of the garrison of Soissons. --Last operations of the peasants in the East.** --From this moment an emptiness surrounded the Emperor. But if the great dignitaries, his Marshals and his former brothers-in-arms left him one after the other, if those who remained with him sent successively their acceptances to the new state of affairs, the officers, the soldiers, and the people, were less accepting of the white cockade, to abandon the tricolor flag, to lay down their arms.

On 6 April, a strong detachment of 600 men, 150 horses, and two guns, left Soissons, advanced to Crouy, ejected the Prussian outposts, and remained in the village until nightfall.<sup>5</sup> Four days later, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, the garrison of Soissons carried off a convoy destined for the besieging troops from Billy-sur-Aisne, and brought back the cavalrymen who were its escort.

At Fontainebleau as at Paris, at Versailles as at Blois, at Orléans as at Tours, in Brittany as at Normandy, they persisted in shouting "Vive l'Empereur" and trampling under the white cockade.

At Soissons, by a singular irony of fate, Easter Day was celebrated on Sunday, 10 April, at the moment when the fall of the Emperor was already consummated, the last *Domine salvum fac Imperatorem* which resounded in 1814 under the vaulted ceilings, of a French cathedral.

In the East there was scarcely any disposition to disarm, although the Allies had not failed to spread the news of the capture of Paris and the fall of the Emperor in the villages. Thus, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, the Feldzeugmeister Duka wrote from Dijon to the Chief of Staff, Count de Raigecourt, blaming him for not having the peasants under arms shot the day before and on the preceding days.<sup>6</sup> On the same day the commander of a squadron sent to Vignory had wanted to feed his horses at a short distance from this village when he noticed a group of armed men. The Captain d'Aillimont,<sup>7</sup> who commanded this squadron, had a part of his people dismount and scoured the woods. In his report he announced that there were armed bands of considerable size on all sides, and that he had shot a soldier and two peasants taken in arms.

The next day, 7 April, at four o'clock in the evening, Major Cinicelly,<sup>8</sup> informed of the disappearance of an officer and a certain number of men from his battalion, who, immediately after receiving the report of Captain d'Aillimont he had sent for Vignory with orders to inform him of what had happened there the previous day, sent there a strong patrol of cavalry which brought him this curious note from the Mayor of Vignory<sup>9</sup>: "The mayor of Vignory certifies that Schwarzenberg Uhlans had presented themselves today, at 10 o'clock in the morning, at the mayor's office in search of an infantry detachment which lodged there yesterday from 11 o'clock until 4 o'clock and who, on their way back to Chaumont, was attacked and taken three quarters of a league, according to the reports made here."

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This armistice was not announced by Berthier to the corps commanders, to Allix, Augereau, Soult, and Sachet, until the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> of April. The Chief of Staff gave them at the same time communication of the fixing of the line of demarcation of stop on 8 April in Paris between Schwarzenberg and the three Commissioners. (*Archives of the War*, Records of Berthier and Belliard.)

<sup>5</sup>VON SCHMIDT, Oberstlieutenant, *Das 3 Pommersche Infantry Regiment n° 14, von seiner Gründung bis zum Jahre 1888*; FLEURY, *History of the Invasion of 1814 in the departments of north-east France*.

<sup>6</sup>Feldzeugmeister Duka to General Earl of Raigecourt, Dijon, 6 April. (*K. K. Kriegs, Archiv.*, IV, 344.)

<sup>7</sup>Report of the Captain d'Aillimont, 6 August. (*Ibid.*, IV, 370 d.)

<sup>8</sup>Major Cinicelly to Chief of Staff Count Raigecourt, Chaumont, 7 April, 1814, 4 o'clock in the evening. (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, IV, 370 c.)

<sup>9</sup>Certificate established by the Mayor of Vignory, Vignory, 7 April 1814. (*Ibid.*, IV, 370 b.)

The agitation was not about to subside, and more than a month after the signing of the treaty of Fontainebleau, General de Beckers, writing from Colmar on 15 May to General Frimont,<sup>10</sup> announced to him that "He had ordered General Count Pappenheim to withdraw the detachments of execution posts in the communes of Saales and Rothau (a short distance from Saint Dié). But he added that he had just attacked in the Vosges bands of armed peasants, led by a certain Bertrand, a former officer of the Guard; that Major Visconti had dispersed these bands and taken 38 of these brigands."

However, everything had been irrevocably finished since 6 April, from the moment when the Emperor, discouraged by so many defections, had signed his abdication pure and simple. On the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup>, the line of demarcation between the armies had been issued in Paris.

This line followed from the sea the line which separates the departments of the Somme, of the Oise, of the Seine-et-Oise, of the Yonne, of the Côte-d'Or, of Saône-et-Loire and of Rhône, of those of the Seine-Inférieure, of the Eure, of the Eure-et-Loir, of the Loiret, of the Nièvre, the Allier and the Loire to follow, from there, the limit of the department of Isère until the Mont-Cenis. In Seine-et-Marne, the Allies occupied the right bank and the French the left bank of the river.<sup>11</sup>

On the 11<sup>th</sup>, while Metternich and the French plenipotentiaries signed the Treaty of Fontainebleau, the last French troops evacuated the department of Seine-et-Oise, and the Imperial Guard itself left for Châteaudun, with the exception of 1500 to the escort of Napoleon.<sup>12</sup>

More than Alexander, Talleyrand had attained his goal. The Bourbons took the place of the Emperor. The Emperor's degradation extended to his son. The vengeance and hatred of the Vice-Elector had triumphed over everything. The man who had done so much for his glory was banished from France. To the one before whom the world had trembled so long, to the one who had crossed the Niemen at the head of half a million men, was left the derisory sovereignty of the Island of Elba and the command of 400 grenadiers. Napoleon paid dearly for the fault of having called or tolerated near him people unworthy of his confidence.

The triumph of Talleyrand, the illusions which the Allied sovereigns had been able to conceive at the moment when they restored the legitimate monarchy, were only to be ephemeral.

The Imperial epic was not finished, and, notwithstanding the pompous speeches, the noisy but hollow demonstrations of the partisans of the Bourbons, the whole population, excepting the inhabitants of some localities of the South, along the journey of the Emperor was rushing to see again, to greet with enthusiastic cheers the fallen Caesar.

"In vain did one endeavor," wrote General Lieutenant Count von Bismarck in his *Aufzeichnungen*, "to defame and belittle the man who had glorified France, who had restored order and religion to it. One sought to tarnish the glory of him who, by his organizing genius, his spirit of enterprise, his strength of will, his indomitable energy, had been able to substitute himself for the Revolution and for 14 years to be the arbiter of the destinies of the world. One would have wished, if it had been possible, to annihilate even his name, just as the memory of his actions."

It was in vain, indeed, that an attempt was made to detach the army and the nation from his person and his glory.

To quote only one example, in 1824, at the time of the publication of his *Memoirs on the War of 1809*, General Pelet eloquently justified the army in his introduction and did not hesitate to write the following lines: "Those who are

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<sup>10</sup>General Beckers to General Frimont, Colmar, 15 May 1814. (*Ibid.*, V, 105.)

<sup>11</sup>Records of Berthier, 9 April (*Archives of the War*); Orders of Prince Schwarzenberg, cantonments, provisions for 10 April (*K. K. Kriegs Archiv.*, IV, 86), and Barclay de Tolly to Schwarzenberg, Paris, 11 April (*Ibid.*, IV, 88).

<sup>12</sup> It was on the night of the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> of April that Napoleon, in a fit of despair caused by the cowardly abandonment of all those whom he had loaded with riches and honors, tried to poison himself.

not insensible to generous feelings or even gentle pity cannot disagree with the action of a soldier who raises a monument to the old army and to his general, to whom he calls his father. This army was like a family in which everything stood, from the last soldier, a devoted child, but an enlightened and severe judge of the conduct of his chiefs, to the supreme commander who constantly showed himself and was recognized as the father of all. *The most admirable eulogium of Napoleon, a praise which nothing can destroy, is in the love and fidelity of this French army, so loyal, generous, and proud!* The army under the Empire had not ceased a moment in being national. It has sufficiently proved it by its entire conduct, and especially by its sublime devotion in 1814 and 1815, in that continual battle in which it contested with all her blood every corner of France with the saber of the stranger, immolated itself, while its antagonists were intriguing. After having effaced by its exploits the prodigies of the heroes of antiquity, it gave the world the most beautiful example of patriotism...It must be repeated, that the soldier's constant love is the panegyric of Napoleon, as the constant devotion of the army, in the midst of the most terrible crises, is our most glorious title."

As for the people, dazzled by so much glory followed by so many misfortunes, it shows very little knowledge of its character and its pride to expect them to forget overnight the man who, while he was alive, had already become a legendary character, to accept the white cockade and deny the tricolor flag. The retreat of Russia, Leipzig, the Invasion, La Rothière had been able momentarily to break down the courage and dispel the blind faith in the star of the Caesar so long triumphant and undefeated.

Champaubert, Montmirail, Vauchamps, Étoges, Mormant, and Montereau had sufficed to restore his former prestige. It was certainly in the ranks of the people, more than in other classes of society, that the man who, after shedding French blood to the four corners of Europe, had ended by compromising the grandeur and the existence of France. But when this people saw him proudly stand against evil fortune, to struggle alone and so gloriously with mutilated debris, with helpless old men and inexperienced children, against the armies of all Europe, when it saw him multiplying, lavishing, replacing force by audacity, number by genius, this people, forgetting their grievances and sacrifices, returned to him with more enthusiasm than ever, too late to prevent his fall, but in time, at least, to surround him with a popularity which ought not to perish, and which proved to the world that France, unhappy, conquered, overcome, invaded, never ceases to admire and venerate that which is great and glorious.

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