

The Napoleon Series

The Campaign of 1814: Chapter 19, Part III

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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 XIX.

OPERATIONS IN BELGIUM AND NORTHERN FRANCE, FROM 3 MARCH UNTIL THE TERMINATION OF HOSTILITIES

Movement of Thielmann on Kortrijk. --While that, graced by the speed of his march and the intelligent measures which had presided over the preparation and execution of his movements, Maison succeeded in giving way to his opponents, and securing his junction with the division of Roguet, Hellwig noticed, to his great surprise, that the French were relinquishing the menacing to Oudenaarde; his scouts had met only a few French patrols on the side of Bellegem. The Prussian major immediately warned Thielmann and concluded that French troops were present at Kortrijk, while acknowledging that he had been unable to obtain any data on the direction taken by the bulk of the forces at Maison.

Thielmann, who was still hoping to reach the tail of the column of Maison at Kortrijk, was obliged to engage himself with him, and in this way compel the French general to back track to disengage the only two battalions left at Tournay and went to Warcoing with what he had of available forces (8 battalions, 4 squadrons and 9 guns). As on the 18th of March, the pontoon bridge of Hérinnes had been pulled back and thrown on the Scheldt, at the level of the château of Chin, he thought it necessary to position at Ramignies one of his battalions, which he charged to cover the bridge and stagger his column.

On reaching Warcoing, he divided his troops into two groups, detaching a battalion, a half-squadron, and one piece to the right against Zwevegem, moved to Bellegem, where he stopped the bulk of his column and pushed his cavalry

to Kortrijk. His squadrons could only note the departure of Maison and transmit the first news of the march of the French on Ghent and Antwerp.

27 March. --Thielmann returns to Kortrijk. --In these circumstances Thielmann had no longer any reason to establish himself at Kortrijk; arrived too late to oppose the movement of the French, and thinking himself too weak to act usefully in their rear, he returned to Tournay on the morning of the 27th to await orders and reinforcements.

Uncertainty and fears of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar. --The news from the bold stab of Maison on Ghent, the information sent from Brussels by Colonel Count Lottum, from Malines by General-Major von Gablenz, of the retreat of the Cossacks of Bihalov I on Aalst, of the appearance of troops from Antwerp and which had pushed through the Tête de Flandre as far as Saint-Nicolas, Rupelmonde, Temse and Waasmunster, the movements carried out on the Scheldt by a flotilla composed of about twenty light boats which had advanced as far as the confluence of the Rupel, had increased the indecision and fear of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, and completely disoriented the headquarters of Mons.

It was not known whether, as General Graham seemed to dread, Maison would not push as far as Antwerp, and would not seek to leave this town to raise the siege of Berg-op-Zoom. It was questioned whether, as General Thielmann and Gablenz thought, the French general would not prefer to penetrate from Ghent to Aalst and Brussels, and would not attempt to strike a blow by the capture of that city, the effect on morale of which would have been incalculable, and might have caused serious complications, by causing the Allies to lose the advantages which, from the point of view of the organization of the country, they had assured themselves, by two months of undisputed possession by detaching from them populations which, having strong preference and sympathy for neither of the two adversaries, wanted only calm, tranquility, and peace.

First steps taken by the Duke of Saxe-Weimar. --Meanwhile, and before taking a final decision, it was nevertheless necessary to take care of the most urgent. It was the idea of General Thielmann, who, in order to cover Brussels at once, proposed to entrust the guard of Tournay to Colonel von Egloffstein with 2,000 men and 4 guns, and to file without delay with the rest of his people by Ath on Aalst and Dendermonde. In order to facilitate the execution of this movement without compromising the lot of the troops left in their former positions, the squadron of hussars belonging to the Saxon column of Colonel von Seydewitz was ordered to march from Leuze to Ronse and to rejoin the flying corps of Major Hellwig. The Saxon battalion, posted at Enghien, passed through Geraardsbergen, and went to Parike on the road to Oudenaarde, whilst the three other battalions, which had been stopped at Braine-le-Comte, followed in the same direction and pushed as far as Grammont.

Colonel Count Lottum, who commanded at Brussels, was ordered to give up himself to Dendermonde, and to bring to Aalst the two battalions of Landwehr from Weimar and Gotha, hitherto stationed at Brussels, and to concentrate on this point all available troops.

At the same time, one ordered General von Gablenz to direct all the fractions of troops on Aalst, from which, without much weakening, he might pass temporarily before Antwerp. The exits and movements of the garrison and flotilla of Antwerp prevented General von Gablenz from complying with these orders; but Colonel von Lottum took upon himself to take, besides the two battalions of Weimar and Gotha, two battalions of Landwehr of the division of Anhalt-Thuringia, which ought to have proceeded from Brussels to Enghien.

Finally one charged Lieutenant-Colonel von Thümen, posted to Péruwelz with two battalions, three squadrons, and two pieces of mounted artillery, to occupy Leuze, and, if required, to send detachments to Tournay. One informed at the same time General Borstell, that he should, as long as he remained at Bavay, continue to make demonstrations on Valenciennes and Condé and strengthen the detachment of Lieutenant-Colonel von Thümen in order to ensure the maintenance of communications with Tournay.

The Duke of Saxe-Weimar, whose detached corps of the Northern Army was now under the control of Blücher, hastened to report to the Field Marshal, to insist on the dangers arising from the movement of Maison and the possibility of his entry into Antwerp, on the difficulty of maintaining Brussels, and of maintaining communications with the interior of France, and of asking him to write to the Crown Prince of Sweden, to induce him to leave Liège immediately, and to bring his Swedes to Brussels.

But time was pressing, the moments were precious, the situation seemed too serious to be able to await the more than doubtful result of a step to which Bernadotte was likely to oppose an objection. The Duke of Saxe Weimar resolved, therefore, to send without delay Colonel von Zeschwitz to General von Wallmoden-Gimborn, who, though placed under the orders of the Crown Prince of Sweden, appeared more disposed than his leader to take an active and immediate part in operations.

This general officer, to whom one had confided the command of the Russian-German Legion (7 battalions of infantry forming 2 regiments, 1 battalion of Hanoverian jäger, 8 squadrons of hussars and 3 batteries including 2 mounted, representing a total of 7,471 men, 1970 horses and 24 guns), had left Bremen on 27 and 28 February. Passing through Osnabrück, Munster, Hamm and Hagen, he had arrived at Dusseldorf on the 12th and 13th March. On the 17th and 18th of March, charged by the Crown Prince of Sweden to observe Venlo and Maastricht, Wallmoden had crossed the Rhine and the Meuse with his troops, which he quartered between Roermond and Maaseik. On the 23rd of March, at the request of General Graham, who demanded the immediate dispatch of reinforcements in the direction of Antwerp, the Crown Prince of Sweden had authorized Wallmoden to march by Asch, Hasselt, Diest, and Leuven to Malines.¹ Arrived on the 27th at Leuven, joined on this point by Colonel von Zeschwitz and by a courier of General Graham, Wallmoden readily agreed to replace in Brussels the troops which Colonel von Lottum had just taken to Aalst and to relieve at Lier and at Mechelen the brigade of the Major-General von Gablenz.

28 March. --Maison communicates with Antwerp. --Arrival in Ghent of the division of Roguet. --Obliged to remain in Ghent, in order to attain the object which he had proposed, Maison had taken advantage of his stay in that city to procure the supplies he needed and the funds necessary to pay his troops a part of their outstanding balance. Meanwhile Colonel Villatte entered Antwerp on the morning of the 27th. Maison had thus succeeded in communicating with Carnot 48 hours after his departure from Lille, and on the 28th the Roguet Division, with 4,500 men and 14 guns, went from Antwerp on to the left bank of the Scheldt, arriving without encumbrance in Ghent and effected there its junction with the troops of Maison.

Positions of the Allied corps. --In spite of the arrival of this reinforcement, which, almost doubling the strength of the French general, enabled him to be able to maintain the campaign, in spite of the considerable effect which his march had produced on the minds of the people, the general situation of the Allies, far from being aggravated, had on the contrary improved considerably, thanks to the assistance which General Wallmoden² had agreed to lend, and to the movements which he had undertaken to execute forthwith, approval from the Swedish headquarters at Liège. Somewhat reassured by the fate of Brussels, the Duke of Saxe Weimar renounced directing Thielmann on Aalst and Dendermonde, and himself went to Oudenaarde with the seven battalions, the four squadrons, and the 13 remaining pieces. From this town Thielmann could, according to events, threaten the enemy as long as he remained in Ghent, make his retreat difficult if he tried to return to Lille, and finally connect with the troops stationed at Aalst, in case Maison would design a marked offensive movement on Brussels.

Upon his arrival at Oudenaarde, of which Hellwig had guarded up to that time, Thielmann sent the flying corps of the Prussian major to Avelgem with orders to push his advance posts in the direction of Kortrijk and Harelbeke and added a battalion of landwehr and 2 cannons.

Almost at the same time General Wallmoden entered Brussels with four battalions, four squadrons and two batteries, and replaced the troops which Colonel von Lottum had taken to Aalst, while his second rank (three battalions, four squadrons, and one horse battery) passed through Vilvoorde and was about to relieve the brigade of General-Major

¹WEINGARTEN, *Geschichte des Armeekorps unter Befehlen der General-Lieutenants Grafen von Wallmoden-Gimborn* (Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift, 1827).

The strength of the Wallmoden corps was at this time only 6,000 men, including the cavalry.

²Taking advantage of the absence of Bernadette who had gone to the headquarters of the sovereigns, Wallmoden had confined himself to giving notice of his movement to the Swedish Field Marshal Stedingk, and to advise him also to advance in order to cover Brussels.

von Gablenz at Malines and Lier.

The next day, the 29th, General Wallmoden, settling with his first column between Aalst and Asse, took command of the troops which covered Brussels.

Vainly solicited by General von Gablenz, General Graham had refused to undertake any action against Antwerp, and had also again addressed General Wallmoden, asking him to come and strengthen him.

29 March. --Departure of the division of Borstell. --New positions occupied by the Lecoq Division. --If exaggerating the dangers of his situation, expecting at all moments to see Maison, who had not yet undertaken anything since the day before, to push with all his might on the capital, the Duke of Saxe-Weimar had thought it necessary to transfer on the morning of the 29th his headquarters from Mons to Brussels. In the presence of the formal orders sent to Borstell, the Duke had to let the Prussian general begin his march towards the interior of France, and proceed to Laon, passing through Pont-sur-Sambre and Avesnes. Consequently, he had been compelled to change the position of the Saxon troops of General Lecoq. Before leaving for Brussels, he had sent him orders to raise the siege of Maubeuge, to confine himself to observing this place, to take charge of the maintenance of communications between Beaumont and Avesnes, and to establish himself on a long line extending from Ville-Pommerœul, passing by Givry to Beaumont, and to provide, in front of his face and at both ends of his line, the posts of Saint-Ghislain and Solre-sur-Sambre.

Indecisions and mistakes of the Allied generals. --Resolution taken by Maison. --A demonstration by a small French column, which debouching from Melle, occupied the villages of Westrem and Oordegem, pushed beyond these villages to the points occupied before Aalst by the outposts of Colonel Count Lottum and skirmished with them until nightfall, ended by inducing the Duke of Saxe-Weimar to make him believe in the imminence of a movement of the French on Brussels.

Even admitting, what seems more than hypothetical to us, that Maison had for a moment thought of capturing Brussels, there can be no doubt that he had already renounced this project. He knew, and his correspondence indicates,³ that forces superior to those which he had succeeded in collecting at Ghent covered the capital of Belgium, that corps of Thielmann was assembled at Oudenaarde, and that Hellwig was marching on Kortrijk. His object was attained: he had strengthened himself with the Roguet Division, henceforth useless to Antwerp; he had obliged the Allies to raise the siege of Maubeuge; to evacuate Bruges and the department of the Lys; he had succeeded in giving his opponent an opportunity of changing; he had decided to send back his forces to Brussels. The moment had come for him to crown this fine operation by approaching the towns of the old frontier.

Perfectly informed about the movements of his adversary, Maison had recognized that he had no more time to lose and that he had to, the following day at the latest, undertake a flank march made all the more risky as it was necessary to march between the Lys and the Scheldt and as the Allies were masters of the three bridges existing on the river. Luckily for him, his movements on the road to Brussels and his demonstration on Aalst had completely disoriented the commander of the IIIrd Corps of the Confederation.

Another circumstance, the divergence of views, and the diversity of temperament of the Allied generals, was still to serve the plans of the Maison, and to enable him to take the lead he needed to keep from being revealed his march and escape the danger of being overwhelmed and cut off from his line of retirement.

More cautious and circumspect because he felt the burden of a responsibility that seemed to him too heavy, the commander of the IIIrd Corps had thought only of concentrating as many troops as possible ahead of Brussels, to bring about 18,000 to 20,000 men on the Oudenaarde-Aalst-Asse line, with whom he wished first to cover the capital, and then, as soon as the time appeared to him, to act against the lines of retreat of his adversary observed on the one hand, by the flying corps of Hellwig posted at Kortrijk, Harelbeke and Deinze, and on the other by the detachment of Major Count Pückler, who was still scouring the countryside between Bruges and Ghent.

The apparent immobility of Maison during the days of March 28 and 29 seemed, to a certain extent, to justify the plan of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar. The generals placed under his orders were far from sharing his views; Thielmann

³Maison to the Minister, Lille, 1 April. (*Archives of the War.*)

scarcely took care to conceal his desire for independence. Since his arrival at Oudenaarde, he sought to free himself from the immediate direction of the general-in-chief, and dreamed of executing on his own account, or at most with the assistance of Wallmoden, an operation suited to his enterprising character, and from which, all the honor would have been for him.

As soon as he heard of the movement of Wallmoden on Brussels and Aalst, he hastened to inform him of his plans, and to communicate them at the same time to the head-quarters of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar. Thielmann, crossing at Oudenaarde on to the left bank of the Scheldt, wanted to be charged with taking Maison in the rear while Wallmoden attacked him head-on.

This plan of operations was rejected by Wallmoden and the Duke of Saxe-Weimar; the former strongly condemned a project which seemed to him hazardous because it increased the dispersion of the forces of the Allies; the second ordered Thielmann to remain at Oudenaarde, and insisted that, owing to the immobility of Maison, the absence of any information on his plans, one might need to bring the Saxons to Aalst and Ninove and that in any case it was important to wait for Wallmoden to enter the line to resume the offensive.

The Duke of Saxe-Weimar, knowing the ardent temperament of Thielmann, had above all wished to prevent him from throwing himself alone into an adventure which might have cost his division dearly. It is evident that Thielmann, if he had been allowed to debouch from Oudenaarde and establish himself between the Scheldt and the Lys, might have been caught in his own net. Maison, in fact, would not have waited for the attack of Thielmann at Ghent; after having cut the bridges of the Scheldt, he would have turned against the Saxon general, and would have driven him before him, either on Oudenaarde or on Lille, or else he would have overrun him and have fallen upon him by using himself for this purpose, the pontoon bridge equipment which he had taken with him, and which assured him complete freedom of movement.

Obliged to obey, Thielmann did not renounce his plans; in the afternoon of the 29th of March, he sent one of his officers to Wallmoden, in Aalst, to return to the charge, and to obtain the assistance of this general for the movement which he intended. Far from accepting the wish of the Saxon general, Wallmoden, whose proposals had in the meantime been accepted by the commander of the IIIrd Corps of the Confederation, and which was to be joined on the same day, or at the latest the following day, by the brigade of General-Major von Gablenz, on the contrary, invited Thielmann to proceed on the morning of the 30th, from Oudenaarde to Zottegem, about halfway to Aalst, in order to effect on this point their junction with him and finding, the next day the 31st, a means to be able to act with all their forces united against the corps of the Maison. In the situation resulting from the concentration in front of Brussels, this was an essentially reasonable project, compromising nothing and allowing them to either attack Ghent if Maison persisted in staying there, or to meet up with him and to menace him if he decided to retreat to Kortrijk and Lille.

But although Thielmann deployed from the roads leading from Oudenaarde to Grammont and from Grammont to Ghent, he claimed that the state of the roads made such a movement absolutely impossible, and insisted again on his old project, while at the same time admitting to Wallmoden that the total strength of his troops was only 6,500 men, a thousand horses and 13 guns.

30 March. --The Duke of Saxe-Weimar at Asse. --Formal orders sent to Thielmann. --On the morning of 30 March, the Duke of Saxe-Weimar transferred his headquarters from Brussels to Asse and visited Aalst in person to confer with Wallmoden. Asked by this general officer who was aware of the plans of Thielmann, and of the useless efforts he had made to make him accept his ideas, curb his untimely ardor and induce him to combine their actions and to make their union before attempting anything against Maison, the Duke, feeling that it was necessary to put an end to the misunderstandings which weakened the authority of the command, sent Thielmann the order to come immediately to Zottegem, unless there were unforeseen events keeping his troops in Oudenaarde. The Duke at the same time told Thielmann that there was no longer any reason to fear for Tournay. The detachment of Colonel von Egloffstein had, in fact, relieved the 2,000 men of Lieutenant-Colonel von Thümen, who had been made to take a position at Leuze, and, further to push from Mons to Ath, a battalion of infantry and a battery of 12 pounders.

March of Maison from Ghent on Kortrijk. --Positions of his troops on the evening of 30 March. --But while the Duke of Saxe-Weimar was preparing to attack Ghent on the 31st of March, Maison had left the city on the morning of the 30 March, on two columns: one, that of General Solignac, skirted the left bank of the river, Scheldt

and headed for Petegem; the other took the direct route to Kortrijk by the right bank of the Lys. Chasing without difficulty from Deinze the detachment of Major Pückler, from Harelbeke and Kortrijk, the flying corps of Hellwig, which fell back on Avelgem, overthrowing the small advanced posts of Thielmann in the direction of Petegem, Maison executed this flank march without hindrance, that should have been so dangerous to him, and arrived that same evening at Kortrijk, where he took a position. The division of Barrois occupied Harelbeke and provided a post at Zwevegem. The division of Solignac was established at Kortrijk, occupying Bellegem with its advanced guard; the Roguet Division was in reserve at Kortrijk, and the cavalry of Castex observed the road to Ypres.⁴ Finally, to give the Allies a more complete exchange, General Brenier-Montmorand had sent from Lille to Tournay a reconnaissance which, protected by fog, surprised several small Saxon posts and pushed on to the outskirts of the city.⁵

Movements of Wallmoden and of Thielmann. --On the afternoon of 30 March, informed by the Cossacks of Bihalov I and the outposts of Colonel Count Lottum of the evacuation of Ghent by the French troops, Wallmoden immediately ordered the Cossacks, reinforced by the 1st Regiment of Hussars of the Russo-German Legion, to follow the movement of the Maison; to Colonel Lottum, to leave his positions of Aalst and Dendermonde without delay, to enter Ghent, and to march on Deinze from the morning of the 31st. Believing more than ever of the need for combined action, he told Thielmann at the same time that he intended to leave Aalst on the evening of the 30th with all his troops reinforced by the brigade of Gablentz, to make a grand halt at Zottegem, arriving the 31st towards noon in Oudenaarde to make its junction with him and then attack Maison.

But in the meantime, Thielmann, taking advantage of the change which had just taken place in the situation to regain his independence and give free rein to his entrepreneurial spirit, had confined himself to summarily explaining to the Duke of Saxe-Weimar the movements which he was about to execute the same evening.

Convinced that part of the French troops had to go back to Antwerp, fearing that Maison would escape him and believing that he would have to deal only with his rear-guard, Thielmann, instead of waiting for the arrival of troops of Wallmoden at Oudenaarde, informed him, on the contrary, that he was determined "to attack the enemy at daybreak, that he considered himself, even if the enemy should hold well, as strong enough to occupy it by itself until the arrival of the troops coming from Aalst." Recalling all his detachments in haste, the Saxon general concentrated his whole force on the evening of the 30th at Avelgem, with the exception, however, of the battalion established at Grammont, which he sent to reinforce the garrison of Tournay. He posted to his right, towards Heestert, the five battalions, the three squadrons, and the 6 pieces of General Major von Brause, whose brigade was to serve him as an advance guard; to his left, the five battalions, the two squadrons, and the 7 cannons of Prince Paul of Würtemberg.⁶ Finally, the flying corps of Major Hellwig was to proceed to Bellegem, in order to cover and prolong the left of Thielmann, as soon as the vanguard of General von Brause took possession of Zwevegem.

31 March. --Battles of Kortrijk and of Zwevegem. --The 31st of March, at about 6 o'clock in the morning, the column of von Brause came up against the French outposts in front of Zwevegem, and pushed them towards the village, which they soon evacuated to Kortrijk. Believing more and more that he would find only the rear-guard of the Maison in front of him, Thielmann only left at Zwevegem two squadrons of cuirassiers and two pieces, and pushed on Kortrijk all the rest of the Brause Brigade formed over two lines and followed at about 1000 meters by three battalions and five pieces of the brigade of Prince Paul de Würtemberg; the other two battalions of this brigade formed a fourth rung between the tail of the 2nd Brigade and the squadrons left at Zwevegem.

Maison let the Saxon columns to advance a kilometer from Kortrijk and begin their deployment in the plain. As soon as he recognized the strength and disposition of Thielmann, he resolved to entertain him on his front, and to attack him on both wings. Wanting at the same time to prevent Thielmann from completing his deployment, and throwing him back into the sort of defile by which he had come, he ordered General Barrois to leave Harelbeke and

⁴Maison to the Minister of War, Lille, 1 April. (*Archives of the War.*)

⁵General Brenier-Montmorand to the Minister of War, Lille, 20 March. (*Ibid.*)

⁶*Geschichte des Königlich Sächsischen Garde-Reiter Regiments*; DÖRING, *Geschichte des 7^{ten} Thüringischen Infanterie Regiments n° 96.*

go straight on Zwevegem to attack the right of the Saxons, take them in flank and cut off their retreat on Oudenaarde. General Solignac was to attack the left of Thielmann. Maison in person had reserved the direction of the column of the center composed of the Roguet Division, tightened en masse to the right and to the left of the highway of Oudenaarde, and the cavalry of the generals Castex and Meuziau. This column, destined at first to contain the troops of Brause, and then to follow them as soon as the Saxons began their retreat, advanced as soon as the divisions of the wings formed their attack, and cut the Saxon lines in two. Thielmann noticed the danger which threatened him only when it was already too late to remedy it, and when his troops, and more particularly the brigade of Prince Paul of Württemberg, were already so actively engaged that it was impossible to break off the fight.

Pushed forward by the troops of Roguet, the troops of General von Brause retreated on Zwevegem, then on Avelgem. Hellwig, threatened to be cut off from the side of Bellegem, retreated in all haste, while on the right of Thielmann the brigade of Prince Paul of Württemberg, overrun by one of the regiments of the Barrois Division, fled in the greatest disorder beyond Avelgem, and carried away by its example the brigade of Brause, which had hitherto executed its retreat in fairly good order. A vigorous charge of the generals Castex and Meuziau at the head of the chasseurs à cheval completed the rout of the Saxons. Two squadrons of cuirassiers and a half battery tried in vain to stop the progress of the French, who pursued the disbursed troops of Thielmann to Kerkhove, on the road to Oudenaarde, where the fugitives were collected by the troops of the General Von Gablenz.

This affair, caused solely by volatile character of Thielmann, by Thielmann's obstinacy and ambition, and which had hardly lasted two hours, cost his division dearly. The losses of the Saxons amounted to 3 officers and 252 men killed, 17 officers and 423 wounded, 19 officers and 1194 prisoners or disappeared, and 2 cannons.⁷

Towards 5 o'clock in the evening Colonel Lottum, coming from Ghent and Deinze, presented by Harelbeke to Kortrijk, and might have succeeded in penetrating the town, and taking possession of the prisoners, had Maison not been careful to leave there General Daudenarde with the lancers, a regiment of the Barrois Division and the gendarmerie.⁸

Attempt of Maison on Tournay. --Decided, in spite of the success he had just gained, to continue his movement on Lille, Maison left at Avelgem only the Barrois Division. Accelerating the march of the rest of his troops, he made his way to Tournay in the hope of profiting by the confusion caused by the defeat of Thielmann in attempting to seize this city by a coup de main. Maison knew, indeed, that Colonel von Egloffstein, who commanded at Tournay, possessed only three battalions of infantry, about thirty horses, and 4 pieces. He was unaware, it is true, that the Colonel had received orders from Thielmann to support his operation on Kortrijk, and had taken a position on the morning of the 31st at Pecq. Having remained without news of Thielmann, Egloffstein, informed by his patrols of the checks made to this general, had hastened to fall back on Tournay, and to have his troops occupy their posts for combat. About 5 o'clock in the afternoon the advanced guard of General Solignac showed itself at the gates of Tournay and attempted a coup de main that failed because of the timely arrival of the infantry battalion from Grammont. It was too late to make an assault with troops tired by long marches and a first battle, and Maison, putting off the attack until the next day, confined himself to bringing his artillery into position and making them attempt a few shots against the battlements.

1 April. --Maison returns to Lille. --Consequences of his operations on Ghent. --But informed in the evening of the arrival of the detachment of Lieutenant-Colonel von Thumen coming from Leuze, from the approaching brigade of Gablenz, of which he had been informed of the departure of Oudenaarde, Maison, who had taken a position on the heights of Orcq, brought his troops back the following day behind the Marque, and returned on the 1st of April to Lille. "I will give," he wrote to Clarke, "a day's rest for my troops, after which I shall go to

⁷Maison to the Minister of War, Lille, 1 April (Archives of the War); DÖRING, *Geschichte des 7^{ten} Thüringischen Infanterie Regiments n° 96*; LIPPE-WESSENFELS, *Geschichte des Königlich -Preussischen 6^{ten} Husaren Regiments (ehedem 2^{ten} Schlesischen)*, *Geschichte des Königlich Sächsischen Garde-Reiter Regiments, Verzeichniss der Offizieren und Mannschaften des dritten deutschen Armee Corps, welche in den verschiedenen Gefechten geblieben verwundet, gefangen, vermisst wurden.*

⁸Maison to the Minister of War, Lille, 1 April. (Archives of the War.)

Maubeuge."⁹

Barrois, for his part, had left Avelgem on the evening of the 31st, and had retired to Lille, without having been for a moment disturbed by the troops of Thielmann and Hellwig.

The obstinacy and vanity, ambition and blindness of Thielmann, who, despite all the observations of Wallmoden, in spite of the formal instructions of the commander of the IIIrd Corps of the Confederation, had inconsiderably engaged young troops against the French battalions already seasoned by a series of marches, combats, and clashes had enabled Maison not only to crown his expedition with a brilliant victory, unfortunately unnecessary because it was too late, but also to re-establish the Emperor's affairs on the Scheldt.

Not to mention the effect on the morale it produced in Belgium, the new situation resulting from the addition of the Roguet Division to his operating corps, the bold stab of Maison on Ghent and the successful outcome of an operation whose success was solely due to the energy and skill of the French general, were to have consequences which might have affected a character of real importance without the critical and desperate turn of affairs in the principal theater of war.

New distribution of the IIIrd Corps of the Confederation. --The Allies had indeed recognized that it was indispensable to establish themselves firmly in Ghent, and that without the undisputed possession of that city it was impossible for them to prevent the renewal of enterprises of the same kind and to prevent the active intervention of the garrison of Antwerp. To continue to hold only a flying column or a detachment of cavalry in Ghent was to expose the French to profit by a fault which had already cost the Allies very dearly; West Flanders at the mercy of a coup de main, to allow the Antwerp garrison to communicate with the operational troops of Lille, to abandon it to the whole of the left bank of the Scheldt, and finally to give it the power of requisitioning on the side of Ghent, Dendermonde, and the coast. Moreover, as the news received at the headquarters of the IIIrd Corps signaled the formation of a French corps composed of troops from the garrisons of Metz, Luxembourg and Saarlouis, concentrated at Thionville and its movements on Longwy, one had thought given Maison, for the active operations, a nucleus of 13,000 to 14,000 men, to resume the campaign, and to maneuver in such a manner as to make his union with the French troops of the Ardennes, already on the point of arriving at Longwy, to snatch Belgium from the Allies, either in order to take effective action on the rear of the Allies, or to establish themselves on their lines of communication, to cut them off from the Low Countries, and then to try to rejoin Napoleon.

It was therefore necessary to preserve Mons, Tournay, and Bruges, and to post respectable reserves at Ath, and perhaps even at Ghent. It was, however, important to note that, notwithstanding the arrival of the reinforcements which Wallmoden had brought to him, the Duke of Saxe-Weimar could only take the measures he deemed necessary only after having obtained from Field-Marshal Stedingk, Army of the North in the absence of Bernadotte, the promise to cover Brussels, to participate in the blockade of Antwerp and to relieve the 2nd Brigade of Wallmoden.

1-3 April. --Positions of the troops of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar. --In waiting for the reply of the headquarters of Liège, the Duke of Saxe-Weimar ordered Kortrijk to be occupied by the flying corps of Major Hellwig, and sent back to Ghent the detachment of Colonel Count Lottum, temporarily held at Oudenaarde and Zottegem during the day of the 1 April, the 1st Brigade of General Wallmoden, and ordered Thielmann to proceed on the following day to Tournay.

The response of Field Marshal Stedingk enabled the Duke of Saxe-Weimar to proceed with a new division of his corps, which now formed two large groups supported by reserves and charged with observing the concentration of French troops reported from Valenciennes. The first of these groups was established at Tournay, where General Thielmann arrived on 2 April with twelve battalions, four and a half squadrons, and sixteen guns. The outposts of this group were established on the right at Ramegnies-Chin, in the center at Orcq, Marquain and Blandain, on the south at Ere, Willemeau and Antoing, and watched from far away Kortrijk, Lille and Condé. The second group, consisting of fourteen battalions and four squadrons, the two regiments of Cossacks of Bihalov I and Rebjev II, and the fourteen pieces of General Lecoq, had its center at Mons, and held posts at Saint-Ghislain, Bavay, and Beaumont, whose mission consisted in observing Condé, Valenciennes, Maubeuge, and Philippeville, and covering the road to Avesnes.

⁹Maison to the Minister of War, Lille, 1 April. (*Archives of the War.*)

Behind these two main groups, General von Wallmoden, given the command of the reserves, had under his orders the brigade of Saxon general Gablenz, who occupied Ath with six battalions, four squadrons, and fourteen guns, and had in the second line seven battalions, eight squadrons and 24 pieces of the Russo-German legion marching from Grammont to Lessines. The flying corps of Hellwig came to establish itself at Ghent, and left at Oudenaarde only an observation post. A battalion of Landwehr temporarily remained at Enghien with the headquarters of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar.

The two battalions of landwehr of Gotha and Schwarzburg furnished the garrison of Brussels; finally a brigade of Swedish infantry was marching from Liège to Louvain.

4 April. --The movement of Maison on Valenciennes. --These essentially defensive arrangements, inspired by the determined resolution of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar not to undertake anything before the French general had revealed his plans, were not likely to displease Maison. The Allies therefore gave him time to complete his preparations, to attract to him a few reinforcements and to resupply. More than ever decided to continue active operations, Maison left Lille again on the 4th and moved by Orchies and Saint-Amand-les-Eaux to Valenciennes.

Although the Duke of Saxe-Weimar was officially informed of the capitulation of Paris on the evening of the 3rd of April, the news of the march of Maison caused real uneasiness at the headquarters of the IIIrd Corps. On the 4th of April, at 6 o'clock in the evening, it had been learned at Tournay that Maison, leaving Lille in the morning, had gone south. It was pretended that he had been followed by a considerable number of wagons destined to accelerate the transport of his infantry. It was known that one of his columns, composed exclusively of cavalry and 4 pieces of horse artillery, and which seemed to flank the march of the main body, had passed through Orchies, and had announced to the inhabitants that it was to continue its march on Condé and Valenciennes. But it had been believed that the French cavalry had been ordered to spread these rumors in order to change patrols of Thielmann, and it was concluded that there was a probable movement directed at Douai. The absence of any information hoped to be received by the scouts whom General Lecoq had sent between Condé and Saint-Amand contributed to corroborate this belief.

5-6 April. --Measures taken by the Duke of Saxe-Weimar. --Maison returns to Lille. --The 5th of April passed without being much more advanced than the day before, and without the discovery of the plans of the French general. Thielmann had, however, pointed out the departure of Maison from Saint-Amand-les-Eaux, and announced that he had continued his march on Valenciennes, at the head of a column of 8,000 men, 1,200 horses, and 23 guns. But if one of the spies of Lecoq, who had arrived from Valenciennes, claimed to have seen Maison on the same day, he added that he had not been able to determine whether the French troops, which he said were preparing to resume their movement, were going on to Maubeuge and Mons.

Due to the events of Paris, the headquarters of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar was inclined to believe that Maison had only concentrated on Valenciennes in order to try to rejoin the Emperor by marching through Avesnes ahead of the Imperial army. The commander of the IIIrd Corps of the Confederation, in order to be more completely in a position to deal with any eventuality, prepared to bring his troops closer to Valenciennes, and ordered General Thielmann to be ready to leave on 6 April his least solid battalions at Tournay and to move on Bury with the rest of his column. At the same time he informed General Lecoq that he would have to settle at Frameries, between Mons and Maubeuge, and Generals Gablenz and Wallmoden, whom he had incessantly directed, the first on Belveil, the second on Ath.

But at the moment when the Duke of Saxe-Weimar communicated his instructions to the generals under his command, affairs had already completely changed their appearance. Warned on arrival at Valenciennes of the events in Paris, anticipating the consequences of the Allied entry into the capital, Maison had left the brigade of General Penne at Valenciennes, threw a few reinforcing battalions at Bouchain and Douai and had returned on the evening of 6 April to Lille, where his presence had become indispensable.

7 April. --Last operations in Flanders. --In spite of the gravity of the news which had reached him, Maison did not wish to continue until the last moment, until the official notification of a definitive solution which seemed to him inevitable and imminent, the war of chicanery which had become so successful.

On the morning of the 7 April, 1600 infantry and 400 horses, supported by a few guns, issued on his orders from Valenciennes, overthrew the Cossacks stationed at Quiévrain, and came to reconnoiter the outposts of Saint-Ghislain.

This offensive reconnaissance, which two days earlier had seriously disturbed the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, produced the least effect on him as he was already aware of the return of the Maison on Lille, and that the news from the great quarter of the sovereigns no longer allowed any doubt about the imminent cessation of hostilities.

9 April. --Suspension of arms. --Last sortie from the Antwerp garrison. --Answer from Carnot to Bernadotte. --Maison could not succeed in hiding anymore from his troops the events already known to the population. Obligated to seek by every means in his power to maintain discipline in his regiments, to combat desertion, he had to accept on 9 April the suspension of arms which the Duke of Saxe Weimar had offered him. On the same day the garrison of Antwerp executed a last sortie by the Tête de Flandre, pushed as far as Melseledijk and Beveren, and brought back forage and provisions into the town.

Informed by Bernadotte of the constitution of a provisional government, invited by him to put an end to the hostilities and open the gates of Antwerp to him, Carnot addressed to him the following day, 10 April, a proud and noble reply which we cannot resist the pleasure to reproduce:

"Prince, it is in the name of the French Government that I command in the city of Antwerp. It alone has the right to fix the term of my office. As soon as the government is definitely and unquestionably established on its new foundations, I shall hasten to execute its orders."

"This resolution cannot fail to obtain the approbation of a prince born French, and who knows so well the laws which honor prescribes. The inhabitants of Antwerp do not suffer. Peace reigns among them, perhaps more than in any part of Europe. They all feel, as I do, the necessity of waiting until the political order has taken its place, and we will without doubt receive directly the instructions which we must follow."¹⁰

12 April. --Armistice of Pont-à-Tressin. --On the 12th of April Maison, who had received instructions from the provisional government in the meantime, signed the armistice of Pont-à-Tressin with the Duke of Saxe-Weimar.

General considerations on the attitude and conduct of Maison. --Thanks to his indefatigable activity, Maison had succeeded, at the head of a handful of men, if not to keep in check, at least to immobilize for nearly four months the considerable forces which the Allies opposed him. Forced to abandon Belgium, he had, by contending with them foot in foot, succeeded in preserving the fortresses, protecting our former frontier from the north, repelling all attacks, and organizing the little army which won the victory at Kortrijk, on the very day when the Allied sovereigns made their entry into Paris.

The campaign of Belgium, full of useful lessons, would suffice to honor one career alone, to add a beautiful page to the history of Maison. But the commander of the 1st Corps had succeeded in acquiring other titles to the gratitude and esteem of his contemporaries. Listening only to his honor as a soldier, a slave to his duty, Maison, although he had not, like so many others of his companions in arms, been heaped with honors, wealth and favors by the Emperor, he had nevertheless given, during the last days of this campaign, a magnificent example of patriotism and fidelity too rare at the time. It is this act, which is too little known and deserves to be carefully preserved, an act which brings to light the righteousness and loyalty of General Maison, which we think we ought to recall before concluding the chapter which we have devoted to the last operations of the Belgian campaign.

"During the course of this campaign," *the Duc de Broglie* expressed himself in his speech to the Chamber of Peers on 22 March 1842, on the occasion of the death of Marshal Marquis Maison, "the firmness of General Maison was put to more than one trial. The Imperial government leaned towards its ruin. The Grande Armée was crushed, France was exhausted, the Restoration was preparing. In Flanders, in Artois, the Royalist Party was beginning to show itself. It was known that General Maison had never been counted among the men attached to the Emperor by the bonds of an old affection and personal gratitude. What a triumph if it had been possible to detach him from the Imperial cause, and to secure the concurrence of an army, doubtless small, but victorious. *Towards the end of the*

¹⁰Carnot to Bernadette, Antwerp, 10 April. (*Archives of the War.*)

month of March, King Louis XII offered the General the baton of Marshal, the government for life of the towns of Belgium, which he had so valiantly defended, and an establishment proportioned to this high fortune. These proposals were rejected as they ought to be. The Imperial cause was still at that time the cause of France. Far from betraying the Emperor, far from abandoning him in this desperate extremity, General Maison hastened, on the day after the victory at Kortrijk, to assemble all the troops he could dispose of to effect a powerful diversion in moving by forced marches on the rear when the news of the abdication of Fontainebleau obliged him to lay down his arms."

"This event terminated everything."

" France was again called upon to give herself a government. Each citizen was entitled to participate freely in this choice. General Maison, consulted confidentially by one of his companions in arms, General Dessolles, then engaged in the subsequent negotiations with the Allied sovereigns in favor of the House of Bourbon, declared himself ready to recognize and serve the Government which would obtain the assent of France; but he expressed great doubts as to the possibility of founding, on the inseparable ideas of a restoration, a solid, durable and national order of things."

"We must render to the King Louis XVIII this justice, that at the moment when General Maison was presented to him at Calais, he remembered neither his rejected offers, nor the liberty with which the general had expressed his opinion, or rather, if he remembered it, it was to honor the fidelity and reward the patriotism. He welcomed General Maison with eagerness, congratulated him on the services he had rendered to France, persisted in assigning him the dignity of marshal, and appointed him governor of Paris."As you have been faithful to the Emperor," he said, "you will be faithful to the King of France."

"It was thinking and acting like a king; the confidence of this enlightened prince was not deceived. As long as the first Restoration lasted, General Maison fulfilled the duties of his office with an unalterable devotion, giving the new government salutary councils, arresting, as far as he depended, obsolete pretensions, containing with equal firmness all parties, remaining alien to all plots. When the Hundred Days revolution broke out, he not only remained at the last moment at his post near Louis XVIII, but, on taking leave of the monarch who had been exiled for the second time, he loudly declared that no consideration could persuade him to associate himself with the events which were preparing, that he looked upon his sword as broken, and his career as finished. The cause of emigration had never in his eyes been the cause of France, he could not embrace it; The Imperial cause was no longer so, he could not support it."

"He executed his resolution at once; he retired to an estate which he possessed on the banks of the Rhine. There he rejected with regret, but with perseverance, the repeated entreaties, the pressing solicitations of the Emperor, with indignation, the efforts made to persuade him to take sides in a directly opposite direction."¹¹

Finally, in order to justify General Maison with unjust accusations against him, we shall again borrow a few lines from the speech of the Due de Broglie: "This part of the life of General Maison has been variously appreciated. He has always disdained to repulse the attacks directed against him on several sides. He has acted as two men have acted, the memory of which is dear to France, and whose history has placed the names among the most honored: Marshal Saint-Cyr and Marshal Macdonald. However, by explaining to his friends the reasons for his determination, by entrusting his children with the task of making known the truth on this delicate subject, by depositing in their hands all his papers, all his correspondence, he attached a great price what he regarded his opinion as being his own and exclusively personal, that he had obeyed above all duties of position, and that in default of his arm his heart had always been in the midst of his brothers in arms and under the flag of his country."

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¹¹Chamber of Peers, Session of 22 March 1842: speech delivered by the Due de Broglie on the occasion of the death of the Marshal Marquis Maison.