

The Napoleon Series

The Campaign of 1814: Chapter 20, Part VI

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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 XX.

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

12 April. --Affair of the Grande-Chartreuse. --Suspension of arms. --On the following day, 12 April, while the conditions of the suspension of arms were negotiated at Valence, according to which each party retained the positions it occupied at that moment until the return of an officer, Major Debeau, sent by Augereau to Talleyrand,¹ the posts, which Marchand, unaware of the opening of the negotiations, had established at Grande-Chartreuse, attacked the Austrian outposts, drove them out of their positions, and carried off a few prisoners.

13-24 April. --Attitude of Augereau. --Character of his relations with the Crown Prince of Hesse-Hombourg. --The hostilities were now over. Like Maison and Carnot, like Soult and Suchet, Marshal Augereau had only to wait for the result of the negotiations begun in Paris and the orders of the government. More than any of his comrades-in-arms, the Duke of Castiglione ought to have understood that, in order to be pardoned for his faults, he should abstain from any personal action, intervene only in exceptional cases, and use only his position, his rank, to defend the interests of his army, the people and his country. The course of action he had to follow was traced to him by events. Confining himself to his military duties, carefully avoiding any political demonstration, solely concerned with maintaining discipline in the corps under his command, he had only to bring an extreme measure, a wise reserve in his relations with the commander of the Austrian Army of the South, so as to oppose the claims and

¹Augereau to Talleyrand, Valence, 12 April. (*Ibid.*)

pretensions of a conqueror with the attitude of dignity, correctness, and firmness, which alone is suitable for the vanquished. But, too haughty and too arrogant to accept advice or to ask for advice, the Marshal, instead of waiting for communications from the headquarters of the Crown Prince of Hesse-Homburg, compromised his situation on the very day of the signature of the Armistice, by asking his former adversary to prolong its duration until the return of the officer whom he had sent as a courier.²

The commander of the Austrian Army of the South hastened to take advantage of such a useless and untimely approach. He hastened to consent to an indefinite suspension of arms, however, reserving to each of the two parties the possibility of denouncing it at any moment, and fixing within six days the period which would elapse between the notification of the denunciation and the resumption of hostilities. In doing so, the Prince did not commit himself to anything; he did not exceed his powers; but the apparent generosity and condescension, which he had just shown, now afforded him the means not only of continuing with Augereau a correspondence which it would have been difficult for him to engage, but of asking for and obtaining advantages which, the weakness, the inconsistency, and the vanity of the Marshal gave him an insight. The Grande-Chartreuse affair, moreover, came very opportunely to enable him to test the ground, and to send one of his officers to Augereau, charged far less to protest against one of those incidents of no importance or gravity which almost inevitably is produced at the moment of the cessation of hostilities, than of securing for himself the dispositions and the state of mind of the Marshal. The results of this process exceeded the expectations of the commander of the Army of the South. Augereau filled Major Prince Auersperg with exaggerated regards and attentions.

After a long conversation with him, he gave him a letter in which he acknowledged the accuracy of the fact, and expressed his regret, on the subject of the Grande-Chartreuse and Fort Barraux, in terms one could not expect to find in the mouth of a Marshal of the Empire, and informed the Austrian general-in-chief that he ordered Marchand "to immediately surrender the land and the prisoners, and to give General Dessaix, the order to refrain from any hostility."³

At this moment the Marshal still hesitated; ignorant of the turn of events, and fearing to compromise himself, he still sought the way which could best satisfy his ambition. His wait was not going to be long. On the following day the Marshal had made up his mind. He knew what had happened at Fontainebleau and could now act with full knowledge of the facts. In a letter he wrote to Massena,⁴ he did not hesitate to say to him: "BONAPARTE has signed his abdication pure and simple. He is relegated to the island of Elba."

Henceforth, breaking with his past, devoting himself solely to his future, thinking only of his personal interests, he sought exclusively to conciliate the good graces of the conquerors, and to create by his ingratitude towards Napoleon, by the noisy explosion of his royalist sentiments, by his rigors against the officers and soldiers who did not share his zeal and enthusiasm as a neophyte, titles not reputable to the recognition of the new government.

Not content with abandoning the sovereign to whom he owed his marshal's baton, his titles, his endowments, and the command of the Army of Lyon, the Duke of Castiglione, was blinded by ambition, that he owed his country.

On 17 April, when he received communication of the convention fixing the line of demarcation between the two armies, he did not hesitate to write to the Crown Prince of Hesse-Hombourg⁵ telling him that "*in spite of the*

²Augereau to the Crown Prince of Hesse-Hombourg, Valence, 12 April. (Correspondence of Augereau, *Archives of the War*.)

³Augereau to the Crown Prince of Hesse-Hombourg and to General Marchand, Valence, 14 April. (Correspondence of Augereau, *Archives of the War*.)

⁴Augereau to Massena, Valence, 15 April. (*Ibid.*) In this letter Augereau again said to Massena: "I long to know your resolution, which I believe is not doubtful."

⁵Augereau to the Crown Prince of Hesse-Hombourg, Valence, 17 April. (Correspondence of Augereau, *Archive of the War*.)

doubtful meaning of the text of the convention: leaving from the department of the Rhône, the line will follow the frontier from the department of Isère to Mont Cenis, *he will give it the interpretation most favorable to the Allies and will evacuate Grenoble on the 21st.*" Finally, to mark more fully the gravity of the resolution which he had had the sad courage to take, the scope of the sacrifice to which he had voluntarily consented, in order better to assert the greatness of the service which he had voluntarily rendered to the Allies, he did not hesitate to add, *that he reserved, if this article were interpreted otherwise, to hope that the Allies would evacuate Grenoble forthwith.*⁶

Here is the exact text of the letter that a Marshal of France did not blush to write to his adversary of the day before:

Valence, 17 April. --"Prince, I have received the letter which Your Highness has done me the honor to write to me, which was handed to me by the Field Marshal Baron Wimpffen, and to which was attached a copy of the armistice concluded between the French army and the Allied Powers."

"A difficulty arises. This agreement stipulates that, from the department of the Rhône, the line will follow the frontier of the department of Isère to Mount Cenis."

"According to the literal meaning of this article, it is evident that the most straight line from the Rhône to Mont Cenis being by Bourgoin and La Tour-du-Pin, the Commissioners certainly wanted to designate the outer boundary of the department of the Isère; for, if the department of Isère should have been included within the Austrian army line, this department would have been carried to that of the Rhône in the picture of those who are assigned to the cantonments of the Allied troops. Accordingly, I believe, Prince, that this Article is susceptible of interpretation by the respective Commissioners who are announced to be appointed for the execution of this Convention. Nevertheless, according to the order of dislocation of the Allied armies shown to me by the Field-Marshal Lieutenant Baron Wimpffen, it appears that the department of Isère is included in those which are assigned to the cantonments of the Army of the South. Wishing to do all that would depend on me for mutual interests, *I consent to give the doubtful article the most favorable interpretation to the Allies.* Consequently, I will give orders to General Marchand to evacuate Grenoble on the 21st of this month. This delay is indispensable to prepare the movement of the troops, of which part must necessarily come in the Drôme by the high road from Grenoble to Valence on the right bank of the Isère."

"It is well understood, and your Highness's loyalty is a sure guarantee to me, that if the article in dispute were subsequently interpreted in favor of the French army, the Allied troops would immediately evacuate Grenoble. Moreover, I think it is superfluous to add that the occupation of this city being friendly and peaceful, the establishments and stores of the State will remain in the hands of the French administration and that it will not experience any charges from the conquered countries. It is on this basis that I authorize General Marchand to negotiate evacuation with such a commissioner as your Highness may wish to appoint. I hope that He will see in this concession the sincere desire I have of smoothing all difficulties and the confidence I have in her loyalty."

But the words and the writings were no longer sufficient for the Marshal. He thought it necessary to put, by his actions, the limit of his weaknesses and his guilty concessions. The same day he informed Marchand that the armistice ceded the Isère to the Austrians and ordered him to evacuate Grenoble and to come to the Drôme after having settled the details of the evacuation with General Bubna who was to replace him in Grenoble.⁷ On the same day he summoned the officers of the division of Bardet and of the Ordonneau Brigade, who, indignant at the proclamation which the Marshal had addressed to his army the day before, having not adhered to the new government, to resign. He warned them that in case of refusal he would reform them without treatment and cause them to leave the army.⁸ In spite of these threats, generals, officers, and soldiers, exasperated by the incomprehensible attitude of the Marshal, refused to follow the example of their chief, to deny their former sovereign, to deliver to their enemies of the day the territory they occupied and that they could not be snatched from them by force.

⁶*Ibid. in id.*

⁷Augereau to General Marchand, Valence, 17 April. (*Archives of the War.*)

⁸Correspondence of Augereau, 17 April. (*Ibid.*)

Although the Marshal endeavored to demonstrate to Marchand and Dessaix that "the occupation was done in order to render honors to the Emperor,"⁹ Marchand persisted in remaining in Grenoble, and the army continued to wear the tricolor cockade, to proclaim loyally his attachment and his love for the Emperor. Finally, whatever discipline he might be, General Marchand did not decide to obey him until he received a second order, still more formal than the first, telling him "to hand over the 24th at the latest Fort Barraux to the Austrians, to evacuate Grenoble and the department of Isère, to quarter his division half in the Hautes-Alpes, half in the Drôme and to force General Dessaix to immediately evacuate the department of Mont-Blanc and to gather his troops with those of Marchand."¹⁰

Increasingly blinded by his ambitious preoccupations, having completely lost the notion of duty and the sense of his personal dignity, Augereau had not even noticed that his obsequious attitude towards the Allies, his misplaced condescension, his lack of patriotism, his protestations of devotion to the new order of things, too noisy to be disinterested, too sudden to appear sincere, had made him lose the little authority he still exercised over his troops, and had not the slightest regards, nor very smallest concession on the part of the Crown Prince of Hesse-Homburg. Wholly selfish in his pursuit, he had not even realized that the more willing he would be to yield to the demands of the Allies, the less he would find them disposed to grant his claims. On the 23rd of April, when he noticed at last the uselessness of his advances, it was too late to change his tone. Although the Marshal had not failed to expose to the Crown Prince of Hesse-Hombourg the causes of the delay in the evacuation of Grenoble, although he had promised him that this place would be given him on 24 April at the latest, Field-Marshal Lieutenant Wimpffen had nevertheless continued to advance towards Grenoble, and had acted as an enemy. On the other hand, and by the very fact that Augereau had voluntarily consented, and without being invited to do so, to cede the Isère to the Allies, the Prince of Coburg had raised and maintained the pretension of remaining in the Haute-Loire, in opposition to the text of the convention which obliged the Allies to evacuate the departments located on the right bank of the Rhône. Finally, although the armistice had been signed at Valence on the 12th of April, although the Allied troops had been informed well before that date of the cessation of hostilities, Count Ignatius Hardegg had taken possession of Clermont on the 14th, and did not at all appear disposed to leave that city. On the 23rd of April the Marshal tried to protest shyly in a letter to the Crown Prince of Hesse-Hombourg against these flagrant violations of the convention.¹¹

24 April. --Interview of the Emperor and Augereau. --The Marshal's attitude during the voyage of the Emperor that crossed the region occupied by the troops of the Army of Lyons on the 14th of April, is so incomprehensible, so sad, so full of contradictions, that it can be explained only by the weakness of character of Augereau, by a return to reason, by an awakening of moral sense, by the explosion of late and sterile regrets caused by the uselessness of his compromises, by the sudden manifestation of the remorse of his conscience, the great man who had done so much for himself, and whom he had not hesitated to abandon, from the great man to whom he had replied by the most black ingratitude, by the most culpable selfishness, and whose disobedience and whose slowness, weakness, and insufficiency had, if not caused, at least facilitated and accelerated the fall.

"On the 24th of April," as expressed in the *Commentaries of Napoleon*,¹² "they crossed Saint-Vallier and Tain. Half way from Tain to the Isere, a six-horse carriage with two couriers stopped. Marshal Augereau, on his way to Paris, dismounted with three aides-de-camp and asked to speak to the Emperor. His Majesty got out of the carriage and listened for half an hour. The commissioners and the officers of the suite had also got out of the carriage and formed a group at a distance of 60 paces. The Emperor reproached Augereau for the slowness of his operations, his

⁹Note from General Marchand on the occupation of the Isère and the surrender of Fort Barraux to the Austrians, April 13-23. (*Archives of the War*.)

¹⁰Augereau to General Marchand, Valence, 27 April. (*Archives of the War*.)

¹¹Augereau to the Crown Prince of Hesse-Hombourg and to General Marchand, Valence, 23 April. (*Archives of the War*; Correspondence of Augereau.) In this letter Augereau was careful to insist again on his condescension towards the Allies: "On my part," he wrote, "all the conditions of the armistice are fulfilled, even those whose articles had a doubtful meaning and to which I gave the most favorable interpretation to the Allied troops."

¹²*The Isle of Elba and the Hundred Days; Commentaries of Napoleon.*

negligence, and his abandonment of Lyons with such a fine army. The general stammered, turned pale, and defended himself badly. He cried out a great deal about the turn which affairs had taken; said he had hoped for the regency; that it was impossible for any soldier who had any honor for any Frenchman who loved his country to see himself under that leaden scepter; that he was going to retreat to the country, until a new order of things, which could not take long to take place, would revive the national party. The Emperor noticed the embarrassment of the countenance of Marshal Augereau.¹³ At the moment of going back in the carriage, the Marshal, with tears in his eyes, asked permission to embrace the Emperor. His Majesty was still ignorant of his last sentiments, and did not refuse this favor to an old companion in arms."

"They got out of the carriage a quarter of a league from the Isère. General Koller¹⁴ then approached the Emperor and said to him, "I have just seen a very extraordinary scene. --Why? He is an old soldier, said the Emperor, "he has grown old twenty years under my command; he no longer has the same ardor; moreover, he had military means, but never genius or education. --You surprise me, said General Koller. You have been betrayed by Augereau; a fortnight ago he made a treaty with us. His movements were mere feints, and you do not even know his proclamation. They handed it to me yesterday at Lyon, and here it is."

"The Emperor did not conceal his indignation on seeing this signed proclamation of the same man who had just given him so different words."

Proclamation of Augereau to his army. --The man who could have easily avoided meeting the chief, whom he had so ill-served, the man who had owed his reign at the head of the Army of the Rhône to the real friendship which the Emperor preserved in spite of everything to his comrade-in-arms of the Army of Italy,¹⁵ the man who had

¹³It has often been claimed, and not without reason, that Napoleon had sought in his *Commentaries* to justify his actions, to explain his faults, his errors, by rejecting responsibility of his lieutenants, sacrificing history to legend. The passage of the *Commentaries* we have just quoted is, however, much less severe for Marshal Augereau than the account given by the Graf Truchsess zu Waldburg, the Prussian commissioner who accompanied Napoleon, a narrative which differs, moreover, from that which is found in the *Commentaries*.

"On the 24th of April, towards noon," writes the Graf Truchsess zu Waldburg, "in his *New Relation of Napoleon's Journey from Fontainebleau to the Isle of Elba*, we met Marshal Augereau near Valence. The Emperor and the Marshal got out of the carriages. Napoleon put on his hat and held out his arms to Augereau, who embraced him, but without saluting him. "Where are you going," said the Emperor, taking him by the arm, "you are going to the Loire?" Augereau replied that for the moment he was going to Lyon. They walked nearly a quarter of an hour together along the road to Valence. I know the result of this interview from a good source. The Emperor reproached the Marshal for his conduct towards him, and said to him: "Your proclamation was stupid. Why insults against me, it was simply necessary to say: *"The vow of the nation having pronounced itself in favor of a new sovereign, the duty of the army is to conform to it. Long live the King! Long live Louis XVIII!"*

"Then Augereau began to talk to Bonaparte, and in his turn bitterly reproached him for his insatiable ambition, to which he had sacrificed everything, even the happiness of the whole of France. This speech fatiguing Napoleon, he turned abruptly towards the Marshal, embraced him, took off his hat, and threw himself into his carriage."

"Augereau, with his hands behind his back, did not disturb his cap from his head, and only when the Emperor got back in his carriage made a contemptuous gesture with his hand, saying farewell. On his return he addressed a very gracious greeting to the commissaries."

¹⁴ General Koller, to whom Major Count Clam-Martinic had been added, accompanied the Emperor as Austrian commissioner. The other commissioners were for Russia General Shuvalov, for Prussia the Graf Waldburg zu Truchsess, and for England General Campbell.

¹⁵ During the course of the campaign, the Emperor had more than once thought of raising Augereau to a command which only an ambitious general, but energetic, disciplined, and ready to risk everything to execute the orders of his

thought himself able to wash with a few tears, with a doubtful sincerity, the shame of his inexplicable conduct, was the same one who, had had the sad courage to address to his troops the following proclamation:¹⁶

Soldiers!

"The Senate, the interpreter of the national Will, tired of the tyrannical yoke of Napoleon Bonaparte, pronounced, on 2 April, his dethronement and that of his family."

"A new monarchical Constitution, strong and liberal, and a descendant of our ancient kings replace Bonaparte and his despotism. Your ranks, your honors and your distinctions are assured."

"The Legislative Body, the great dignitaries, the marshals, the generals, and all the corps of the Grand Army, have acceded to the decrees of the Senate, and Bonaparte himself, by an act, dated Fontainebleau, 11 April, abdicated for himself and His heirs the thrones of France and Italy."

"Soldiers! You are released from your oaths; you are so by the nation in which sovereignty resides; you are further, if necessary, by the very abdication of a man who, having sacrificed thousands of victims to his cruel ambition, did not know how to die as a soldier."

"The Nation calls Louis XVIII to the throne. Born French, he will be proud of your glory and surround himself with pride of your leaders. Son of Henry IV, he will have the heart: he will love the people and the soldier."

"Let us swear fidelity to Louis XVIII and to the Constitution which presents it to us. Let us wear the truly French color which makes all emblems of a revolution which is finished, disappear, and soon you will find in the gratitude of your King and your country a just reward for your noble labors."

"At the headquarters of Valence, 16 April, 1814."

The army understood its duty better than the Duke of Castiglione.¹⁷ Far from following the shameful example which a Marshal of the Empire was not afraid of giving it, a man who renounced with a stroke of his pen a glorious

and to defy all dangers to attain the goal which was so clearly indicated to him. While acknowledging that, on 14 March, for example (letter to Clarke, *Correspondence* n° 21,482), Augereau had neither the energy nor the confidence to carry out the important operations for which he was responsible, that the Emperor had recoiled before an indispensable measure, that his friendship for Augereau had prevented him at the last moment from giving a formal order to the Minister of War.

The Emperor later regretted the fault he had committed. "Augereau," he wrote, "in writing to Saint-Helena his notes on the Italian Campaign, was incapable of conducting himself. He had no training, no scope in the mind, no education. He maintained order and discipline among his soldiers; he was loved. His attacks were regular and orderly. He divided his columns well, placed his reserves well, and fought with intrepidity. But all this lasted only one day. Conqueror or vanquished, he was most often discouraged in the evening, whether by the nature of his character, or by the little calculation and penetration of his mind."

¹⁶ Proclamation of Augereau to his army, Valence, 16 April, (*Correspondence of Augereau, Archive of the War.*)

¹⁷On the evening of the day on which he had the last interview with the Emperor, Augereau received at 9 o'clock the following report from the officer in charge of reporting to him the incidents of the Emperor's journey, to inform him of the sentiments of the army on the passage of Napoleon.

"I awaited the return of the officer whom I had sent to Loriol to report to your Excellency on the passage of the Emperor. After having crossed the Isère, his Majesty was received by the soldiers on guard at Pont-Brule, by the cries of "Long live the Emperor!"

"At Valence he did not stop, as it had been announced, for lunch. He crossed the suburb quickly. The grenadiers of

past which sacrificed his honor as a man and a soldier to his ambitious aims, it remained faithful to its fallen and exiled Emperor. Prepared to group at the first signal around the chief, whose faults and misfortunes had not diminished the prestige, it resigned itself with difficulty to repress in the depths of its heart the unshakable feelings of veneration, devotion, and love which it had vowed to the great captain whose name had filled the world, and whose genius and victories had caused the tri-colored flag to flutter over the capitals of Europe, vanquished, quivering and stupefied.

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the head-quarters, the hussars of the escort of Your Excellency, and the company of Austrian chasseurs had rendered him military honors. The people and the soldiers were calm and not a cry rose. He showed emotion by seeing the French grenadiers and greeted them with tenderness. Many of them (and this is not an exaggeration) shed tears. I have experienced a heart-wrench, of which I have not yet recovered."

"He changed horses out of town on the road to Loriol. There, several isolated soldiers shouted "Long live the Emperor!" --"My friends," he said to them, "I am no longer your Emperor; it is Long live Louis XVIII you must cry." "You will always be our Emperor," replied a voltigeur of the 67th Regiment, rushing to the door and pressing his hand. He move his eyes from him and said to General Bertrand: "This brave man is doing me harm."

"Between La Paillasse and Loriol, the carriages met the Ordonneau Brigade. The regiments were in front and gave him military honors. Soldiers in a small minority shouted "Long live Emperor!" He called General Ordonneau and chatted for a few moments with him. When he saw Colonel Teulet of the 67th, he said, "This Colonel comes out of my Guard," and spoke with him."

"Having arrived at Loriol, he was surrounded by the cuirassiers of the 1st Division, who left only tomorrow. One of them told him:"

"If there were 20,000 men like me, we would take you away and put you at our head. It was not your soldiers who betrayed you. They were your generals."

"He has had a convulsive movement, which General Bertrand has calmed by pressing his arm."

"He left Loriol with the plan to rest at Montélimar. He seemed to be afraid of going to Avignon and Aix."

"The escort of your hussars has left him at Loriol."

Valence, 24 April, 9 o'clock in the evening. (*Archives of the War.*)