

A REVOLUTION IN WARFARE? THE ARMY OF THE SAMBRE
AND MEUSE AND THE 1794 FLEURUS CAMPAIGN

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

August 2012

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Hayworth, Jordan R. A Revolution in Warfare? The Army of the Sambre and Meuse and the 1794 Fleurus Campaign. Master of Arts (History), August 2012, 226 pp., 9 maps, references, 108 titles.

During the War of the First Coalition, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, commanded by Jean-Baptiste Jourdan, played the decisive role against Coalition forces in the Low Countries. Created in June 1794, the army defeated the Allies at the battle of Second Fleurus on 26 June 1794 and commenced the Coalition's retreat to the Rhine River. At the end of the year, Jourdan led the army to winter quarters along the left bank of the Rhine and achieved France's historically momentous "natural frontier." Despite its historical significance, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse has suffered from scant historical attention. Based largely on archival research, this thesis provides a detailed examination of the army's performance during the Fleurus campaign. In addition, this thesis pursues several broader themes. A detailed study of the Sambre and Meuse Army provides insight into institutional military change during the late eighteenth century. While historians traditionally argue that the French Revolution inaugurated an attendant "revolution in military affairs," this thesis presents evidence of evolutionary changes and continuities. Another important theme is the question of the combat effectiveness of French field armies during the Revolutionary epoch. Although historians typically present the French armies as unique and superior to their Old Regime opponents, this thesis demonstrates the effective parity between the armies of Revolutionary France and the Old Regime on the battlefield.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank my major professor and mentor Dr. Michael Leggiere for his constant support and encouragement. This thesis simply could not have been completed without his advice and assistance throughout the past few years. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my committee members, Drs. Guy Chet, Robert Citino, and Geoffrey Wawro and the support that the Chair of the Department of History, Dr. Richard McCaslin, has provided for my work. Dr. Frederick Schneid at High Point University has been a constant source of encouragement and advice from the very beginning.

I received generous grants from the Toulouse Graduate School as well as the College of Arts and Sciences at UNT. The Department of History also graciously provided monetary support, as did the department's Military History Center. I must thank everyone at the French war archives at Vincennes for making my trip very pleasant. Professor Peter Hicks at the Fondation Napoleon welcomed me and kindly provided information on General Marceau.

Last, but definitely not least, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my wife, Brittany, and my parents, Rick and Dwanna Hayworth, for their unwavering love. My entry into graduate school required their devotion, sacrifice, and encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

During the first war unleashed by the French Revolution, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, commanded by Jean-Baptiste Jourdan, played a central role in the struggle against the First Coalition. Created at the height of the Reign of Terror in June 1794, the very formation of the army proved the key decision of the campaign in the Low Countries. While the more famous Army of the North fought Allied forces on a direct line from the Atlantic coast to central Belgium (the Austrian Netherlands to contemporaries), the Army of the Sambre and Meuse struck the Coalition's critical left flank, forming a permanent wedge between Allied forces in the Low Countries and those operating along the Rhine River. After turning the tide of the 1794 campaign at the battle of Second Fleurus on 26 June 1794, the army cleared Austrian forces from France and Belgium through a siege campaign and two "forgotten battles" on the Ourthe and Roer Rivers in September and October respectively. At the end of the year, Jourdan placed the victorious army in winter quarters along the left bank of the Rhine, achieving France's historically momentous "natural frontier."¹

Although general studies of the French Revolutionary Wars mention the Army of the Sambre and Meuse and the Fleurus campaign, few detailed works exist in either Francophone or Anglophone historiography. The only study that focuses on the Fleurus

¹ French claims to the Rhine River as a "natural frontier" to the north and east derived originally from Julius Caesar's declaration in his classic study of the wars in Gaul that the Rhine constituted the demarcation line between ancient Gaul and barbarian German territory. An enlightening discussion of the Rhine River and the theory of "natural frontiers" is found in Sydney Seymour Biro, *The German Policy of Revolutionary France: A Study in French Diplomacy during the War of the First Coalition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), 1:1-27.

campaign is Victor Dupuis's detailed staff history, *Les opérations militaire sur le Sambre en 1794: Bataille de Fleurus*.² Ramsey Weston Phipps and Henri Antoine Baron de Jomini summarize the campaign in their respective works.³ R.R. Palmer's *Twelve Who Ruled* discusses the battle of Fleurus and verifies its significance to the political history of the French Revolution.⁴ Regardless, no historian has written a comprehensive history of the Sambre and Meuse Army. Claude Desprez's nineteenth century study suffers from a hagiographic interpretation and lack of detail.⁵ Peter Wetzler's recent work shines light on a neglected aspect of the army – logistics – but provides little information on the army's performance in battle.⁶ The two biographies of Jourdan discuss the Sambre and Meuse Army and the Fleurus campaign, but not in great detail.⁷ Thus, despite the historical import of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, it has suffered from inadequate study – a problem this thesis seeks to rectify.

While providing a detailed history of the Sambre and Meuse Army through examining the Fleurus campaign, this thesis explores several broader themes. The question of institutional military change in the late eighteenth century demands attention from historians interested in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods. While general agreement exists that warfare changed between the Frederician and Napoleonic periods,

² Victor Dupuis, *Les opérations militaires sur la Sambre en 1794: Bataille de Fleurus* (Paris: Chapelot, 1907).

³ Antoine-Henri Baron Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire des guerres de la révolution*, 16 vols. (Paris: 1820-1822); Ramsey Weston Phipps, *The Armies of the First French Republic and the Rise of the Marshals of Napoleon Ist* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926-1939), 5 vols.

⁴ R.R. Palmer, *Twelve who Ruled: The Year of Terror in the French Revolution* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁵ Claude Desprez, *Les Armées de Sambre-et-Meuse et du Rhin* (Paris: L. Baudoin, 1883).

⁶ Peter Wetzler, *War and Subsistence: The Sambre and Meuse Army in 1794* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985).

⁷ Frederick Hulot, *Le Maréchal Jourdan* (Paris: Pygmalion, 2010); René Valentin, *Le Maréchal Jourdan (1762-1833)* (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle, 1956).

the exact nature of the transformation remains unresolved. The leaders of the French Revolution emphasized the superiority and distinctiveness of their war making from the outset of the War of the First Coalition, especially through propaganda asserting the superiority of revolutionary *élan* and tactics. Traditionally, historians have accepted this view and labor to identify the elements of a revolution in military affairs that occurred after 1789.

In his classic summation of European warfare, Michael Howard affirms that “revolutionary changes” separated the limited wars of the eighteenth century from the total wars of the Napoleonic epoch.⁸ Gunther Rothenberg identifies the French Revolution as the dividing line between the “wars of kings” and the “wars of nations.”⁹ Hew Strachan argues that the French Revolution “burst asunder” limitations on warfare and brought radical changes in military operations. Specifically, commanders no longer sought geographic points as objectives, but sought to annihilate the enemy army.¹⁰ David Bell’s recent interpretative synthesis views the period as the “first total war,” an era that saw “an astonishing transformation in the scope and intensity of warfare.”¹¹ Finally, historians have utilized the concept of the “nation in arms” to explain the French victories in 1794. By assuming that new social and political paradigms brokered military

⁸ Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 75.

⁹ Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1978), 11.

¹⁰ Hew Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War* (New York: Routledge, 1983), 40.

¹¹ David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 7.

innovations, the “nation in arms” school sustains the theory of a revolution in military affairs.¹²

While admitting that revolutionary changes largely occurred in the political and social spheres, this thesis highlights continuities in the French way of war between the Old Regime and Revolutionary periods. Although new men commanded French armies of raw recruits, the military practices of the previous century did not disappear with the *Fleurs de lis*. Institutional change did not radically break with the past, but followed an accelerated trajectory. Thus, the nature of military change during the mid to late 1700s was far more evolutionary than revolutionary.

Jean Colin offered the first compelling evidence of the Revolution’s Old Regime military inheritance. According to Colin, Revolutionary armies did not reject traditional tactics, but remained faithful to the tactical formation most characteristic of the Old Regime: the line. Furthermore, Colin argues that French officers emphasized discipline and training more than *élan* and improvisation.¹³ Although rejecting Colin’s infatuation with linear tactics, Robert Quimby provides a definitive analysis of French military theory and tactics during the eighteenth century, arguing that “all the tactical innovations which have so impressed many writers, especially English, on the Revolutionary and

¹² For recent critiques of this approach, see Alan Forrest, *The Legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars: the Nation-in-Arms in French Republican Memory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 12-28; S.P. Mackenzie, *Revolutionary Armies in the Modern Era: A revisionist approach* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 33-51.

¹³ Jean Colin, *La campagne de 1793 en Alsace et dans la Palatinat* (Paris: Chapelot, 1902); Colin, *La tactique et la discipline dans les armées de la Revolution* (Paris: Chapelot, 1902); Colin, *L’infanterie française au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Chapelot, 1907).

Napoleonic Wars are to be found in the writings of the eighteenth century.”¹⁴ Brent Nosworthy also asserts an evolutionary view of military change.¹⁵ Claus Telp’s recent study cites the Revolutionary Wars as a crucial stage in the evolution of operational warfare.¹⁶ Finally, Jeremy Black argues that the dialectical view of revolutionary warfare eclipsing eighteenth century military practices fails to consider the fluidity of change in the late 1700s and the numerous continuities that existed between the two systems.¹⁷

Most histories that enter this debate draw conclusions from a general survey of military affairs during the age of the French Revolution.¹⁸ Although beneficial, this macro-approach would greatly benefit from more micro-level studies. Since the late nineteenth century, few historians have closely examined the various French field armies of the revolutionary era.¹⁹ Even fewer have studied the armies of the Old Regime powers during the same period.²⁰ A detailed examination of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse during the Fleurus campaign provides one important piece of the larger puzzle. While admittedly unable to answer every question, this thesis addresses the issue of military

¹⁴ Robert S. Quimby, *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare: The Theory of Military Tactics in Eighteenth Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 5.

¹⁵ Brent Nosworthy, *With Musket, Cannon, and Sword: Battle Tactics of Napoleon and His Enemies* (New York: Sarpedon, 1996).

¹⁶ Claus Telp, *The Evolution of Operational Art, 1740-1813: From Frederick the Great to Napoleon* (New York: Frank Cass, 2005).

¹⁷ Jeremy Black, *European Warfare, 1660-1815* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994), 148-175.

¹⁸ A good example is Owen Connelly, *The Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon, 1792-1815* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁹ One recent exception is Gilles Candella, *L’Armée d’Italie, des missionnaires armés à la naissance de la guerre napoléonienne* (Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011).

²⁰ Gunther Rothenberg, *Napoleon’s Great Adversary: Archduke Charles and the Austrian Army, 1792-1814*; Peter Paret, *Yorck and the Era of the Prussian Reform, 1807-1815* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966).

change as it relates to tactics, discipline, organization, and leadership in the Sambre and Meuse Army and provides insights that are relevant to the broader debate.

Another important theme related to the issue of military change concerns the combat effectiveness of the French Revolutionary armies compared to the armies of the Old Regime. Traditionally, historians venerate the French citizen-soldiers while denigrating the professional soldiers who served in the opposing armies. Jules Michelet, for instance, portrays the French troops as the “soldiers of God” in his nationalistic history.²¹ Michelet’s triumphalist interpretation reappears in the works of prominent historians such as Albert Mathiez, Jean Jaurès, Georges Lefebvre, and Albert Soboul.²² Jean-Paul Bertaud synthesized the interpretations of these earlier works with groundbreaking archival research to demonstrate that the Revolution permeated the French army at all levels.²³ Finally, John Lynn’s classic work on tactics and motivation in the Army of the North emphasizes the superior combat effectiveness of the French soldiers – rather than factors such as generalship, strategy, and numbers – as the primary reason for the Republic’s military success. According to Lynn, “on the battlefield, the combat effectiveness of the [French] rank and file – their tactics and their spirit – explain

²¹ Jules Michelet, *Les Soldats de la Revolution* (Paris: 1878), 23-35.

²² Albert Mathiez, *The French Revolution* trans. Catherine Alison Phillips (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964); Jean Jaurès, *L’armée nouvelle* (Paris: 1911), 147; Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution: From 1793 to 1799* trans. John Hall Stewart and James Friguglietti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964); Albert Soboul, *Les soldats de l’an II* (Paris: 1959).

²³ Jean Paul Bertaud, *The Army of the French Revolution: From Citizen-Soldiers to Instrument of Power* trans. R.R. Palmer (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988).

success.”²⁴ Collectively, these specialized works form the standard view of the French Revolutionary army that general studies tend to echo.²⁵

By rejecting the triumphalist narrative of the French “citizen-soldier,” this thesis supports an increasingly prominent revisionist trend in the historiography. T.C.W. Blanning’s recent survey of the French Revolutionary Wars rejects Lynn’s explanation of French military success. According to Blanning, the French failed to devise a superior tactical system to the Old Regime, but won their victories through manpower and sheer force of will. Blanning convincingly argues that the inconsistent pattern of French success undermines the notion of their military superiority.²⁶ Similarly, Paddy Griffith asserts that the Coalition deserves criticism for losing the war more than the French merit praise for devising a winning military system.²⁷

Although the social status of Old Regime soldiers during the 1790s needs more attention, this thesis demonstrates their continued effectiveness on the battlefield despite the supposed gains made by their French adversaries. Regarding the Fleurus campaign, a contextualized account of the battle undermines the traditional version enshrined in Revolutionary mythology. As this thesis demonstrates, the advantages the French purportedly gained through their revolutionary military system never provided them with an absolute superiority over their Old Regime opponents.

A variety of archival and published sources provide material for this study. The French *archive de la guerre* at Vincennes contains Jourdan’s unpublished military

²⁴ John Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791-1794* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1996), 278.

²⁵ André Corvisier, *L’Histoire militaire de la France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), II.

²⁶ T.C.W. Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars, 1787-1802* (New York: Arnold, 1996), 270.

²⁷ Paddy Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France, 1789-1802* (London: Greenhill, 1998).

memoirs from 1793-1796, along with much of his professional correspondence. In addition, cartons in the B1 series hold the correspondence of the Sambre and Meuse Army. Other archival sources include an eyewitness account of the siege of Charleroi, the correspondence of representatives on mission, General Nicholas Godinot's march journal, and the letters of Marshal Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte. Victor Dupuis's detailed staff history of the Fleurus campaign contains valuable published archival materials. Published primary sources of note are the memoirs of Marshal Jean de Dieu Soult and General Jean Etienne Championnet, as well as the correspondence of General Jean-Baptiste Kléber and Lazare Carnot. As few secondary works concerning the Sambre and Meuse Army exist, this work is based primarily on archival and published primary research. Of the secondary works, Dupuis, Wetzler, Phipps, and Chuquet have been most valuable.

An analytical narrative provides the best framework to understand the Sambre and Meuse Army and the process of institutional change. Despite a focus on the Sambre and Meuse Army, the second chapter analyzes the Army of the Moselle's experience from 1792-1794. The Moselle Army served as the nucleus of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse in June 1794. Rather than being an army of inexperienced recruits, many of the troops in the Army of the Sambre and Meuse gained experience on campaign and in battle while serving with the Moselle Army. Through a series of difficult campaigns that saw both success and failure against the armies of the Old Regime, the troops became disciplined, trained, and professional. Conversely, the commanders and political officials assigned to the Moselle Army worked to create an effective fighting force through a

combination of experimentation with new ideas and the adoption of traditional military practices.

Chapter 3 examines the early life and military education of Jourdan, the commander who led the Army of the Sambre and Meuse to victory in 1794. Born a member of the lower-middle class, Jourdan's rise to the preeminent ranks of the French army depended on the Revolution's transition of a "society based on birth" to a "society based on merit." Revolutionary France provided opportunities that Jourdan's personal merit allowed him to exploit. Nonetheless, while Jourdan's rise to command the Army of the Sambre and Meuse signals a revolution in war and society, he did not initiate a revolution in the art of war. In fact, his performance in 1794 demonstrates that the continuation of Old Regime methods such as siege warfare, dispersed deployments, and cautious operations tempered the pace and impact of the decisive campaigns desired by the revolutionary regime.

The fourth chapter examines Jourdan's promotion to command the Moselle Army in 1794. It addresses his relationship with the French government, his multiple responsibilities, and the numerous challenges he faced. Working alongside the army's representatives on mission, Jourdan struggled to acquire supplies, weapons, and food while organizing an effective combat force. Finally, the chapter analyzes the second expedition to Arlon in April 1794, which saw the French gain one victory but suffer a defeat shortly after. Chapter 5 examines Jourdan's efforts to march his army into the Low Countries in May 1794 per the orders of the all powerful Committee of Public Safety. After the defeat at Arlon, Jourdan reorganized the army before marching north

towards the Meuse River. While the Allies allowed the French to advance into the Low Countries, the French erroneously attributed the Coalition's withdrawal to an admission of inferiority. Stirred by their success, the French believed that their army of "citizen-soldiers" would easily defeat the "slave-soldiers" of the Old Regime armies defending Belgium.

Chapter 6 examines Jourdan's efforts to strike the decisive blow in eastern Belgium. After French forces failed to besiege Charleroi on 3 June 1794, Jourdan received command of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse. The new force included troops from the Moselle, Ardennes, and North Armies and totaled slightly less than 100,000 men. Although Jourdan's army posed a menacing threat to the Allied flank in the Low Countries, victory was not assured. On 16 June 1794, four days after the French renewed the siege of Charleroi, the Dutch Stadtholder, William V, the Prince of Orange-Nassau defeated the French at the overlooked battle of First Fleurus. This victory demonstrated the continued combat effectiveness of Old Regime armies against French Revolutionary armies.

The final chapter analyzes the more famous battle of Second Fleurus, where Jourdan defeated the Coalition's main army of Prince Frederick-Josias of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld and forced the Allies to commence the retreat from Belgium. Despite the success, victory did not result from a systemic breakdown of Old Regime warfare on the battlefield. Furthermore, although the French gained the victory, it proved less than the decisive "battle of annihilation" that Lazare Carnot desired. While the French benefitted from a combination of evolutionary developments such as better organization and more

flexible tactics, Old Regime armies and the soldiers serving in them remained effective. Despite the advantages held by the French, especially in the strategic and political realms, warfare remained essentially symmetrical throughout the French Revolution and decisive battles remained elusive.

The conclusion offers a brief synopsis of the Sambre and Meuse Army's experience after the Fleurus campaign. It summarizes the arguments made in the thesis and provides further evidence for the evolutionary nature of military change and the effective parity between French Revolutionary and Old Regime armies.

CHAPTER 2
TOWARD A NEW MODEL ARMY
The Army of the Moselle, 1792-1794

The experience of the Army of the Moselle demonstrates the gradual transformation of warfare from 1792-1794. In contrast to the French patriotic myth, the army simply did not overrun the various Old Regime armies it faced. While eventually proving effective against its Austrian and Prussian adversaries, the army sustained its share of setbacks and defeats. Furthermore, the French displayed a continuing reliance on traditional military virtues rather than a complete rejection of established norms. While the government attempted to create a “revolutionary army,” the Army of the Moselle depended on basic military practices such as discipline, training, and well-coordinated tactics in achieving victory.

Originally styled the Army of the Center, the Moselle Army was the first of three armies created by the Legislative Assembly to defend the northeastern frontier of France in 1791 in the event of war.¹ By December 1791, the Army of the Center consisted of 20,000 men at Metz under the perpetually inscrutable Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette. In July 1792, Lafayette conspired with the commander of the Army of the North, the septuagenarian Marshal Nicholas Luckner, to switch their armies’ positions so that Lafayette would be closer to Paris in the event of a major political uprising in the capital. Thus, in what history remembers as the *Chassé-*

¹ Arthur Chuquet, *La première invasion Prussienne (11 Aout-2 September 1792)* (Paris: 1886), 37. The other two armies were the Army of the North and the Army of the Rhine.

croisé, the original Army of the North under Luckner moved southeast towards Metz where it became the new Army of the Center.² In September 1792, General François Christophe Kellerman led the Army of the Center against the Prussian army of Charles William Ferdinand, Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel at Valmy. On 1 October, the Army of the Center officially became the Army of the Moselle in a wave of patriotic elation following its victory over the Prussians. By the end of October, Brunswick withdrew his forces from Verdun and Longwy, and the Moselle Army rejoiced at having cleared French soil of the invaders. The Army of the Moselle then entered cantonments between Longwy and Saarlouis.³

Influenced by Generals Charles François Dumouriez and Adam Philippe Custine of the Army of the North and the Army of the Rhine respectively, on 24 October the Executive Council ordered Kellerman to concentrate on the Sarre River and to march the Army of the Moselle north to take Trier and Koblenz.⁴ The Executive Council sought to capitalize on Dumouriez's invasion of Belgium and Custine's capture of Mainz. Citing the poor condition of his army, Kellerman refused to participate in the general offensive. The Army of the Moselle contained both regular line troops of the old Royal Army as well as new volunteer battalions. Due to inadequate supplies, the volunteers deserted in droves while the line troops often acted insubordinately.⁵ Given this demoralizing crisis, Kellerman desired to reorganize his army and postpone the offensive until January 1793.

² Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:5.

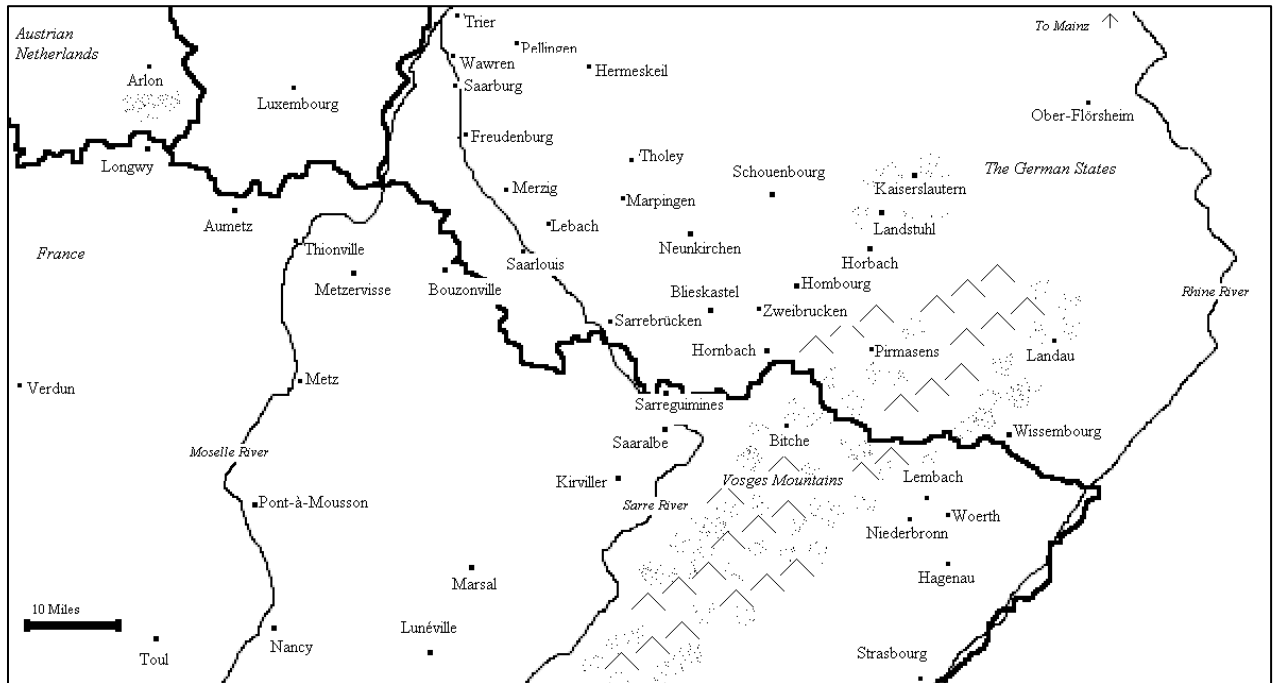
³ Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 2:27.

⁴ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:33.

⁵ Henri Wallon, *Les représentants du peuple en mission et la justice révolutionnaire dans les départements en l'an II (1793-1794)* (Paris: 1890), 4:33, 41.

MAP 1

Operations of the Moselle Army, 1792-1794



Nevertheless, Kellerman's rebuff of Custine's proposal earned the latter's indignation, prompting him to denounce to the Convention his colleague's contemptible timidity. In November, the Convention summoned Kellerman to Paris. Rather than punishing the hero of Valmy, the Committee granted the elder general a new assignment with the Army of the Alps. General Pierre de Reul Beurnonville replaced Kellerman as commander of the Moselle Army.⁶

Formerly a lieutenant-general under Dumouriez, the forty-year-old Beurnonville submissively executed his master's wishes, although he recognized the serious obstacles

⁶ Ibid., 4:44.

to a successful campaign against Trier. Beurnonville privately considered Custine's proposed expedition a "geographical dream" that failed to consider the difficult terrain covering the forty miles between Saarlouis and Trier.⁷ Nonetheless, arriving at his new headquarters on 14 November, Beurnonville prepared the Army of the Moselle for the campaign, which commenced on 4 December amidst the onslaught of winter snows.

Beurnonville divided the 20,000 men under his command into two main groups. The group under General René Charles de Ligniville moved directly north along the Sarre River through Merzig, Freudenburg, and Saarburg, while Beurnonville personally led the second force over twenty miles northeast from Lebach through Marpingen, Tholey, and Hermeskeil.⁸ After Beurnonville overran the enemy's advance posts, the sixty-year-old Austrian General Frederick William du Hohenlohe-Kirchberg occupied the Grünenberg heights at the confluence of the Moselle and Ruwerbach Rivers, south of Trier.⁹ Following a sharp bombardment of the position, Beurnonville judged the Austrian entrenchments impregnable and decided against an infantry assault.

On 13 December, Beurnonville entered Pillingen while French forces under General Amable-Henry Delaage fought Austrian troops at Wawren. Delaage failed to dislodge the enemy from Wawren, and Beurnonville withdrew from Pillingen after the arrival of enemy reserves. On 15 December, Beurnonville ordered a fresh assault on the heights of Wawren. Led by General Charles Joseph Randon Pully, French forces

⁷ Chuquet, *L'Expédition de Custine* (Paris: 1892), 161.

⁸ Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 2:300; Chuquet, *Custine*, 162-163.

⁹ The Archduke Charles served on Hohenlohe-Kirchberg's staff.

executed four concerted attacks against the location, all of which failed.¹⁰ Lacking boots and proper clothing and suffering from the cold weather and poor roads, the soldiers deserted *en masse*. Failing to reach Trier, Beurnonville ordered the retreat to Saarlouis on the 17th.

Although the Trier campaign of December 1792 gave the soldiers of the Army of the Moselle crucial combat experience, it proved disastrous for the army in the short-term. Around 4,000 men deserted between November and December 1792.¹¹ In February 1793, Beurnonville became War Minister after the former minister, Jean-Nicholas Pache, fell from favor. Beurnonville accepted the new position but refused to relinquish command of the Moselle Army. Instead, he appointed General René Charles Élisabeth de Ligniville to command the army in his place. In April, Ligniville faced interrogation by two representatives from the Committee of General Security. The Committee inquired why Ligniville failed to send 15,000 troops to support Custine's efforts along the Rhine. Ligniville informed the representatives that the 50,000 men officially composing the Army of the Moselle inaccurately reflected the army's true size. According to Ligniville, the weather and insufficient supplies left 7,000 troops sick or in the hospital. Thus, the Moselle Army possessed only 15,000 infantry and 4,800 cavalry for field operations, while the rest of the army occupied various garrisons throughout the region. Considering these facts, Ligniville thought it impossible to support Custine's

¹⁰ *Victoires, Conquêtes, Désastres, Revers et Guerres Civiles des Français, de 1792 à 1815* (Paris: 1817), 1:92-93.

¹¹ Chuquet, *Custine*, 167, 171. Chuquet states that 100 men on average fled the Army of the Moselle each day during the campaign against Trier.

operation. Furthermore, the commander maintained that his orders from Beurnonville barred him from engaging in any offensive operation.¹²

Following his appointment to the War Ministry, Beurnonville ordered the observance of an “imposing defensive” from the Atlantic coast to the Rhine River. Accordingly, Beurnonville’s orders to Ligniville tasked the Army of the Moselle with guarding the line of the Sarre while supporting the right flank of the Ardennes Army around the Luxembourg border. Ligniville sent one division to link with Custine’s left at Zweibrücken, but Beurnonville subsequently ordered it to return to the Army of the Moselle. Around the middle of April, Ligniville fell from his horse and resigned command of the army to the sixty-three year old General François Marie d’Aboville.¹³

Meanwhile, Custine’s anger over Beurnonville’s unwillingness to support his operations along the Rhine reached its zenith. Denouncing the commanders of the Army of the Moselle to the Committee of General Security, Custine utilized political developments at Paris to achieve supreme command of that army along with the Army of the Rhine on 6 April 1793.¹⁴ After Dumouriez’s defeat at Neerwinden and his machinations with the Austrians in Belgium, Beurnonville accompanied four of the Convention’s commissioners to bring the noncompliant general back to Paris. In the event, Dumouriez arrested Beurnonville and the four Commissioners. The duped

¹² Alphonse Aulard, *Recueil des actes du Comité de salut public: avec la correspondance officielle des représentants en mission et le registre des représentants en mission et le registre du Conseil exécutif provisoire* (Paris, 1889), 3:206-207.

¹³ C. Clerget, *Tableaux des armées françaises pendant les guerres de la Révolution* (Paris: 1905), 18.

¹⁴ Steven T. Ross, *Quest for Victory: French Military Strategy, 1792-1799* (New York: Barnes, 1978), 46-47.

Beurnonville passed into Austrian captivity.¹⁵ Beurnonville's misfortune created a command vacuum that Custine quickly filled. On 29 April, General Jean Nicholas Houchard received command of the Army of the Moselle, although he remained subordinate to Custine. Accordingly, Custine marched the Army of the Rhine to the right bank of the Lauter River and ordered Houchard to position his army on the Sarre from Sarreguemines to Saarlouis.¹⁶

During this period of intrigue and command reshuffling from April to May, the Army of the Moselle engaged in few actions against enemy forces. Nevertheless, the army received new recruits. Jean Colin estimates that the army received 33,461 recruits from the 12 February 1793 *levée* of 300,000. Rather than immediately entering front line units, these recruits went to garrisons or camps, where training and drill taught them to load their weapons, deploy into line, column, and square, and endure the rigors of military life.¹⁷ On 13 May, the wily Custine received command of the pivotal Army of the North. His departure allowed Houchard to take full command of the Moselle and Rhine Armies. General Dominique Diettman served under Houchard as commander of the latter.¹⁸

¹⁵ Beurnonville remained an Austrian prisoner until December 1795, when French and Austrian diplomats exchanged him for Louis XVI's daughter, Princess Marie-Thérèse. Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 1:161.

¹⁶ Custine ordered the creation of a new force, the Corps of the Vosges, to stand at Hornbach between the two main armies in the east. Custine created the Corps of the Vosges from units of the Army of the Moselle, and General Pully initially received its command. On 5 September 1793, General René Moreaux took command of the Corps of the Vosges, and in October 1793, it officially rejoined the Army of the Moselle. *Ibid.*, 2:47.

¹⁷ Jean Colin, *La campagne de 1793*, 1:18.

¹⁸ Clerget, *Tableaux*, 18.

At the beginning of June, General Charles Edward Jennings de Kilmaine of the 8,500-man Army of the Ardennes proposed a joint attack in the direction of Liège with the Army of the Moselle. Houchard agreed to Kilmaine's proposal with one significant qualification. Rather than marching directly on Liège and abandoning his sector of the frontier, Houchard arranged to send General Delaage with a force of 10,500 of his best men to attack the Austrians at Arlon, nearly 100 miles south of Liège and west of the Luxembourg border. If Arlon fell to the French, Houchard ordered Delaage to hold the city for two days after which he would fall back to Longwy.¹⁹ Thus, Houchard merely hoped that the operation against Arlon would distract the Austrians from events along the lower Rhine. Although Custine subsequently forbade Kilmaine from marching the Ardennes Army towards Liège, the proposed expedition to Arlon continued unimpeded and Kilmaine immediately sent 2,000 men under General Pierre-Raphaël Paillot de Beauregard from Sedan through Montmedy towards Arlon to assist Delaage.²⁰

Across the border in the Austrian Netherlands and around twenty miles north of Longwy, Arlon sat upon the convergence of four major roads from Luxembourg, Longwy, Namur, and Liège. Thus, the city occupied a crucially important strategic position only three miles west of the Luxembourg border. A series of heights running one mile south of the city overlooked a vast plain surrounded by woods to the east and

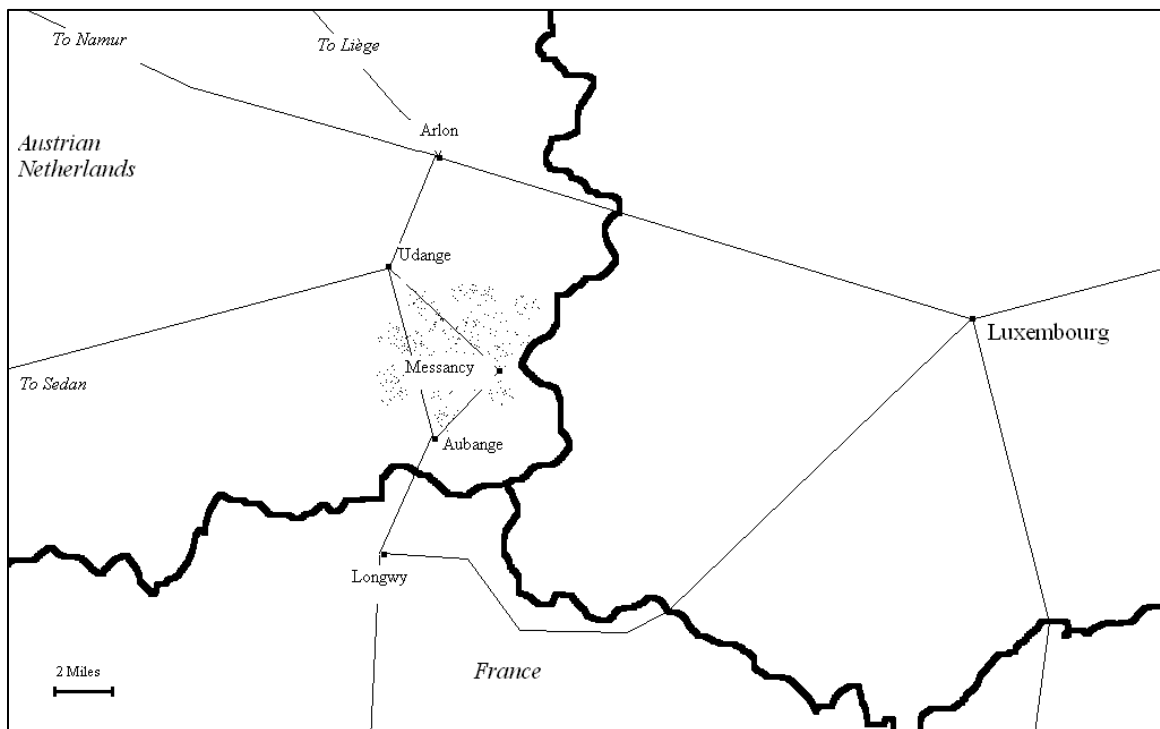
¹⁹ Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 3:240-241; Wallon, *Représentants du peuple en mission*, 4:104.

²⁰ In general, historians have considered Arlon an insignificant sideshow in 1793. Jomini found the campaign so strategically pointless that he refused to describe it. Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:51, provides the clearest, if not entirely accurate, account of the campaign and battle of Arlon in the English language. For the French sources, see the triumphalist account in *Victoires et Conquêtes*, 1:162-164; and the more balanced and authoritative presentation in Chuquet, *Wissembourg (1793)* (Paris, 1893), 29-41; see also the account by General Desperrières in his own *Vie politique et militaire du general Desperrières* (Paris: 1824).

west, which provided a significant advantage to a defending force.²¹ The Austrian General Johann Gottfried Freiherr von Schröder occupied the heights of Arlon with around 8,000 troops and thirty cannon dispersed in an echelon defense. Delaage divided his 10,500 men into four columns. General Louis de Tolozan commanded the advance guard of 1,000 cavalry and around 1,500 infantry. Delaage assigned General Joseph Marie Tenet de Laubadère command of the 1st Brigade of 4,000 men, General Antoine Poissonnier-Desperrières the 2nd Brigade of 5,000 men, and General Jean François Thierry the 3rd Brigade of 3,000 men.²²

MAP 2

The Arlon Campaign, June 1793



²¹ Chuquet, *Wissembourg*, 30.

²² Desperrières, *Vie politique et militaire*, 106.

The small army departed Longwy at 9:00 A.M. on 7 June, marching north along the Longwy-Arlon road in a single column under heavy rain. By noon, Tolozan's advance guard contacted enemy forces near the heights of Udange, around fifteen miles north of Longwy. Tolozan launched his infantry battalions and two cavalry regiments, the 4th Hussars and 1st Chasseurs, against the enemy outposts. Lacking cannon and possessing fewer cavalry than the Austrians, Tolozan's advance guard halted before the Austrian position. After repulsing the French attack, the Austrians commenced a counter-assault that overthrew Tolozan's infantry and dispersed his cavalry. Learning of Tolozan's misfortune but lacking resolve, Delaage sent only 300 carabineers to assist Tolozan's troops. Distressed over torrential rains and exhausted from the forced march, Tolozan's men sought safety within a deep hollow that allowed Austrian fire to fly over their heads.²³ Delaage ordered Tolozan to retire beside his main body. The army occupied woods south of the heights of Udange and camped for the night, the rain providing an unceasing annoyance.

The following morning, Delaage decided to retire south to Longwy. He cited the army's fatigue, the persistent rains, and the reverses of the previous day as reasons for concluding the campaign against Arlon. Furthermore, Delaage received a letter from Houchard indicating Custine's aversion to Kilmaine's proposal and encouraging him to return to Longwy as soon as possible. Just as Delaage prepared to organize the retreat to Longwy, General Beauregard arrived from Sedan with 2,000 men from the Army of the

²³ Chuquet, *Wissembourg*, 30; Desperrières, *Vie politique et militaire*, 107-108.

Ardennes. Considering Beauregard's strenuous efforts in reaching Arlon, Delaage agreed to attack the heights of Arlon alongside Beauregard the following day.²⁴ Delaage's delay, however, afforded Schröder time to better arrange his troops in a series of entrenchments on the heights of Arlon. Schröder placed a small infantry detachment between the two roads to Namur in order to protect his rear. He personally commanded the rest of the army, which held a steep ridgeline south of Arlon, running between the Longwy and Luxembourg roads for about one mile.²⁵ The Austrian artillery battery of thirty cannon constituted an imposing threat to any forces advancing across the open plain south of Schröder's entrenchments.

On the morning of 9 June, Delaage summoned a council of war that unanimously determined to execute the assault on Arlon.²⁶ According to the representatives on mission with the Army of the Moselle, although the troops suffered from the "continuous rain" and the "constant enemy fire," the courageous soldiers "only demanded to march on the field against the enemy."²⁷ The decision to strike Arlon precipitated one of the most violent and inconsequential engagements of the French Revolutionary Wars. The army marched to Arlon in a single column, with Tolozan's advance guard illuminating the march. Making contact with enemy outposts, Tolozan again fell back on the main body. Delaage decided to attack the Austrian entrenchments along three points. Desperrières received command of the center of the French line and assaulted the front with his 5,000

²⁴ *Victoires et Conquêtes*, 1:164; Chuquet, *Wissembourg*, 33-34; Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:51.

²⁵ Chuquet, *Wissembourg*, 34.

²⁶ Desperrières, *Vie politique et militaire*, 109.

²⁷ Representatives on Mission with the Army of the Moselle to the Committee of Public Safety, 10 June 1793, in Aulard, *Recueil des actes*, 4:504-505.

men. Delaage instructed Laubadère to strike the woods on the French right with his 4,000 men to cut the road to Luxembourg. Finally, Delaage ordered Thierry's brigade of 3,000 men along with Beauregard's 2,000 men from the Army of the Ardennes to march through the woods on the left of the French position to strike Schröder's right flank. While Tolozan's infantry proved too exhausted and distressed to reengage the enemy, his cavalry operated alongside Beauregard's fresh troops. Delaage lacked sufficient strength to establish a reserve.²⁸

The French assault commenced after Thierry's brigade and Beauregard's forces deployed in a confused manner: the inexperienced officers led their battalions too far to the right. Nonetheless, Desperrières and Laubadère deployed their brigades in good order and the French line began a general assault. Marching in columns through the open field against intense fire from the Austrian artillery battery, the French troops purportedly advanced to cries of "*Vive la république!*"²⁹ However, reportedly seized by passion, Laubadère advanced his brigade too far ahead of the French line, outdistancing his artillery support. Regardless of their republican *élan*, Laubadère's troops could not withstand exposure to the unmitigated Austrian fire. Panicking, Laubadère's brigade collapsed into an utter rout. Pursued by Austrian cavalry under General Joseph Kinsky, men and officers alike fled down the Longwy road, sounding the alarm and spreading rumors that an inferior army had crushed them.³⁰

²⁸ Chuquet, *Wissembourg*, 35.

²⁹ *Victoires et Conquêtes*, 1:163.

³⁰ Chuquet, *Wissembourg*, 34; Desperrières, *Vie politique et militaire*, 109.

Back at Arlon, Delaage ordered his carabineers to reestablish order. The carabineers launched four successive attacks against the Austrian entrenchments, each of which collapsed with heavy losses: nine officers perished while seven received serious wounds.³¹ Fortuitously for the French, the horse artillery under General Jean Barthélemy Sorbier quickly advanced to within eighty paces of the Austrian defenses, pummeling the Austrian troops with shrapnel and canister.³² Desperrières deployed his brigade into two closed columns with narrow intervals between each company. Thierry's column followed Desperrières on the left. Captain François Joseph Lefebvre commanded the 13th Light Infantry Battalion in Desperrières's brigade and captured a key position in the woods to the right.³³ Finally, Beauregard struck the *coup de grâce* against Schröder's right flank, forcing the Austrian troops to evacuate the heights of Arlon.³⁴

Exhausted by several days of forced marching and by the fanatical fighting at Arlon, Delaage's army proved unable to pursue Schröder's troops. Consequently, the Austrian forces retreated to Luxembourg in good order. For their efforts, the French captured fifty-five prisoners, including an Austrian colonel, five caissons, and three cannon. Besides gaining the formidable position of Arlon, the French acquired 3,000 sacks of flour, 9,000 bags of oats, and a mass of other provisions requisitioned from the captured city.³⁵ Austrian losses included thirty-two officers and 519 soldiers *hors de combat*. The French suffered 194 killed and 632 wounded. Considering the strength of the enemy position, the French efforts marked a coming of age for the troops that

³¹ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:51.

³² Chuquet, *Wissembourg*, 33.

³³ Wirth, *Lefebvre*, 64-65; Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 1:51.

³⁴ *Victoires et Conquêtes*, 1:164.

³⁵ Chuquet, *Wissembourg*, 33-34.

participated in the campaign. Except for Laubadère's poorly led troops, the French infantry displayed great courage and resiliency, fighting through rain and under constant artillery fire. By providing crucial support at a pivotal moment during the battle, the French artillery sustained its impressive reputation, although the enemy's artillery outnumbered it during the battle. The French cavalry performed admirably in the face of the superior Austrian cavalry. Furthermore, as recognized by the representatives on mission, "the grandest concert reigned between all the generals of the Army of the Moselle and that of the Ardennes."³⁶ Arlon cemented the important relationship between these two armies, which bore much fruit in 1794.

While largely meaningless for the war in 1793, the Arlon campaign demonstrates a fundamental truth that the in-depth study of combat between French and Austrian forces during the French Revolutionary Wars repeatedly reveals: the French armies did not simply march over their Old Regime foes on the battlefield with superior numbers and *élan*. As French casualty figures indicate, the victory at Arlon occurred after a desperate struggle against a strong enemy. Factors such as motivation and patriotism proved largely impotent in winning the battle. As revealed, Laubadère's infantry possessed an overabundance of patriotic fervor, but by advancing too far in advance of their artillery support they broke a fundamental rule of war and suffered heavily. Only the proper coordination of infantry assaults supported by artillery fire proved effective against the Austrian army's strong position. Furthermore, Beaugard's flanking maneuver proved crucial to breaking the enemy's line. Thus, the adherence to basic

³⁶ Aulard, *Recueil des actes*, 4:508.

military principles and the existence of effective leadership proved crucial in the success of French armies. Combined with superior numbers and disciplined troops, these armies proved an effective weapon against those of the Old Regime. However, their strengths did not always guarantee success.

For the moment, Houchard retained command of the Army of the Moselle. On 28 May 1793, Custine submitted to the Committee of Public Safety a new plan of operations for all French armies stationed on the north and eastern frontiers. According to Custine, the French armies should direct their principle efforts towards Flanders, where his Army of the North would spearhead the main assault against Allied forces in the Low Countries. Furthermore, the Army of the Moselle and the Army of the Rhine should send large numbers of reinforcements to the Army of the North to support this grand offensive. Thereafter, the remainder of those armies should remain in defensive positions in Alsace. Although the French troops at Mainz stood under siege and lacked adequate provisions, Custine believed their courage and resilience would enable them to hold out until French offensives in the north forced the Allies to withdraw from the Rhine to protect the Low Countries.³⁷ From the Army of the Moselle, Custine sought all of the cavalry, several units of infantry, and the army's best officers including General Alexis Balthazar Henri Schauenburg, Chief of Staff Gabriel Marie de Hédouville, and Adjutant-General Nicholas Martin Barthelemy.³⁸ While the representatives initially approved Custine's plan, the protests of Houchard and the representatives on mission with the Moselle Army doomed

³⁷ Brunswick's Prussians had recently besieged Mainz, which Custine had captured.

³⁸ Chuquet, *Wissembourg*, 35-36.

Custine's scheme. On 19 June, the Committee of Public Safety formally suspended his grandiose project.³⁹

Thus, Houchard retained control over the Moselle Army and directed its efforts toward the relief of Mainz alongside the Army of the Rhine.⁴⁰ During the spring of 1793, while Beurnonville maintained the Army of the Moselle in its "imposing defensive," Brunswick's Prussian forces drove Custine's Army of the Rhine south of Mainz. Although briefly stalling Brunswick's advance at Ober-Flörsheim, Custine continued the retreat south to Landau and eventually withdrew to Wissembourg. At Mainz, General François Ignace Ervoil Doyré's 20,000 men stood alone against the concerted efforts of the Austro-Prussian armies. In the Army of the Moselle and the Rhine Army, the salvation of Mainz became a rallying cry among the soldiers, who reportedly cheered "Mainz or death!" while on the march.⁴¹ On 7 June 1793, Houchard met the new commander of the Army of the Rhine, Alexandre de Beauharnais, at Bitche to discuss the possibility of relieving Mainz by throwing their combined strength of 100,000 men against the numerically inferior besieging forces.⁴² While Beauharnais favored an immediate strike, Houchard resisted. Emphasizing the rawness of his new recruits, Houchard suggested delaying the offensive until the troops received proper training and

³⁹ Wallon, *Representatives du peuple*, 4:118.

⁴⁰ The Haitian-born husband of Josephine de Beauharnais, the future wife of Napoleon Bonaparte.

⁴¹ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:55.

⁴² Born on Martinique, Beauharnais was the first husband of Josephine de Beauharnais, the future Josephine Bonaparte.

preparation.⁴³ On the 27th, Houchard and Beauharnais conferred at Bitche once again, and finally agreed to an advance on Mainz.

After delaying the operation for several more weeks, Houchard's forces finally departed Sarrebrücken on 16 July. Houchard divided the Moselle Army into three groups. Delaage led the left wing north toward Saint-Wendel with the intention of capturing Lauterecken to guard Houchard's advance to Kreuznach. Houchard commanded Pully to lead the center to Landstuhl and eventually attack the western side of Kaiserslautern. René Moreaux led the final corps thirty miles south, which Houchard ordered to link with Beauharnais's left wing at Weidenthal.⁴⁴ The slowness of Houchard's advance enabled Brunswick to coordinate his defense. Moreaux's forces suffered most from Houchard's advance. On 22 June, Moreaux's 1,500 men engaged one company of chasseurs and eighty grenadiers – no more than 300 men – defending a height at Trippstadt. After a sharp combat, the Austrians repulsed Moreaux's troops.⁴⁵ Following Moreaux's defeat, Houchard received news of the fall of Mainz to Field Marshal Dagobert Sigmund von Wurmser's army. Houchard initially refused to believe the reports.⁴⁶

On 3 August, Houchard received command of the Army of the North. General Schauenbourg attained command of the Moselle Army two days later. After news of the

⁴³ "If each one was at his work and knew what to do, and if we banded together, we would win prodigiously," noted Houchard, Chuquet, *Wissembourg*, 45-47.

⁴⁴ According to the plan of operations devised by Houchard and Beauharnais during the second meeting at Bitche, the 40,000 man Army of the Moselle "would proceed along the Glan River, by Waldmohr and Kusel, turning at Kaiserslautern and gaining Kreuznach." *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁵ Moreaux's hagiographic biography attempts to excuse the general's performance, but the narrative presented is conclusive. Moreaux, *Le général René Moreaux et l'armée de la Moselle, 1792-1795* (Paris: 1886), 26-41.

⁴⁶ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:55-56.

capitulation of Mainz, Houchard led the Army of the Moselle back to the line of the Sarre, while Beauharnais retreated to Wissembourg. Despised by the troops, who proclaimed “Mainz or Death!” in June, Beauharnais fled from his post, forcing the former noble, General Charles Hyacinthe Leclerc de Landremont, to take command of the Rhine Army.⁴⁷ From 15 July to 15 August, the Army of the Moselle sent 19,000 troops to reinforce the Army of the North. The departure of these troops significantly weakened the army, which already suffered from substantial desertion throughout the summer campaign. On paper, the army contained 66,000 men on 15 August 1793; however, Schauenbourg possessed an active force of only 36,832 men.⁴⁸

A gifted soldier of the Old Regime, Schauenbourg sought to reestablish order and discipline within the Army of the Moselle. Stationed along the Sarre, the army underwent an intense process of training and conditioning, while the Allies lacked the energy to pursue another campaign from the Rhine. This brief respite in August enabled the soldiers of the Army of the Moselle to acquire proper military skills, which helped them throughout their service in that army and in the Army of the Sambre and Meuse. According to the drill book written by Schauenbourg for the Moselle Army, the recruits received instruction according to the Regulations of 1791. These regulations provided for the effective employment of both column and line formations in maneuver and in combat. From February to August 1793, the recruits that entered the Army of the Moselle practiced marching in column and deploying into line, while also changing from

⁴⁷ Saint-Cyr, *Mémoires sur les campagnes des armées du Rhine et de Rhin-et-Moselle de 1792 jusqu'à la paix de Campo-Formio* (Paris: 1829), 1:72.

⁴⁸ Colin, *Campagne de 1793*, 75-77.

closed to open order formations. Historians who emphasize the French Revolutionary soldiers' lack of training and subsequent tactical backwardness fail to consider the experience of the Army of the Moselle in 1793, just as those who persist in propagating the merits of the "cult of the bayonet." In fact, the Moselle Army became an effective and professional military force by 1794, in large part because of Schauenbourg's strenuous efforts.⁴⁹

If Schauenbourg excelled as an instructor, he failed to assimilate into the new political and command culture of Revolutionary France. The summer of 1793 marked the beginning of the Republic's earnest efforts to create a revolutionary army. The French officer corps underwent a major transformation. Prior to late 1793, the French officer corps remained dominated by soldiers and officers from the Royal Army, even as the emigration of nobles occurred in large numbers. After the treachery of Lafayette and Dumouriez, the government grew weary of these noble vestiges.⁵⁰ As declared by the Commune of Paris to the National Convention: "We demand the dismissal of all nobles occupying high rank in the armies of the Republic."⁵¹ However, only in August 1793 did the campaign to purge the noble officer corp gain energy. The War Minister, Jean-Baptiste Noël Bouchotte, exhibited radical *sans-culottes* views and favored generals who represented the political values of the New Regime. Noble officers such as Custine, Beauharnais, and Schauenbourg naturally faced scrutiny from Bouchotte and the representatives on mission from the National Convention.⁵² Although not actually a

⁴⁹ See Colin, *Campagne de 1793*; and his *La tactique et la discipline*.

⁵⁰ Blanning, *French Revolutionary Wars*, 125-127.

⁵¹ Bertaud, *Army of the French Revolution*, 143-144.

⁵² Chuquet, *Wissembourg*, 82-85.

noble, Houchard attracted the government's mistrust by his association with noble officers. Consequently, the Committee removed him from command of the Army of the North in favor of Jourdan. The government guillotined seventeen noble generals in 1793 and sixty-three in 1794. During the Reign of Terror, more aristocratic officers died at the hands of the French government than from enemy fire.⁵³

Historian R.R. Palmer perceptively identifies the fundamental problem of military leadership facing the Republic because of these purges. "In a world where generalship had been the business of aristocrats, could a régime that denounced aristocracy conduct a successful war? Could the middle class, which had replaced the aristocracy in so many other ways, now replace it on the battlefield?"⁵⁴ Through a combination of observation, reporting, and favoritism, government leaders such as Bouchotte and Lazare Carnot succeeded in finding middle class soldiers to replace the purged aristocratic officers.⁵⁵ The Republic's purges represent a complete social transformation of the French officer corps; nevertheless, in learning to command armies, these middle class officers drew on traditional military principles to achieve victory, fusing old practices with new command styles.

Schauenbourg retained provisional command of the Army of the Moselle until September 1793. Although enthusiastically supporting the regime's efforts to create a more disciplined force, his social background led to a series of denunciations and his

⁵³ Blanning, *French Revolutionary Wars*, 125-127.

⁵⁴ Palmer, *Twelve who Ruled*, 96.

⁵⁵ Marcel Reinhard, *Le Grand Carnot* (Paris: Hachette, 1952), 2:91-102.

eventual replacement. Nonetheless, under his watch, the army received as many as 19,000 men from the famous *levée en masse* of 23 August 1793.⁵⁶

If the purging of the noble officers aimed to ensure loyal commanders, the *levée en masse* intended to solve the Republic's basic military problem: manpower. Declaring all of France in a permanent state of requisition, the decree stated:

The young men will go to battle; married men will forge arms and transport provisions, women will make tents and clothing and serve in the hospitals; children will shred old linen; old men will have themselves carried to public places to arouse the courage of warriors and preach the hatred of kings and unity of the Republic.⁵⁷

In practice, each district raised battalions of nine companies commanded by a *chef de bataillon*. The soldiers received payment similar to the line battalions.⁵⁸ Drawn largely from the surrounding Moselle and Meurthe *départements*, Schauenbourg stationed the overwhelming portion of the new battalions sent to the Army of the Moselle in garrisons such as Metz, Thionville, Longwy, Sarrelibre, and Phalsbourg, while only 547 men from the Battalion of the 1st Requisition of Joinville joined the field army.⁵⁹ As with the recruits of February 1793, service in garrisons offered time for training and drill prior to incorporation in front line units.

Along with increasing manpower through the national requisition, the French government attempted to create a unified army beginning in August 1793. Thus, the government ordered the construction of demi-brigades. Known as *embrigadement*, this policy combined two of the new battalions with one line battalion. The Committee hoped

⁵⁶ Colin, *Campagne de 1793*, 212-228.

⁵⁷ The full text of the decree of the *levée en masse* can be found in Blanning, *French Revolutionary Wars*, 100-101.

⁵⁸ Bertaud, *Army of the French Revolution*, 102-110.

⁵⁹ Colin, *Campagne de 1793*, 214.

the *amalgame* would achieve both political and practical goals. Politically, it sought to terminate the factitious discord within the army between the line soldiers and the new recruits (known by their uniforms as the *blancs* and the *bleus*, respectively). Practically, Carnot believed that the old regulars would instill discipline and professionalism in the new recruits, who would in turn provide a political model for the regulars to emulate. The process of amalgamation occurred over a period of thirty months from 1793-1796.⁶⁰ Initially, the government deferred responsibility for *embrigadement* to the army generals. However, a minority of generals pursued the policy with energy. Consequently, few armies possessed full-sized demi-brigades of 3,500 men by the end of 1793. Until November 1793, continued setbacks and disorganization prevented the Moselle Army from implementing amalgamation.⁶¹

In September 1793, an offensive by Brunswick compelled the Army of the Moselle under Schauenbourg to retreat to the left bank of the Sarre after being defeated at Pirmasens on 12 September. General Moreaux, who commanded the Corps of the Vosges, now replaced the aristocratic Schauenbourg as commander of the Moselle Army. After Moreaux received a wound and refused his promotion, General Jacques Charles René Delaunay replaced him in provisional command of the army.⁶² Landremont led the Army of the Rhine in a failed crossing of the Rhine in late August. Repulsed by Wurmser, Landremont retreated with the Army of the Rhine to Wissembourg. Pursued by Wurmser, he withdrew from Wissembourg thirty miles south to Strasbourg. General

⁶⁰ Bertaud, *Army of the French Revolution*, 166-167.

⁶¹ Chuquet, *Wissembourg*, 89-91.

⁶² Clerget, *Tableaux*, 18.

Antoine Guillame Delmas temporarily replaced the ruined Landremont on 29 September, but Paris recognized the perilous situation facing its weakened armies in the German theater. With the Moselle and Rhine Armies beaten and demoralized, the Committee of Public Safety devised an emergency program to rehabilitate the desperate military situation in Alsace.

In response to the setbacks in September and October 1793, the Committee sent two representatives on mission to Alsace, Louis Antoine Saint-Just and Philippe Le Bas, with the stated objectives of saving the armies in the Rhineland, preventing the fall of Strasbourg, and forcing the Allied armies to withdraw from French territory before the onset of winter.⁶³ The mission of Saint-Just and Le Bas to Alsace lasted from 17 October to 30 December 1793 and accomplished nearly all of its goals. The two representatives purged the Moselle and Rhine Armies of noble officers who they no longer trusted.⁶⁴ Furthermore, they reestablished discipline in both armies. Saint-Just in particular applied his own military ideals. Desiring to create a “school of virtue” in the armies, he emphasized the superiority of the civil government over military authority in promoting a democratic, national, and republican army. Thus, Saint-Just promoted political education within the armies, attempting to instill republican political values throughout the ranks. In order to enforce the new discipline, he strengthened the power of the military courts. He also recognized the severe morale problems resulting from

⁶³ Norman Hampson, *Saint-Just* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1991), 145.

⁶⁴ Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled*, 177-179.

poor supply. Therefore, he requisitioned from the surrounding area and lobbied Paris for supplies and reinforcements.⁶⁵

Resulting from its success, Saint-Just's mission to Alsace achieved a sacred place in Revolutionary mythology.⁶⁶ Patriotic French historians have overstated the extent to which the Army of the Moselle became a "school of virtue." Regardless of Saint-Just's own ideological program, the practical effects of his mission remained the reestablishment of military discipline, the promotion of more effective leadership, and the improved maintenance of supply. Rather than creating a new military force motivated solely by revolutionary enthusiasm, Saint-Just demanded a disciplined army that could "fight despotism with despotism's own tools."⁶⁷ Furthermore, he acquired approximately 20,000 reinforcements for the Moselle Army. These troops provided the necessary numbers for a successful offensive against Austro-Prussian forces in Alsace.⁶⁸ While Saint-Just allowed the commanders of the Moselle and Rhine Armies to develop military strategy in correspondance with Carnot, his efforts through December 1793 provided the basic military tools to accomplish their goals: disciplined soldiers, adequate supplies, and capable leaders.

On 29 October 1793, the young and ambitious General Lazare Hoche received command of the Army of the Moselle. Perceived by the Committee as the model Republican general, Hoche made a resounding first impression on Saint-Just. Prior to reaching his army, Hoche wrote to the soldiers, informing them that "on all fronts our

⁶⁵ Jean-Pierre Gross, *Saint-Just: sa politique et ses missions* (Paris: 1976), 126-127.

⁶⁶ Mackenzie, *Revolutionary Armies*, 44-45.

⁶⁷ Griffith, *Art of War*, 96.

⁶⁸ Gross, *Saint-Just*, 129.

armies are triumphant; we are the last to victory, but victors we shall be.”⁶⁹ As with Saint-Just, Hoche demanded discipline from the soldiers, and informed the officers that they should lead by example so the troops would aspire to emulate their behavior. Reminding the men of their mission to defend liberty, he assured them that the nation appreciated their noble sacrifices.

Despite Saint-Just’s efforts to provide for the troops, the supply situation remained an ongoing struggle in October and November 1793. After observing the condition of his men, Hoche responded to the Committee’s inquiries, frankly stating that, “the Army of the Moselle, dispersed on a line around twenty five leagues [75 miles], is without force or consistency and it has very poorly organized dispositions.”⁷⁰ Therefore, Hoche determined to reorganize the Army of the Moselle prior to commencing any operation.⁷¹

After reorganizing the Army of the Moselle, Hoche commenced operations towards the middle of November. With the Allies besieging French forces at Landau, the Committee ordered Hoche to deliver the garrison by striking the enemy siege force. General Jean-Charles Pichegru took command of the Rhine Army, which remained further south around Strasbourg in an unhelpful position. While Pichegru technically commanded Hoche, the Army of the Moselle played the leading role in the initial effort to relieve Landau. Hoche informed Pichegru that he needed the Army of the Rhine’s full

⁶⁹ Hoche to the Soldiers of the Moselle Army, 23 October 1793, in Ernest Cuneo d’Orano, *Hoche: sa vie, sa correspondance* (Paris: 1802), 17.

⁷⁰ Chuquet, *Hoche et la lutte pour l’Alsace* (Paris: 1893), 61.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 62, provides the order of battle for the Army of the Moselle after Hoche’s assumption of command. See also Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:97-98, for Hoche’s efforts to organize the army.

assistance in an offensive operation against Landau, or at least significant reinforcements to bolster his army's effective strength.⁷² Pichegru observed that his army's weaknesses precluded immediate cooperation in an offensive. Rather than directly participate, he agreed to send Hoche 10,000 reinforcements.

In mid-November 1793, Hoche divided the Moselle Army into three groups commanded by Generals Taponnier, Rémy Vincent, and Jean-Jacques Ambert to assault Brunswick. After failing to preemptively take Bitche on 15 November, Brunswick placed his Prussian-Saxon army in a defensive position east of the Lauter stream at Kaiserslautern.⁷³ Perceiving Brunswick's retreat as an admission of weakness, Hoche confidently advanced his army in a dispersed and reckless manner.⁷⁴ Brunswick positioned his 50,000-man army behind fortified lines occupying high ground and optimistically awaited the French offensive.⁷⁵ Ignoring the obvious advantages of the Prussian position, Hoche informed the War Ministry on the 27th that "tomorrow we shall strike the grand *coup*."⁷⁶ On the morning of the 28th, Hoche ordered his army to assail the heights of Otterberg, initiating the battle of Kaiserslautern. Lasting three days (28-30 November 1793), the battle marked a major failure of revolutionary warfare. According to revolutionary propaganda, the advantages the French held in motivated troops and mass tactics should have allowed them to crush the "horde of slaves" in Brunswick's Old Regime army. Nonetheless, Brunswick's numerical superiority and impressive defensive position should have cooled Hoche's optimism. His blind faith in the bayonet and the

⁷² D'Orano, *Hoche*, 87-90.

⁷³ Moreaux, *René Moreaux*, 68-69.

⁷⁴ D'Orano, *Hoche*, 96.

⁷⁵ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:86.

⁷⁶ Hoche to the War Ministry, 27 November 1794, in D'Orano, *Hoche*, 32-33.

revolutionary enthusiasm of his troops, coupled with strong urgings to attack from the representatives on mission, compelled Hoche to launch the inadvisable assault.⁷⁷

On the morning of 28 November, Ambert's 6,000 troops completed a draining forced march, crossed the Lauter, and attacked Otterberg ten miles north of Kaiserslautern. Hoche directed General Louis Pierre Huet's division in the center from Rodenbach through the valley of the Lauter towards Otterbach. Taponnier led his division on the right from Landstuhl towards Kaiserslautern. While advancing from Rodenbach to Erfenbach west of the Lauter, Hoche's division entered the Vogel Forest and lost its way.⁷⁸ While Hoche's troops dithered on the left bank of the Lauter, Taponnier fought Brunswick's advance posts and drove them back on a series of heights that provided an even stronger defensive position. On the French left, Ambert advanced south towards Katzweiler. His skirmishers contacted the forces of General Friedrich Adolf von Kalkreuth and compelled them to withdraw south towards Otterbach. However, heavy Prussian artillery fire from the Schlossberg heights to the east stymied Ambert's advance. Against the Prussian line infantry, Amber formed his infantry into attack columns to assail the position with the shock of the bayonet. Unfortunately for the French, Ambert's artillery, unable to debouch from the Lauter, proved incapable of supporting the infantry assaults. Consequently, each of Ambert's attacks failed with

⁷⁷ Hoche assured the Committee of Public Safety that "our bayonets" would overrun "the enemy's strong position," Ibid.

⁷⁸ Like Hoche, the other French generals lacked proper knowledge of the terrain around Kaiserslautern, and this proved costly throughout the three-day battle.

considerable losses. Ambert retreated to Katzweiler and crossed the Lauter unmolested. As his left withdrew, Hoche signaled the retreat for the rest of his army.⁷⁹

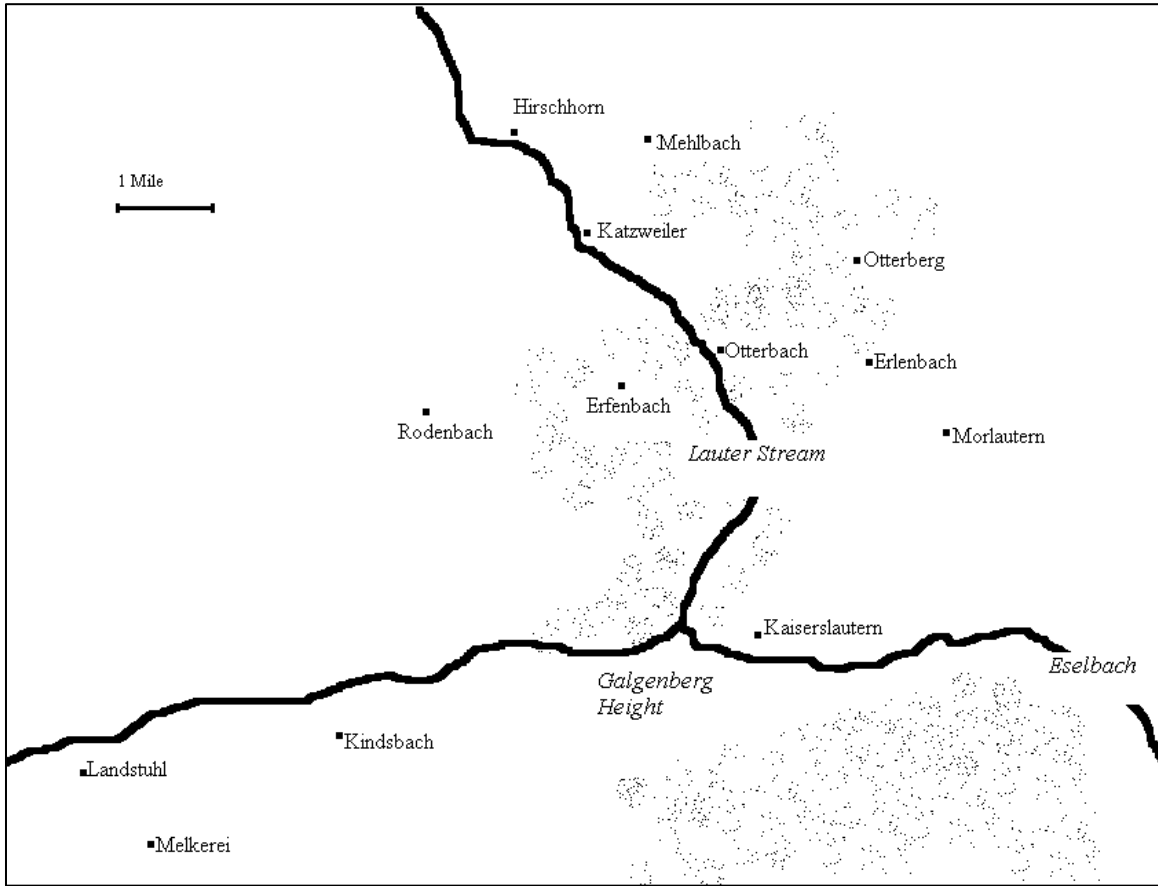
The following day, Hoche determined to concentrate against the Prussian forces occupying Morlautern, south of Otterberg.⁸⁰ Ambert crossed the Lauter at Hirschhorn and advanced against the enemy's right at Mehlbach. Further south, Hoche directed Generals Huet and Antoine Morlot across the Lauter at Katzweiler as Generals Jean-Baptiste Olivier and Alexis Dubois led their divisions one-half-mile south at Otterbach. Taponnier again advanced towards Kaiserslautern from the south, where he encountered substantial enemy forces occupying the Galgenberg. Effectively combining infantry assaults with artillery bombardments, Hoche's center drove Kalkreuth's Prussians south from Morlautern to Brunswick's main line at Kaiserslautern. However, Ambert's division offered little support for Hoche's main assault. One of Ambert's brigades lost direction while marching on Erfenbach and was surrounded by Prussian cavalry. The Prussian troopers virtually destroyed the four isolated French battalions while they attempted to form square. On the French right, Taponnier advanced

⁷⁹ Chuquet, *Hoche*, 82; Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 4:156-157; Moreaux, *René Moreaux*, 71-72; Saint-Cyr, *Mémoires*, 1:324-335.

⁸⁰ Hoche reportedly told his subordinates after the failure on 28 November, "the ball will commence again tomorrow." Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:87.

MAP 3

The Kaiserslautern Campaign, November 1793



against the Prussian infantry occupying the Galgenberg height. Brunswick ordered Karl August, the Duke of Weimar, to lead the Saxon cavalry against Taponnier's troops. Overwhelming the exhausted French, Weimar drove Taponnier back to Melkerei, where their infantry broke. Brunswick then ordered Weimar to charge Hoche's center at Morlautern. As his right and left wings retreated, Hoche found his center unable to withstand the enemy cavalry and withdrew west across the Lauter. He ordered the

French artillery to maintain its position on the right bank, and an artillery duel commenced that lasted through much of the night.⁸¹

While Hoche's army remained effective, the fighting on the 29th proved costly in men and material. Nevertheless, Hoche's overriding belief in the superiority of French morale convinced him to commence another assault on the 30th.⁸² The fighting opened with a French artillery bombardment of Morlautern, to which the Prussians responded with devastating fire of their own. Meanwhile, Ambert assaulted Prussian forces at Bachberg. Although his forces dispersed the enemy light infantry and captured the border of the woods beside the village, Kalkreuth counterattacked with Saxon and Prussian infantry supported by several Prussian cavalry squadrons, thoroughly crushing Ambert's assault.⁸³ On the right, Taponnier attacked in three columns Weimar's forces occupying the Galgenberg. While Taponnier's attack succeeded in driving a Saxon infantry battalion into the suburbs of Kaiserslautern, the arrival of substantial reinforcements repulsed one of his columns. Another of Taponnier's columns suffered from the "murderous fire" of the Prussian artillery on the Galgenberg, while a Prussian cavalry charge overran the final column's flank.⁸⁴ In the center, Hoche commenced an assault against Morlautern. However, at 9:00 A.M. he received word that artillery munitions failed to arrive. After a lull in the fighting, Prussian hussars advanced towards the Lauter around 3:00 P.M., when they realized that Hoche led the Moselle Army back across the river. General Ambert retreated to Katzweiler, where he remained until 1

⁸¹ Chuquet, *Hoche*, 83-85; D'Orano, *Hoche*, 103; Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:87; Jean de Dieu Sout, *Mémoires du Maréchal-Général Sout* (Paris: 1834), 1:80.

⁸² Chuquet, *Hoche*, 85.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

⁸⁴ Sout, *Mémoires*, 1:81-82.

December in order to cover the army's retreat. On the 3rd, the rest of the Army of the Moselle bivouacked at Zweibrücken. The Prussians suffered forty-four officers and 785 soldiers killed, wounded, or captured, while the French lost around 2,000 men killed and wounded and 700 taken prisoner.⁸⁵

Fortunately for Hoche, the Committee of Public Safety demonstrated a rare instance of sympathy for a general. Writing to the disheartened Hoche, the Committee declared: "A reverse is not a crime, as long as every effort was made to merit victory."⁸⁶ Of course, Hoche's actions essentially conformed to the government's overall instructions. According to Bouchotte, French armies should "act offensively without cease."⁸⁷ While the Committee originally advised Hoche to link with Pichegru's Army of the Rhine, they subsequently accepted his decision to concentrate against Brunswick.⁸⁸ Therefore, Hoche's resolution to attack Brunswick's army at Kaiserslautern despite poor odds represented the logical application of revolutionary propaganda to tactics and field command. As Kaiserslautern demonstrates, the blending of revolutionary principles and propaganda with French tactics, while simultaneously overlooking basic military principles, proved detrimental to the combat effectiveness of the Republic's armies. Lacking numerical superiority and effective coordination with the Army of the Rhine, Hoche's attempt to singlehandedly drive the Prussian and Saxon forces across the Rhine reveals an overconfident attitude that made the campaign's failure almost certain.

⁸⁵ Chuquet, *Hoche*, 89, 91.

⁸⁶ D'Orano, *Hoche*, 105.

⁸⁷ Mackenzie, *Revolutionary Armies*, 34.

⁸⁸ Hoche to CPS, 10 December 1794, in D'Orano, *Hoche*, 34-35.

After retreating to Zweibrücken, Hoche agreed to execute the Committee's original plan by moving southeast through the Vosges Mountains to link with Pichegru's Army of the Rhine for a concerted offensive against Wurmser. Unlike the ill-fated Kaiserslautern campaign, the next offensive united the efforts of Hoche and Pichegru and provided the French with clear numerical superiority over Austrian forces around Landau. By combining the strength of the Moselle and Rhine Armies, the Committee devised an effective operational plan that dispelled enemy forces from Alsace by the end of the year.

Prior to commencing the new offensive, Hoche reorganized the army while Saint-Just purged the officers. The Army of the Moselle received 10,000 reinforcements from the Ardennes Army on 5 December. Although the army suffered from the campaign against Kaiserslautern, Hoche maintained that its spirit remained positive, informing the Committee that "the army is always brave and good". Nonetheless, he could not overlook the desperate condition of his supplies. As he pleaded to the Committee on 10 December, "in the name of the Republic, send clothing and equipment to its valiant defenders."⁸⁹ Thus, Hoche earnestly attempted to alleviate his men's suffering by repairing the supply situation along with Saint-Just. Beyond providing for the troops' material needs, Hoche and the representatives reignited the process of amalgamation that proved crucial to the tactical success of the Republic's armies. As Saint-Just reported to the Committee: "The order that you have taken for the incorporation of men of the requisition in the old corps we understand is very important, and we desire that it be

⁸⁹ Ibid.

executed without delay.”⁹⁰ Nevertheless, due largely to the lack of enthusiasm among the officer corps for *embrigadement*, the process of amalgamation remained muddled and incomplete through 1793. Only by a decree of 8 January 1794 did the process officially commence.⁹¹ In terms of leadership, Hoche replaced failed commanders such as Ambert and Huet with leaders such as Dubois and Jacques Maurice Hatry.

After repairing the strength and condition of his army, Hoche executed the operational plan that Carnot devised.⁹² To relieve Landau, which the Allies recently besieged, Carnot desired an offensive against Coalition forces in Alsace. Brunswick’s position north at Kaiserslautern left Wurmser’s right flank dangerously exposed to an assault through the various passes of the Vosges. If the Rhine Army could pin Wurmser’s forces on the Lauter or Moder Rivers while the Army of the Moselle struck its flank, the Austrian commander would have no recourse but to evacuate the Rhine valley.

On 23 November, Hoche sent a division under General Philippe Joseph Jacob to link with Pichegru at Niederbronn. Hoche and Pichegru met on 8 December at Niederbronn and agreed to an effective operational plan.⁹³ While Hoche and Pichegru coordinated their operations, Wurmser and Brunswick proved unable to engineer a coordinated defense.⁹⁴ On 14 December, Wurmser moved his main body northwest to

⁹⁰ Gros, *Saint-Just*, 443.

⁹¹ Bertaud, *Army of the French Revolution*, 160-165.

⁹² After Kaiserslautern, Carnot wrote to both Saint-Just and Hoche, advocating combining the strength of the Army of the Moselle with that of the Rhine Army and advancing against Wurmser; Reinhard, *Le Grand Carnot*, 2:120-121.

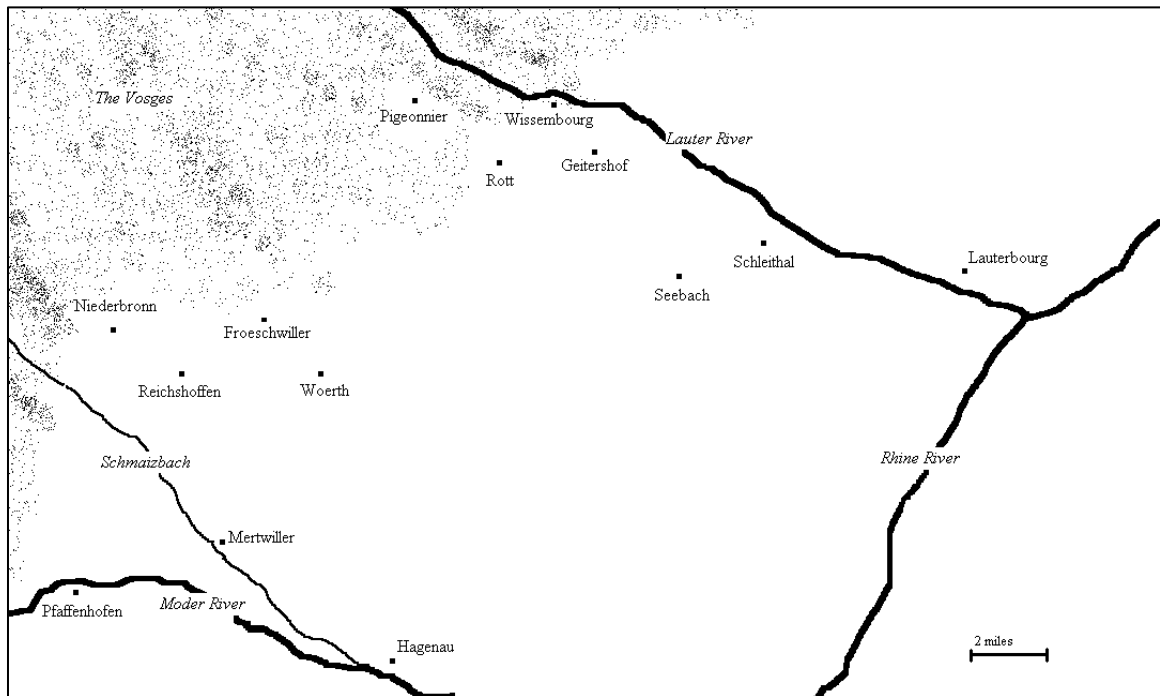
⁹³ D’Orano, *Hoche*, 111-112; Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:96-97; Chuquet, *Hoche*, 138-143.

⁹⁴ Chuquet, *Hoche*, 146-147.

bar the Moselle Army's passage through the Vosges. Four days later, he attacked French forces between Niederbronn and Froeschwiller. Hoche counterattacked at Reichshoffen, and

MAP 4

The Wissembourg Campaign, November-December 1793



forcing Wurmser to reposition his force at Woerth. Meanwhile, Pichegru constantly harassed Wurmser's covering force to the south near Hagenau, thus depriving Wurmser the ability to concentrate superior strength against one of the French armies.

Outnumbered and fearing Pichegru's threat to his rear, Wurmser saw no option but to cede the line of the Moder and retreat north to the Lauter River.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 4:168-169; D'Orano, *Hoche*, 118. As an aside, a cannon ball struck a tree branch that fell on Hoche's horse during a combat at Lembach, knocking the general from his mount. Moments later, a musket ball struck Hoche's second horse, causing the commander to reportedly declare, "It's nothing! They are simply trying to make me an infantry commander!"

Forcing Wurmser to retreat, Hoche and Pichegru united their force on 23 December. Hoche became generalissimo of the Moselle and Rhine Armies on the 25th, after a rather tense struggle with Pichegru.⁹⁶ The general immediately continued the offensive against Wurmser. Saint-Just pressured Hoche to redeem his failure at Kaiserslautern by gaining a victory. As Hoche wrote to his friend General Alexis Le Veneur de Tillières, “I must win or perish.”⁹⁷ Luckily for the French, the Coalition’s failure to sufficiently coordinate their operations undermined Wurmser’s defense of the Lauter. Indeed, Wurmser considered his position so precarious that an Austrian war council on 24 December determined to continue the retreat to the Rhine. However, Brunswick’s urgings to prolong the resistance, along with a minor success against the French at Geitershof on the 25th, convinced Wurmser to hold the left bank of the Lauter. Wurmser divided his army into three large groups. General Siegfried Kospoth commanded the first column of six battalions and eight squadrons west of Seebach at Wissembourg, while Wurmser placed the second column of five battalions and twelve squadrons under General Karl d’Aufsess two miles east of Kospoth. On the left, Prince Hohenlohe led the third column of two battalions and fifteen squadrons of Prussian cavalry at Lauterbourg. On Wurmser’s right, Prussian forces led by Karl Friedrich Heinrich, Graf von der Goltz and accompanied by Brunswick defended the Pigeonnier Heights within the Vosges.⁹⁸ Although advised to retreat on the 26th by his chief of staff, Wurmser remained committed to defending the Lauter.

⁹⁶ D’Orano, *Hoche*, 35-36; Clerget, *Tableaux historique*, 18; Chuquet, *Hoche*, 151.

⁹⁷ Hoche to Leveneur, 28 December 1794, in D’Orano, *Hoche*, 40.

⁹⁸ See Wurmser’s report in Pingaud, *L’invasion Austro-Prussienne*, 309-311.

Against Wurmser's dispersed and largely demoralized forces, Hoche concentrated the bulk of his army to assail the decisive point of his enemy's line.⁹⁹ Although he ordered strikes on Lauterbourg and Schleithal, Hoche directed four divisions against Wurmser's center at Wissembourg. At 11:00 A.M. on 26 December, Hoche commenced the general assault. After an artillery bombardment, the French advanced towards Wissembourg. Lefebvre and Taponnier marched directly towards the village while Ferino and Hatry moved northwest to strike Wurmser's left flank. The Austrians retreated north to the Geisberg heights with their backs to the Lauter. Hoche's men reportedly attacked the position audaciously, despite the seven powerful artillery batteries that defended the heights. As the Austrians gradually ceded ground, Wurmser realized the inexorable nature of the French advance and decided to save his army from destruction by retreating across the Lauter. Meanwhile, Brunswick heard the sound of cannon to the southeast and marched to relieve Wurmser. Encountering the exposed flank of Hatry's division, Brunswick struck with his infantry and cavalry, forcing the French to fall back on the town of Rott. Brunswick's timely intervention allowed Wurmser to retreat safely across the Lauter and repair his shattered forces.¹⁰⁰

After Brunswick's assault, nightfall ended Hoche's advance. His main body bivouacked on the ground they gained during the day's fighting.¹⁰¹ On the right,

⁹⁹ Just before Hoche opened the attack, the troops received word of the relief of Toulon. Inspired by the victory, the men in the ranks reportedly declared to their general: "Our brave comrades have saved Toulon, just like we shall save Landau!" Chuquet, *Hoche*, 155.

¹⁰⁰ Chuquet, *Hoche*, 189-190; D'Orano, *Hoche*, 123-125; Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 4:170-176; Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:108-110; Saint-Cyr, *Mémoires*, 2:194-197; *Victoires et conquêtes*, 2:179.

¹⁰¹ Ferino's division camped in the village of Altstadt and the woods near Fort Saint-Remy, Taponnier and Lefebvre at Geisberg, while Hatry's division remained at Rott.

Michaud gained Schleithal. Desaix's two divisions advanced to Lauterbourg and successfully dispersed the *émigré* army from the city.¹⁰² Although the victory pleased Hoche, the enemy's escape disappointed the representatives on mission. In order to assuage potential criticism levied against his leadership, Hoche shifted the representative's vicious condemnation onto General of Brigade Jean Donadieu, who hesitated in executing Hoche's orders to pursue Wurmser with four cavalry regiments. Donadieu joined the numerous other generals who mounted the scaffold for failing to exhibit an adequate degree of offensive zeal.¹⁰³

For all of the claims regarding French martial dominance during the Revolutionary period, the French victory at Wissembourg did not result in the complete destruction of the Old Regime armies fielded by the Austrians and Prussians. While Wurmser was thoroughly defeated, the campaign of 1793 presents little evidence of a systemic military breakdown of Old Regime warfare, especially on the battlefield. As Brunswick demonstrated at Kaiserslautern in November and by his intervention at Wissembourg, Old Regime armies proved lethal against French Revolutionary armies. Had Brunswick and Wurmser coordinated their operations to a greater degree, the outcome could have been much different.

Regardless of Wurmser's escape, Hoche triumphantly entered Wissembourg the following morning. Wurmser and Brunswick continued their retreat to the Rhine. Despite his proclivity for offensive campaigns, Hoche failed to pursue the Allies energetically. Nevertheless, the Committee of Public Safety desired Hoche to commence

¹⁰² Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 4:176.

¹⁰³ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:110.

an expedition against Trier immediately. Given the bone-chilling weather and poor supply, Hoche preferred to halt the advance until the end of winter. However, the Committee's further urgings forced him to pursue Brunswick's Prussians towards Mainz. After marching over the harrowing ground at Kaiserslautern and advancing south of Mainz, Hoche received the Committee's permission to enter winter quarters between Bitche and Longwy on 7 February 1794. Yet, his preparations to continue the advance to Trier during the upcoming spring proved futile. At the end of February, the Committee transferred Hoche to Toulon, ostensibly to command an expeditionary force bound for Oneglia. At Toulon, the commander of the Army of Italy, General Pierre Jadart Dumerbion, arrested Hoche in compliance with the Committee's orders. Apparently, the government grew increasingly fearful of Hoche's popularity with the troops and his refusal to execute their orders. As Pichegru grew more popular with the Committee (soon receiving command of the Army of the North), he was able to denounce Hoche and have his rival removed.¹⁰⁴

From its creation as the Army of the Center in December 1791 to the day Hoche departed in March 1794, the Army of the Moselle fought numerous battles and waged several campaigns. Its performance symbolized that of the entire French army during the early period of the French Revolutionary Wars. Thrown into chaos by the Revolution, the French army struggled to survive against the professional forces of the Old Regime. Rather than dominating Old Regime armies with revolutionary *élan* and innovative military practices, the Moselle Army compiled a mixed record. Although victorious at

¹⁰⁴ Chuquet, *Hoche*, 200, 232-234; D'Orano, *Hoche*, 500; Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:110-113.

Valmy, the army suffered during the grueling expedition to Trier under Beurnonville. After driving enemy forces from Arlon in June 1793, it failed to relieve Mainz in July. Under Hoche, the army suffered a tremendous setback at Kaiserslautern, but subsequently dislodged the Austrian army from Wissembourg. While the army eventually triumphed over its Old Regime enemies, its victory did not signal the downfall of Old Regime warfare. Rather, the Moselle Army adopted numerous military principles that the Old Regime perfected in achieving victory. Disciplined soldiers, effective leadership, and flexible and well-coordinated tactics proved just as crucial to success as revolutionary enthusiasm.

As will be discussed in the subsequent chapters, the combat experience of the Army of the Moselle from 1792-1793 explains its effective performance in the Fleurus campaign and the subsequent conquest of Belgium. Through a series of difficult campaigns in 1792-1793, the soldiers of the Army of the Moselle acquired proper military training and became professional soldiers. If not invincible, they proved able to withstand setbacks and overcome frustrations in the pursuit of victory. In 1794, they became the nucleus of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse under General Jean-Baptiste Jourdan.

CHAPTER 3

A COMMANDER'S APPRENTICESHIP

The Rise of Jean-Baptiste Jourdan, 1762-1794

Jean-Baptiste Jourdan entered the world in 1762, the first and only son of Roch Jourdan, a surgeon in the town of Limoges.¹ Losing his parents at a very young age, Jourdan progressed through his youth without the benefit of parental support. Despising the drudgeries of civilian life and longing for adventure, Jourdan enlisted in the French Royal Army and served in North America and the West Indies during the War of American Independence. After returning to France and retiring from the Royal Army, Jourdan travelled to his hometown of Limoges, opened a haberdashery, and started a family of his own. After the French Revolution began in 1789, Jourdan joined the local Jacobin Club and eagerly enlisted in a National Guard battalion. Benefitting from prior military service and political connections, Jourdan became captain of the 2nd Battalion of Volunteers of the Haute-Vienne in 1791. Two years later, as the First French Republic faced defeat, the haberdasher from Limoges received command of the Army of the North, the principal field army of Revolutionary France.

In October 1793, Jourdan led the Army of the North to victory at Wattignies. The triumph significantly reduced the threat facing the Republic and cemented Jourdan's popular prestige as the "Saviour of France." Nevertheless, Jourdan's disenchantment

¹ The most detailed biography of Jourdan remains Valentin, *Le Maréchal Jourdan*. Hulot, *Le Maréchal Jourdan*, is also worth consulting. See also, Michael Glover, "The True Patriot: Jourdan," in *Napoleon's Marshals*, ed. David Chandler (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 156-175.

with the Revolutionary regime's subsequent orders led to a second withdrawal from military service. After he returned to his haberdashery at Limoges, the French government called on his talents the following year when he received command of the Army of the Moselle. In June 1794, Jourdan forged 42,000 men of that army into a new force, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, which he led to victory at Fleurus on 26 June 1794. Until September 1796, Jourdan commanded the Army of the Sambre and Meuse through several difficult campaigns and became one of the New Regime's leading generals.² He eventually became a marshal during the First French Empire.³

An understanding of Jourdan's early life must begin with his troubled childhood. At the age of two, Jourdan lost his mother to labor complications during the birth of her second child.⁴ The death of his mother left young Jourdan with a father too preoccupied with his work to devote much time to his children. Around his sixth birthday, Jourdan moved to Beauceuil to begin his studies at the local abbey, where his uncle, Laurent Jourdan, served as the *curé*. Jourdan's father, Roch, desired his son to acquire a broad education before beginning medical studies. Under his uncle's persistent guidance, Jourdan followed a standard curriculum of Latin, science, and literature.⁵ In October 1771, tragedy again struck the family. At the age of thirty-three, Jourdan's father died prematurely from unknown causes, leaving the future marshal of France an orphan.

² Jourdan resigned command of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse in September 1796 after the failed campaign against the Austrian army of the Archduke Charles in the German states.

³ Jourdan became a marshal in 1804. He later served as Joseph Bonaparte's military advisor in Spain during the Peninsular War. After a remarkable life, Jourdan died as governor of the Invalides in 1833.

⁴ Valentin, *Jourdan*, 25. Jourdan's mother, Jeanne Foreau-Francisquet Jourdan, died on 23 September 1764. She was the daughter of the master surgeon of Limoges, which is how Jourdan's father, Roch, initially gained her acquaintance.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

In the eighteenth century, a young man commonly entered his father's career after coming of age. However, the death of Jourdan's father threw his plans to pursue the career of surgeon into disarray.⁶ Facing the daunting prospect of making his own way in the world, Jourdan remained under his uncle Laurent's tutelage until he reached the age of fifteen. After completing his studies, Jourdan moved to Lyon, where he began an apprenticeship under another uncle, Jean-François Jourdan. A successful fabric merchant, Jean-François expected his nephew to work long hours for modest pay. Possessing the skills of a good businessman with the ethic of a strict disciplinarian, Jean-François allowed Jourdan little freedom or independence.⁷ That this young man, orphaned, nearly destitute, and working for a meager wage in his uncle's fabric shop, eventually reached the highest ranks of the French military establishment is a remarkable story.

Growing tired of his somber existence in Lyon, Jourdan fatefully decided to enlist in the French Royal Army. In this respect, Jourdan represented the majority of recruits during the eighteenth century. Prior to the nationalistic awakenings associated with the French Revolution, patriotism did not compel individuals to enlist in national armies. While all armies of the period resorted to the recruitment of vagabonds and criminals, the lack of financial opportunities, the desire to escape the drudgeries of civilian life, and the sublime longing for adventure and *gloire* supplied quality volunteers who defy the

⁶ Hulot, *Jourdan*, 23; for the economic and social opportunities and restrictions that shaped bourgeois life in eighteenth century France, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1965), 1-15 and Roger Price, *A Concise History of France* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 66-67.

⁷ Valentin, *Jourdan*, 35.

stereotypical image of the eighteenth century soldiering class as the “filth of the nation.”⁸ Of average height and weight with a strong physique, Jourdan perfectly fit the mold of a successful soldier. Possessing an untypically high level of education for a recruit, he had the opportunity to be commissioned as an “officer of fortune.” For an educated young man, more prospects appeared for advancement and prestige - even within the stratified royal army - than in his uncle’s stifling fabric shop.⁹

Seeking revenge for its humiliating defeats in the Seven Years War, the French government entered the War of American Independence against Great Britain in 1777 after the American victory at Saratoga. Whether or not Jourdan felt sympathy for the American cause remains unknown. Similarly, it is difficult to determine the effect of his first experiences of war in the colonies on his subsequent military career. Unfortunately, Jourdan left no recollection of his experiences during the American Revolution and he goes unmentioned in the French sources relevant to the campaigns in which he participated. Jourdan served under Colonel Claude-Charles de Damas in the *régiment d’Auxerrois* and assisted in the failed siege of Savannah in 1779. Whether or not he aided in the defense of the island of Saint-Vincent or the conquest of Tobago remains unclear.¹⁰

In July 1782, Jourdan returned to France after suffering a stress-induced hernia. By the time he recovered, the war in America ended and the French government

⁸ Christopher Duffy, *The Military Experience in the Age of Reason, 1715-1789* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1987), 89-92.

⁹ M.S. Anderson, *War and Society in Europe of the Old Regime, 1618-1789* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1988), 203-204; Hulot, *Jourdan*, 26-27.

¹⁰ A concise overview of the regiment’s combat record from the American Revolution through 1792 is provided by Louis Susane, *L’histoire de l’ancienne infanterie française* (Paris: 1850), 3:282-289.

redirected his unit to Verdun. Amidst the process of general demobilization following the Treaty of Paris of 1763, Jourdan resigned from Louis XVI's army. While the prospects for advancement seemed abundant to the miserable teenage orphan in 1777, it appears that the privilege-ridden army of the 1780s disillusioned the intelligent and talented twenty-two-year old veteran in 1784. Most infamously, the French government passed the Ségur Law in 1781, which required aspiring soldiers to demonstrate at least four quarters of nobility prior to admission into the French officer corps.¹¹ Now cognizant of the gross inequities in the French army, Jourdan chose to reintegrate into civilian society, where a prosperous career and comfortable lifestyle now seemed within reach.¹²

As noted, the lessons Jourdan learned from his years of military service in America remain elusive. According to his chief biographer, René Valentin, Jourdan emerged from his experiences committed to the cause of the American Revolution. Suggesting that Jourdan compared America's struggle against Great Britain to his own resentment against his tyrannical uncle, Jean-François, Valentin contends that Jourdan's service during the American Revolution imbued him with an affinity for the ideals of liberty and equality.¹³ Historian Samuel Scott, however, argues that few French soldiers derived liberal political views from their service in North America and the West Indies. Occupied by military duties and isolated from civilian populations as much as possible,

¹¹ Anderson, *War and Society*, 198-199. Recent work challenges the reactive nature of the Ségur decree, arguing that its primary target constituted the *enobli*, recently ennobled commoners, rather than the bourgeoisie. See primarily David Bien, "The Army in the French Enlightenment: Reform, Reaction, and Revolution," *Past and Present* 85, no. 1 (1979): 68-98, along with Rafe Blaufarb, *The French Army, 1750-1820: Careers, Talent, Merit* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2002).

¹² Hulot, *Jourdan*, 32-33.

¹³ Valentin, *Jourdan*, 50-51.

few opportunities for political indoctrination existed for the rank-and-file.¹⁴ Jourdan could have been an exception to the rule. Educated and cognizant of his surroundings, Jourdan probably understood something of the cause for which he fought. Unfortunately, the dearth of sources on Jourdan's life during this period makes the exact relationship between his early military service and his subsequent political views indiscernible. Regardless, Jourdan's early experiences acquainted him with military life, even if his service in America as a soldier offered little knowledge of the higher art of strategy.¹⁵

After a brief stay in Alsace, Jourdan returned to Lyon where he once again sought work from his uncle Jean-François.¹⁶ Turned away by an uncle still bitter over Jourdan's previous departure, the young veteran ventured to the abbey at Beureceuil and then to his hometown of Limoges. There, the enterprising Jourdan opened his own haberdashery with the assistance of a wealthy merchant named Michel Avanturier. Hardworking and trustworthy, Jourdan pursued business in a manner that soon met with success. Through his relationship with Avanturier, Jourdan met Jeanne Nicholas, Avanturier's sister-in-law, whom he married in 1788. On 30 December 1789, the couple had their first child. Four other daughters and one son followed.¹⁷

Owning a prosperous business, Jourdan created a comfortable life for his family in Limoges, where he flourished among the local *bourgeoisie*. Based on his subsequent views and actions, it appears that Jourdan acquired political ideas common to the bourgeoisie during the 1780s. The social injustices he confronted in Old Regime France

¹⁴ Samuel F. Scott, *From Yorktown to Valmy: The Transformation of the French Army during an Age of Revolution* (Niwot, Colorado: University of Colorado Press, 1998).

¹⁵ Duffy, *Military Experience*, 125-129, 140-142; Rothenberg, *Age of Napoleon*, 11-14.

¹⁶ Valentin, *Jourdan*, 38.

¹⁷ Hulot, *Jourdan*, 36. Jourdan's son died in infancy.

probably rekindled memories of the unfair social hierarchies in the Royal Army.¹⁸

Regardless, by the birth of his first child, the French Revolution already had started to impact Jourdan's world. Like many of his contemporaries, the events of the Revolution offered Jourdan the means of leaping from obscurity onto the pages of history, radically altering the place of the middle class in French society.

As demonstrated by numerous historians, the impact of the Revolution varied in the provinces.¹⁹ The Revolution proceeded rather benignly at Limoges.²⁰ The economically driven bourgeoisie of the Limousin sought stability under whatever regime ruled in Paris. Jourdan appears to have viewed the early Revolution as the harbinger of a brighter future of opportunity.²¹ A series of events facilitated Jourdan's rapid advancement over the next few years. To begin, he joined a popular society in Limoges. One of his friends, a man named Nicaud, founded the club – named the “Friends of the Constitution,” or, the Jacobin Club – and Jourdan's name figures on the first list of members for the society. Although eventually becoming more radical, the Club initially advocated progressive ideas such as liberty and equality of opportunity for all and grew especially popular among the Limousin bourgeoisie.²²

Jourdan's first appearance on the political scene offers an explanation of his political beliefs. Beyond revealing an affinity for the progressive ideas of the New

¹⁸ Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 27-29; Hulot, *Jourdan*, 37-38; Price, *History of France*, 67-69; Valentin, *Jourdan*, 41.

¹⁹ Elisabeth A. Cawthon and Steven G. Reinhardt eds., *Essays on the French Revolution: Paris and the Provinces* (Arlington, Texas: University of Texas at Arlington, 1992); Alan Forrest, *Paris, the Provinces, and the French Revolution* (New York: Arnold, 2004).

²⁰ Léon Jouhaud, *La Révolution française en Limousin (1789-1792)* (Limoges, 1947), 204.

²¹ Hulot, *Jourdan*, 37; Valentin, *Jourdan*, 48-49

²² Valentin, *Jourdan*, 54.

Regime, his association with the popular societies reveals Jourdan's ambition, a prerequisite for those who advanced during the Revolutionary period. Despite his recent entry into the ranks of the upper middle class, Jourdan garnered a local political coterie among the Jacobins of Limoges and this became a crucial factor in his subsequent rise. Historians following the hagiographic school of Jules Michelet emphasize the selfless motivation of French Revolutionary generals and overlook this vital aspect of the careers of those who rose to military fame during the Revolutionary period. Jourdan possessed high ambition and actively sought social advancement. Like other generals of Revolutionary France, Jourdan appears more like a political general than as the paragon of selfless virtue enshrined in Revolutionary mythology.²³

Two months after the formation of the "Friends of the Constitution," Limoges raised its first National Guard battalion.²⁴ Jourdan became the battalion's captain based on his prior military service and his political connections within the Assembly of Limoges and the Jacobin club. As Limoges possessed few men with substantial military service to lead the battalions of the National Guard, Jourdan's appointment appears logical. His previous military experience benefitted him during his tenure with the National Guard. He understood the requirements of the professional soldier and successfully instilled discipline among the new recruits.²⁵ While the battalion apparently engaged in little action beyond parade-ground drills, the command offered Jourdan a

²³ For a hagiographic depiction of the French Revolutionary officer class as paragons of virtue, see Michelet, *Les Soldats de la Revolution*, 79-81. For a similar portrayal of the generals comprising the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, see Desprez, *L'Armée de Sambre-et-Meuse*, 15. Similar hagiographic interpretations have been established for generals such as Hoche, Championnet, and Marceau.

²⁴ Jean-Paul Bertaud, *The Army of the French Revolution*, 43-44.

²⁵ Hulot, *Jourdan*, 40-41; Valentin, *Jourdan*, 55-56. Unfortunately, little is known about Jourdan's experience with the National Guard battalion.

useful training ground for his subsequent career as a general. It seems likely that he began to learn leadership principles that proved beneficial in his later military command.

The next major event in Jourdan's career came in 1791, when the National Assembly ordered the creation of volunteer battalions to bolster the Royal Army in the event of war. The Haute-Vienne department raised 1,150 volunteers divided into two battalions. In order to ensure proper administration of the battalions, the Directory of the Haute-Vienne appointed Captains Jourdan and Dalesme of the National Guard to lead the volunteers. Jourdan directed the 2nd Battalion of Volunteers of the Haute-Vienne. While his military competency played a role in his selection, the fact that he exhibited liberal political views probably increased his popularity among the volunteers and the departmental Directory.²⁶ The men whom Jourdan commanded in this volunteer battalion constituted models of the revolutionary citizen-soldiers. Historian Jean-Paul Bertaud referred to the volunteers of 1791 as a "bourgeois army." Drawn from the middle-classes and motivated by a developing sense of patriotism, these soldiers quickly proved reliable and capable, especially compared to the volunteers and conscripts whom entered service in 1792 and 1793.²⁷

Jourdan led his battalion from Limoges on 25 October 1791. Lacking uniforms and short on equipment, the 2nd Battalion of the Haute-Vienne hardly resembled a military unit. The battalion marched north through Montargis, Melun, and Meaux on its way to the northern frontier. Towards the end of November, he and his men took winter

²⁶ Glover, "The True Patriot," 154. According to Hulot, Jourdan's views were "politically correct" at the time. Hulot, *Jourdan*, 44.

²⁷ Bertaud, *The Army of the French Revolution*, 65-71.

quarters at Villers-Cotterêts, seventy-five miles northeast of Paris.²⁸ During this brief respite, Jourdan engaged to instruct and equip his battalion. Working with government officials and local merchants, Jourdan remedied a poor supply situation. Equally important, he instructed his men in military discipline and habits.²⁹ He appears not only as an effective leader of men, but as an officer capable of maintaining his battalion as an effective fighting force.

After the National Assembly declared war against the “King of Bohemia and Hungary” on 20 April 1792, Jourdan’s battalion marched north from its position at Etampes. Although in close proximity to Valmy in September 1792, the battalion’s baptism of fire came one month later at Jemappes.³⁰ Dumouriez, commander of the Army of the North, emerged as the central individual behind the defense of the Republic in 1792. Known for a boldness verging upon rashness, Dumouriez’s personality and vacillating political loyalties proved unsuitable for the development of a stable command relationship with the ever-changing government in Paris.³¹ At the battle of Jemappes on 6 November 1792, Jourdan’s battalion played only an auxiliary role, guarding the right wing of Dumouriez’s army under General Louis August Juvénal des Ursins d’Harville.³² Nonetheless, Jemappes exposed Jourdan’s men to battle and constituted his first experience of actually commanding troops in combat.

²⁸ Valentin, *Jourdan*, 65.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁰ Hulot, *Jourdan*, 50.

³¹ Richard M. Brace, “Dumouriez and the Girondins,” *American Historical Review* 56 (1951): 493-509; Arthur M. Griffiths, *French Revolutionary Generals* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1891), 49-58.

³² Jean-Baptiste Jourdan, “Memoires Militaires de Maréchal Jourdan: Campagne de 1793,” *Service Historique de l’armée de terre* (hereafter cited as SHAT), M1 608, 2.

Jourdan's rise through the ranks of the French officer corps occurred rapidly after Jemappes. Following the French defeat at Neerwinden and the treason of Dumouriez in early 1793, the Convention promoted Jourdan to general of brigade on 27 May and general of division two months later.³³ Clearly, the mass emigration of the nobility from the French officer corps made Jourdan's rapid rise possible. Historians estimate that 6,000 of 9,000 noble officers fled France between 1789 and 1793, thus leaving a significant command vacuum.³⁴ Nevertheless, factors beyond simple circumstance must explain Jourdan's unusually swift ascension. From 1791-1793, he demonstrated his skills as a natural leader and quickly acquired the talents of a commander. Only in an army valuing merit more than social class could Jourdan's rise have occurred.

After Dumouriez's treason, Custine took command of the Army of the North. A soldier of the Old Regime, Custine clashed with the civil government. Custine's inability to cooperate with Paris revolved around his failure to work under the representatives on mission: the government's notorious civil agents who maintained constant oversight over the Republic's armies.³⁵ After Custine died by the guillotine, General Jean Nicholas Houchard assumed command. Under Houchard's leadership, Jourdan became a leading figure in the Army of the North. As such, he acquired a prominent reputation among powerful individuals. Beyond gaining Houchard's admiration, Jourdan impressed Carnot, the Committee of Public Safety's strategic architect.³⁶

³³ Glover, "The True Patriot," 159.

³⁴ Scott, *From Yorktown to Valmy*, 156. As Scott states, the highest percentage of noble emigration occurred after Louis XVI's flight to Varennes.

³⁵ Wallon, *Représentants du peuple*, 4:103-119.

³⁶ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 1:213-214; Reinhard, *Le Grand Carnot*, 2:76.

From August to September 1793, Jourdan executed a series of orders, and, by all estimations, excelled in his duties. In August, the representative on mission to the Army of the North, Ernest Dominique François Joseph Duquesnoy, assigned Jourdan an important mission: to drive enemy forces from the region around Cassel, thirty miles south of Dunkirk. While Jourdan encountered superior enemy forces, he succeeded and received the representative's praise. Referring to Jourdan and another general, Duquesnoy informed the Committee: "I can only praise the brave and intelligent conduct of those two generals."³⁷ As a general of division, Jourdan exhibited all of the requisite skills of a commander: courage, obedience, determination, and level-headedness. Furthermore, Jourdan's political loyalties to the Jacobin Club served him well during the first months of the Reign of Terror and made him a favorite of the Committee of Public Safety.³⁸

At the battle of Hondschoote on 8 September 1793, Jourdan gained his first experience of divisional command in a large-scale battle by commanding the center of the Army of the North. As common among generals of Revolutionary France, Jourdan led from the front in the midst of the fight.³⁹ After an Austrian assault forced his division to withdraw, he reformed his units and brought forward two more battalions. These he personally led in a charge that crushed the Austrian line.⁴⁰ This paradigm of personal leadership in battle demonstrated comradeship with the rank and file, providing a moral

³⁷ Quoted in Valentin, *Jourdan*, 76.

³⁸ Palmer, *Twelve who Ruled*, 97-98; Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 1:247.

³⁹ Hulot, *Jourdan*, 60-61.

⁴⁰ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 1:228-229.

example of bravery that proved crucial to the new command culture created by French Revolutionary generals and demanded by the New Regime.⁴¹

After the victory at Hondshoote, the representatives on mission, and especially Carnot, lauded Jourdan's performance. However, the Committee of Public Safety recalled Houchard after he failed to exploit his success. He faced a trial by the Revolutionary Tribunal and soon went to the guillotine.⁴² The cases of Houchard and Custine demonstrate the Revolutionary government's paranoid fear of generals after Dumouriez's treason. This created a command climate that mandated effective performance, political loyalty, and obedience. Houchard's removal represented a watershed in Jourdan's military career. On 24 September 1793, he received news of his appointment to command the Army of the North.⁴³ The orphaned youth from Limoges had risen to receive command of the Republic's primary field army at a moment of serious urgency.

As commander of the Army of the North, Jourdan faced no small task in October 1793. His success demonstrates much about his character and potential as a military leader. Prior to accepting his new position, Jourdan informed the Committee that he lacked the experience to fill such an important post. Nevertheless, a "decree from the Convention that ordered the arrest of all citizens who refused the employment in which they have been called," persuaded him to accept the command.⁴⁴ On reaching his headquarters at Gavrelle on 26 September, Jourdan lacked basic knowledge of the army

⁴¹ Marie-Cécile Thorat, *From Valmy to Waterloo: France at War, 1792-1815* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 111-113. It is important to note that this did not lack precedent in Old Regime armies.

⁴² Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars*, 110.

⁴³ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 1:247.

⁴⁴ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

under his command. For instance, he could not ascertain the exact number of troops available or even the names of his subordinate generals.⁴⁵ The sack of Houchard caused this chaotic situation as the Committee arrested many members of Houchard's staff or placed them on temporary leave.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Jourdan soon organized his army with the assistance of his competent chief of staff, General Jean-Augustin Ernouf.⁴⁷

Even with a properly ordered force, the situation facing Jourdan appeared bleak. On 29 September, an Allied army of 65,000 men under Prince Josias of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld crossed the Sambre River from the east and advanced against the fortress of Maubeuge. Inside the strategically significant fortress, 17,000 French troops remained stranded. Intelligence reports indicated that Austrian sympathizers within the town actively conspired to undermine the morale of the garrison. The Committee considered relieving Maubeuge an imperative because its fall would open Paris to a concerted attack by the Coalition.⁴⁸ Although Jourdan's army numbered around 175,000 men, by October 1793 he had only 50,000 men available for field operations. Furthermore, as Jourdan relates in his memoirs:

The entire army was in a pitiable situation: the officers and generals were amateurs who in the space of only a few months had risen to the highest grades, and only possessed zeal and courage; their troops were lacking proper clothing and equipment, and their arsenals were deprived of arms and munitions; the cavalry suffered from a lack of forage; finally the old regiments, which had not received recruits for a long time, were reduced by half.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Palmer, *Twelve who Ruled*, 98.

⁴⁷ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁴⁸ Ross, *Quest for Victory*, 71.

⁴⁹ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

Regardless of these conditions, the Committee of Public Safety ordered Jourdan to relieve Maubeuge by defeating Coburg's army. Jourdan agreed to the Committee's plan and prepared his numerically inferior army for the offensive.

Seeking to inspire his men, Jourdan resorted to war propaganda, a central aspect of the command culture of the New Regime. Distributing the Committee's report to the troops, Jourdan informed the soldiers that, "victory belongs to courage. It is yours." He exhorted them to "exterminate the satellite of tyrants" and reminded them that their enemies were "cowards" covered "by your blood, and still more by that of your wives and children." Finally, Jourdan assured the men that "your country is watching and the Convention supports your generous devotion."⁵⁰

Coburg divided his forces into two groups. The first, 25,000 men under the Dutch Stadtholder, William V the Prince of Orange-Nassau, besieged Maubeuge. Meanwhile, a covering force of 20,000 men under General Franz Sebastian de Croix, Graf von Clerfayt guarded Coburg's southern flank.⁵¹ Carnot personally travelled from Paris to Gavrelle to assist the young and relatively inexperienced commander. Jourdan and Carnot decided to strike Clerfayt's force while the French garrison at Maubeuge sortied and advanced against the Prince of Orange. This would trap Coburg's army in a pincer movement.⁵² With 50,000 men, it should have been no difficult task to overrun Clerfayt's 20,000. Carnot's meddling, however, made the situation difficult. On 15 October, he impressed on Jourdan the importance of completely crushing the Austrians in a grand style and

⁵⁰ Jourdan, quoted in Palmer, *Twelve who Ruled*, 101.

⁵¹ Victor Dupuis, *La campagne de 1793 à l'armée du Nord et des Ardennes* (Paris: Chapelot, 1909), 2:153-155.

⁵² SHAT, M1 608, 2.

ordered a double-envelopment against Clerfayt. Unfortunately for the French, this dispersed Jourdan's numerically superior army to poor effect.⁵³ On the first day of the ensuing battle of Wattignies, the Austrian army repulsed the Army of the North's center and forced both wings to withdraw.

Although Carnot's tactical directive proved ineffective, Jourdan could not safely override the judgment of his political superior. However, on 16 October, Carnot departed for Paris and Jourdan developed a new plan that called for a concentration of strength on the French right wing, preparatory for a decisive strike against Clerfayt's left. Interestingly, Jourdan organized an embryonic form of wing commands for the battle – a concept he later developed with the Army of the Sambre and Meuse. To facilitate command and control, he entrusted General Florent Joseph Duquesnoy to command two divisions of the right wing (22,000 men), while General Jacques Pierre Fromentin directed two divisions on the left (17,000). This increased the army's flexibility and unity of command.⁵⁴ At 9:00 A.M., Jourdan transferred his command post to the right wing of the Army of the North. The French launched two attacks, both of which the Austrians repulsed. Jourdan remained in the rear, rallying the men and regrouping the defeated units. Demonstrating determination and resolve, he reorganized his units for a final assault. After a lively engagement, this final attack broke through Clerfayt's line. Wattignies soon fell and Jourdan's efforts saved Maubeuge from Coburg's army.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Dupuis, *La campagne de 1793*, 2:289-290; Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 1:255.

⁵⁵ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

Jourdan's performance at Wattignies represents impressive leadership given his lack of experience commanding armies. Coburg's army escaped destruction largely because the 17,000 French at Maubeuge failed to break out of the town. After Carnot returned to Paris, he sent Jourdan fresh orders. The Committee of Public Safety ordered Jourdan to continue his offensive by crossing the Sambre River to cut Coburg's lines of communication.⁵⁶ Wattignies severely weakened Jourdan's army and it took several weeks to recover before renewing the campaign.⁵⁷ By November, he found the Sambre flooded and impassable. Moreover, Coburg established a solid position on the east bank of the river and seemed unlikely to let Jourdan pass unmolested.⁵⁸ Therefore, Jourdan informed the Committee that if they persisted on an advance, he would resign: "I cannot stand the heart-breaking spectacle of an army destroyed without fighting. I give justice to the brave soldiers who compose it: not the least murmur has come from them, although they are half-naked and without shoes, exposed to all the effects of the weather, as it has been impossible to move the wagons."⁵⁹ Clearly, Jourdan made a sound judgment: his losses at Wattignies made it impossible to sustain another offensive so close to winter. Nonetheless, his resolve against the Committee's reckless orders proved costly, and nearly fatal.

Considering the fate of his two predecessors, his refusal demonstrates an impressive nerve that his subsequent service with the Army of the Sambre and Meuse corroborates. Jourdan's objection reveals much about his character. While he made use

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 1:269.

⁵⁹ Jourdan to Ministry of War, 4 November 1793, SHAT, M1 608, 2, PJ, no. 34.

of political connections to advance his career, he also exhibited a genuine concern for the condition of his men throughout his tenure of command. Although military historians usually emphasize the aggressiveness of French Revolutionary generals, Jourdan's refusal to cross the Sambre reveals his understanding of his force's limitations. Nevertheless, the Committee punished Jourdan for his snub. On 10 January, it recalled him to Paris and presented a document written by Carnot that called for his dismissal and arrest.⁶⁰ This undermines Carnot's claims that he was an innocent bystander during the Terror. Here, he appears an active participant, persecuting a man he formerly promoted. By chance occurrence, the intervention of Representative Duquesnoy, who just happened to be in Paris and vouched for Jourdan's loyalty, saved him from the guillotine.⁶¹ Dismissed by the Committee, although they retained the right to call on his services in the future, Jourdan returned to his haberdashery at Limoges.

Jourdan's early life and military education were formative experiences. In contrast to commanders such as Napoleon Bonaparte and Archduke Charles of Austria, Jourdan did not spend his early life at a military academy or under military tutorship, learning the art of war from books; rather, he gradually acquired military knowledge through experience. Therefore, his approach to command derived from practicality rather than theoretical training. He demonstrated his abilities as he rose through each level of leadership and his rise, based on talent and merit rather than social status, marked a revolution in war and society. Nevertheless, Jourdan never mastered the strategic principles of war. In contrast to the commonly held view that French Revolutionary

⁶⁰ Glover, "The True Patriot," 161.

⁶¹ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 1:272-273.

generals brokered innovations in the art of war, Jourdan's command reveals a continuation of traditional military practices and a gradual evolution in military organization and operations.

Jourdan's life drastically changed between 1789 and 1794. From a successful provincial business owner, he became a hero of the First French Republic, and then, almost one of its victims. A blending of military and political ability allowed Jourdan to rise through the ranks of the French army at a time when the mass emigration of the nobility quickly made competent leadership a prized commodity. Previous commanders such as Dumouriez, Custine, and Houchard lacked the political and military skills that enabled Jourdan to achieve command and retain the trust of the Committee and the representatives on mission. Jourdan's effective negotiation of civil-military relations, though not perfect, facilitated his success in 1794 and the creation of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, which proved decisive in the campaign that followed.

CHAPTER 4

DESITNIES UNITED

Jourdan, the Moselle Army, and the Arlon Campaign, March-May 1794

After escaping the guillotine, Jourdan returned to Limoges where he resumed work at his haberdashery in January 1794. Jourdan's ambition precluded a humble withdrawal into anonymity in imitation of the famous Roman general Cincinnatus. Rather, Jourdan enthusiastically exploited the provincial city's fascination with its hometown hero by appearing at his haberdashery in full-dress uniform, a practice that earned him the nickname, the "General of Limoges." Famous as the savior of France for his victory at Wattignies, Jourdan enjoyed widespread popularity and his haberdashery received a steady stream of inquiring customers.¹ The Jacobin Club of Limoges elected Jourdan its president and, in this position, he encouraged the citizens to denounce "those who commit treason against the public good."² Jourdan also returned home to his wife and children, whom he had not seen since departing Limoges with the 2nd Battalion of Volunteers of the Haute-Vienne in 1791. His oldest daughter had now reached the age of four. Jourdan's homecoming ended abruptly. On 10 March 1794, he received an unexpected letter from Minister of War Bouchotte informing him of his appointment to command the Army of the Moselle.³

¹ Hulot, *Le Maréchal Jourdan*, 78.

² *Ibid.*, 79.

³ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 10-11

As noted, the Army of the Moselle primarily operated alongside the Army of the Rhine in the Vosges Mountains from 1792-1793. Except for the brief Arlon expedition of June 1793, the army rarely ventured beyond Luxembourg's frontier. On 2 February 1794, Carnot revealed his desire to see the army play a far greater role than the passive hinge between French forces in the Low Countries and those on the Rhine. According to Carnot, "all the armies of the Republic must act offensively, but not all to the same extent. The decisive blows must be struck on two or three points only; otherwise, the...enemy will not be sufficiently damaged to be unable to recommence the campaign the following year."⁴ He identified the Low Countries and the northern frontier of France as the decisive theatre in the upcoming campaign.⁵ There, the Allied armies concentrated their greatest strength and posed the most dangerous threat to Paris.

The Committee of Public Safety directed the Army of the North and the Army of the Ardennes to "combine their movements in the moment of execution." Further east, Carnot desired the Rhine and Moselle Armies to continually monitor and harass the enemy, preventing the Allies from "moving all of their forces to the Low Countries." However, he assigned the Army of the Moselle a special task: "it is essential to order the general in chief [of the Army of the Moselle] to establish 20,000 troops at Arlon, from where they can menace the country of Trier and Luxembourg, on one side, and on the other, the lands around Liège and Brabant."⁶ Already at the commencement of 1794, Carnot envisioned the Moselle Army marching northwest to strike the left flank of the

⁴ *Correspondance de Carnot*, 4:279-280.

⁵ Ross, *Quest for Victory*, 77.

⁶ *Correspondance de Carnot*, 4:280.

Allied forces in the Low Countries, forming a strong wedge between Liège and the Electorate of Trier. In strategic terms, this would split in half the Coalition's line from the Atlantic coast to the Rhine River.

Immediately prior to Hoche's dismissal in March, the Army of the Moselle numbered 100,363 men on paper, with an active force of 67,673 troops. Hoche divided the army into two main groups: one based west of Thionville, covering the Moselle River and observing enemy forces commanded by Austrian Generals Johann Peter Freiherr Beaulieu and Ernst Paul von Blankenstein at Luxembourg and Trier respectively. Hoche stationed the second group over forty miles east of Thionville, stretching from Sarrebrücken to Pirmasens, guarding the western approaches of the Vosges against the Prussian forces of General Field Marshal Wichard Joachim Heinrich von Möllendorf.⁷ The French commander established army headquarters at Bouzonville, nearly halfway between Thionville and Sarrebrücken. Twenty miles northwest of Thionville, Morlot occupied Aumetz with his division of 6,534 infantry and 279 cavalry, while Taponier stationed his division of 6,328 infantry and 650 cavalry at Villers-la-Montagne, twenty miles northwest of Aumetz. The newly appointed divisional general, Lefebvre, commanded the army's advance guard of 7,222 infantry and 832 cavalry at Metzervisse, fifteen miles southeast of Thionville. A small detachment of 984 troops from the 5th Regiment held Sarrebrücken, linking Lefebvre's advance guard with Moreaux's division of 5,875 infantry and 853 cavalry positioned at Blieskastel, twenty-five miles east of Sarrebrücken on the Blies River. Thirty miles southeast of Sarrebrücken, Desbureaux led

⁷ Moreaux, *René Moreaux*, 109.

a division of 4,069 infantry at Hornbach, while Hatry's division of 4,356 infantry and thirty-nine cavalry camped far to the east at Pirmasens, bordering the Vosges.⁸ In addition to these units, 24,177 men occupied twelve fortresses along the northeastern frontier of France from Longwy to Bitche.⁹

By the time Jourdan took command of the Army of the Moselle on 19 March, the army's size and dispositions changed considerably. Fears of an Allied offensive in Flanders drew many reinforcements to that theatre, which Carnot deemed the most crucial. On 6 March, the Committee of Public Safety ordered the 1st and 2nd Regiments of Carabineers and the 3rd Regiment of Hussars to Cambrai and Lille, where they joined the Army of the North.¹⁰ Four days later, Representative on Mission Jacques Gillet sent six battalions totaling 5,750 infantry to bolster the small Army of the Ardennes south of the Sambre River.¹¹ The situation to the southeast along the Rhine also subtracted considerable strength from the Army of the Moselle. On the 16th, the army sent eleven battalions and the 8th Regiment of Dragoons to the Army of the Rhine in compliance with an order from that army's representative on mission.¹²

The Committee of Public Safety also made several changes to the army's dispositions between Hoche's departure and Jourdan's arrival. On 9 March, it officially

⁸ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 5-6.

⁹ These garrison forces included 3,101 infantry and 560 artillery at Sarrelibre; 2,197 infantry and 380 artillery at Thionville; 443 infantry and 577 cavalry at Pont-à-Mousson; 155 artillery at Bitche; 2,386 infantry, thirty-three cavalry, and 160 artillery at Longwy; 106 infantry and twelve artillery at Marsal; 1,710 cavalry at Lunéville; 604 infantry and 311 cavalry at Toul; 824 infantry and 956 cavalry at Nancy; 956 infantry, 639 cavalry, and 139 artillery at Phalsbourg; 234 infantry and eighty-six artillery at Sarreguemines; and 2,320 infantry, 128 cavalry, and 843 artillery at Metz; see *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰ Aulard, *Recueil des actes*, 11:567.

¹¹ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 7. The six battalions were the 19th of Paris, the 3rd of the Puy-de-Dôme, the 2nd of the 43rd Regiment, the 5th of Seine-et-Oise, the 4th of the Manche, and the 2nd of the 13th Regiment.

¹² *Ibid.*

ordered “20,000 men of the Army of the Moselle to establish in front of Longwy, near Arlon” to intercept communication between “Trier and Luxembourg with Liège and Namur.”¹³ The Committee instructed the commander of the Army of the Moselle to move immediately toward the frontier south of Luxembourg, and to leave in the garrisons only the forces necessary for their normal defense. Furthermore, it exhorted the commander to “keep his troops in a continual action without tiring and acting without cease in an offensive manner.”¹⁴ On the 14th, Jourdan, en route from Limoges to the army’s headquarters at Bouzonville, received new orders to guard Kaiserslautern.¹⁵ Desbureaux’s division moved from Hornbach to occupy the town. Thus, in addition to his chief tasks of holding the Moselle and advancing against Arlon, Jourdan gained the chore of defending Kaiserslautern from the Austrians and Prussians to mitigate the Army of the Rhine’s incapacity.

Jourdan received command of the Army of the Moselle on 10 March and arrived at Bouzonville on the 19th with his mind full of the Committee’s orders and unsure of the force now under his command. If any uncertainties regarding the new commander’s merit existed among the soldiers, Hoche assuaged them in dramatic fashion on his departure: “Brave Comrades, under the new commander, whose name you have already heard, you shall annihilate the tyrants who have combined against our holy freedom.”¹⁶ According to Jean de Dieu Sault, a marshal of the First Empire who served as Lefebvre’s chief of staff in 1794, Jourdan already possessed a reputation among the troops as “a man

¹³ Aulard, *Recueil des actes*, 11:603.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11:691.

¹⁶ Hoche to the Army of the Moselle, March 1794, in D’Orano, *Hoche*, corr., 66.

known by a great devotion to his duties and by the brilliant services he already had contributed.”¹⁷ While informing Jourdan of the army’s situation, War Minister Bouchotte reminded the commander of his affection for the “popular system” and the “zeal and activity” that he must demonstrate to maintain the “national trust.”¹⁸ Accordingly, Jourdan’s first proclamation to his soldiers rang with Jacobin fire: “I remind myself constantly that I have the honor of commanding Republicans, free men. The instant approaches when we shall march bravely against the enemies of our freedom! Prepare your bayonets, they are the terror of slaves! I will lead you to the field of honor.” While promoting revolutionary enthusiasm, Jourdan also demanded that his soldiers submit to discipline, which he called “the force of armies.”¹⁹

Beyond reminding the new commander of the Damoclean sword hovering above his head, Bouchotte’s letter from 11 March cogently summarized for Jourdan the situation facing the Army of the Moselle and the Committee’s intentions. Overlooking the troops recently deducted from the army, Bouchotte incorrectly informed the commander that he led eighty battalions totaling 100,000 men with 66,000 in arms, in addition to 25,000 men dispersed in eleven garrisons between Longwy and the western side of the Vosges. To the southeast, the Army of the Rhine remained camped at Speyer, between the Vosges and the Rhine River. Bouchotte believed the Allies had recalled the Austrian troops from the Ardennes Forest to position them further north at Namur and Mons, replacing them in the Ardennes with poor quality Dutch troops. The Allied line in

¹⁷ Sout, *Mémoires*, 1:143.

¹⁸ Bouchotte to Jourdan, 11 March 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 1.

¹⁹ Jourdan to Army of the Moselle, 19 March 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 10.

Jourdan's sector stretched from north of Thionville, Sierck, and Rodemack in order to cover the frontier south of Luxembourg and Trier. Bouchotte informed Jourdan of the Committee's desire to open the campaign with an attack on Arlon by a force of 20,000 men. By assaulting Arlon, he would cut communications between Luxembourg and the Allied forces at Liège and Namur. Bouchotte trusted Jourdan to choose a "very active" general to lead the operation. In Bouchotte's dubious calculations, 40,000-50,000 men would remain to guard the posts along the northeastern frontier and menace the enemy at all points. In an almost patronizing manner, Bouchotte indicated the Committee's expectations that Jourdan pursue a decisive offensive in an energetic and intelligent fashion: "Study the land well. Conduct for yourself frequent reconnaissances; send intelligent men to examine the situation of places, the passages, bridges, posts and entrenchments, enemy dispositions, and their path of retreat."²⁰ Bouchotte also instructed Jourdan to provide the War Ministry thorough reports of all operations and developments. On the 15th, he added to Jourdan's responsibilities by forwarding the Committee's orders for the Moselle Army to guard the position of Kaiserslautern from an expected Allied assault.²¹

In demonstrating his subservience to the Committee, Jourdan executed the government's orders precisely, assuredly notifying the apprehensive representatives that he "would do everything in his power to execute your orders."²² Jourdan succeeded in gaining his friend, Ernouf, as chief of staff. The two established their friendship while

²⁰ Bouchotte to Jourdan, 11 March 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 1.

²¹ Bouchotte to Jourdan, 15 March 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 3.

²² Jourdan to Committee of Public Safety (hereafter cited as CPS), 19 March 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 5.

serving together in the Army of the North in 1793. Acting with the energy and intelligence demanded by Bouchotte, Jourdan carefully surveyed his army and designated the 20,000 men destined to assault Arlon. Although originally intending to appoint the experienced Moreaux to command the Arlon operation, Jourdan realized that the additional obligation of protecting Kaiserslautern would inevitably pull the army in two directions: one northwest towards Arlon and the other southeast towards the Vosges. As Jourdan expected to oversee the primary operation against Arlon, he entrusted the more seasoned Moreaux to command the divisions around Kaiserslautern, which would remain largely outside of Jourdan's direct control. Jourdan chose the less tested Hatry to command the Arlon force, which contained the divisions of Morlot, Jean Étienne Championnet, and Lefebvre, over which Jourdan maintained a tight hold. Jourdan ordered the army's supply commissar to gather provisions around Longwy for the operation against Arlon. While the Committee advised immediately opening the campaign, Jourdan prepared the army methodically to avoid the mistakes of haste. For the defense of Kaiserslautern, Moreaux received command of three divisions including those of Ambert and Desbureaux. Ambert occupied Kaiserslautern, while Desbureaux held a line fifteen miles south of Kaiserslautern from Horbach to Schouenbourg. Moreaux placed his own division further west between Blieskastel and Neunkirchen.²³

Although Jourdan actively complied with the Committee's orders, he could not ignore the plethora of problems hampering the Army of the Moselle. To begin, he soon realized that Bouchotte overestimated the number of men available for the upcoming

²³ Ibid.; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 8; Moreaux, *René Moreaux*, 44-45.

campaign. While the War Minister assured Jourdan 66,000 effectives, the commander found only 50,000 men available for action.²⁴ The *levée en masse* of 23 August 1793 ensured the creation of an unprecedentedly large army, but with eleven armies dispersed across France's multiple fronts each field army struggled to maintain adequate troop strength in theatre. As Jourdan reported to the Committee on 24 March, after sending reinforcements to the Rhine and Ardennes Armies, and after subtracting the troops reserved for Arlon and Kaiserslautern, only 4,000 men remained to hold the army's center between the Sarre and Moselle Rivers. Thus, Jourdan found the army's wings too extended and warned of his center's disturbing frailty.²⁵ On the 29th, the Committee ordered General Pierre Antoine Michaud of the Army of the Rhine to send 6,000 men to support Jourdan.²⁶ Two days later, Bouchotte informed Jourdan of the Committee's order and instructed him to coordinate with Michaud the particular battalions that would be transferred.²⁷ On 5 April, Jourdan assured Moreaux that the 6,000 reinforcements would soon arrive at Kaiserslautern to bolster the position. He advised the general to maneuver 2,000 men between the Sarre and Moselle Rivers to secure Thionville until the reinforcements arrived and to send a staff officer to Michaud's headquarters at Kirviller to expedite the process.²⁸ Thus, Jourdan worked to raise the manpower of the Moselle Army to an acceptable level.

²⁴ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:127.

²⁵ Jourdan to CPS, 24 March 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 14.

²⁶ Aulard, *Recueil des actes*, 12.

²⁷ Bouchotte to Jourdan, 31 March 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 16.

²⁸ Jourdan to Moreaux, 5 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no.22; Jourdan to CPS, 9 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 20.

As Jourdan's efforts to lobby the Committee for much needed reinforcements succeeded, he organized the Army of the Moselle into three groups for the expedition against Arlon and the defense of Kaiserslautern. On the right, Moreaux retained command of three divisions around Kaiserslautern totaling 14,863 infantry and 1,119 cavalry. Ambert held Kaiserslautern, Desbureaux moved his division between Landstuhl and Hombourg, and Moreaux positioned his own division near Blieskastel. In the center, General Remy Vincent commanded 4,969 infantry and 850 cavalry between Sternberg and Sierck-les-Bains, positioned on the Sarre and Moselle Rivers respectively. The left wing, designated by Jourdan to assault Arlon, consisted of three divisions numbering 21,788 infantry and 1,850 cavalry under the overall command of Hatry. Lefebvre led the advance guard between Longwy and La Malmaison. Championnet succeeded Taponier in command of his division between Crune and Tiercelet to Lefebvre's east, while Morlot moved his south between Villers-la-Chèvre and Villers-la Montagne.²⁹ Jourdan's front extended nearly 100 miles from Kaiserslautern to Longwy.

Although properly reinforced and intelligently deployed, the Army of the Moselle faced numerous administrative challenges that Jourdan worked diligently to overcome in late March and early April 1794. From the outset, he found the army poorly supplied in all areas vital to a successful campaign. Jourdan informed Commissar Archier that he received urgent demands for supplies from his generals everyday and that they described their troops as "out of condition for a campaign."³⁰ On 21 March, Jourdan complained to the Committee that the army lacked 3,000 horses necessary for the artillery park, sixty

²⁹ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 13-14.

³⁰ Jourdan to Archier, 28 March 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 12.

caissons of cartridges for the infantry, seventy caissons of shells for the six pounders, and faced a severe shortage of bayonets. He sharply requested immediate assistance from Paris.³¹ Amid the influx of new recruits from the *levée en masse*, Jourdan notified the Committee that many conscripts and volunteers arrived without arms and merely exacerbated the army's critical deficit in weapons and munitions.³² To Representative on Mission Jean-Baptiste Lacoste, Jourdan described the lack of adequate clothing and supplies, notably food, among the 20,000 men designated for the Arlon expedition. He sought the representative's immediate assistance in requisitioning supplies near Longwy.³³ To the generals at the front, Jourdan expressed regret for their distress and promised to send weapons, munitions, and supplies as soon as they arrived.³⁴ After waiting in vain for over a week for these necessities to appear at Longwy, Jourdan coordinated with Archier to requisition supplies from the Moselle department, authorizing the transfer of arms from the Metz arsenal and the National Guard battalions to the field army.³⁵

While Jourdan confronted these logistical failures, the complex process of *embrigadement* occurred in the Army of the Moselle. As noted, a variety of political and technical arguments existed in favor of amalgamation: the process by which a unified army would be created. The failure of unification in 1793 revolved around the tepidity of many generals to create demi-brigades. In response, the Convention issued a decree on

³¹ Jourdan to CPS, 21 March 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 6.

³² Jourdan to CPS, 23 March 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 7.

³³ Jourdan to Lacoste, 24 March 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 8.

³⁴ Jourdan to Morlot, 25 March 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 10; Jourdan to Moreaux, 25 March 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 11.

³⁵ Jourdan to Ernouf, 9 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 11.

10 January 1794 directing the representatives on mission to oversee the creation of demi-brigades within the field armies.³⁶ Accordingly, Representative Gillet took charge of *embrigadement* in the Army of the Moselle. Numerous obstacles impeded the process throughout the spring of 1794. Most notably, the lack of adequate arms and equipment prevented the overworked representative from filling the battalions with sufficiently equipped soldiers.³⁷ As the Arlon expedition constituted the Committee's primary objective, Gillet focused on creating demi-brigades within the divisions designated for the upcoming operation.³⁸ Resistance to *embrigadement* within the battalions also stymied Gillet's efforts. On 13 April, the representative informed the Committee of a subverted plot within several companies of the 173rd Demi-Brigade of Lefebvre's division to lead a mass desertion.³⁹ Regardless of these difficulties, *embrigadement* continued gradually and eventually proved effective. Soult later credited the demi-brigades with "providing more consistency and a better spirit to the new units."⁴⁰

The 132nd Demi-Brigade offers an interesting and unique case study of the process of *embrigadement* and divisional organization in the Army of the Moselle. Formed on 5 April 1794 amidst Jourdan's strenuous efforts to prepare the Arlon force at Longwy, the 132nd Demi-Brigade contained the 2nd Battalion of the 71st Line Regiment, the 2nd Battalion of Volunteers of the Cher, and the 5th Battalion of Volunteers of the

³⁶ Bertaud, *Army of the French Revolution*, 166.

³⁷ Jourdan to CPS, 2 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 15.

³⁸ Representative on Mission Duquesnoy to CPS, 30 March 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 392-394.

³⁹ Gillet to CPS, 13 April 1794, *Ibid.*, 398. Gillet arrested eight men for involvement in the plot, while eighteen successfully deserted with arms and bags of supplies. Seven of the prisoners received the death penalty from a military commission established to enact revolutionary justice. Gillet instructed Jourdan to emphasize to the generals the need for surveillance within the battalions.

⁴⁰ Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:43.

Meuse. The 2nd Battalion of the 71st Line emerged from the old Vivarais Regiment. Originally fighting with the Army of the North in 1792, the battalion reinforced the Army of the Moselle in 1793. The 2nd Battalion of the Cher, created on 25 August 1792, served in the Army of the Moselle through several grueling campaigns between 1792 and 1793. Notably, the battalion defended Bitche from imperial forces in November 1793. Finally, the 5th Battalion of the Meuse entered the Army of the Moselle on 12 October 1792, after the fall of Verdun and the victory at Valmy. Both the 2nd Battalion of the 71st Line and the 2nd Battalion of the Cher served in General Taponier's division in the fall 1793 campaigns against Kaiserslautern and Wissembourg. The 5th Battalion of the Meuse served through those campaigns in General Morlot's division, often working alongside the division of Taponier. According to Gaston du Martray, the 132nd Demi-Brigade's historian, "the three units were therefore not unknown by each other."⁴¹ Martray maintains the standard argument that the line battalion enhanced the demi-brigade's discipline and experience while the volunteer battalions distinguished themselves through patriotism and love for glory.⁴²

Representative Gillet placed the newly created 132nd Demi-Brigade in Championnet's division, ensuring that it would participate in the upcoming offensive against Arlon.⁴³ The demi-brigade contained 90 officers and 2,900 effectives, including older line soldiers as well as younger conscripts and volunteers. The fifty-five-year-old Seven Years War veteran, Brigadier Capella, an officer from the Vivarais Regiment with

⁴¹ Gaston du Martray, *La 132e Demi-brigade: Deux ans a l'armée de Sambre-et-Meuse, 1794-1796* (Paris: 1887), 8.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 44-46. Championnet's division also included the 94th and 181st Demi-Brigades, which were soon joined by the 178th and the 59th Demi-Brigades.

twenty years of military experience, commanded the unit.⁴⁴ The demi-brigade's other officers possessed varying degrees of military experience: some vestiges of the royal army and others newly promoted officers from the volunteer battalions.⁴⁵ Martray corroborates Soult's claim regarding the soldiers' trust of Jourdan and the army's other generals: "The generals under whom the 132nd Demi-brigade would open the campaign were already illustrious. Their valor was without equal, their patriotism was sincere, and their application to the practices of war already had gained the trust of their troops."⁴⁶ Wearing the blue uniforms designed by the National Convention and carrying three flags of the tricolor, the soldiers of the 132nd Demi-Brigade soon appeared ready to execute the Committee's proposed assault on Arlon.

In addition to the 132nd Demi-brigade, Championnet's combined-arms division included three other demi-brigades, one cavalry brigade commanded by General Gabriel Jacques Lérivint, and two artillery batteries. The other commanders organized the divisions in the Moselle Army in imitation of Championnet's division. Each division numbered around 10,000 men at full strength and possessed its own staff. These combined-arms divisions represent an evolutionary development in military organization that the French adopted during the Revolution.⁴⁷

Administrative requirements such as *embrigadement* demanded serious attention from both Jourdan and Gillet, and delayed the commencement of the Arlon expedition, which the newly appointed commander originally assured the Committee would begin on

⁴⁴ Brigadier Burchin soon replaced Capella.

⁴⁵ Martray, *132nd demi-brigade*, 8-12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁷ Steven T. Ross, "The Development of the Combat Division in Eighteenth Century French Armies," *French Historical Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring, 1965): 84-94.

30 March. After settling administrative affairs at his new headquarters at Listroff, Jourdan departed for Longwy, where he arrived late at night on 31 March. Prepared to execute the Committee's plan, Jourdan soon lamented that "despite my precise orders the objects of campaign have not yet arrived."⁴⁸ The commander reported to Paris that he would promptly begin the expedition as soon as the necessary supplies and arms arrived to prepare the force. Jourdan also attributed the delay of the campaign to persistent rains that prevented effective marching. He continued to observe the Allied forces and informed the Committee of the concentration of 15,000 Austrians at Arlon, supposedly commanded by Beaulieu.⁴⁹ To cover the Arlon expedition, Jourdan directed the forces at Kaiserslautern and between the Sarre and Moselle to harass the Allies constantly.⁵⁰ On 10 April, the War Ministry informed Jourdan that despite the poor conditions of the army, he could "spare no time in executing the operation," and advised the commander to "concert movements with the generals on your left and right." The War Ministry ordered Jourdan to manage the supply problem to the best of his ability and to seek bayonets and armaments with any measures necessary. They assured the commander that "Republican audacity will win the day!"⁵¹ Accordingly, Jourdan requested General Jean Debrun, commander of the right of the Army of the Ardennes at Carignan, to assist the Arlon force by directing a division on Virton, Saint-Léger, and Châtillon in the direction of

⁴⁸ Jourdan to CPS, 2 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 15.

⁴⁹ Jourdan to CPS, 4 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 18.

⁵⁰ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 18-19.

⁵¹ Bouchotte to Jourdan, 10 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 27.

Longwy.⁵² On the 11th, Jourdan finally informed the Committee of the rain's termination and readied Hatry's force of 20,000 men to assault the Austrians at Arlon.⁵³

The French planned to exploit the dispositions of the Allied armies near Luxembourg, Trier, and the Rhine. To guard the northeastern frontier from Luxembourg to the upper Rhine, the Allies divided their forces into four significantly dispersed groups. The Prussians fielded an army of 40,000-50,000 men at Mainz to defend the Rhine crossings. Further north, 6,015 Austrians lingered in the garrison at Trier. General Blankenstein commanded 9,000 additional troops throughout Trier, defending the ancient electorate from an expected French invasion. Most importantly, Beaulieu led seven infantry battalions and twelve cavalry squadrons – around 15,000 men in total – at Arlon. The sixty-eight-year old field marshal positioned his force one-half-mile south of the town, with his right anchored by four twelve-pound cannon, four six-pound guns, and two howitzers three miles southwest of Arlon on the Hirschberg heights. Two infantry companies occupied the small village of Heischling, stationed on advantageous terrain near the Hirschberg. Austrian light infantry roamed as far west as Vance, monitoring the enemy's whereabouts with orders to notify Beaulieu if the French threatened his right flank. Beaulieu's center held entrenched positions at Toernich, Sesselich, and Weiler, two miles directly south of Arlon, with a substantial force of infantry and artillery holding a solid ridgeline three miles in length. Austrian advance posts held Châtillon, Buvange, and Hondelange, ten miles south of Arlon. On the left, Beaulieu posted a small force of infantry on a precipice north of Barnich, on the northern bank of the Nieder

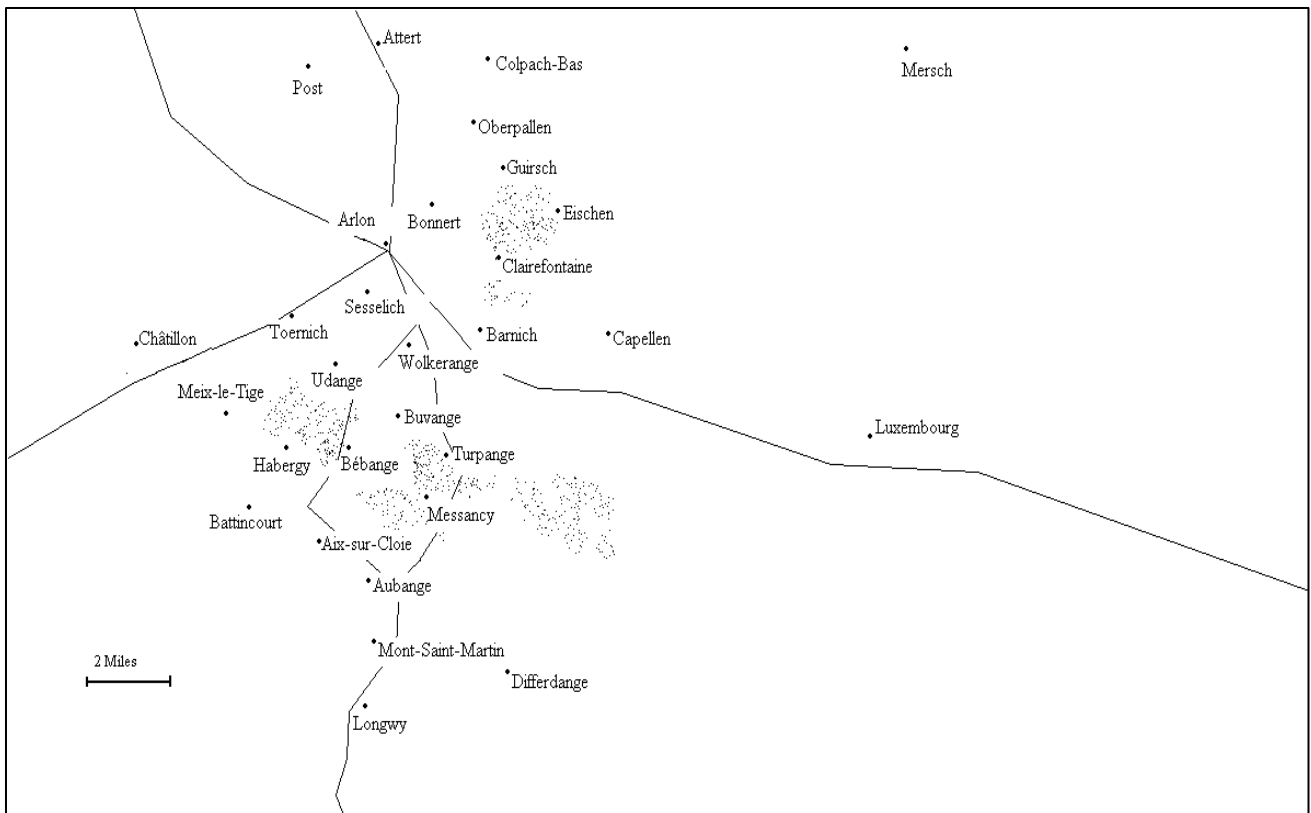
⁵² Jourdan to Debrun, 12 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 26.

⁵³ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 20.

stream.⁵⁴ According to Allied strategy, each of these four distinct forces would maintain a defensive posture. Only in the event of an advance toward the Meuse by the Army of the Moselle would the Prussian army at Mainz launch an attack from the east.⁵⁵

MAP 5

The Second Arlon Campaign, April 1794



Finally ready to initiate the expedition against Beaulieu, Jourdan sent Hatry precise instructions for his movements toward Arlon. Jourdan ordered the Arlon force, with Lefebvre's advance guard leading, to depart Longwy and follow the northern road

⁵⁴ G.F. Prat, *Histoire d'Arlon* (Arlon: 1873), 1:370; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 22.

⁵⁵ Ross, *Quest for Victory*, 76-78.

through Mont-Saint-Martin to Aubange, a distance of eight miles. After passing Aubange, the advance guard would split into two leading columns to envelop the Messancy Wood, fifteen miles south of Arlon. Morlot's division should follow the left column of the advance guard two miles northwest through Aix-sur-Cloie, where it would in turn be divided into two smaller columns: the left column to enter the village of Battincourt and the right column to pass between the Rappet Wood and Messancy. After clearing Messancy, Jourdan ordered Morlot to reunite his division and proceed five miles northwest through the Stallon Wood to Meix-le-Tige. Meanwhile, the advance guard's right column would depart Aubange and follow the Arlon road north through Messancy, approaching the villages of Bébange and Habergy and clearing the surrounding woods of any enemy forces. Jourdan instructed Championnet's division to follow Lefebvre's right column.⁵⁶ After clearing Messancy, the advance guard would reconnoiter the villages of Buvange, Udange, and Wolkrange, only five miles south of Arlon. Jourdan ordered a reserve corps of three battalions and two squadrons to follow Championnet's division to the east. Two companies of sappers should follow Morlot's division, while one advanced on the right. The artillery park would also trail Morlot. Each division contained two twelve-pound guns and one field howitzer. Jourdan instructed Hatry to commence the march at 4:00 A.M. on the 16th with the supplies and equipment proceeding along the Arlon road behind the main force. Wine would be distributed to the troops. Jourdan demanded the Supply Commissar to monitor troop movements and manage every aspect

⁵⁶ Sault's memoirs inaccurately place Championnet on the left and Morlot on the right, Sault, *Mémoires*, 1:145. Jomini makes the same error, probably by uncritically relying on Sault's inaccurate account: Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 5:116. Phipps makes no mention of this error in citing Sault and Jomini's accounts in his brief analysis of the operation. The colonel appears to have lacked access to Jourdan's memoirs and correspondence, which describe the operation in detail.

of administration, notably the supply of ambulances to care for the wounded. Jourdan and Hatry would oversee Championnet's division on the right, with Hatry exercising control over the generals under his command. Finally, Jourdan ordered "the greatest silence and the greatest order to be observed. General Hatry will hold each commander and officer personally responsible for any disorders that occur in their battalions."⁵⁷

The dispersal of Allied forces at Arlon, Trier, and Mainz effectively isolated Beaulieu's 15,000 men. Furthermore, his positions just south of Arlon prevented him from hindering the French advance from Longwy to Messancy. Nevertheless, Lefebvre's advance guard encountered difficulties advancing north from the woods around the latter village.⁵⁸ As Lefebvre's light infantry emerged from the Messancy Wood, Beaulieu's advance posts informed him of the French approach from the south. The field marshal summoned several infantry battalions and two hussar squadrons under General François Kinsky to advance southwest from Barnich with three guns and one howitzer to the east of Buvange. Concealed by woods northeast of the village, Kinsky threatened Lefebvre's right flank. Furthermore, Beaulieu ordered a second group of three battalions, one cuirassier squadron, and several pieces of field artillery commanded by Captain Alton to charge Lefebvre's front at Buvange, also well covered by woods to the north. The Austrian attack surprised the French light infantry at the church of Saint-Croix at

⁵⁷ Jourdan to Hatry, 15 April 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 28.

⁵⁸ The sources surrounding Lefebvre's combat with Austrian forces on 16 April are confusing in the extreme. Dupuis completely ignores it, preferring to analyze Jourdan's instructions to Hatry rather than actual accounts of the battle. This is especially frustrating as Dupuis claims to have accessed Beaulieu's elusive battle report at the *Kriegs Archiv* in Vienna. Jomini describes the attack on Lefebvre as occurring when the advance guard attempted to cross a bridge at Aubange on its way to Buvange; however, this makes no sense as Jomini correctly states that Lefebvre's division retreated to Messancy, which is north of Aubange. A detailed report in the *Gazette politique et litteraire de Luxembourg* from 26 April 1794 provides the only logical account of the action and from the Austrian perspective. The report is reproduced in Prat, *Histoire d'Arlon*, 1:371-372.

Buvange. After Kinsky struck Lefebvre's flank from the east, Beaulieu ordered Alton to press the attack with his infantry battalion at the double supported by artillery fire. Overwhelmed by the unexpected charge of the Austrian infantry, the French advance guard retreated south to Messancy in chaos, suffering significant casualties from the fire of Austrian gunners while crossing a bridge at the village of Turpange.⁵⁹ Night fell as the French retreated to Messancy and Beaulieu halted his attack, ordering his units to reassume their original positions. Elements of Lefebvre's division continued to venture north of the Messancy Wood and camped at Bébange.⁶⁰

On the night of 16 April, Jourdan provided Hatry further instructions, outlining the plan of attack for the following day. At 4:00 A.M., Lefebvre would form the advance guard in the positions he occupied near Bébange, south of Beaulieu's army at Buvange. Concurrently, the right column commanded by Championnet would unite north of Messancy in the advance guard's rear. Jourdan ordered Morlot's division on the left to seize Habergy with its *tirailleurs* and continue to Udange in several columns. After clearing Udange, Morlot's division should strike the Hirschberg heights between Toernich and Arlon – as Jourdan stipulated, “at the charge.”⁶¹ A reserve would remain in Morlot's rear to sustain the momentum of the attack columns. To assist Morlot's assault on the enemy's dominant position, Jourdan instructed Lefebvre to assail the enemy's center at Buvange, Wolkrange, and Sesselich with the advance guard's light troops. Lefebvre's attack should focus on capturing the church of Saint-Croix in Buvange and

⁵⁹ This is likely what Jomini confused with the “pont de Aubange.” Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 5:116-117.

⁶⁰ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁶¹ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 23.

the Sesselich Woods to the northeast. Jourdan directed Championnet to follow Lefebvre and sustain his advance. After the advance guard broke Beaulieu's center, Championnet's division would deploy in columns and charge the field marshal's weak left flank south of Barnich. Jourdan instructed Hatry to station the reserve on heights just south of Messancy, ready to execute new orders and guarding the artillery park. If unsuccessful, the three divisions would reoccupy their original positions. In the event of victory, Jourdan instructed Hatry to push Championnet's division against Beaulieu's left flank at Barnich, crossing the Nieder stream and cutting his line of retreat between Arlon and Luxembourg.⁶²

The French attack on Beaulieu's position commenced on the morning of 17 April according to Jourdan's plan. On the French left, Morlot's division advanced from Habergy and pushed enemy forces north through Udange and Toernich. Lefebvre directed the advance guard against the Austrian center at Buvange and Sesselich. After the advance guard deployed, Championnet hurried northeast and launched his division across the Nieder stream.⁶³ Morlot's attack made great progress against enemy forces northwest of Udange. Between Toernich and Arlon, nearly 3,000 Austrians commanded by the sixty-four-year old General Leopold von Welsch defended the Hirschberg Heights. According to the *Luxembourg Gazette*, the French arrived in "*grandes forces*," south of

⁶² Jourdan to Hatry, 16 April 1796, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 29; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 23-24.

⁶³ Jomini's incorrect account reads: "On the 17th, Championnet marched in several columns on Toernich; Lefebvre attacked Sesselich and [Weyler], while that of Morlot, after clearing the [Ober-Elter Wood?], struck on the Luxembourg road. With General Championnet capturing the heights of Toernich, which undermined his entire position, and with Morlot menacing his left, Beaulieu ordered the retreat." Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 5:116. Martray's study of the 132nd demi-brigade also makes the same error, Martray, *132nd demi-brigade*, 21. These examples epitomize the basic factual errors plaguing many otherwise distinguished histories of the French Revolutionary Wars.

the heights and “soon, another enemy column emerged from woods by the Châtillon Road, attacking the flank of the Hirschberg position.”⁶⁴ This “other enemy column” must have been General Jean Debrun’s forces from the Army of the Ardennes, from which Jourdan had sought assistance on 12 April.⁶⁵ The coordinated attack weakened the Austrians, although the French columns attacking the entrenched positions suffered heavily. Welsch purportedly “frantically” sought support from Beaulieu. Although meager reinforcements arrived from the Austrian center, they could not repulse the French attack on the Hirschberg; Welsch informed Beaulieu of his need to retire immediately on Arlon. Witnessing the utter collapse of his entire front, the field marshal advised Welsch to continue to Mersch: fifteen miles across the Luxembourg border!⁶⁶ Although suffering from the combat south of Arlon, Welsch’s troops remained stoic and retreated in good order.

Concurrent with Morlot’s assault at Hirschberg, Lefebvre led the advance guard against Beaulieu’s center, pounding Buvange and Sesselich with artillery fire and infantry assaults. He soon succeeded in capturing the church of Saint-Croix. As Lefebvre advanced, Championnet deployed his division to the east and assailed the enemy at the Felingen Wood. Although encountering a “vigorous resistance,” Championnet managed to capture the heights around Barnich north of the Nieder with the 94th and 181st Demi-

⁶⁴ Prat, *Histoire d’Arlon*, 1:372.

⁶⁵ Although no specific references are made to Debrun’s forces in the reports or instructions, they were the only units that could arrive from Châtillon. Furthermore, Hatry informed Jourdan on 26 April that Debrun’s forces returned from Arlon to the Army of the Ardennes, seeming to indicate that they had played a role in the battle. Hatry to Jourdan, 26 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 31. Dupuis states that Debrun did not participate in the battle, but it is unclear why.

⁶⁶ The report can be found in Prat, *Histoire d’Arlon*, 1:373.

Brigades, which purportedly charged the position enthusiastically.⁶⁷ Along with Morlot's capture of the Hirschberg, Championnet's attack on the right compromised Beaulieu's entire line. Seeking to prevent a complete rout, the field marshal smartly ordered the retreat before Championnet could close the road to Luxembourg.

Around noon on 18 April, the French entered Arlon. While a success, the attack achieved less than the Committee desired. Of the 15,000 men he commanded, Beaulieu sustained only twenty killed, ninety wounded, and eighty-two captured: casualty figures that Jourdan regretted "were not very considerable."⁶⁸ The French suffered more men killed than wounded, totaling over 200 casualties. To his credit, only one month after arriving at Bouzonville to command the Army of the Moselle, Jourdan successfully overcame tremendous administrative challenges and executed the Committee's order to take Arlon. Still, Beaulieu's army retreated to Luxembourg without suffering a decisive defeat.

If only a partial victory, the Army of the Moselle's performance demonstrates continued progress in combat effectiveness and discipline. Jourdan praised Lefebvre's advance guard in particular for its *sang-froid* in the face of Austrian artillery fire. He proudly noted that the troops "marched in truly admirable order to the music of war."⁶⁹ Championnet highlighted the role played by the 94th, 181st and, 132nd Demi- Brigades in his attack across the Nieder stream.⁷⁰ Jourdan expressed his sincere appreciation and confidence for generals of division Hatry, Lefebvre, Morlot, and Championnet, who

⁶⁷ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 46-47.

⁶⁸ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 25.

⁶⁹ Prat, *Histoire d'Arlon*, 1:366.

⁷⁰ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 47.

together formed a solid cadre of effective commanders: “They each executed with precision and intelligence the orders with which they had been entrusted.”⁷¹ While the exact tactics employed by the army remain unclear, they effectively combined firepower with the venerated shock of “cold steel.” Certainly, the rugged and wooded terrain south of Arlon favored the use of skirmishers and advances in column.

Confident in Hatry’s management of the Arlon force, Jourdan departed on 19 April to inspect the Army of the Moselle’s center and right wing between Thionville and Kaiserslautern.⁷² The commander left detailed instructions for Hatry to outline his responsibilities. Jourdan reaffirmed the need to fully secure communication between Luxembourg and Namur and ordered Hatry to keep the troops constantly active, “harassing the enemy daily with strong thrusts on different points.” Hatry should impede the Coalition’s ability to move troops into Belgium, which the Committee viewed as the decisive theatre in the upcoming campaign. Most importantly, Jourdan instructed Hatry to “search for the occasion of giving battle to the enemy, to cut his supply convoys, and to capture or burn his magazines.” As Jourdan recognized, Hatry had to accomplish his instructions with an under-equipped force. He ordered the commander to “live off the enemy’s supplies as much as possible,” and to “conserve his communication with Longwy, giving me and, when necessary, the Committee of Public Safety and the War Ministry your opinion on all enemy movements.” Finally, Jourdan demanded that Hatry “maintain order and discipline” among the troops, and “firmly oppose all kinds of

⁷¹ Jourdan to CPS, 19 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 35.

⁷² Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 26.

pillage.”⁷³ The latter order served two goals. Principally, it aimed to prevent the erosion of discipline among the poorly supplied soldiers, which often occurred during the chaos of foraging. In addition, Jourdan sought to prevent an anti-French insurgency from emerging in the surrounding peasant populations of Belgium and Luxembourg.⁷⁴

Jourdan’s fear of a peasant uprising arose from evidence of anti-French sentiment and insurgent activity throughout Luxembourg and the Rhineland. On 17 April, he ordered Captain d’Abonval to march the 1st Battalion of the Haut-Rhine and a detachment of the 18th *chasseurs à cheval* fifteen miles directly east of Longwy across the Luxembourg border to Differdange, “to upset the troops positioned there and to prevent their union with the enemy corps that was at Arlon.”⁷⁵ Arriving south of Differdange the following morning, d’Abonval found the place defended not by Austrian regulars, but by nearly 400 armed-peasants. Although the French easily dispersed the insurgents, their very presence signaled the danger of further inflaming the population. General Moreaux offered Jourdan more troubling news after his scouts discovered a large body of partisans around Pirmasens. Alarmed, Jourdan and Representative Gillet sought precise instructions from Paris regarding the government’s policy for managing relations with civilian populations.⁷⁶ Gillet perceptively articulated his position in a report to the Committee on 19 April: “When we take the war to another country, it is without doubt not to hunt the inhabitants; that would only *nationalize* the war and reduce them to the

⁷³ Jourdan to Hatry, 18 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 31. .

⁷⁴ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁷⁵ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 27.

⁷⁶ Gillet to CPS, 21 April 1794, *Ibid.*, 401-402.

extremity of joining the armies of the tyrants whom we are fighting.”⁷⁷ Fearing that depleted supplies would compel Moreaux to pillage villages in the Rhineland, Jourdan urged him to “guard against nationalizing the war; which will serve our enemies.”⁷⁸ Despite these humanitarian statements, dire necessity mandated that certain actions occur to procure supplies from conquered areas. For instance, Hatry’s force requisitioned one day’s worth of forage from seven villages between Arlon and Post after adequate levels of forage failed to arrive from Longwy. Stirred by Austrian declarations and propaganda, the local population of Luxembourg and Belgium seemed to anticipate and fear French pillaging. Prior to Hatry’s capture of Arlon, the inhabitants fled the city “with their effects.”⁷⁹ On entering the city, the tired and nearly famished French soldiers found almost every house bare of food and water.

Concerns over armed-peasants and occupation policy distracted the French from Beaulieu’s stringent efforts to reform his army at Mersch. On 26 April, over a week after entering Arlon, Hatry sent Jourdan two reports indicating his army’s movements and the enemy’s supposed whereabouts. As noted, Hatry sent a detachment north to requisition forage between Arlon and Post. Furthermore, these 4,000 men would conduct reconnaissance and inform him of the enemy’s positions north of Arlon. Hatry received reports indicating Beaulieu’s advance from Mersch and his concentration around Capellen, only twelve miles east of Arlon.⁸⁰ He also warned Jourdan of rumors that

⁷⁷ Gillet, quoted in *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁸ Jourdan to Moreaux, 9 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 24.

⁷⁹ Gillet to CPS, 19 April 1794, Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 400.

⁸⁰ Hatry to Jourdan, 26 April 1794, in *Ibid.*, 406-407.

reinforcements arrived from Trier, which he could not authenticate.⁸¹ According to Austrian reports, published on 5 May in the *Gazette politique et litteraire de Luxembourg*, Beaulieu received one battalion from Trier on 27 April, emboldening the field marshal to take revenge on the French.⁸² Rather than marching west from Capellen, Beaulieu aimed to drive the French from their positions between Arlon and Attert, specifically the village of Bonnert and the nearby Sandberg height. The field marshal directed General Welsch to march from the north against Attert and to take the Sandberg position with two battalions, “300 volunteers of Captain Alton,” and several cavalry squadrons.⁸³ Meanwhile, further south, General Johan Zoph would lead a strong column west from Oberpallen on the night of 29 April to capture Bonnert. On the far left, Captain Molcamp would march northwest through the Clairefontaine Wood to Guirsch with three companies, one piece of artillery, and one platoon of hussars. Beaulieu hoped Molcamp’s meager forces would confuse French scouts and suggest that he planned to attack from the southeast, concealing the main thrust from the north. Between the positions taken by Welsch and Zopf, three battalions, five squadrons, and the reserve artillery would hold the center at Colpach-Bas, only to advance after Welsch captured the Sandberg height.⁸⁴

Regardless of the distractions posed by the civilian population and the various logistical issues, French reconnaissance efforts detected Beaulieu’s movements from the northeast. This forced Hatry to respond to an imminent Allied attack on his dispersed

⁸¹ Hatry to Jourdan, 26 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 31.

⁸² Prat, *Histoire d’Arlon*, 377.

⁸³ The “300 volunteers of Alton” were Luxembourg peasants who volunteered to fight the French.

⁸⁴ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 29.

forces. On the evening of 28 April, he informed Jourdan of the day's uninviting developments. He reported enemy concentrations of between 4,000-5,000 men making camp at Oberpallen. In addition, Hatry noted the presence of an enemy advance guard "that could be around 1,000 men" at Colpach-Bas, along with "further advance posts of infantry and cavalry," which "advanced within one and one-half leagues of Arlon."⁸⁵ He identified two possible scenarios for Beaulieu's unexpected movements. First, the Austrian commander might be covering a larger effort to reinforce Allied forces further northwest at Namur. Alternatively, Hatry recognized the possibility that Beaulieu might be planning to attack his forces around Arlon. He believed that if the latter scenario proved correct, Beaulieu's movements indicated that he would probably strike his army's right flank. Refusing to be a prisoner of fate and abiding by Jourdan's order to seek battle with the enemy, Hatry determined to march on Beaulieu if the field marshal did not attack by 9:00 A.M. the following day. If Beaulieu attacked before then, he resolved to defend his army's positions and analyze the actual situation before ordering a retreat. Hatry sent a messenger to General Debrun, asking him to return from Carignan to lend support to the Arlon force if the need arose. In addition, he summoned General Vincent to march from the south to the sound of cannon.⁸⁶

Hatry's actions on 29 April contradicted his resolution to attack Beaulieu at 9:00 A.M. if the field marshal did not first assail the French. The commander's lack of precise information regarding the Austrian's whereabouts deflated his exuberant confidence. In his report to Jourdan on the 29th, Hatry revealed that Beaulieu's forces camped during the

⁸⁵ Hatry to Jourdan, 28 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 32.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 29.

previous night on a plateau in front of the French advance posts. At daybreak on the 29th, Hatry observed a “great number of caissons and several of the enemy troops marching and countermarching.” Rather than blindly attacking the forces presented in front of his position, at 11:00 A.M. he prudently sent two battalions through the woods lying between the positions held by the French and Austrians in order to determine if the enemy units he viewed constituted Beaulieu’s main force. The commander also advanced “a few platoons of cavalry with a half company of light artillery to support the two infantry battalions in case they made contact with enemy forces.” After the two battalions emerged from the woods west of Beaulieu’s position at Oberpallen, the Austrians retreated without resistance. Rather than pursuing, the two French battalions returned to their original positions and reported the day’s proceedings to Hatry in Arlon at 8:00 P.M. Having witnessed the enemy’s retreat, he felt assured that Beaulieu meant to cover a larger movement towards Namur, and that the field marshal did not seek to engage him. As scouting reports from the divisions of Morlot and Championnet reported no sight of enemy units, Hatry’s conviction of Beaulieu’s timidity appeared fully reassured. In addition, an Austrian deserter arrived at French headquarters on the morning of the 29th, reporting that Beaulieu ordered the evacuation of all forage and grain held by his army at Luxembourg. Hatry deduced that his opponent sought to resupply the forces concentrating around Namur, and the commander again proposed marching against Beaulieu.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Hatry to Jourdan, 29 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 33.

Believing that the enemy's southward movement constituted a mere covering effort, Hatry received the news at 3:00 A.M. on 30 April that Beaulieu's forces had just attacked Morlot's division at the Sandberg height, between Arlon and Attert, with complete shock.⁸⁸ The Austrian assault on Morlot's division commenced at 2:30 A.M. on the 30th, with Welsch's force marching south from Attert to lead the main attack. Awoken by the unexpected sound of cannon fire, Morlot soon found himself in danger of falling into enemy hands. The *Luxembourg Gazette* offered a humorous and possibly dubious description of Morlot's humiliating adventure: "General Morlot was truly surprised by that brisk attack – he mounted his horse alone and fled in costume: that of *sans-culottes!*"⁸⁹ Across the front to the southeast, Championnet's division held the Clairefontaine Wood with numerous skirmishers. The rest of his division controlled Eischen to the north. Captain Molcamp's small force, along with support from General Zoph, struck Championnet from the southeast after Welsch succeeded in capturing the Sandberg position further north.⁹⁰ While the Austrians assailed the French left and right wings, General Lefebvre's advance guard at Bonnert, positioned too far east of Hatry's main line at Arlon, found both its flanks exposed to Zoph's strong column and the Austrian reserve marching southwest from Colpach-Bas.⁹¹ According to Austrian

⁸⁸ Hatry to Jourdan, 30 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 34. Hatry's surprise at Beaulieu's attack was so complete that the commander never grasped the entire situation of his army on the 30th. His report to Jourdan indicates this by its uncharacteristic vagueness: "The enemy struck this morning at 4:00 A.M. on two points, and attacked me so vigorously that I have been forced to retire." Jourdan's reports to the Committee, which he based on Hatry's account, also lacked clarity. The commander suggested the Committee members read Gillet's more thorough report to learn the details. Jourdan to CPS, 2 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 37.

⁸⁹ Prat, *Histoire d'Arlon*, 377. Due to the lack of detail in the French reports, information on Beaulieu's attack at Arlon comes primarily from Austrian sources and French memoirs.

⁹⁰ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 48.

⁹¹ Gillet to CPS, 1 May 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 411-422.

reports, the general assault against the French front proceeded perfectly: “no point held against the approach of our musketry.”⁹² By the early afternoon, Beaulieu’s attack drove the astonished French troops nearly ten miles south of Arlon to the hills north of Buvange, overlooking the Messancy Wood one-half-mile south of the village.⁹³ Although Beaulieu brought forward his entire reserve to strike the French position, the well-placed artillery of Championnet’s division halted the Austrian attack. Along with his artillery, Championnet employed his division’s three demi-brigades and the 1st Regiment of Dragoons in safeguarding the retreat of Hatry’s shaken army to Messancy.⁹⁴

Although Hatry originally considered counterattacking from Messancy, fears of Beaulieu’s threat to his left flank, uncertainty regarding the defensive merits of his position, and the complete exhaustion of his troops compelled him to retreat twenty miles south of Arlon to Longwy during the night of 30 April. The French reached the fortress the following evening.⁹⁵ Lefebvre’s division moved eight miles southeast of Longwy to Tiercelet. Ten miles directly west of Lefebvre’s position, Morlot occupied Lexy, four miles southwest of Longwy. Finally, Championnet camped one mile south of Lexy at the woods of Cutry.⁹⁶ Gillet approved Hatry’s decision to enter Longwy, as “the troops were exhausted and they thought it more prudent to rest for several days, rather than immediately seeking a new combat.”⁹⁷ Jourdan assured the Committee of his satisfaction with Hatry’s handling of the setback. The commander noted that Beaulieu’s advance

⁹² Prat, *Histoire d’Arlon*, 378.

⁹³ Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 5:117.

⁹⁴ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 49.

⁹⁵ Hatry to Jourdan, 30 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 34.

⁹⁶ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 30-31.

⁹⁷ Gillet to CPS, 1 May 1794, in *Ibid.*, 412.

posts occupied various positions around Arlon. He soothed the Committee's frustration by guaranteeing them that Beaulieu could not hold the position against a French counterattack, especially if Jourdan received reinforcements from the Army of the Rhine and support from the Army of the Ardennes.⁹⁸

Beaulieu's retaking of Arlon caught Hatry completely off-guard, yet demonstrated the continued effectiveness of Old Regime armies against the French. Austrian reports praised the performance of their troops who "from the officers to the lowest soldier, have fought with a truly heroic courage and are covered by an immortal glory."⁹⁹ The battle cost both sides few casualties: Beaulieu suffered 200 men killed, wounded, and missing, while the French lost 196 killed along with twenty wounded, twenty-six taken prisoner, and four cannon and one caisson captured.¹⁰⁰ The French commanders and representatives sought to deflate the significance of their defeat. Gillet reported that Arlon lacked the strategic value the French originally supposed because the Austrians simply utilized an alternative line of communication from Luxembourg to the Low Countries, which bypassed Arlon and proceeded to Namur through Bastogne.¹⁰¹ Championnet noted that despite the defeat, his troops offered "the most courageous resistance" and retreated in "the best order."¹⁰² Reflecting on the event later in his life,

⁹⁸ Jourdan to CPS, 2 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 37.

⁹⁹ Prat, *Histoire d'Arlon*, 379.

¹⁰⁰ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 31.

¹⁰¹ Gillet to CPS, 1 May 1794, SHAT, B1 133.

¹⁰² Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 49.

however, Soult determined that Beaulieu's surprise attack at Arlon taught the army "a useful lesson, and we performed better in the future."¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:146.

CHAPTER 5

THE ROAD TO VICTORY

Jourdan, the Moselle Army, and the March to the Meuse, May 1794

Subsequent events confirmed the temporary significance of the Arlon setback to the general strategic situation in May 1794. Even before Beaulieu's successful attack, the Committee drafted new orders for Jourdan and the Army of the Moselle. On 27 April, it placed two major operations under Jourdan's responsibility. First, the Committee proposed an expedition to capture Trier. Second, it suggested that Jourdan direct a segment of the Moselle Army north to take Liège or Namur.¹ The Committee considered Liège the more important objective and Jourdan subsequently agreed. However, he frankly stated that without reinforcements he could not imagine successfully capturing Liège as well as defending Kaiserslautern and the stretch between the Sarre and Moselle Rivers.² Three days later, the representatives ordered 16,000 men from the Army of the Rhine to reinforce the Army of the Moselle without delay.³ The Committee ordered the commander of the Moselle Army to march – again “without delay” – all available forces on Liège and Namur. Jourdan would maintain between the Moselle and Sarre only the “forces necessary to defend the fortified places, the posts of Arlon, and Kaiserslautern.”

¹ CPS to Jourdan, 27 April 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 504. Unfortunately, the author was unable to consult the relevant cartons at the *archive de la guerre* for the Moselle Army in May 1794. Luckily, the nearly 200-page appendix of Dupuis's excellent work includes hundreds of archival materials that allow for a thorough analysis. This chapter will draw heavily from the sources printed in that magnificent work.

² Jourdan to CPS, 29 April 1794, in *Ibid.*, 506. Jourdan favored Liège. As he wrote: “I do not see the Trier expedition as an important help to the Army of the North. I will march on Liège and Namur to aid in the decisive theatre.”

³ “Copy of an order of the Committee of Public Safety,” 30 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2: PJ, no. 38.

According to the Committee, the force designated to march north into Belgium should be no less than 20,000-25,000 troops. Finally, the Committee commanded Jourdan to conduct the operation in “the greatest secrecy, covering his expedition with a deceptive maneuver against Trier or the Palatinate.”⁴

Understanding the Committee’s new orders requires a brief overview of the general strategic situation in the Low Countries and on the Rhine in May 1794. Thus far, Carnot’s policy of delivering decisive blows in the north secured few successes. From Ostend to Trier, the Allies fielded approximately 150,000 Dutch, British, Austrian, and Imperial troops.⁵ On the Allied right, Prince Frederick Augustus, Duke of York and Franz Sebastian de Croix, Graf von Clerfayt commanded 30,000 effectives from Ostend to Tournai: a line of nearly 100 miles west to east. Surrounding Le Cateau-Cambrésis, Catillon-sur-Sambre, and Landrecies, Prince Frederic-Josias von Coburg-Saalfeld led the main Allied army of 65,000 men, holding the center of the Allied line. On the left, Field Marshal Franz Wenzel, Graf von Kaunitz directed 27,000 troops between Rouveroy (twenty miles west of Longwy) and Charleroi, nearly 100 miles to the northwest. The bulk of Kaunitz’s force occupied Bettignies, with posts established twenty miles northeast at Hantes and Thuin. Kaunitz stationed 5,000 troops southeast of Charleroi to guard the territory between the Sambre and Meuse Rivers from Dinant and Saint-Gérard. As noted, Beaulieu and Blankenstein commanded approximately 20,000 troops at Arlon and Trier, respectively.⁶ The British offered the Prussian government a substantial

⁴ “Copy of an order of the Committee of Public Safety,” 30 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 39.

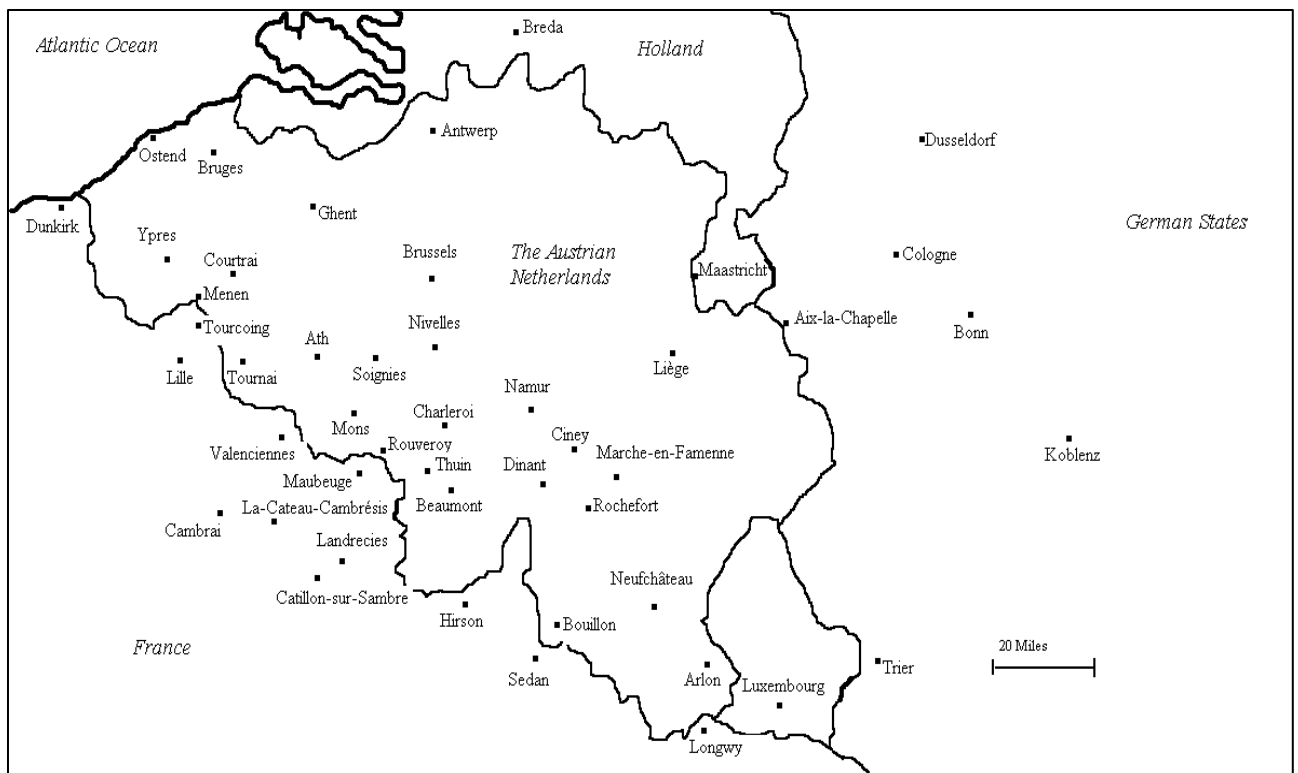
⁵ Ross, *Quest for Victory*, 76-77.

⁶ Alfred von Witzleben, *Prinz Friedrich Josias von Coburg-Saalfeld, Herzog zu Sachsen* (Berlin: 1859), 172-177.

subsidy in return for 62,000 Prussian troops to fight in Belgium, but Frederick William II flatly refused to send Prussian troops to defend Austrian territory. Thus, Prussian forces commanded by Mollendorf remained at the Rhine.⁷

MAP 6

Operations in the Low Countries, 1792-1794



In May 1794, French armies from Flanders to the western Vosges totaled approximately 194,000 men. To the east, the Army of the Moselle contained 41,000 effectives. Moreaux commanded three divisions of 14,000 troops between Neunkirchen and Kaiserslautern on the right. In the center, Vincent led 6,000 soldiers between the

⁷ Ross, *Quest for Victory*, 77.

Sarre and Moselle. Hatry directed the three divisions of the army's left wing around Longwy, numbering 21,000 men. To the west of the Army of the Moselle, the 21,000 men in General Louis Charbonnier's Army of the Ardennes held the center of the French line for thirty miles east to west from Sedan to Hirson, with headquarters at Bossus. The 132,000 men of General Jean-Charles Pichegru's Army of the North held the left of the French line, stretching 100 miles east to west from Beaumont to Bergues. On the army's right, General Jean Dominique Favreau commanded 32,000 troops in the divisions of Generals Jacques Desjardin, Eloi Laurent Despeaux, and Jacques Pierre Fromentin between Beaumont and Landrecies. General Jacques Ferrand led Generals Antoine Balland and Dubois's divisions at Guise and Abbaye de Bohéries respectively: 22,000 men total. Finally, Pichegru personally oversaw the 75,000 men in the five divisions of the left under Generals Jean Pierre Ostein, Nicolas Pierquin, Joseph Souham, Jean-Victor Moreau, and Jean-Pierre Michaud.⁸

Allied strategy for the upcoming campaign aimed to exhaust the French by forcing them to advance from their base of operations, while simultaneously attacking key fortresses in northern France. Allied commander in chief Coburg determined to assault La Cateau, fifty miles southwest of Charleroi, and then Landrecies, five miles to the southeast. From there, he would advance twenty miles west to Cambrai: the last fortress barring his approach to Paris. The French followed Carnot's policy of attacking on a few key points. Pichegru would lead the left wing of the Army of the North against Ypres and Ghent, ultimately to take Brussels by a western approach. The Army of the

⁸ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 80.

Ardennes would hold the French center. Finally, the Committee planned to mass a large force against the Allied left flank in the Low Countries, commencing with the attack on Arlon, which the Army of the Moselle executed in April.⁹

After commencing his advance on 17 April, Coburg besieged Landrecies on the 21st. From the 22nd to the 26th, the Austrians repulsed two French efforts to save the garrison, costing the French 4,000 casualties on the second attempt. Meanwhile, Pichegru began his operation further west, taking Courtrai and advancing southwest to Menen. On 30 April, the day Beaulieu counterattacked at Arlon, Coburg's army captured Landrecies. Conversely, the Allied garrison at Menen barely escaped Pichegru's clutches. By the beginning of May, neither side's objectives stood firmly accomplished. After Pichegru defeated an Austrian attempt to retake Menen and Courtrai from the west, Coburg launched a major attack from the southeast against Pichegru's left flank around Tourcoing, five miles south of Menen. From 17-18 May, the French defeated Coburg's army at Tourcoing, forcing the Allied commander to retire southeast on Tournai. Pichegru advanced to assail Tournai, but the Allies inflicted 6,500 casualties on his army. Nevertheless, Pichegru's timely success forced Coburg to channel reinforcements from Kaunitz's army between the Sambre and Meuse Rivers to Flanders. These movements corresponded to the Committee's planned attack against the Coalition's left flank from the southeast, where Jourdan carefully prepared the Army of the Moselle to spearhead the upcoming advance.¹⁰

⁹ Ross, *Quest for Victory*, 77-78, provides the most coherent summary of the opposing strategies.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 78-79. The standard works on these campaigns remain John W. Fortescue, *A History of the British Army* (London: 1906), vol. 4; M.H. Coutanceau, *La campagne de 1794 à l'armée du Nord* (Paris: 1905);

Historians of these campaigns typically devote little attention to the Army of the Moselle's experience in May 1794. According to Jomini, "the month of May passed in affairs of little importance."¹¹ The confusing reports surrounding Jourdan's march toward the Meuse River probably deflect attention, while the fighting in Flanders attracts the concentration of most military historians. Nevertheless, Jourdan's efforts to prepare the Army of the Moselle in May for the upcoming expedition proved crucial to his success in June. Phipps's classic history of the French Revolutionary Wars interprets Jourdan's actions in May 1794 as "doing more than the *Comité* intended, and was rather forcing its hand, especially with respect to the strength of the force he took with him."¹² In contrast, Jourdan docilely followed the Committee's orders throughout April and May 1794, constantly seeking its approval of his every movement.

On 27 April, the Committee congratulated Jourdan for his successful campaign against Arlon, attributing the commander's success to the "accuracy of the measures you have taken to implement the Committee's views, and the speed of their implementation."¹³ On the 29th, Jourdan informed the Committee of his desire to attack Liège and Namur, along with reinforcements from the Rhine Army. While agreeing to leave 6,000 troops to guard the crossings of the Sarre and Moselle Rivers, he informed the Committee that he needed a force stronger than 30,000 men to execute its orders successfully. Jourdan restated his want for reinforcements, but revealed to the Committee that Michaud refused the request to send reinforcements to the Army of the

Louis Jouan, *La Conquête de la Belgique, mai-juillet 1794* (Paris: 1915); Witzleben, *Coburg*; and, in English, Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, vol. 1.

¹¹ Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 5:117.

¹² Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:149.

¹³ CPS to Jourdan, 27 April 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 504.

Moselle earlier that month.¹⁴ On 3 May, Jourdan received the Committee's orders sending 16,000 troops from the Army of the Rhine to the Army of the Moselle. In addition, the Committee indicated that "the measures that you propose, by your last letter and by that of 10 [*floréal*], are in complete concordance with our orders; but they must be implemented as soon as possible. Landrecies has fallen to the enemy."¹⁵

Jourdan's previous hazards with the Committee of Public Safety while commanding the Army of the North compelled him to be especially faithful to orders after receiving command of the Army of the Moselle. He assured the Committee that "my only ambition is to contribute my best to the Republic, one and indivisible!"¹⁶ Creating cordial relationships with the representatives on mission proved a key factor in Jourdan's ability to ensure the Committee's favor. As discussed, Jourdan effectively supported Gillet's efforts to pursue *embrigadement* in March and April. Furthermore, he actively assisted Representative Ernest-François-Joseph Duquesnoy in his efforts to remedy the army's poor supply condition. In May, Jourdan discussed the army's movements with both representatives during a conference at Villers-la-Montagne, southeast of Longwy. While the Committee urged Jourdan to commence the movement north "without delay," Jourdan convinced Gillet and Duquesnoy of the army's dire need for supplies and reorganization before launching a hasty attack.¹⁷ The representatives informed the Committee of their agreement with Jourdan to delay a renewed attack on

¹⁴ Jourdan to CPS, 29 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 36.

¹⁵ CPS to Jourdan, 3 May 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 507.

¹⁶ Jourdan to CPS, 29 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 36.

¹⁷ Jourdan to CPS, 4 May 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 508.

Arlon, which would open the next campaign, proposing to begin the march fifteen days later.¹⁸

After postponing the upcoming expedition by at least fifteen days, Gillet and Duquesnoy posed a vital question to the Committee: “What should we do in the meantime?” As noted, a surplus of problems continued to plague the Army of the Moselle, even after Jourdan’s strenuous efforts in March and April to revitalize the army. The representatives enthusiastically desired to “occupy enemy territory and facilitate the operations of the Army of the North,” but they asked the Committee to consider the “inconveniences of a partial movement.” Beaulieu’s army remained at Arlon, and Hatry’s forces could not easily retake the city without reinforcements. Gillet and Duquesnoy favored holding a defensive position south of Arlon at Messancy, which posed challenges to an attacking army. They also proposed a diversionary attack in the direction of Trier, aiming to draw the enemy’s attention away from the Luxembourg border. In addition, the representatives sought concrete directions from the Committee regarding “a general rule of conduct in the enemy country.” As in earlier statements, they feared “prolonging the war by forcing the inhabitants to revolt because of their vexations.” The representatives advised the Committee to reform the supply commissaries and to select competent officials to oversee the raising of forage and other supplies. Finally, they noted the arrival of several recruits, all of whom “come without

¹⁸ Gillet and Duquesnoy to CPS, 4 May 1794, SHAT, B1 133.

arms: if there exist any in the arsenals, we ask that you give orders to send them to us in the field, if possible, at least 6,000 muskets.”¹⁹

Basic issues of organization continued to confound Jourdan and the representatives’ efforts to prepare the Army of the Moselle for the expedition north. Spurred to action by the Committee in light of the loss of Landrecies, Jourdan and the representatives struggled to organize the army for the assault on the Sambre.²⁰ The commanders maintained the army’s standard organization in six divisions and one smaller division, with three divisions between Pirmasens and Kaiserslautern, three divisions holding the army’s left around Longwy, and the smaller division protecting the force’s center between the Sarre and Moselle Rivers. Supply Commissar Archier counted 95,000 effectives including the troops stationed in garrisons.²¹

Jourdan received the task of assimilating the 16,000 troops arriving from the Army of the Rhine into the main body. He informed the Committee on 3 May that he would “use the 16,000 men from the Army of the Rhine to guard Kaiserslautern, cover Zweibrücken, and guard communication with Sarrelibre and Sarrebrücken;” Jourdan directed Moreaux to command these forces and those around Thionville as “he has an exact knowledge of the terrain.”²² On the 14th, Jourdan noted the arrival of the first units from the Army of the Rhine and received notification that the Committee also ordered General Michaud to send him a dragoon regiment.²³ These reinforcements provided the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ CPS to Jourdan, 3 May 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 507.

²¹ “Situation of the Army of the Moselle on 20 *floréal* Year Two,” in Ibid., 510-511.

²² Jourdan to CPS, 3 May 1794, in Ibid., 507.

²³ Jourdan to CPS, 14 May 1794, in Ibid., 522.

necessary strength to enable Jourdan to execute his orders to march north into the Low Countries and defend the Sarre River.

While Jourdan assigned Moreaux command of the units remaining south and east of Thionville, he diligently prepared the divisions on the army's left for the expedition to Namur and Liège. As noted, the need to organize these forces delayed the commencement of the campaign.²⁴ On 14 May, Jourdan agreed to order the army to depart Longwy within the coming week, as he "hoped to have united by the end of the month [of *floréal*] an army of over 42,000 men."²⁵ Jourdan created an additional division from the reinforcements he received from the Army of the Rhine, which he placed under Hatry's command. Three days later, Jourdan transferred his headquarters south to Thionville to personally oversee the organization of the force destined to advance to the Meuse.²⁶

Embrigadement continued to demand the attention of the army's representatives on mission.²⁷ Gillet found the process of brigading particularly challenging in May because of the army's continued movements. Of the sixty-three battalions Gillet reviewed from March to May, he assigned only fifty-one to demi-brigades – most of which went to the Army of the Ardennes. In addition to the continual movements of the army, Gillet blamed his sluggish progress on the disorder reigning in many battalions. To expedite the operation, he ordered the War Commissars to send all the quartermaster registers and other records existing in each battalion to his headquarters at Morfontaine. After

²⁴ Jourdan to CPS, 4 May 1794, in *Ibid.*, 508.

²⁵ Jourdan to CPS, 14 May 1794, in *Ibid.*, 522.

²⁶ Jourdan to CPS, 16 May 1794, in *Ibid.*, 523.

²⁷ On 14 May, Duquesnoy notified the Committee that his colleague "Gillet is hard at work on *embrigadement*." Duquesnoy to CPS, 14 May 1794, in *Ibid.*, 521.

receiving the registers, he would process new reports on each battalion. In addition, he advised the War Ministry to enforce the Regulations of 1791 in each infantry battalion and held the War Commissars personally responsible for the execution of his orders. Gillet complained of the lack of line battalions to supplement the volunteer-conscript battalions in each demi-brigade. Most significantly, he bemoaned the continued application of seniority in officer promotion. In response, he suggested the use of officer qualifying exams to ensure that only those with merit achieved higher rank.²⁸ On 13 May, the representatives of the Moselle and Rhine Armies ordered that each demi-brigade commander send a staff officer to Morfontaine to report on “the condition of each of their three battalions’ depots and that they concentrate their battalions in the same place.”²⁹ Regardless of these measures, Gillet expressed his utter frustration with the slowness of the operation to his colleague with the Army of the Rhine on the 17th: “the campaign opens in less than three days; I can only hope to be finished by the end of the campaign.”³⁰

In addition to organization, Jourdan and the representatives on mission continued to promote training and discipline within the Army of the Moselle. On 18 May, he instructed Chief of Staff Ernouf to order the “men who are out of condition for beginning a campaign...those who are incapable of coming to arms in a moment and those who cannot yet reload their weapons,” be sent from their battalions to depots in the rear.³¹ Jourdan instructed the demi-brigade commanders to “give precise orders to those

²⁸ Gillet to Rougement, 14 May 1794, SHAT, B1 133.

²⁹ “Order of 24 to 25 *floréal* (13 May),” in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 520.

³⁰ Gillet to Rougement, 17 May 1794, SHAT, B1 133.

³¹ Jourdan to Ernouf, 18 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 41.

occupying the depots” in matters of instruction, armaments, and clothing, “so that in twenty days they return more powerful to their respective units.”³² The representatives on mission also intervened to promote discipline and order within the ranks. On 9 May, Duquesnoy issued an order that starkly defined the new terms of obedience expected from the soldiers at all levels: “The time of impunity has passed: a severe and republican discipline will be established in the army; traitors and cowards will tremble, chaste justice will be prepared; deathblow to the guilty.”³³

As Duquesnoy’s harsh declaration indicated, the authorities expected discipline from the officers as well as the soldiers. Representatives Saint-Just and Le Bas, who worked alongside French forces nearing the Sambre River, commanded “the generals of corps to punctually execute the orders they receive from the commanding general. Representatives of the people will punish with grand severity all acts of insubordination on the part of officers. Discipline will be sustained in the army by the force of law.”³⁴ On 29 May, Gillet and Duquesnoy warned the officers of the Army of the Moselle to remain at their posts unless granted leave of absence, especially during marches: “the general commanding a division must be at the head of his division, the generals commanding the brigades must be at the head of their respective brigades and the *chefs de corps* at the head of their respective corps.”³⁵

The representatives on mission enacted military justice in order to maintain discipline in the field armies. In May, the Commission on the Organization and

³² Ibid.

³³ “Order of 9 May 1794,” in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 513.

³⁴ “Order of Representatives of the People with Army of the North, Le Bas and Saint-Just, dated 19 *floréal*, Year Two of the Republic one and indivisible,” in Ibid., 519.

³⁵ “General order of 29 May 1794,” in Ibid., 531.

Movement of the Armies informed Representatives Gillet and Duquesnoy of the inadequate number of police officers and military lawyers necessary to sustain the activity of the criminal and military tribunals assigned to the Republic's armies. On the 18th, the Committee ordered the representatives to nominate citizens to serve as provisional judges and exercise authority over the military tribunals with the Army of the Moselle.³⁶ Five days earlier, Gillet authorized the arrest of all those found guilty of leaving the ranks without permission until "the enemies are driven from *la patrie*."³⁷ On the 14th, Duquesnoy visited the advance guard and noted that while some soldiers required punishment, "the soldiers and officers applauded these acts of vigor" on the part of the representatives.³⁸ During the army's advance towards Liège later in May, Gillet issued orders to each company demanding the soldiers to "respect the property and persons of the people of Liège," warning that "those who do not will be deemed counter-revolutionary and punished by the military commission."³⁹

A few extant examples provide insight into the crimes most feared by the representatives on mission and the punishment inflicted on the guilty. Two soldiers from the 12th Regiment of Dragoons found guilty of attempting to desert to the enemy with arms and supplies received "two years of detention" and were declared "incapable of serving in the Republic's armies." A sous-lieutenant named Dominique Tricotre of the 4th Regiment of Dragoons received a harsh punishment of "ten years in irons" for leaving his regiment without permission. A gunner of the 5th Battalion of the Haut-Rhine named

³⁶ Order of the CPS 18 May 1794," in *Ibid.*, 523.

³⁷ Gillet to CPS, 13 May 1794, SHAT, B1 133.

³⁸ Duquesnoy to CPS, 14 May 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 521.

³⁹ "General order of 27 May 1794," in *Ibid.*, 530.

Joseph Henri collected the same sentence for stealing 412 francs from a P. Chrétien of the Neuville-les-Dorengt commune. After discovering that Adrien Dean of the 24th Company of Light Artillery “had been absent from his corps between 3 September 1793 and 3 *germinal* (3 March 1794)” the tribunal sentenced him to one year of detention. An unfortunate trumpeter of the same company received a reduced sentence of six months detention for failing to sound the call according to his chief’s orders: the tribunal deemed his infraction “excusable seeing the poor state of his trumpet.”⁴⁰

Simultaneous with their efforts to promote discipline and implement military justice, Jourdan and the representatives on mission confronted the continuing problems of supply. As War Commissar Archier noted, the increasing size of the army – especially after the 16,000 reinforcements from the Army of the Rhine arrived – exacerbated the persistent lack of supplies. Failing to overcome the supply deficit by normal means, the representatives resorted to making requisitions within France as well as from the occupied territories.⁴¹ Despite the requisitions, logistical shortcomings remained serious. On 19 May, Gillet informed the Committee that of 98,000 quintals of wheat requisitioned from the Haute-Marne department, only 29,141 arrived. The representative ordered the departmental administrators to furnish the full quota over a twenty-day period or face “the pain of military execution.”⁴² Other than food supplies, the army lacked arms, uniforms, and other vital equipment. On 6 May, Gillet and Duquesnoy requested that the Committee send muskets. Three days later, the representatives sought 10,000 bayonets.

⁴⁰ “Extract of judgments giving by the military tribunal of the arrondissement of the quarter general of the Army of the North,” in *Ibid.*, 518.

⁴¹ “Situation of the Army of the Moselle on 20 *floréal* Year Two (9 May 1794) of the French Republic,” in *Ibid.*, 511.

⁴² Gillet to CPS, 19 May 1794, SHAT, B1 133.

The representatives ordered the Metz district placed under requisition until providing 3,000 hats.⁴³ The Revolution's redistributionist social policies influenced the process of requisitioning. For instance, Duquesnoy ordered that three-quarters of all requisitions fall on "the six highest contributors of each commune and the other quarter on the rest of the inhabitants with regards to their means."⁴⁴ In addition to requisitions, the Committee encouraged Jourdan to capture the enemy's magazines throughout eastern and southern Belgium.⁴⁵ Though imperfect, the efforts of Jourdan, the representatives on mission, and the supply commissars enabled the Moselle Army to march on Namur and Liège in May.

In the midst of these administrative challenges, Jourdan prepared to open the campaign against Allied forces to the north between the Sambre and Meuse Rivers. The Committee informed him on 6 May that Beaulieu's surprise attack on Arlon provided an unexpected benefit: by temporarily distracting Beaulieu's attention from the Army of the Ardennes, that army could march north against Charleroi. The Committee urged Jourdan to commence the proposed operation and to march on Givet, fifty miles northwest of Arlon. As further motivation, it informed Jourdan of the success of French armies in the Midi, where the Army of Italy and the Army of the Pyrenees defeated Coalition forces on their respective fronts. The members of the Committee expressed their satisfaction at Jourdan's decision to march on Namur, calling him a "general on whom we can surely count."⁴⁶ On 14 May, Jourdan resolved to move his force within the next five days, confident in his army's ability to defeat "the slaves who are before me." He expressed

⁴³ Gillet and Duquesnoy to CPS, 9 May 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 505.

⁴⁴ Duquesnoy to CPS, 29 May 1794, in *Ibid.*, 520.

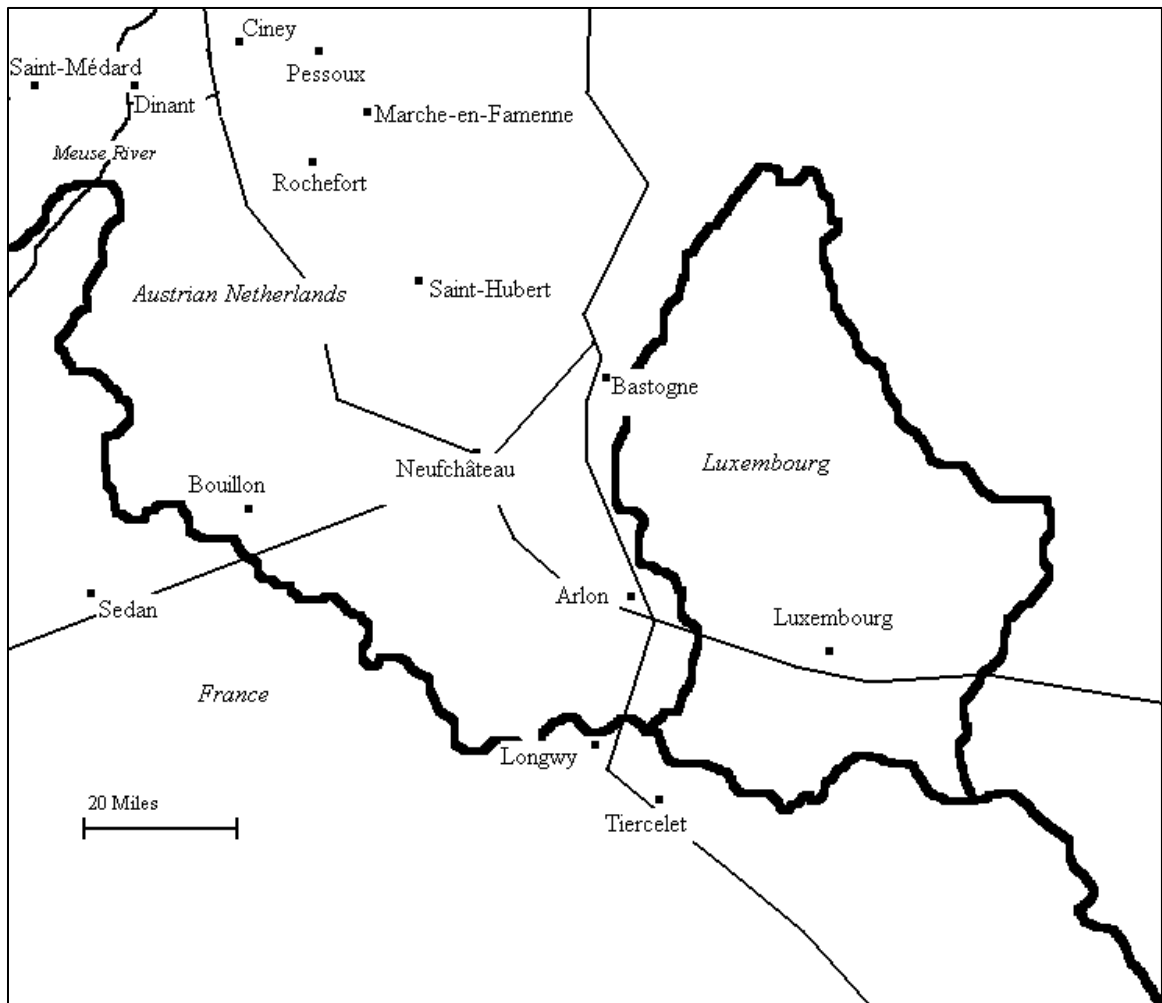
⁴⁵ Jourdan to CPS, 27 April 1794, SHAT, M 1 608, 2:PJ, no. 32.

⁴⁶ CPS to Jourdan, 6 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, no. 40.

his desire to emulate the armies in the Midi, promising to “aid with all my power the success of the armies of the North and Ardennes” and to “pursue the enemy so that the Army of the Moselle will merit the praise of the nation.”⁴⁷

MAP 7

The March to the Meuse, May-June 1794



⁴⁷ Jourdan to CPS, 14 May 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 522.

On 19 April, Jourdan readied Lefebvre's division to advance against Arlon the following day. Beaulieu took advantage of the lull provided by the French commander's efforts to organize the Army of the Moselle to strike a detachment of the Army of the Ardennes forty-five miles northwest at Bouillon. General Debrun informed Jourdan of his failure to defend the position against Beaulieu's surprise attack on the 19th. Jourdan exploited Beaulieu's bold attack by commencing the advance on Arlon the following morning. On 20 April, he reported to the Committee that Lefebvre's advance guard "entered Arlon today without difficulty."⁴⁸ The next day, Jourdan received reports indicating that Debrun's small army repulsed Beaulieu from Bouillon, forcing the field marshal to retire twenty miles east to Neufchâteau.⁴⁹ The Committee originally intended for Jourdan to march directly north to Bastogne after retaking Arlon. However, Jourdan feared that the 15,000 Austrian and 11,000 Dutch troops commanded by Beaulieu at Neufchâteau could easily strike his line of communication from the west if he advanced to Bastogne. Thus, he requested the Committee's permission to march along the road running northwest from Arlon to Neufchâteau, bolstering his argument by indicating Gillet and Duquesnoy's approval of it.⁵⁰ The Committee approved Jourdan's revised plan and ordered him to leave a force at Arlon to guard the position. Once again, they motivated the commander with the reminder that "the Army of the North and the Army of the Ardennes need your help in striking the decisive blow."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Jourdan to CPS, 21 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 42.

⁴⁹ Debrun to Jourdan, 22 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 46.

⁵⁰ Jourdan to CPS, 21 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 42.

⁵¹ CPS to Jourdan, 20 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 43. Apparently, Gillet and Duquesnoy sent a request for the revised plan to the Committee before 21 May because the Committee wrote their response to Jourdan before he drafted his request.

Over the next three days, Jourdan's expeditionary force advanced northeast to Neufchâteau, with Lefebvre's advance guard leading the way. On the 24th, Jourdan ordered it to assail Beaulieu's strongly arrayed force at Neufchâteau. Beaulieu placed a unit of cavalry and several infantry battalions one mile south of the city. The 1st Regiment of Chasseurs and a detachment of the 3rd Hussars charged Beaulieu's position and quickly repelled the field marshal's cavalry. The French suffered only five men killed and fifteen wounded while capturing seventy prisoners.⁵² Jourdan lacked information on Beaulieu's line of retreat as he failed to find spies, but he believed the field marshal withdrew toward Luxembourg. Regardless, he planned to march north the following day to Saint-Hubert and then Rochefort, in the direction of Dinant on the Meuse River.⁵³

Confident from the recent success, the representatives informed the Committee that "the challenge is not victory, but to compel the slaves to stand and fight against free men."⁵⁴ This certainty in the superiority of the amateur citizen-soldier over the professional soldier of the Old Regime repeatedly arises in the reports of the representatives on mission and the generals, including Jourdan. Of course, Beaulieu's success at Arlon on 30 April demonstrated the continued combat effectiveness of the Old Regime slave-soldier. As the French should have learned, they continued to overestimate their own superiority on the battlefield to their detriment.

⁵² Gillet and Duquesnoy to CPS, 24 May 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 528.

⁵³ Jourdan to CPS, 24 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no.48.

⁵⁴ Gillet and Duquesnoy to CPS, 24 May 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 528.

Events southwest of Longwy demonstrated this point even further. While Jourdan advanced toward Dinant, Moreaux retained command of the Thionville-Kaiserslautern sector. On the 23rd, the day before the French captured Neufchâteau, the formerly inactive Prussians surprised one of Moreaux's divisions – Ambert's – at Kaiserslautern. While French troops at Hombourg resisted the enemy onslaught, Ambert found his division attacked and outnumbered by four Prussian columns totaling approximately 25,000 men. After four hours of combat and “despite the bravery of the intrepid troops,” Ambert could not prevent the enemy from taking the position.⁵⁵ Even worse, the Prussians captured nearly all of the division's artillery after it hastily retreated southwest to Pirmasens.⁵⁶

While Moreaux struggled to maintain the southern front, Jourdan continued the advance north. The Committee's original orders for Jourdan to march toward the Meuse River failed to specify the main objective beyond the vague goal of striking the Coalition's left flank in the Low Countries. Thus, on 24 May, Jourdan asked the Committee for further instruction: “Is your intention for me to attack Namur or to remain on the right bank of the Meuse? In either case, I will strike Dinant next.”⁵⁷ After entering Saint-Hubert on the 25th, the French captured Rochefort, twenty miles southeast of Dinant, the following day. Jourdan then directed the army ten miles northeast toward Marche-en-Famenne, where he believed Beaulieu now stood. After ordering Hatry to occupy Givet, Jourdan instructed him to send one brigade of 6,000 troops east to

⁵⁵ Moreaux to Jourdan, 25 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 53.

⁵⁶ Ambert to Moreaux, 23 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 54.

⁵⁷ Jourdan to CPS, 24 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 49.

Tiercelet as a covering force for Longwy. With Givet secure, the commander ordered Hatry to march north to join his force's main body.⁵⁸ On the 27th, Jourdan reported to the Committee that the enemy refused to fight at Marche-en-Famenne. The following day, he determined to forward the advance guard ten miles northwest to Ciney while his main body remained at Marche-en-Famenne. He informed the Committee that Hatry left Givet that morning to join him east of Dinant. Unfortunately for the troops, the necessary "food has not arrived, the bread is lacking, providing a pretext for the soldiers to pillage the property of the local inhabitants."⁵⁹ He advised that Givet send provisions to counteract the harmful effects of pillage.⁶⁰

In response to Jourdan's 24 May inquiries, the Committee issued detailed yet slightly confusing instructions on the 27th. It commanded Jourdan to march to the Brabant region and capture Brussels. Rather than taking Namur immediately, the Committee urged him to attack Dinant on the Meuse River and then to assail Charleroi on the northern bank of the Sambre River. Fearing Beaulieu's threat from the east, it advised the commander to guard the left bank of the Meuse as far as Namur with a strong detachment. After taking Charleroi, the Committee ordered him to besiege Namur with a large force, while another group of his army formed a *corps d'observation* between the French siege force and an enemy army that might try to save the Namur garrison. If confronted by an equal or stronger enemy, the Committee advised Jourdan to secure his retreat southwest to the territory between the Sambre and Meuse Rivers. The principle

⁵⁸ Jourdan to Hatry, 26 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 50.

⁵⁹ Jourdan to CPS, 27 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 51.

⁶⁰ Jourdan to CPS, 30 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2: PJ, no. 52.

goal remained securing the right flank of the Army of the Ardennes while it besieged Charleroi. Nonetheless, the Committee instructed Jourdan to use his *corps d'observation* to constantly menace the enemy on all points. It clarified that Jourdan should leave as small a force as possible to cover the siege of Namur, while preserving the bulk of his force for the *corps d'observation*. Only by engaging the enemy on every occasion could Jourdan end the war. According to the Committee, if the enemy refused to advance, Jourdan should strike rapidly to the northwest and assist Charbonnier and Pichegru in gaining a decisive battle.⁶¹

Anticipating the Committee's orders to capture Dinant, Jourdan moved the Army of the Moselle's advance guard five miles west from Ciney to assault the city on 28 May. The Committee's letter of the 27th authorizing the movement to Dinant arrived at his headquarters at Marche-en-Famenne on the evening of the 29th. On the morning of the 30th, Lefebvre advanced his division directly east of Dinant.⁶² Beaulieu positioned his main force two miles southeast of Namur at Andoi and left only a small detachment of infantry and cavalry guarding the heights on the right bank of the Meuse east of Dinant. While the French interpreted Beaulieu's precipitous retreat north as a humiliating admission of his army's weakness, the field marshal sought to conserve communication with Austrian forces in Flanders by retiring on Namur. From Namur, he could continue harassing the French between the Sambre and Meuse Rivers while threatening the right flank of any army that crossed to the north bank of the Sambre to attack Charleroi.

⁶¹ CPS to Jourdan, 27 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 55.

⁶² Jourdan to CPS, 30 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 52.

After daybreak on 30 May, Lefebvre's division assaulted Dinant from the east and easily drove Beaulieu's small detachment from a series of fortified heights along the right bank of the Meuse. The French overran the position and inflicted substantial casualties on the Austrians. In addition to the enemy killed and wounded, the French captured between thirty-four and sixty prisoners and one howitzer. While the Austrians retreated to the left bank of the Meuse and entered the village of Saint-Médard, the French advance guard occupied the heights at Dinant and unleashed fire from a light artillery battery.⁶³ The divisions of Morlot and Championnet lingered ten miles east of Dinant at Pessoux to guard Lefebvre's rear from an attack by Beaulieu at Namur. Hatry continued his march north from Givet to unite with Jourdan at Dinant the following day.⁶⁴

Jourdan and the representatives on mission continued the assault on the Austrian detachment at Saint-Médard on 31 May while the rest of the army advanced to Dinant. Eager to conform to the Committee's instructions, Jourdan informed the representatives that he intended to strike Charleroi after he drove the enemy from Saint-Médard and moved his entire army to the left bank of the Meuse. The commander also notified the Committee that he established contact with Charbonnier and Desjardins and desired to assist them in their operations on the Sambre. Jourdan informed Pichegru of the Army of the North, to whom he remained subordinated, that he looked forward to working with him. He also informed Representatives on Mission Le Bas and Saint-Just of his arrival at the Meuse and offered his assistance.⁶⁵ Gillet indicated his support for Jourdan's plans,

⁶³ Jourdan to CPS, 30 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 52; Gillet to CPS, 30 May 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 534.

⁶⁴ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁶⁵ Jourdan to CPS, 30 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 52.

noting that Lefebvre would attack Saint-Médard while the rest of the army entered Dinant. In addition, Gillet mentioned hearing a strong cannonade from the west, which he correctly assumed announced an assault on Charleroi by the Army of the Ardennes.⁶⁶

While the Army of the Ardennes opened its attack on the fortress, Lefebvre's divisions attacked two groups of Austrian light infantry west of Dinant on the heights of Saint-Médard. Due to the Austrian failure to destroy the bridge over the Meuse while retreating from Dinant the previous day, Lefebvre's skirmishers easily crossed the river and engaged in an obstinate fusillade with the Austrians that lasted until nightfall. While Morlot and Championnet's divisions advanced to Dinant, a detachment of fifty Austrian hussars threatened Championnet's rear. The 1st Dragoon Regiment from Championnet's division charged the hussars and forced them to retreat. Hatry's division reached Dinant at 4:00 P.M. and crossed the Meuse to join the main body.⁶⁷ With Hatry's arrival, Jourdan commanded approximately 43,000 men between the Sambre and Meuse Rivers.

In February 1794, Carnot's notes on the system of war for the upcoming year defined a decisive campaign as one that impeded the enemy's ability to continue fighting the following year. Forcing the enemy to fight battles in disadvantageous circumstances remained the Committee's goal from March to June 1794. Rather than focusing on one decisive victory, Carnot realized that multiple battles – and sieges – would have to occur to achieve the crippling effect he desired. Although Carnot employed the rhetoric of rapid offensives to motivate the commanders, his specific orders outlined more methodical and gradual campaigns. From March to May, Jourdan prepared the Army of

⁶⁶ Gillet to CPS, 30 May 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 535.

⁶⁷ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

the Moselle to achieve victory in the decisive theatre in the Low Countries: the area between the Sambre and Meuse Rivers. Jourdan faced a number of administrative obstacles after assuming command of the army on 19 March. By working diligently with the representatives on mission and the supply commissars, he partially overcame these problems. While living conditions became tolerable, major logistical problems remained prevalent. Nonetheless, Jourdan focused his efforts on creating a better organized, better trained, and more disciplined combat force.

As the upcoming campaign demonstrates, his efforts bore fruit. Yet, the French never possessed the inherent superiority over Old Regime armies portrayed by their hubristic rhetoric. In reality, a high degree of parity existed between the combatants. The key to victory was not the application of revolutionary ideology on the battlefield, but the adherence to traditional military virtues within the context of a revolutionary military system.

CHAPTER 6

ELUSIVE VICTORY

The First Battle of Fleurus, 16 June 1794

As the French crossed the Meuse, problems of supply and maladministration followed. Describing his division's march from Arlon to Dinant, Championnet wrote: "Misery followed the army; the rapid march that had been conducted did not allow sufficient time for the supply convoys to arrive, and we lacked bread for three days."¹ According to the journal of Isaac Dupuy, a volunteer of 1792 serving in the 13th Light Demi-Brigade in Lefebvre's division: "since the day of departure [from Longwy], the soldiers march from nine in the morning to ten at night. Often we march six leagues without encountering one house, or fields, or gardens, or plows – nothing but the woods, of heaths and heathers. Our fatigue is inconceivable."² "The bread is always lacking," wrote Gillet to his colleague Duquesnoy on 1 June, "yesterday, five men of the 34th Demi-Brigade died from starvation and, if we do not receive prompt assistance, the army will perish from lack of resources."³ Declaring his regret for the suffering, Gillet pledged to "do my best to procure supplies for you and I will not rest until you are free from need."⁴ The representative noted the paucity of resources in the land between the Sambre and Meuse Rivers: the Austrians emptied their magazines while retreating to the northern bank of the Sambre. On 30 May, Gillet managed to procure enough supplies to distribute

¹ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 50.

² P. Boissonnade, *Histoire des Volontaires de la Charente pendant la Revolution* (Paris: 1890), 352.

³ Gillet to Duquesnoy, 1 June 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 536.

⁴ "Gillet to the Brave Soldiers of the Army of the Moselle," 1 June 1794, in *Ibid.*, 537.

“four ounces of rice and two rations of meat.”⁵ Three days later, the representative ordered the town of Dinant to contribute 600,000 *livres* to the French Republic “within twenty-four hours under pain of military execution.”⁶ Despite these efforts, Jourdan made the Committee aware of the supply administration’s corrosive effect on his army. “We are in great distress,” wrote the commander, “I hope to prevent the enemy from interfering with the siege [of Charleroi]...but to act, we must have bread for the troops, they suffer cruelly. The administration provides nothing for their needs and inertia continues. My movement could be more rapid if my supplies were in proper measure.”⁷

Meanwhile, driven by Representatives on Mission Le Bas and Saint-Just, the commanders of the Army of the North and the Army of the Ardennes launched an attack across the Sambre in late May. Saint-Just defined the commanders’ options plainly: “you must soon provide a victory to the Republic: choose between a siege or a battle.”⁸ Against the desires of the majority of the generals, Desjardins and Charbonnier led their polyglot force of the Ardennes Army and the Army of the North’s right wing north across the Sambre at Charleroi on 29 May, forcing the small Austrian covering force to retire.⁹ The following day, Colonel Armand Samuel de Marescot reconnoitered Charleroi to determine the condition of the fortress. Estimating the garrison to be 3,000 men, Marescot noted Charleroi’s strengths: well armed with artillery, defended by exterior works in exposed places, numerous palisades and barriers, and armed ramparts around

⁵ Ibid., 538.

⁶ Gillet, 2 June 1794, SHAT, B1 33. Gillet decreed that three quarters of the contribution would fall on the twelve wealthiest inhabitants of the city.

⁷ Jourdan to CPS, 1 June 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 56.

⁸ Gross, *Saint-Just*, 449.

⁹ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:145-147.

the entire circumference. While Charbonnier and Desjardins foolishly wanted to take the fortress by *coup de main*, Marescot argued in favor of a formal siege. On 31 May, Marescot commenced the bombardment from two batteries: one placed on the right bank of the Sambre and the other on the left.¹⁰ From 1-2 June, the French bombarded Charleroi, setting fire to several houses in the city. The Charleroi garrison responded with equally effective fire. On 1 June, the Commandant of Charleroi, Colonel Reynac, declared his intention to defend the place “to the last extremity.”¹¹ The following day, Marescot suspended siege operations after receiving news of the enemy’s approach from the northwest.

On 1 June, Jourdan learned of the Army of the Ardennes’ assault on Charleroi and determined to participate despite the poor condition of his army. He informed the Committee of his intention to clear the area between the Sambre and the Meuse of Allied forces. Jourdan hoped to cross the Sambre with the army to facilitate the capture of Charleroi.¹² After Lefebvre attacked Saint-Médard on the 1st, Jourdan travelled approximately thirty miles ahead of his army to assist Charbonnier and Desjardins at Marchienne-au-Pont, one of the key crossing points on the Sambre one mile west of Charleroi. Leaving 6,000 men to guard Dinant and the supply route to Givet, Lefebvre and Hatry advanced their divisions fifteen miles northwest to Saint-Gérard. Championnet and Morlot proceeded ten miles directly west of Dinant to Stave with their respective

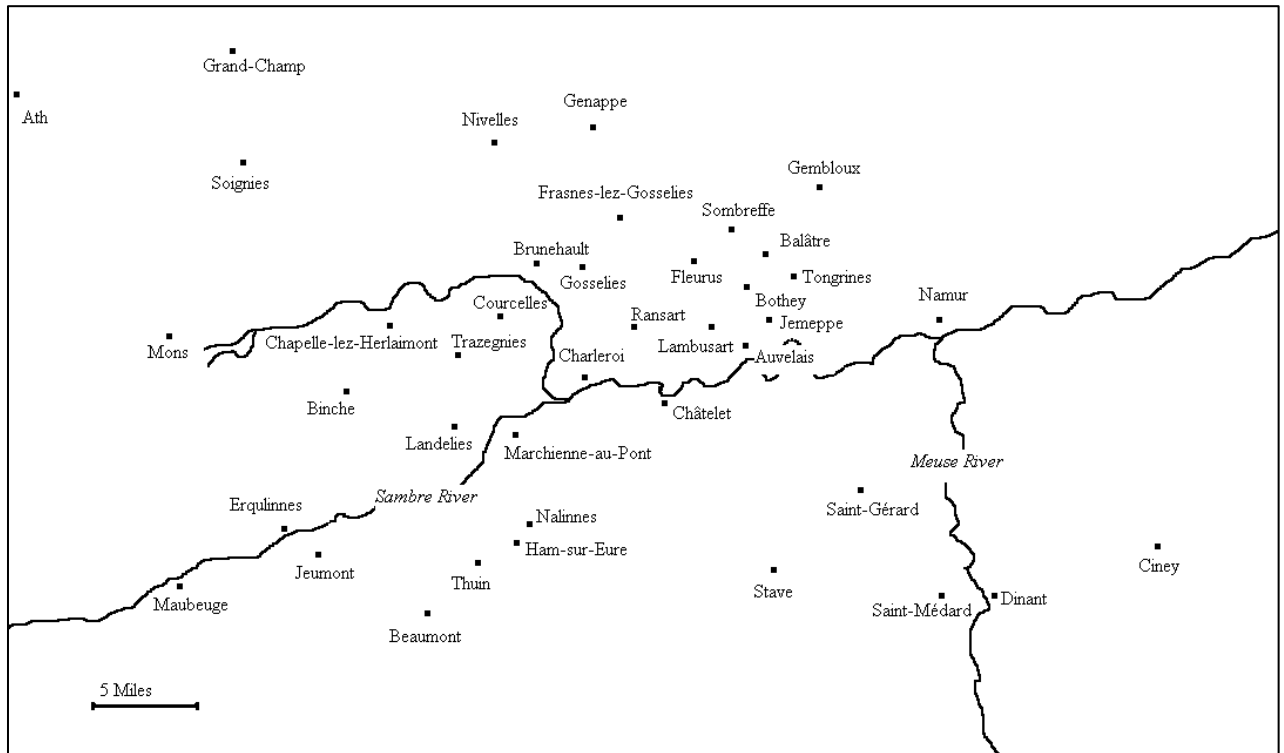
¹⁰ Marescot’s report on the siege of Charleroi is found in Victory D. Musset-Pathay, *Relations des principaux sièges fait ou soutenus en Europe par les armées françaises depuis 1792* (Paris: 1806), 361-363. More information on the siege can be found in “Relations de trois attaques de Charleroi,” SHAT, B1 137.

¹¹ Musset-Pathay, *Relations des principaux sièges*, 363.

¹² Jourdan to CPS, 1 June 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 56.

MAP 8

The Fleurus Campaign, June 1794: Theater Map



divisions and the army's artillery park. Finding no Austrian forces northwest of Saint-Médard, the French assumed that Beaulieu concentrated his entire force at Namur.¹³

Arriving at Marchienne-au-Pont on the morning of 2 June, Jourdan learned of Allied reconnaissance operations to the north, which announced preparations for an offensive.

Eager to defend the siege force at Charleroi, Jourdan ordered Championnet and Morlot to march their divisions to his assistance immediately.¹⁴

¹³ Gillet to CPS, 3 June 1794, SHAT, B1 33.

¹⁴ Jourdan arrived at Charleroi on 2 June. "I learned that the enemy had reconnoitered the position, which signaled an attack for the next day, and I approved the order to send the divisions of Morlot and Championnet to come as quickly as possible to camp before Charleroi." SHAT, M1 608, 2.

The Allies feared the increasing number of French troops massing on the Sambre. Writing to his sister from the Duke of York's headquarters on 3 June, Adjutant General Sir Harry Calvert noted: "I believe the banks of the Sambre will afford the next interesting intelligence."¹⁵ From Rouveroy, the Allies sent an army of 33,500 men commanded by the Austrian General Alvinzy and the Dutch Stadtholder, William V Prince of Orange to relieve the Charleroi garrison. The Allied force included both Austrian and Dutch troops, with more of the former than the latter.¹⁶ On 1 June, Holy Roman Emperor Francis II arrived at Nivelles with Archduke Charles and General Karl Mack von Leiberich to inspire the troops. The force conducted numerous reconnaissances from 1-2 June and engaged in a short firefight with the French at Courcelles on the 2nd.¹⁷ In total, the French possessed around 52,000 men to cover the siege of Charleroi against an Allied army of 33,500 troops.¹⁸

¹⁵ Harry Calvert, *The Journals and Correspondence of General Sir Harry Calvert* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1853), 228.

¹⁶ A covering detachment of five battalions and six squadrons (5,000 men total) stretched fifteen miles from Erquelines north to Bettignie, twenty-five miles west of Charleroi. Latour commanded eight battalions and eight squadrons of the first column at Chapelle-lez-Herlaimont twelve miles northwest of Charleroi to guard the march of the main force. Werneck led the second column of eight battalions and ten squadrons ten miles southeast from Nivelles to Felun while Wartensleben and Prince of Reuss directed nine battalions and fourteen squadrons of the third column south from Nivelles to Pont-à-Celles. Quasdanovich marched the fourth column of nine battalions and twelve squadrons further east of Nivelles in the direction of Charleroi. On Quasdanovich's left, General Riese advanced 5,104 troops between Sombreffe and Namur to link with two battalions and three squadrons of Beaulieu; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 201-202.

¹⁷ "Letter from Charleroi," 3 June 1794, SHAT, B1 33.

¹⁸ While Marescot directed the siege of Charleroi with eight battalions commanded by General of Brigade Jean Victor Tharreau, Desjardins and Charbonnier positioned their main army to cover the siege from Courcelles to Gosselies. General Claude Vézou positioned his division at Gosselies north of Charleroi while General Joseph Sebastian Mayer's division bolstered the left of Vézou's division at Goysart. General Jacques Pierre Fromentin led his division in line with the two preceding division's at Basses-Hayes. General Guillame Soland led the cavalry reserve across the Sambre and occupied Ransart after driving eighty enemy horses from the position. The cavalry of General Jean-Joseph Ange d'Hautpoul held Courcelles, Forchies-la-Marche, and Piéton on the left flank. Marceau guarded Marchienne-au-Pont with his division. Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 267-268; Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 5:109.

While Jourdan ordered Championnet and Morlot to join the force north of the Sambre, maladministration continued to impede his efforts and proved disastrous for the siege operation. Gillet wrote dejectedly to the Committee on 3 June announcing the complete failure of the army's supply administration, going so far as to question the motives of the Supply Commissars. The representative's frustration revolved around basic deficiencies that plagued the army's efforts: "We absolutely lack maps of the country; the general officers themselves have no maps, or histories, and are often forced to march in hazard of being lost. I ask you to verify with the war depot if there exist any histories on the earlier campaigns of Namur and, if so, send a copy and a good map."¹⁹ Gillet's frustrations grew after he received news from Charleroi.

On 3 June, the Allied army opened the attack against the French north of the Sambre before the divisions of Championnet and Morlot arrived. By advancing in four columns, William V determined to launch the principle assault against Gosselies while attempting to cut the French line of retreat over the Sambre from both east and west. His first column captured Courcelles and Trazegnies after a short combat with French cavalry and advanced toward Marchienne-au-Pont. Marching east from Brunehault, the second column attacked Gosselies. Moving west from Heppignies through the Lombue Wood, the third column likewise struck Gosselies. Lastly, the fourth Allied column advanced against Ransart. Beaulieu and Riese threatened to cut the French line of retreat to the east by striking from Fleurus toward Charleroi and Châtelet. Outnumbered on their critical right flank, the French offered only a short resistance and retired south of the Sambre

¹⁹ Gillet to CPS, 3 June 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 540.

before Championnet and Morlot arrived at 1:00 P.M. Marceau managed to hold Marchienne-au-Pont against William's first column, allowing the French to retreat with most of their artillery and baggage.²⁰

On 4 June, the day after the defeat at Charleroi, the representatives on mission consented to giving Jourdan command of French forces operating south of the Sambre: the three divisions from the Army of the North and the two divisions from the Army of the Ardennes, as well as his own from the Army of the Moselle. Representative René Levasseur rushed to Paris to gain the Committee's approval.²¹ Jourdan's first mission was to restore order in the defeated units. During the retreat, many routed, losing all semblance of discipline. The French lost around 2,000 men while the Allies sustained less than 500 casualties. One captain of the 74th Infantry Regiment noted that the defeat caused the soldiers of the Army of the Ardennes to lose faith in their generals.²² Adding to the demoralizing defeat, a persistent rain fell during the night of the retreat to contribute further misery. Gillet complained of the lack of supplies and angrily noted that the divisions of Championnet and Morlot would have arrived in time to save Charleroi if the supply administration had provided provisions.²³ Understanding the Committee's desire to see Charleroi taken regardless of the material condition of the army, Jourdan stated his intention to recommence the siege: "If the success depends on

²⁰ SHAT, M1 608, 2; Jourdan to CPS, 3 June 1794, SHAT, B1 33; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 205-215; Jomini, *Histoire et Critique*, 6:110-112; Foucart and Finot, *Defense nationale dans la nord*, 2:396-400.

²¹ Gillet to CPS, 4 June 1794, SHAT, B1 33.

²² Captain Auvray's letter is printed in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 212.

²³ Gillet to CPS, 3 June 1794, SHAT, B1 33.

my good will, you have nothing more to desire. I will conduct with grand celerity the important operation. But before all, I will take measures to prevent another retreat.”²⁴

During the battle on 3 June, the Allies demonstrated their ability to defeat poorly organized and ill-led armies. The key to future success involved properly organizing the combined force, surmounting administrative deficits, and restoring quality leadership. On the 6th, Jourdan sought to gain the Committee’s support by reporting on his efforts to organize the newly conglomerated army. He noted the objective of uniting the Moselle Army with the three divisions of the Army of the North and the two divisions of the Army of the Ardennes as crossing the Sambre River to recommence the siege of Charleroi and striking a decisive blow against the Allies in Belgium. Moreover, he warned of 7,000 enemy troops reportedly marching from Arlon to Neufchâteau, possibly to mask reinforcements moving from the Rhine River to the Low Countries. The commander announced his concern that Beaulieu intended to mass his forces at Namur and immediately attack his right flank south of the Sambre.²⁵

The Committee’s decree on 8 June granted General Pichegru overall authority of French forces “between the Meuse and the sea.” However, the Committee ordered the “Army of the Ardennes, the right of the Army of the North, and the auxiliary force from the Army of the Moselle to be placed under the immediate orders of Jourdan.”²⁶ Beyond signaling the Committee’s acceptance of the representatives’ initiative, the decree further evinced their faith in Jourdan as a commander.

²⁴ Jourdan to CPS, 4 June 1794, SHAT, B1 33.

²⁵ Jourdan to CPS, 6 June 1794, SHAT, B1 33.

²⁶ “Copy of the order of the Committee of Public Safety, from 20 Prairial Year II,” 8 June 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 64.

After receiving command of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, Jourdan fought pressure to open the operation against Charleroi as soon as possible.²⁷ He “desired to know the troops under his command and to organize his force before menacing the enemy.”²⁸ Jourdan’s army numbered slightly less than 100,000 men divided into nine divisions of infantry and one division of cavalry. From the Army of the North, he now commanded the divisions of Generals Jacques Léonard Muller (14,075 men), Jean-Baptiste Kléber (10,619 men), and Philippe Charles Montaigu (7,042 men) totaling 31,000 soldiers. Muller and Montaigu remained under the command of General Barthélemy Louis Joseph Schérer who placed them between Thuin and Solre-sur-Sambre, some twenty to forty miles southwest of Charleroi respectively. Kléber’s division, containing the brigades of Generals Guillame Soland and Guillame Philibert Duhesme, rested northeast of Schérer’s divisions between Marcinelle and Marchienne-au-Pont, bordering Charleroi’s western side. From the Ardennes Army, Jourdan inherited two divisions totaling almost 20,000 men commanded by Generals Marceau and Mayer. Marceau led his 9,738 troops to a position between Marchienne-au-Pont and Landelies, while Mayer’s 9,009 men stood further west between Landelies and Thuin. To these forces, Jourdan added the four divisions from the Army of the Moselle. Hatry’s of 10,005 men and Lefebvre’s of 9,925 held Saint-Gérard, fifteen miles southeast of Charleroi. Slightly west of Saint-Gérard, Championnet’s 7,500 troops and Morlot’s 8,210 returned to Stave. A detachment of 7,000 men guarded the Meuse at Dinant from

²⁷ From 8 to 29 June, the army was called the “Army United on the Sambre.” For reasons of clarity, this work will use the eventual title: Army of the Sambre and Meuse.

²⁸ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

Beaulieu's army at Namur. Jourdan established headquarters eight miles southwest of Charleroi at Nalines.²⁹

Beyond inheriting a large number of men, Jourdan possessed several effective divisional commanders, many of whom had substantial military experience. Born on 9 March 1753 at Strasbourg, Kléber studied architecture at Münster and then at Paris. As a young man, he entered service in the Austrian army as a sous-lieutenant in the Kaunitz Regiment in 1776. Leaving the army in 1783, he became an architectural professor at the Alsatian city of Belfort. In July 1789, Kléber enrolled as a grenadier in the Belfort National Guard and became adjutant-major on 8 January 1792 in the 4th Battalion of Volunteers of the Haut-Rhine. Proving his ability in drill and training, Kléber was promoted to lieutenant-colonel and then adjutant-general to the brigade at Mainz on 1 April 1793. On 17 August, he became general of brigade and, after the fall of Mainz, went to the Army of the West in the Vendée. In the unstable atmosphere of the Terror, Kléber received promotion to general of division on 17 October but was subsequently suspended by the Committee on 27 November. Returning to service the following year, he received command of a division in the Army of the North on 28 April 1794. Strong-willed, determined, and proud, Kléber proved capable of exercising independent command. In recognition of his leadership skills and military competency, Jourdan appointed him to command the left wing of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse,

²⁹ Jourdan to CPS, 6 June 1794, SHAT, B1 33; Jourdan to CPS, 12 June, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 65; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 265-268.

comprising the divisions of Montaigu, Muller, and Duhesme (formerly Kléber's division).³⁰

While Kléber received command of the left wing, Jourdan appointed Marceau to lead the army's right wing, which contained his former division and that of Mayer. Born on 1 March 1769 at Chartres, Marceau entered the Angoulême Infantry Regiment on 2 December 1785. While still enlisted in the regiment, he joined the National Guard of Chartres in October 1789. After the formation of the 1st Battalion of Volunteers of the Eure-et-Loir in 1791, Marceau received nomination to captain on 6 November. On 1 December, he was promoted to adjutant-general and then rose to lieutenant-colonel on 25 March 1792. Possessing the skills of a professional-career soldier and desiring a cavalry post, Marceau became lieutenant of the light cuirassiers of the Germanic Legion on 7 November 1792. On 1 May 1793, the young officer ascended to captain of the 19th Regiment of Chasseurs à Cheval and commanded in the Vendée. His service in the Vendée gained Marceau the opprobrium of the National Convention, which decreed on 13 June 1793 that he "had well merited the nation." On 16 October, Marceau rose to general of brigade in the Army of the West and became general of division on 10 November. On 14 April 1794, the Committee transferred Marceau to the Army of the Ardennes, where he took part in the crossings of the Sambre throughout May and the

³⁰ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 168-169; Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:142-143. Phipps states that Kléber "was a fine General, loved and trusted by the troops, but he was a difficult character. Every one of his superiors suffered from his captious and critical humor. From now until nearly the end of 1796 he was the right-hand man of his Commander-in-Chief, who deferred too much to him." Jomini is more glowing: "General Kléber must be placed in the ranks of the best generals of the Revolution; and we are not misled to place him immediately after Bonaparte and Moreau. He was the most handsome man of the army; of colossal size, a noble face, a force equal to his courage, tied to the genius of war, he ascends over his comrades." Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 6:71. Pajol, *Kléber: sa vie, sa correspondance* (Paris: 1877).

failed defense of Charleroi on 3 June. Youthful and easily excitable, some indefinable aspect of Marceau's personality proved endearing to all with whom he made contact. Famous for his victory over the Vendéans at Le Mans and having proved his competence despite the setbacks on the Sambre in May and early June, Marceau's appointment to command Jourdan's right wing seemed natural.³¹

The representatives on mission played a predominate role in ensuring effective leadership. On 9 June, Gillet noted his trust of Jourdan and the general's desire "to accelerate by any means possible the preparations of the siege of Charleroi and the passage of the Sambre. All is ready for a lively attack. The army is organized for the march. Each general officer knows his post and the troops that he commands."³² The representatives also worked to remove ineffective commanders at the divisional, brigade, and subsidiary levels. On the 10th, the representatives on mission decreed that commanders select officers of "good service" to fill vacant spots in the army within twenty-four hours in the "mode of advancement prescribed by law." The officers would choose selectees by their merit and a panel of "three officers and sous-officers of the same grade, to be designated by an administrative council from each unit," would approve each appointment.³³

While Jourdan observed his forces and appointed competent leaders, the representatives struggled in the perpetual effort to reorganize the army's administration and repair the supply system. Gillet remained sour over the utter collapse of the

³¹ The definitive, if hagiographic, biography remains Hippolyte Maze, *Le général F-S Marceau: sa vie, sa correspondance* (Paris: 1889), 1-38. Tragically for the French, Marceau died at Aldenhoven in August 1796. A panel on the Arch of Triumph bears a carving of his death.

³² Gillet to CPS, 9 June 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 549; SHAT, B1 33.

³³ Gillet to CPS, 10 June 1794, Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 550; SHAT, B1 33.

administration when the Army of the Moselle crossed the Meuse in early June: “Nothing existed in the Army of the Moselle’s magazines,” wrote the frustrated representative to the Committee, “If better supplied, the army could have saved Charleroi by arriving two days earlier.”³⁴ The depletion of resources between the Sambre and Meuse Rivers by the constant presence of French and Allied armies through May forced the representatives to take measures beyond “living off the land” to alleviate the army’s supply woes.

Attributing much of the problem to maladministration, Gillet appointed Pierre-Alexis Vaillant as the chief Supply Commissar for the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, charged with overseeing the supply of field magazines with grain, forage, oats and other essentials from the frontier departments of the Moselle, Meurthe, Meuse, and Haut-Marne.³⁵ To reduce the consumption of wheat, Gillet changed the bread recipe to one-half wheat and one-half rye, and suspended the distribution of bread to troops in garrison. Furthermore, he worked diligently to streamline the transfer of supplies from Givet to Dinant along the line of communication down the Meuse River. Calling for “zeal and activity,” the representative ordered the inspector of supplies at Givet to accelerate the march convoys. From Maubeuge, Saint-Just announced the arrival of 500 draft horses to expedite the transport of supplies from France to the field armies.³⁶

Along with his efforts to organize the army, Jourdan planned to achieve the Committee’s main goal: the capture of Charleroi. Prior to receiving overall command, he held a conference with Ferrand, Kléber, Dubois, Desjardin, and Schérer along with

³⁴ Gillet to CPS, 6 June 1794, SHAT, B1 33.

³⁵ Wetzlar, *War and Subsistence*, 1.

³⁶ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 270-271.

Representatives Gillet, Le Bas, and Guyton at Thuin on 5 June to determine the objective of the upcoming operation. The participants determined that the taking of Charleroi should be the first goal to make the French masters of the Sambre. Lacking precise knowledge of Coalition forces directly north of the river, they thought it vital to cross with sufficient strength to guarantee the defeat of any Allied effort to relieve Charleroi. The conference also established the dispositions for the Army of the Sambre and Meuse for the campaign. The four divisions of the Army of the Moselle and the three divisions of the Army of the North would form the *corps d'observation* of 60,000 men destined to cross the Sambre and take Charleroi. From this force, 8,000 would besiege the fortress while the remainder covered the siege force. The divisions from the Ardennes Army would hold Saint-Gérard to thwart Beaulieu's efforts to advance west from Namur. The participants deemed the separation of the Army of the Ardennes from the *corps d'observation* necessary considering the animosity between the commanders of that force and those in the Army of the North. The Ardennes and Northern Armies supplemented the four divisions from the Moselle Army, which formed the critical mass.³⁷

Jourdan prepared the Army of the Sambre and Meuse under constant pressure to make haste. On 8 June, he informed the Committee that he would open the campaign in three or four days: "I am working," wrote the commander, "to engage in a decisive affair and I will ensure that all that depends on me is done for the advantage of the Republic."³⁸ The following day, Gillet and Guyton demanded that Jourdan "accelerate, by all possible

³⁷ Jourdan to CPS, 8 June 1794, SHAT, B1 33; Gillet and Guyton to CPS, 6 June 1794, SHAT, B1 33.

³⁸ Jourdan to CPS, 8 June 1794, Ibid.

means, the preparations for the siege of Charleroi and the passage of the Sambre.”³⁹ In preparing to commence the operation, Jourdan confronted “bad weather and the rugged nature of the terrain.”⁴⁰ Poor roads and mud slowed the arrival of convoys and siege equipment. Marescot had informed the commander of the lack of adequate equipment and engineer officers during the first siege of Charleroi. Jourdan took measures to procure siege equipment and officers to oversee the artillery and siege works.⁴¹ On 10 June, he received intelligence indicating that the Prince of Coburg shifted Allied forces further west to confront Pichegru’s attack on Ypres. Believing this provided an opportunity to strike a weaker force on the right bank of the Sambre, Jourdan ordered the army to cross the river on 12 June.⁴²

Conforming to the orders of Francis II, William V moved his victorious army northwest from Charleroi to Rouveroy on 6 June.⁴³ While seemingly bizarre considering his success at Charleroi on the 3rd, the westward shift corresponded to heightened fears within the Allied camp concerning Pichegru’s strike on Ypres.⁴⁴ Although traditionally in favor of concentrating on the Sambre, Coburg consented to the reorientation of Allied operations by granting Clerfayt much-needed reinforcements in Flanders. William received orders to maintain a defensive posture to the east. After sending sixteen battalions and eighteen squadrons to Flanders, the Stadtholder possessed only 31,000 mostly Austrian troops to defend the left flank of the Allied position in the Low

³⁹ Gillet and Guyton to Jourdan, 9 June 1794, *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Jourdan to CPS, 4 June 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 544.

⁴¹ Musset-Pathay, *Relations de sieges*, 367.

⁴² SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁴³ Archduke Charles, *Feldzug von 1794 und 1795: Aus den Hinterlassenen Papieren* (Vienna: 1872), 16.

⁴⁴ Sybel, *French Revolution*, 1:419.

Countries. In addition, Beaulieu's 7,500 men held Namur and Riese remained camped at Balâtre with 4,500 troops. Including the 1,980 men garrisoned at Charleroi, the Allies possessed no more than 45,000 men on the Sambre to confront the approximately 100,000 troops commanded by Jourdan in the Army of the Sambre and Meuse.⁴⁵ By exploiting this general shift in Allied dispositions, Jourdan followed the intent of the Committee's orders by working to achieve reciprocal action with Pichegru. Calvert evinced the nervous optimism with which the Allies appraised the situation along the Sambre: "the attention of all this world was directed to the important operations on the Sambre."⁴⁶

On 11 June, Jourdan ordered Kléber to lead the army's left wing across the Sambre at Marchienne-au-Pont the following day. Kléber provided Duhesme and Muller specific instructions for the passage of their divisions. At 2:00 A.M., Duhesme's division would arrive at Marchienne-au-Pont in "great silence and the best order." A gendarmerie division would lead the crossing, followed by several battalions of the 4th Hussar Regiment with one eight-pound cannon and one field howitzer. One of the division's brigades would then follow the advance force across the right bank of the Sambre. The remainder of the 4th Hussar Regiment would form a rearguard. Further east, Muller's division would utilize a pontoon bridge constructed between Marchienne-au-Pont and Landelies, south of the Monceau Wood. The 32nd Light Infantry Battalion would lead the way, with the 12th Regiment of Chasseurs à Cheval and two cannon following closely. An infantry brigade would then cross the bridge before the remaining squadrons of the

⁴⁵ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 280-284.

⁴⁶ Calvert, *Journals and Correspondance*, 230.

12th Regiment of Chasseurs à Cheval. Each of the brigades would have one twelve-pound gun precede the final battalion of the final demi-brigade that crossed the Sambre. After crossing the river, Duhesme would march due north to Jumet on the Piéton stream. Muller would place the Piéton on his right and extend his left to the heights around Courcelles to defend the Piéton and the Monceau Wood. General of Brigade Louis Fuzier received orders to direct the operation and to throw bridges across the Piéton to facilitate communication between the two divisions.⁴⁷

While Kléber directed the left wing across the Sambre, the bulk of the army comprising Jourdan's center crossed the river between Marchienne-au-Pont and Châtelet. The divisions of Lefebvre and Hatry passed at Châtelet on the morning of 12 June. Lefebvre led his division seven miles northwest of Charleroi to establish a line between the villages of Lambusart and Wangenies. Hatry moved his division of slightly less than 10,000 men one mile west to commence the second siege of Charleroi. Further west at Marchienne-au-Pont, the divisions of Morlot and Championnet along with Dubois's cavalry division advanced to the left bank of the Sambre, east of Kléber's divisions holding the Piéton stream. Morlot linked with Duhesme's division of Kléber's wing by marching six miles due north and halting at Gosselies. Championnet positioned his division between Morlot and Lefebvre by placing his right at Wangenies and his left at Heppignies, while establishing advance posts at Mellet and St. Fiacre.⁴⁸ Dubois led the cavalry division just south of Championnet at Heppignies to Ransart. In addition to the army's center, Jourdan commanded Marceau to lead part of the right wing north of the

⁴⁷ Kléber to Duhesme, 11 June 1794, Kléber to Jourdan, 12 June 1794, SHAT B1 34.

⁴⁸ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 54.

Sambre on the 12th. Marceau directed his advance guard ten miles east of Charleroi to Velaine, where he could guard Jourdan's right flank from an attack by Beaulieu at Namur. Jourdan established his headquarters at Marchienne-au-Pont.⁴⁹

During the evening of 12 June, Jourdan informed the Committee of his successful crossing of the Sambre. He noted that Hatry's division resumed the siege of Charleroi and that the *corps d'observation* securely covered the siege force from a "very advantageous position." Jourdan praised the performance of his men against the meager enemy covering force north of the Sambre: "several shots of cannon, the bayonets of our grenadiers, the fire of our intrepid *tirailleurs*, the precision and order of our movements, each was effective. All the orders were executed perfectly; the intelligence of my generals and the good order of the troops did not cease to reign in the six columns that passed the Sambre."

Jourdan eagerly sought to assist Pichegru's efforts in Flanders by striking the decisive blow on the Sambre. Thus, he announced to the Committee his intention not to await the enemy's march to Charleroi, but to seek out enemy forces and defeat them in battle. Concluding his report with an eye towards sealing the Committee's trust, Jourdan reiterated his faith in the army: "there is every reason to have hope considering the severe discipline, intelligence, and harmony that reigns in the combined army that I have the honor of commanding."⁵⁰ Despite these assertions, Jourdan's subsequent actions demonstrated his hesitancy to wage a rapid offensive.

⁴⁹ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁵⁰ Jourdan to CPS, 12 June 1794, SHAT, B1 33.

From May to June 1794, the Committee's orders exhorted Jourdan to seek battles of annihilation, while simultaneously specifying geographic points as his objectives. Given these seemingly divergent instructions, Jourdan chose to follow the letter of the Committee's proposals. Rather than seeking an enemy army, he adhered to eighteenth century principles and chose to wage a siege campaign. The army would capture Charleroi and then proceed to Namur and Liège, possibly reversing course to capture Mons before marching on Brussels. This allowed Jourdan to wage a campaign within his comfort zone, while also placing him on sounder footing with the Committee and the representatives on mission. This approach also accorded with the army's administrative problems and the need to maintain a supply line on the Meuse. If the Allies decided to attack the French, Jourdan would maintain his army in a defensive position to receive their blow. However, he would not initiate an attack, even when significantly outnumbering the enemy. Jourdan's actions and the Committee's orders in June 1794 refute the common view of the French Revolutionary approach to military operations.

Prior to crossing the Sambre on 12 June, Jourdan carefully prepared the siege force to execute the attack on Charleroi. Marescot indicated his gratitude that Jourdan dedicated several days to preparing the force. "All the necessary dispositions were made," remarked the engineer officer, "a large number of artillery pieces, officers of engineers, miners, tools, fascines, gabions, and other objects involved in siege warfare were made available."⁵¹ Arriving at Charleroi around noon on the 12th, the French found the trenches of the first siege filled. Utilizing the equipment provided by Jourdan's

⁵¹ "Relation de trois attaques de Charleroi," SHAT, B1 137.

efforts, the sappers commenced the siege operation by attending to the critical trenches. On the 13th, the French successfully opened one trench and continued work throughout the day.

While Jourdan positioned the *corps d'observation* in a semi-circle north of Charleroi, Hatry directed the siege. Meanwhile, the artillery commander General Charles Chonet de Bollemont conducted a thorough reconnaissance of the fortress along with Marescot. Once again, the French established artillery batteries on both sides of the Sambre. After the French retreated on 3 June, the Charleroi garrison worked to establish a redoubt along the Brussels road running north of the fortress. Marescot noted the incomplete results of this effort and advised Hatry to attack the redoubt immediately before the Austrians restored it to full effectiveness. Just as the French commenced the attack of the redoubt the following day, the Charleroi garrison sortied to relieve the same position. After repulsing the sortie, a company of grenadiers assailed the Allied troops isolated in the redoubt. According to Hatry, Adjutant General Urbain Devaux commanded the expedition “with dexterity and vivacity” and within ten minutes of the attack, the redoubt lay in French hands.⁵²

Meanwhile, sappers continued to work under enemy artillery fire to demolish a parapet that blocked the digging of trenches. In addition, the French opened a parallel on the Demetz Height from which two artillery batteries could unleash a frontal attack on the fortress. On the 15th, the French dug a second parallel.⁵³ Receiving reports from Hatry,

⁵² Hatry to Jourdan, 14 June 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 67.

⁵³ Musset-Pathay, *Relations des principaux sièges*, 367-370; “Relations de trois attaques de Charleroi,” SHAT, B1 137.

Jourdan informed the Committee of the siege's progress: "Charleroi is perfectly invested; the siege work passes with much activity."⁵⁴

After the French crossed the Sambre on 12 June, a small Austrian covering force retreated twenty miles northwest from Charleroi to Frasné, leaving only 1,000 troops to reinforce the garrison. To the east, Beaulieu camped approximately fifteen miles northeast of Charleroi between Sombreffe and Bothé. Despite the retreat of the covering force, the stadtholder determined to assault the French and recalled four battalions recently sent to reinforce Coburg at Tournai. During the night of the 12th, he marched his principal force twenty miles northeast from Rouveroy to Nivelles. The following day, William moved his army ten miles southeast along the Namur Road from Nivelles to Marbais, where he arrived on the 14th. After conducting numerous reconnaissances on the 14th and 15th, the Prince possessed an accurate knowledge of the French positions north of Charleroi.⁵⁵

On 15 June, William issued the dispositions to attack the French on the following morning. He devised an attack in four main columns. The first column, commanded by Beaulieu and containing fourteen battalions and twenty squadrons, would cover the Allied left by sending a detachment towards Moustier and Jemeppe. Seven battalions and ten squadrons would then march from Balâtre against Marceau's division at Lambusart. The remaining units would assail the French advance guard at Fleurus further northwest. The two groups would then reunite at Ransart, while another detachment captured Châtelet on the French line of retreat. The second column of nine battalions and sixteen

⁵⁴ Jourdan to CPS, 14 June 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 66.

⁵⁵ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 289-290.

squadrons, commanded by Latour, would advance south from Chassart to capture the villages of Heppignies and Wangenies, and ultimately clear the Lombue and Gosselies woods held by Championnet. William assigned command of the third Allied column to Quasdanovich, prescribing him to lead seven battalions and twelve squadrons in a demonstration west of Heppignies toward Mellet and Thiméon, where Morlot's division stood. Finally, Wartensleben would direct the fourth Allied column of nine battalions and twelve squadrons on the right flank against Kléber's divisions holding Courcelles. After capturing Courcelles, Wartensleben would assail the French line of retreat at Marchienne-au-Pont. To achieve that objective, Wartensleben received control of the army's artillery reserve. William provided each column with a reserve of munitions and each possessed adequate cavalry to reconnoiter and pursue. The commander would personally observe the second and third columns in the Allied center.⁵⁶

After crossing the Sambre, Jourdan ordered his commanders to hold their positions to cover the siege.⁵⁷ From 14-15 June, French reconnaissance efforts indicated enemy concentrations and movements to the north. General Dubois sustained Austrian artillery fire at Pont-à-Mignetoux on the 15th, indicating the enemy's presence.⁵⁸ During the night, William ordered his advance posts to harass the French across the entire front. Austrian deserters arrived at Jourdan's headquarters and announced that the Prince intended to attack the French the following morning with an army of 60,000 men.⁵⁹ In reality, the Allied army numbered slightly less than 50,000 troops. Although

⁵⁶ Ibid., 290-292.

⁵⁷ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁵⁸ Dubois to Jourdan, 15 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁵⁹ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

commanding an army of over 90,000 men, the dispersal of units to cover Namur and Dinant south of the Sambre, as well as the detachment of Hatry's 10,000 men to besiege Charleroi, left Jourdan just over 50,000 men to confront the Allies.⁶⁰

Jourdan lacked the details of his adversary's positions and strengths; nevertheless, he understood the enemy's general location and intent to relieve Charleroi. "Believing the army of the Prince of Orange was divided into three corps posted at Chapelle-lez-Herlaimont on the Nivelles Road, Quatre Bras, and at the Sambre on the road to Namur," the commander "determined to prevent the adversary from marching towards Charleroi."⁶¹ Jourdan ordered his newly appointed wing commanders, Kléber and Marceau, to initiate the advance at 3:00 A.M. on the 16th. On the left, Kléber received instructions to march Duhesme and Muller's divisions several miles west of Courcelles towards Gouy-lez-Piéton and Morlanwelz. The left wing commander promptly sent orders to his divisional generals indicating their specific lines of advance. Jourdan ordered Marceau to lead the right wing fifteen miles northeast of Charleroi against William's supposed left flank at Sombreffe. According to Jourdan, his orders to Kléber and Marceau aimed "less to attack the enemy than to observe the Prince's position and to protect Charleroi; but it was strongly recommended that each general follow the enemy with impetuosity if he attempted to come closer to the center."⁶²

⁶⁰ Phipps lists Jourdan's strength on the 16th as 58,000 and William's strength at 43,000, Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 153; Desprez grants Jourdan 65,000 and the Prince of Orange 40,000, Desprez, *Armée de Sambre-et-Meuse*, 17. Both seem to overestimate the French force and underestimate that of the Allies.

⁶¹ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁶² Ibid.

As his wings advanced, Jourdan instructed Lefebvre to lead the advance guard north from the Lambusart-Wangenes line to the villages of Fleurus, Saint-Amand, and Wagnelée.⁶³ During the night of the 15th, orders reached Championnet's headquarters at Heppignies to advance north and split the Allied line by taking a position on the Nivelles-Namur road.⁶⁴ On Championnet's left, Jourdan ordered Morlot to lead his division north along the Charleroi-Brussels road in the direction of Quatre Bras. Morlot would occupy the heights south of Frasne and maintain contact with Championnet's division on his right. Jourdan instructed Dubois to form the cavalry division in a second line at Ransart behind the divisions of Lefebvre and Championnet. Given Hatry's presence at Charleroi, Jourdan lacked sufficient strength to establish a solid reserve. By advancing north with his center, Jourdan hoped to "attack the center of the Allies and if events were crowned with success, he could maneuver to strike or envelop one of the enemy's flanks."⁶⁵

Unfortunately for the French, chance and agency unraveled Jourdan's plan. A heavy fog worsened his imprecise intelligence over the enemy's location. "The fog blocked our view along the entire front," wrote Jourdan.⁶⁶ Kléber attested to the general sense of unawareness: "the fog was so thick we could not see more than fifteen paces before us."⁶⁷ As chief of staff in Lefebvre's division, Soult grasped the challenges presented by the weather: "the fog was very thick; it was by trial and error that we advanced; at every instant we had to stop to reorganize and rally."⁶⁸ The fog slowed

⁶³ Lefebvre to Jourdan, 17 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁶⁴ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 54.

⁶⁵ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁶⁶ Jourdan to CPS, 19 June 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 68.

⁶⁷ Kléber to Jourdan, 17 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁶⁸ Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:152.

Championnet's march to the Nivelles-Namur road because the commander "wanted to ensure that the passage was free" by conducting numerous reconnaissances.⁶⁹ In addition to the fog, the extension of the army's front denied Jourdan accurate knowledge of the situation at crucial moments during the battle. While Jourdan personally observed Championnet's division in the center, his subordinates exercised a great deal of independent command across the thirty-mile front from Trazegnies to Velaine. Finally, the need to guard his flank and rear on the Meuse River and the necessity of devoting Hatry's division to the siege of Charleroi prevented Jourdan from concentrating his army in a decisive battle.⁷⁰

On the morning of 16 June, the French and Allied columns advanced in some confusion across the front until arriving within range of each other shortly after 4:00 A.M. Numerous reports affirm that the fog concealed their presence until they nearly collided. Commanding a brigade in Lefebvre's division, General Nicolas Godinot described the confusion involved in his first contact with the right of Beaulieu's column of 14,000 men: "At daybreak, the army marched to attack the enemy. The enemy marched to attack us and the two armies confronted one another in front of the village of Fleurus. The heavy fog made the two armies ignorant of the march of the other until within pistol range. Then the combat was engaged with several rigorous cannonades, charges of cavalry, and infantry. The battle became very obstinate."⁷¹ At 5:00 A.M., Allied light infantry heading the attack of Beaulieu's left assailed Marceau's advance

⁶⁹ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 55.

⁷⁰ Jourdan subsequently identified three principal faults with his position: it was too extended, divided by the Piéton Stream, and the two points of retreat at Marchienne-au-Pont and Châtelet were found behind the army's two wings. SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁷¹ SHAT, B1 302.

post at Velaine and captured the Saint-Barbe Heights. Marceau's skirmishers then fell back on his division's main line at Lambusart. According to Jourdan, Marceau held the position after "valiantly sustaining the first shock" of Beaulieu's column. However, Beaulieu's reserves enabled the field marshal to launch repeated attacks that drove Marceau into the woods at Tergnée on the left bank of the Sambre eight miles west of Charleroi.⁷² At Fleurus, Lefebvre struggled to contain Beaulieu's attack. "I soon learned that my right was much exposed and that I risked being turned on that side," noted the commander. During Marceau's retreat from Lambusart, the division's artillery – guarding Lefebvre's right at Moulin-à-Vent – ceded the advantageous terrain to Beaulieu's batteries. From the position, the Austrian batteries unleashed a devastating fire on the troops holding Lefebvre's exposed right flank.⁷³

Toward the center of the French line, Championnet's division marched north to the Nivelles-Namur road and contacted Latour's column of 9,600 men at Saint-Fiacre while attempting to deploy into lines of attack. "I thought I heard a very lively firefight beside the village of Saint-Fiacre," reported Championnet, "I immediately went to attack the place. A hail of bullets and well-fueled musketry fire left me with no doubt."⁷⁴ On Championnet's left, Quasdanovich commenced his march south with 7,900 troops after capturing the village of Mellet ten miles north of Charleroi and two miles north of Heppignies. In a rapid assault, the Austrians quickly turned Championnet's left flank "with much ease," according to the French commander, who found himself forced to

⁷² SHAT, M1 608, 2; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 293; Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 6:128.

⁷³ Lefebvre to Jourdan, 17 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁷⁴ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 55-56.

retire into the woods of Heppignies. Several barricades the French erected prior to the battle slowed the enemy's advance. After several hours, the Allies succeeded in attacking Championnet at Heppignies from three directions. According to the French general: "I offered the most vigorous resistance and it was only after four hours of combat that I departed the position of Heppignies to take up that of Ransart."⁷⁵ While his left assailed Championnet's division against an acclivity at Heppignies, the bulk of Quasdanovich's column drove the skirmishers of Morlot's division south of Mellet and Liberchies. After the French light infantry retreated one mile south to Thiméon and Pont-à-Mignetoux, Morlot's division offered an energetic defense in line against Quasdanovich's repeated charges, demonstrating the capacity of the French infantry to employ that formation in both the offense and defense.⁷⁶

Despite the setback on the French right wing, Kléber's 15,000 troops of the French left wing achieved considerable success against Wartensleben's 9,000-man column. At 3:00 A.M., Jourdan ordered Kléber to "prepare the left wing to attack the enemy units found between Gouy-lez-Piéton and Morlanwelz, and to stop all that might come from Binche and Chapelle-lez-Herlaimont."⁷⁷ Kléber hurriedly sent instructions to Duhesme and Muller, outlining the march of their divisions. Duhesme would move his division west toward Trazegnies, while Muller advanced south of Duhesme in the direction of Forchies-la-Marche and Piéton.⁷⁸ While marching in column amid the fog, Duhesme's division encountered the left of Wartensleben's column around 4:15 A.M.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Kléber to Duhesme, Kléber to Muller, 16 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

and “was struck by a hail of bullets, shells, and canister” while attempting to deploy. Striving to prevent Wartensleben from driving his forces from Trazegnies, Kléber instructed Fuzier to hold Wartensleben’s front with one brigade. Meanwhile, he learned of Muller’s progress against the enemy forces defending Forchies-la-Marche and Piéton, southwest of Courcelles. Sensing the enemy’s weakness in that sector, Kléber intended to turn Wartensleben’s right flank with Muller’s division. After two hours of “a very lively cannonade and fusillade,” Kléber’s left wing fell silent. Receiving no news, the commander moved south to personally examine the situation.⁷⁹

After reaching his left flank, Kléber found that one of Muller’s brigades had entered Piéton without contest. However, the brigade on the left stalled while assaulting Forchies-la-Marche. Kléber ordered a unit of dragoons from the 7th Regiment to move west along the road to Binche in order to block Wartensleben’s line of retreat while two battalions from Fuzier’s brigade assailed the Château of Trazegnies. Further north, the battalions deployed into line and attacked the position in accordance with the 1791 Regulations, while two artillery pieces shelled Wartensleben’s troops. “All the movements were executed with much order and celerity,” noted the commander. General Joseph Boyer led Kléber’s cavalry in a charge that dispersed several of Wartensleben’s squadrons. Yet, Boyer then struck too far to the left and found his squadrons facing the broadside of an enemy firing line. Wartensleben’s infantry unleashed a deadly volley that forced Boyer’s cavalry to retreat in disorder. Nonetheless, Kléber’s left wing gained Forchies-la-Marche and succeeded in breaking Wartensleben’s right flank. It is possible

⁷⁹ Kléber to Jourdan, 17 June 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 69.

that the French infantry attacked the retreating enemy in column. Kléber wrote after the battle that “the bayonet had vigorously played its role.” Although Boyer’s repulse allowed Wartensleben to retreat, the French captured several prisoners, ammunition wagons, and weapons from Wartensleben’s column and Kléber moved his wing north towards Nivelles.⁸⁰

After nearly five hours of fighting, the fog mostly dissipated by 9:30 A.M. Remaining ignorant of Marceau’s failure at Velaine, Jourdan determined to exploit the advantage provided by Kléber. Assuming that his right wing and center could hold their positions, the commander sought to pivot on Championnet, Lefebvre, and Marceau. Jourdan ordered Kléber and Morlot along with the cavalry division of Dubois to strike Quasdanovich’s right flank, which formed William’s center.⁸¹ Thus, Kléber shifted his march towards Nivelles further east to converge on Pont-à-Mignetoux, crossing over the bridges Fuzier threw across the Piéton stream. Around 10:00 A.M., Jourdan arrived at Pont-à-Mignetoux and observed to his dismay that Morlot’s infantry could barely hold the village against Quasdanovich’s column. Utilizing Dubois to good effect, Jourdan ordered the 6th Chasseurs and the 10th Cavalry Regiment to charge Quasdanovich’s front. “The charge was conducted with intrepidity,” noted Jourdan, and the French cavalry succeeded in driving the Austrians from the position.⁸² By 11:00 A.M., Morlot’s troops reentered Pont-à-Mignetoux, capturing 600 prisoners and seven guns. Kléber arrived

⁸⁰ Ibid; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 296.

⁸¹ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁸² Ibid.

from the southwest with his two divisions slightly before noon and formed lines on a series of heights less than one mile west of Morlot.⁸³

French fortunes suddenly reversed shortly after 12:00 P.M. when Jourdan received “the most distressing news.”⁸⁴ Initially unaware that Marceau’s retreat from Velaine continued south of Lambusart, Jourdan realized that Beaulieu’s column had essentially routed his right wing. Marceau’s retreat from Lambusart continued in poor order until he crossed the Sambre five miles east of Charleroi at Pont-de-Loup. At Heppignies, Latour and Quasdanovich continued to assail Championnet and forced the French to abandon their position and retreat south to Ransart.⁸⁵ With Marceau and Championnet abandoning their positions, Lefebvre found the advance guard threatened along its entire front and dangerously exposed on both flanks. The hardy troops comprising the advance guard reportedly proved durable throughout the day. While withstanding an artillery onslaught from Moulin-à-Vent, one battalion of French grenadiers anchoring Lefebvre’s right flank withstood two cavalry charges from several of Beaulieu’s squadrons. At another point, ten squadrons of enemy hussars charged one battalion of the 13th Light Infantry Demi-Brigade. Rather than flee, the battalion formed square and “vigorously resisted the enemy.” For seven and one-half hours, Lefebvre’s division endured fourteen enemy assaults. Lefebvre credited the advance guard’s resilience to the “*sang-froid* that characterized the French soldier.” Nonetheless, shortly after midday, Lefebvre exhausted his artillery ammunition. Bitter over this

⁸³ Dubois to Jourdan, Kléber to Jourdan, 17 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁸⁴ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁸⁵ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 54-56.

administrative failure, he ordered the advance guard to retreat south toward the Sambre, crossing the river at Châtelet.⁸⁶ These events forced Hatry to suspend siege operations and cross the Sambre at Marchienne-au-Pont. While formerly planning to deliver the *coup de grâce*, Jourdan now found his army's line of retreat threatened.

At 12:30 A.M. on 16 June, Jourdan ordered his army to withdraw south of the Sambre. Kléber received the news with frustration but commanded his victorious troops to commence the march south to Marchienne-au-Pont. Muller led his division southwest through Fontaine-L'Évêque, while Duhesme marched directly south along the Piéton. "The retreat was conducted in the presence of General Kléber and in the best order although the men were exposed during the entire retreat to the fire and attacks of the Austrians who held the line of the Piéton."⁸⁷ Kléber's wing crossed to the right bank of the Sambre over the bridge at the Monceau Wood. Further east, Championnet found his right flank exposed to Latour and Beaulieu after the advance guard retreated. He directed the withdrawal south after receiving Jourdan's order at Jumet. Championnet vividly describes the dangers that confronted his division during the retreat:

I assembled all my troops on the heights of Jumet [south of Ransart]. I was formed in march columns and I ordered the cavalry and light artillery to sustain the army's retreat. I defiled the infantry and directed my cavalry on Châtelet, then I received the order from the General in Chief. While I was leaving Jumet, I encountered the enemy in battle order on the road: it was a sortie from Charleroi. I unleashed a very lively fusillade and I regretted to see twenty of my comrades fall dead on the field of battle. I ordered two pieces of cannon and two companies of grenadiers to strike in front to repulse the enemy; I imagined, and it was found true, that the bridge of Châtelet would be cut and that, if I continued my current route, I would face a terrible fire from the place of Charleroi. I resolved to change

⁸⁶ Lefebvre to Jourdan, 17 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁸⁷ "Memoires of Duhesme," quoted in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 298.

my route in the direction of Marchienne-au-Pont, I faced the same obstacles: I encountered the enemy which, having made a sortie from Charleroi, had captured all the routes and had forced us to raise the bridge of Châtelet. He was soon forced to repent of his temerity: the grenadiers of the 9th Demi-Brigade fell above them and killed all that were present; the passage being free, I retreated with much ease by Marchienne-au-Pont and took position at the camp of the Tombe (two miles southeast of Marchienne-au-Pont) with the division of General Hatry.⁸⁸

From Pont-à-Mignetoux, Morlot followed Championnet with his division, finally crossing the Sambre at Marchienne-au-Pont and camping at Montigny-les-Tigneau. Both sides suffered moderate casualties. The Allies lost 2,196 men killed or wounded, seven guns, and 600 prisoners, while the French lost around 3,000 killed or wounded and eight cannon.⁸⁹

Although most histories hardly mention the battle of First Fleurus, it forms a crucial aspect in the narrative of the Fleurus campaign. After crossing the Meuse on 1 June, Jourdan struggled to lead first the Moselle Army and then the Army of the Sambre and Meuse in a challenging campaign to gain the decisive victory desired by Carnot. Numerous administrative and logistical challenges continued to impede the French efforts to strike the left wing of the Allies in the Low Countries. The effective relationship between Jourdan and the representatives on mission managed to somewhat mitigate these difficulties. Yet, as First Fleurus demonstrates, the administrative crisis remained detrimental to the army. Lefebvre caustically advised Jourdan to “give orders so that for the future there may be no want of ammunition; for nothing is so disheartening than to see oneself obliged to abandon the combat, having nothing left to return the enemy’s

⁸⁸ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 56.

⁸⁹ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 299-300.

fire.”⁹⁰ Jourdan attributed the army’s defeat to administrative shortcomings. “I must assure you that the enemy gained no other advantage than the terrain and I propose to take our revenge soon,” he wrote to the Committee.⁹¹

Despite French propaganda asserting the superiority of amateur citizen-soldiers over professional slave-soldiers, the battle of First Fleurus again demonstrates the effective parity between the combatants. In terms of the combat effectiveness of the rank and file troops, the French possessed few advantages or special talents. French leaders attempted to save the troops from criticism by scapegoating the administration and underplaying the scope of the defeat. “If French writers had been better informed, they would not have stated that the French army had been beaten,” recalled Jourdan, “because it only abandoned the field of battle by a chance event at the moment of being victorious.”⁹² French historians also devalue the Allied victory. For instance, Dupuis claims that the “Republicans were not really beaten.”⁹³ More egregiously, Desprez refuses to acknowledge the rout of Marceau’s wing at Velaine: “Marceau had not made contact with the enemy; he retired to the Sambre without panic.”⁹⁴ Soult offered a somewhat more forthright analysis: “the affair of the 16th was a poor debut for us, but not a single person in the army let the check stifle their hope.”⁹⁵

Alone among French writers, Jomini duly credited the Allies for their performance. “That *journée* was very honorable for the Allies,” wrote Jomini, “if their

⁹⁰ Lefebvre to Jourdan, 17 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁹¹ Jourdan to CPS, 17 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁹² SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁹³ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 300.

⁹⁴ Desprez, *Armée de Sambre-et-Meuse*, 19.

⁹⁵ Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:155.

initial deployment was not without criticism, Beaulieu, Alvinzy, and Latour merit eulogies for their conduct on the field.” Furthermore, he recognized the faults of the French position and blamed Jourdan for dispersing his troops at the start of the battle.⁹⁶ However, even Jomini overlooked the effective performance of the Allied troops in the day’s fighting. Conversely, the Russian attaché, Louis Alexandre Andrault de Langeron, praised the accomplishment of the Allied troops: “They gained at Fleurus a complete victory, delivered Charleroi, and forced the enemy to cross the eternal Sambre.”⁹⁷ The Coalition quickly announced the victory as a great triumph. “The enemy that attacked us was completely beaten and placed in rout on the Sambre,” read an Allied bulletin that the Austrians distributed at Brussels.⁹⁸ In language rivaling the French, the Austrian “Bulletin Extraordinaire” declared that the “brave army” marched against the numerically superior French with a “certainty of victory.” Through the course of the “obstinate and bloody combat,” the “intrepid troops and generals displayed a grand countenance and valor despite the numbers and vigorous resistance of the enemy.”⁹⁹ While the Austrian bulletins probably overestimate the extent of the victory, they signal the effective parity between the French citizen-soldiers and the Old Regime slave-soldiers in the War of the First Coalition.

In addition to refuting the triumphalist view of the French citizen-soldier, First Fleurus revises the revolutionary view of military change. Rather than innovating a superior method of war, the French fought the battle poorly and according to traditional

⁹⁶ Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 5:131.

⁹⁷ Langeron quoted in Pingaud, *L’invasion Austro-Prussienne*, 74.

⁹⁸ “Bulletin of Brussels,” 16 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁹⁹ “Bulletin Extraordinaire,” 16 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

military principles. Following the orders of the Committee of Public Safety and supported by the representatives on mission, Jourdan remained focused on the siege of Charleroi. Rather than using his superior numbers for a decisive attack, Jourdan ordered a hesitant advance on the 16th, designed more to divine the enemy's positions than to gain an overwhelming victory. Jourdan's decision to institute wing commands proved beneficial in the future, but failed to counteract his other faults at First Fleurus. The French divisional system continued to evolve and offer a superior means of organization to the Old Regime ad-hoc regimental system. Certainly, the divisional system facilitated the ease of the French retreat and prevented a complete rout of the army.

In terms of tactics, the French fought largely according to eighteenth century doctrine embodied in the 1791 Regulations. The training and drill begun in earnest by the French in 1793 allowed the troops, especially those from the Moselle Army, to fight in line, column, skirmishing order, and square. Nonetheless, First Fleurus refutes any notion that the French achieved tactical dominance over Old Regime troops. While Kléber's troops gained success over an outnumbered enemy, Marceau's divisions completely routed almost at first contact. The divisions in the center of the French line fought effectively on the defensive but could not sustain offensive attacks. Conversely, the Austrians employed a flexible tactical system that allowed for repeated and sustained columnar charges. Because each column possessed an effective reserve, the Austrians overcame initial reverses and overran the French advance posts along every sector of the line.

Although defeated at First Fleurus, Jourdan managed to retain command of the army. While unfortunate for the French, the defeat was not irreversible. William remained outnumbered and the French could recover and cross the Sambre again. At the same time, Jourdan and the representatives on mission could continue disciplining and training the troops to prepare for the continuation of the campaign.

CHAPTER 7

AN OBSTINATE STRUGGLE

The Siege of Charleroi and the Battle of Second Fleurus, 17-26 June 1794

By the middle of June, Jourdan's efforts to strike the decisive blow against Allied forces in the Low Countries achieved little success. Fearing demoralization among the troops, he issued a proclamation designed to bolster their morale: "Republicans, victory was stolen from your hands at the moment of our triumph. I am striving to repair the causes of that event which was most unfortunate for us. They must be repaired; the slaves of tyrants deliver a victory over free men and you bristle with indignation."¹ Throughout the following week, Jourdan and the representatives on mission worked to divine the principal causes of the setback. They laid chief blame on organizational, administrative, and leadership failures. In particular, Jourdan seconded Lefebvre by attributing the defeat to the lack of adequate munitions for the artillery.² As soon as the French could surmount these deficiencies, he promised "a victory will repair the setback; I count on you, soldiers of Liberty; stay ready, we will triumph or we will all perish."³

After First Fleurus, the generals of division sought to restore order in the ranks. Kléber ordered a review of all companies of the left wing at 2:00 P.M. on 17 June to reestablish the "military hierarchy." According to his orders, the generals of division would take a thorough account of their units, punishing soldiers and officers found absent without permission. The generals of brigade would examine the cartridges of their

¹ Jourdan to the Soldiers Comprising the Army United on the Sambre, 17 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

² Jourdan to CPS, 19 June 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:PJ, no. 68.

³ Jourdan to the Soldiers Comprising the Army United on the Sambre, 17 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

infantry, ensuring that each soldier possessed forty. Punishments for infractions would follow the orders of the representatives on mission.⁴

As part of the effort to repair the defeated army, the representatives played the leading role in reinstalling discipline and effective leadership. Officers who failed to achieve success at the battle of First Fleurus faced immediate arrest and demotion. For example, the representatives arrested Captain Duplaisset and all the officers of the 2nd Battalion of Volunteers of the Vienne from Kléber's wing after the battalion failed to follow the general's orders. The representatives did not attribute this failure to the soldiers, but to the officers who "neglected to maintain discipline and the love of glory among the troops they commanded."⁵ Duplaisset subsequently wrote an impassioned defense of his actions to the representatives, but to no effect: he was sent to Paris and executed. To replace failed commanders, the representatives ordered the promotion of those who displayed bravery and competence on the field of battle. Military panels would approve or reject each nominee after an official exam. After the 1st Battalion of the 9th Light Infantry Demi-Brigade from Marceau's division failed to rally against Beaulieu's attack, the representatives ordered the arrest of its captain and the promotion of a carabineers captain named Verger.⁶ Beyond enforcing discipline and overhauling the army's leadership, the representatives continued attending to the material and physical needs of the troops. Officers in Mayer's division complained of the poor state of the army's medical services. The representatives subsequently diverted more horses and

⁴ Kléber to Duhesme, 17 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁵ "General Order of 17-18 June 1794," in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 556.

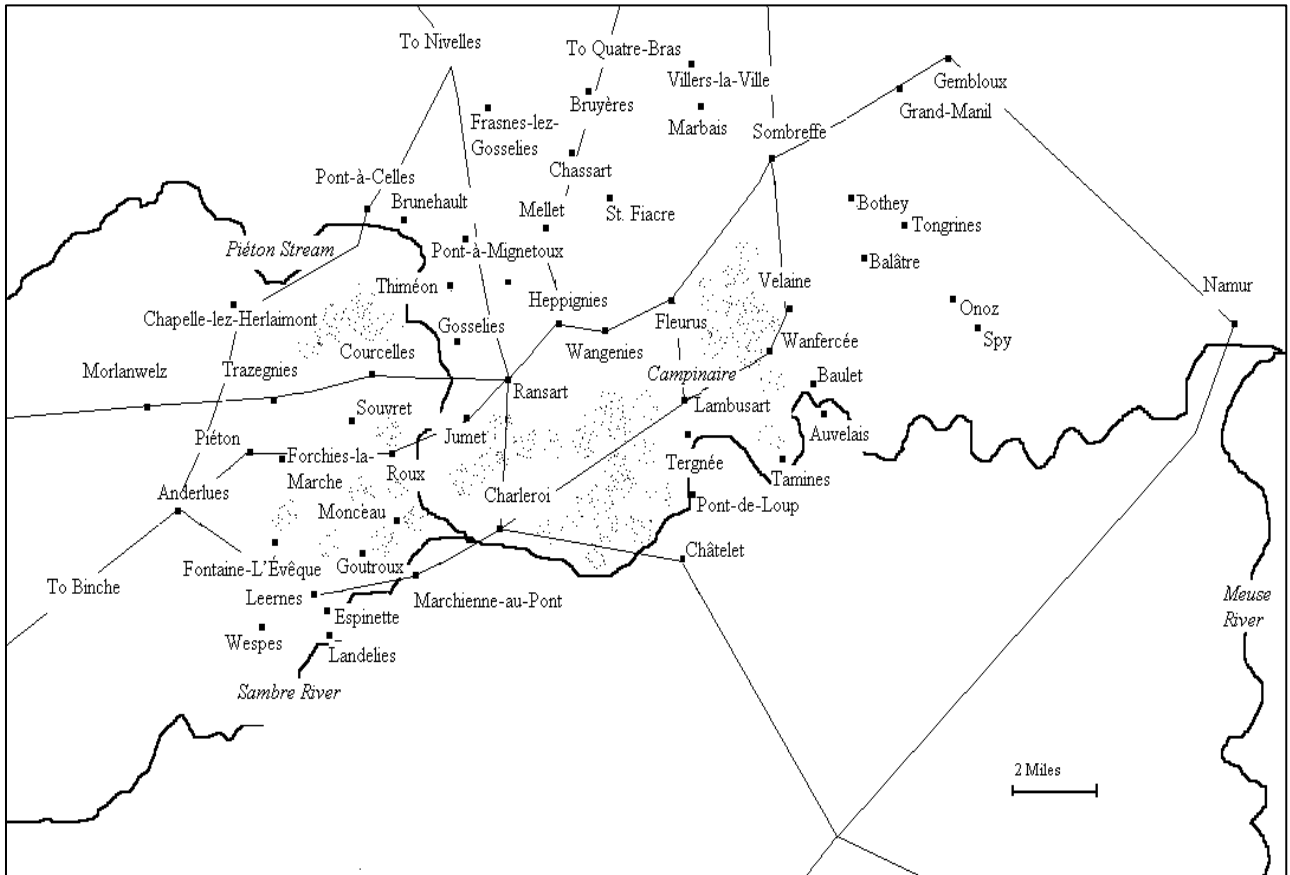
⁶ "Decree of the Representatives of the People," 19 June 1794, in *Ibid.*, 557.

ambulances to the medical corps to facilitate better care for the sick and wounded.⁷

Despite these efforts, the army's struggle with subsistence continued.

MAP 9

The Battle of Second Fleurus, 26 June 1794



On 18 June, Jourdan marched the Army of the Sambre and Meuse north of the Sambre to reoccupy the general positions held prior to the battle of First Fleurus. Kléber led the army's left wing across the Sambre at Marchienne-au-Pont. Duhesme moved his division of 9,000 men directly west, establishing his left flank at the village of Piéton and

⁷ Officers of Mayer to Representatives on Mission, 20 June 1794, in *Ibid.*, 565.

anchoring his right flank to Souvret. After Muller's poor performance at First Fleurus, Montaigu assumed command of his division of 9,000 troops and bolstered Duhesme's right flank one mile north at Morlanwelz and Trazegnies. Kléber instructed the generals to "establish the pickets, defenses, and all necessary posts to ensure the security of the camp."⁸ Possessing a newfound respect for the enemy after the battle of the 16th, Kléber provided instructions for the commanders in case the enemy forced their divisions to retreat. "They are to effect their retreat in the same direction that they advanced, and to gain the same position between the wood of Monceau and that of Leernes," wrote Kléber, "the cavalry will unite and form a rearguard protecting the infantry's retreat."⁹

While Kléber positioned the left wing, Marceau directed the army's right wing of 11,000 men east of Châtelet and stationed three advance posts at Baulet, Wanfercée, and Velaine. Marceau's main line extended two miles further west from the Copiaux Wood to the Campinaire Height southeast to northwest.¹⁰ Around 35,000 troops held the army's center. Lefebvre led his division to a position alongside Marceau's left flank, with his advance guard over ten miles northeast of Charleroi at Fleurus. On Lefebvre's left, Championnet installed his division's right flank at Wangenies and its left flank one mile west at Heppignies. Championnet's advance posts held Mellet and Saint-Fiacre with a cavalry brigade commanded by Soland. Morlot stationed his division at Gosselies between Kléber's troops and Championnet's division, with an advance post established at Thiméon. Another cavalry brigade commanded by D'Hautpoul supported Morlot. South

⁸ Kléber to Duhesme and Montaigu, 18 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Maze, *Marceau*, 44.

of the *corps d'observation*, Hatry's division recommenced the third siege of Charleroi with around 10,000 troops.¹¹

The French crossed the Sambre on 18 June with much ease because the Prince of Orange instructed his forces to offer little resistance. After the victory of the 16th, William directed the bulk of his army west of Charleroi to Chapelle-lez-Herlaimont. The Allied commander remained uncertain regarding Jourdan's intentions: would he again strike Charleroi or attack Mons? To guard the Sambre crossings near Charleroi, he posted two battalions and four squadrons at Gosselies. General-Major Paul von Davidovich led a small detachment southwest to Erquelinnes.¹² The stadtholder planned to either maintain his army along the left bank of the Sambre or march west to assist Coburg in Flanders. For the moment, he sent Coburg four requested battalions to reinforce the western sector. On the morning of 18 June, the Prince of Orange learned that the French captured Gosselies. Considerably inferior to Jourdan, he believed that the French advance threatened to envelope his weak left flank. Consequently, he ordered the withdrawal west to Rouveroy at 10:00 A.M. in a single column of forty battalions and twenty-five squadrons.¹³

William's departure from the left bank of the Sambre enabled the French to recommence the siege of Charleroi. Although Marescot again directed the operation, Saint-Just arrived at the army's headquarters on 17 June to assist. After advancing to

¹¹ SHAT, M1 608, 2; SHAT, B1 302; Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 58; Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:155.

¹² Charles, *Feldzug*, 18.

¹³ "I march tonight with the army to Rouveroy," wrote William to Coburg, "where I will act according to circumstances, which are very thorny at the moment. There is no need, I am assured, to detail for you the necessity of protecting in those environs all the troops found there, nor how mortified I am to find myself in the absolutely impossible situation of sending you reinforcements in Flanders," in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 308.

Charleroi, Hatry's division discovered that the Austrian garrison of 2,800 troops had destroyed one-quarter of the trenches dug by the French during the previous siege. Moreover, the Austrians burned the defensive works of gabions and fascines. Marescot immediately ordered the construction of new barriers. The delayed arrival of tool carts and the artillery park from the village of Ham-sur-Eure stopped the work's progress for several hours. The siege commander ordered each general of division to send engineer officers and sapper companies from the *corps d'observation* to work on the trenches. On the 19th, the sappers repaired a parallel that the Austrians had destroyed. Fortunately for the French, a heavy fog concealed the engineers from the Austrian garrison. However, at 8:30 A.M., the fog dissipated and the Austrians opened fire on the sappers. The artillery park eventually arrived and provided cover for the trench work. From the 20th to the 22nd, the French worked on several trenches and extended the second parallel. The siege commander complained that the small number of workers slowed his progress. On the 23rd, the French artillery succeeded in silencing the guns of the fortress. The following day, the artillery continued pounding the fortress while the siege work progressed.¹⁴

The renewed siege of Charleroi forced Coburg to reorient his strategy for the defense of the Low Countries. Immediately after learning of the French defeat at First Fleurus, the Allied commander in chief shifted reinforcements west from Tournai to support Clerfayt in the Duke of York's army. The following day, he received news of the fall of Ypres to Pichegru. After Jourdan crossed the Sambre on the 18th, Coburg faced a strategic dilemma and ordered his reinforcements to reverse their march from Tournai.

¹⁴ SHAT, B1 137; Musset-Pathay, *Relations de principaux sièges*, 370-372.

On the 21st, he received a letter from William that outlined a plan of operations against Jourdan's army north of the Sambre. The stadtholder proposed that Coburg march his army east and attack the French directly north of Charleroi at Frasnes-lez-Gosselies and Quatre-Bras. Concurrently, the prince would advance northeast from Rouveroy to assail Jourdan's left flank on the Piéton Stream.¹⁵ Coburg informed the Duke of York of his decision to march the bulk of his army east to the Sambre on the 21st. The commander would personally direct 12,000 troops to Nivelles while sending 8,000 men to bolster York's forces in Flanders to "gain a battle so decisive that the enemy will have no choice [but to submit]."¹⁶ Regardless of Coburg's explanation, York received his letter with chagrin. Coburg's decision to attack Jourdan on the Sambre exacerbated poor relations between the nominal allies. After Pichegru's recent success, York was compelled to "march with all the troops under my orders to protect Holland" rather than defend the line of the Scheldt in the west.¹⁷ Nonetheless, Coburg believed that a decisive victory on the Sambre would not only save Charleroi, but also turn the tide of the campaign and, possibly, the war.

On 21 June, Coburg's 12,000 men comprising thirteen battalions, ten companies of artillery, and twenty-six squadrons departed Ath for Nivelles. On the 22nd, the army camped at Soignies further east. Coburg arrived at Nivelles the following day. The Allied troops covered over fifty miles in three marches and many suffered from

¹⁵ Witzleben, *Coburg*, 280-282.

¹⁶ Coburg to York, 21 June 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 315-316.

¹⁷ York to Coburg, 20 June 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 317.

exhaustion. Rather than immediately attacking Jourdan's *corps d'observation*, Coburg rested his men and prepared to open the assault three days later.¹⁸

Those three days proved crucial for Jourdan and the Army of the Sambre and Meuse. Along the front occupied by the *corps d'observation*, the commander prepared the army to sustain another Allied relief effort. He believed Coburg would arrive with 90,000 men. His inflated estimation of the enemy's numbers compelled Jourdan to maintain an active defense north of Charleroi rather than launch an immediate attack.¹⁹ Regardless, with around 75,000 troops north of the Sambre, Jourdan possessed sufficient local numerical superiority to attack the disparate Allied forces in turn. However, he remained committed to the more passive strategy of besieging Charleroi and shielding the siege with his main army. To enable the *corps d'observation* to repulse Coburg's anticipated relief effort, he ordered the construction of field works across the entire thirty-mile front, a system of defense common in eighteenth century campaigns. According to Sault, the troops worked on the entrenchments from day to night in intervals.²⁰

On the right, Marceau's wing of 11,500 men comprising Mayer's division established entrenchments and barricades on a series of heights slightly west of Lambusart. In addition, the right wing fortified the advance positions at Velaine, Wanfercée, and Baullet. Lefebvre protected the advance guard of 10,500 troops with entrenchments at the village, garden, and cemetery of Heppignies. One mile east, he built a strong redoubt armed with eighteen cannon at Fleurus that commanded the plain north

¹⁸ Charles, *Feldzug*, 18-20.

¹⁹ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

²⁰ "By day and by night," wrote Sault, "the troops worked successively on the redoubts, and they took repose only when they were found complete." Sault, *Mémoires*, 1:155.

of the village. An additional line of entrenchments connected Fleurus with Lambusart east of the Campinaire Height.²¹ Championnet and Morlot also constructed field works between their positions at Heppignies and Gosselies to protect their divisions of 10,000 troops each. Kléber fortified the 18,000-man left wing containing Duhesme and Montaigu's divisions with entrenchments at Courcelles, Trazegnies, and Forchies-la-Marche. For support, Jourdan sought assistance from General Jacques Ferrand commanding the small Army of the Ardennes south of Mons. Although hoping to receive the divisions of Muller and Schérer, Ferrand only dispatched the 6,500-man brigade of General Charles Daurier. Nonetheless, the commander appreciated the support and placed Daurier at Fontaine-L'Évêque to bolster the left wing.²²

From 20-25 June, the French covering force engaged Allied detachments in several minor combats. On the 20th, Kléber led the divisions of Duhesme and Montaigu northwest toward Chapelle-lez-Herlaimont, where the Austrians camped with several thousand troops. The divisions formed four march columns and deployed in line before reaching the Allied position. After a short firefight, the French forced the Austrians to retreat.²³ Two days later, the Austrians reoccupied Chapelle-lez Herlaimont after the French returned to their initial positions southeast of the village. Kléber renewed the attack and again forced them to evacuate.²⁴ In the center of the French line, Championnet and Dubois directed an attack north of Heppignies against an Allied detachment at Quatre-Bras on the 21st. After overrunning the weak forces, Dubois's cavalry pursued

²¹ SHAT, B1 302.

²² SHAT, M1 608, 2; Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 58.

²³ Kléber to Duhesme, 20 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

²⁴ Kléber to Duhesme, 22 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

them as far as Genappe.²⁵ After these successes, Jourdan wrote to the Committee of Public Safety: “We have driven the enemy from us. We have beaten him in detail on several points; I hope we continue to make progress at the siege of Charleroi.”²⁶

While the *corps d’observation* prepared field defenses and engaged enemy detachments, Marescot and Hatry continued the siege of Charleroi. After overwhelming the Austrian artillery on 23 June, the French continued to pound the fortress on the 24th, allowing the sappers to establish a third parallel. During the night of the 24th, the garrison launched two sortie attempts that failed to dislodge the French. At noon, Jourdan summoned Reynac to surrender the fortress. Reynac convened a council of war to determine his course of action. The French ceased fire for three hours while they awaited the commandant’s decision. After a further delay of thirty minutes, the French recommenced the bombardment, which lasted through the night. At 10:00 A.M. on the 25th, Reynac sent an envoy to Jourdan to negotiate a surrender. A few hours later, the same officer delivered the commandant’s proposed articles of capitulation. A council of generals and representatives on mission including Jourdan, Hatry, Saint-Just, and Gillet reviewed the articles. Saint-Just reportedly proclaimed: “It is not the paper that I seek but the place itself.” Regardless, the French offered the Austrians generous terms: the garrison surrendered with full honors of war and the officers retained their weapons.²⁷ More than any other factor, the capitulation of Charleroi proved decisive in the outcome of the battle of Second Fleurus by allowing Hatry’s division of 10,000 men to join the

²⁵ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

²⁶ Jourdan to CPS, 23 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 313-314.

²⁷ SHAT, B1 137; Musset-Pathay, *Relations des principaux sièges*, 372-375.

field army. Jourdan positioned Hatry in reserve at Ransart, ready to support the *corps d'observation* in the event of an enemy attack.²⁸

On 23 June, Coburg stated his intention for the campaign: “On the 26th, if God is willing, we will beat [Jourdan], and we will chase him from the frontier and save Charleroi.”²⁹ The Allied commander possessed around 52,000 troops to confront Jourdan’s 75,000 men. His own detachment of 12,000 men occupied Nivelles on 24 June. To the southwest between Rouveroy and Bray, the Prince of Orange led the main army of 28,000 troops. Towards Croix, Major-General William Frederick Prince of Orange (the son of William V and future king of the Netherlands) led 4,000 men. Further east, Beaulieu directed his group of 8,000 effectives at Gembloux.³⁰ As late as the 26th, Coburg remained ignorant of the surrender of the Charleroi garrison. He fired his artillery every hour to inform Reynac of the approach of his army. Reynac apparently failed to hear these numerous signals between 23 and 25 June. Certainly, the commandant could have resisted the French for several more days despite Marescot’s progress.³¹ On the 25th, a young lieutenant named Count Joseph Radetzky took it on his own initiative to lead three cuirassiers and three hussars in an expedition to discover the fate of the Charleroi garrison. By evading the French lines, he reached Charleroi late at night on the 25th only to discover the French in possession of the fortress. Radetzky did not return to Coburg’s headquarters with this news until the afternoon of the 26th.³²

²⁸ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

²⁹ Coburg to Wallis, 23 June 1794, in Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 319.

³⁰ Witzleben, *Coburg*, 288-289.

³¹ Musset-Pathay, *Relations des principaux sièges*, 375; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 320.

³² Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 321.

Working under the false assumption that Charleroi remained in Allied hands, Coburg prepared his army to attack the French on 26 June. William's successful attack at First Fleurus provided a model for the Allied commander in chief. Rather than concentrate his army to attack a decisive point on Jourdan's extended line, Coburg determined to attack the French on both their flanks and across their front. The commander did not know Jourdan's actual numerical strength, particularly after the addition of Daurier's brigade and Hatry's division. These units provided Jourdan 16,000 additional troops, which more than compensated for his losses at First Fleurus.³³

Coburg's plan of attack divided his 52,000 men among five columns. On his right, William would direct twenty-four battalions, thirty-two squadrons, and thirty-two guns southwest from Chapelle-lez-Herlaimont to Courcelles and Forchies-la-Marche at 2:00 A.M. on 26 June. After repulsing Kléber's wing, he would clear the Monceau Wood, overrun the French camp at Espinette, and cut communication from Landelies to Marchienne-au-Pont. Coburg entrusted the second column of seven battalions, sixteen squadrons, and sixteen guns to Quasdanovich. The Austrian commander would proceed south from Nivelles to Grand-Champ during the night of the 25/26 June. The following morning, his column would assail Morlot's division at Pont-à-Mignetoux, Mellet, and Gosselies. Kaunitz, commanding the third column of eight battalions, eighteen squadrons, and seventeen artillery pieces at Chassart, would advance south towards Fleurus, Heppignies, and Wangenies at 2:00 P.M. on the 26th. Further east, Archduke Charles would assault Fleurus and the Campinaire Height with the seven battalions,

³³ "Official Report of the Chief of Staff of the Austrian Army on the Battle of Fleurus," 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

sixteen squadrons, and eighteen guns of the fourth column. On Charles's left, Beaulieu would lead the fifth column of thirteen battalions, twenty squadrons, and eighteen artillery pieces against Lambusart. The Allied plan outlined an attack in three main sectors. The first column would assail the French in the Espinette-Jumet sector. In the center, the second, third, and fourth columns would attack from Mellet to Campinaire. Finally, the fifth would assail the French from Lambusart to Fleurus. Unfortunately for Coburg, by dispersing his forces across exterior lines, his attacks failed to achieve numerical superiority in any sector. Furthermore, the commander lacked the means of reinforcing his columns during the combat via an effective reserve.³⁴

Numerous factors differentiated the situations at First and Second Fleurus in favor of the French. The construction of field works considerably enhanced the strength of the French line. In addition, the several days spent building the entrenchments provided the troops greater knowledge of the terrain. Unlike First Fleurus, the troops would not be surprised or confused by the Allied attack. Furthermore, the French now possessed clear numerical superiority. Jourdan held an effective reserve of 16,000 troops in addition to Dubois's cavalry division, which provided a fluid means of reinforcing critical segments of the line. Finally, Jourdan understood that his fate depended on the outcome of this battle. After his forces crossed the Sambre on 18 June, Saint-Just ordered 30,000 troops to march west from the Sambre to reinforce Pichegru in Flanders. Jourdan blocked the order. In response, Saint-Just made known that the commander's head rested on the

³⁴ Ibid; Witzleben, *Coburg*, 293-298.

outcome of the impending battle. Certainly, this realization compelled Jourdan to defend his line to the extreme.³⁵

The first Allied assault struck the French left between Trazegnies and Fontaine-L'Évêque at 2:00 A.M. William divided his 26,000 troops into two principal columns. On the left, Prince Waldeck commanded fourteen battalions and eighteen squadrons. Further south, Prince Frederick of Orange led a smaller force of seven battalions and twelve squadrons. To link these two columns, Riesch stationed three battalions and two squadrons at Piéton. According to William's orders, Waldeck would direct the strongest column southeast against Forchies-la-Marche and Trazegnies, ultimately to assail Marchienne-au-Pont. Meanwhile, Frederick would debouch from Chapelle-lez-Herlaimont and march south through Anderlues, then turn east toward Fontaine-L'Évêque, Espinette and Roux. If successful, Frederick's column would cut the French line of retreat to Marchienne-au-Pont, while Waldeck's main attack forced the French to retreat either directly east on Jourdan's center or southeast over the Sambre.³⁶

Kléber commanded two divisions and one brigade totaling approximately 25,000 men. One of the divisions – Duhesme's 10,000 men – occupied the crossings of the Piéton Stream with several detachments while the main body stood at Jumet east of the stream. Several miles west, the other division – Montaigu's 9,000 men – anchored its right flank at Courcelles and its left at Trazegnies with small detachments posted as far west as the village of Piéton. South of Montaigu, Daurier's brigade of 6,000 troops

³⁵ SHAT, M1 608, 2; According to Soult, "if we had not been victorious, the majority of our chiefs would have been killed." Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:157.

³⁶ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

established advance posts at Fontaine-L'Évêque and camped on the Leernes Heights.³⁷ The left wing was thus disposed in a triangular line running northwest from Fontaine-L'Évêque to Piéton and northeast from Piéton to Courcelles, finally crossing the Piéton stream at Roux and running east to Jumet. Montaigu's division would receive the first Allied attack while Daurier's brigade bolstered Kléber's left flank and guarded the wing's line of retreat from Landelies to Marchienne-au-Pont. Duhesme's troops held the crossings of the Piéton further east to protect the French center and effectively served as the left wing's reserve.³⁸

At 2:00 A.M. on 26 June, Waldeck's column crossed the Piéton Stream in two echeloned groups between Pont-à-Celles and Culots five miles north of Courcelles. Marching south on Trazegnies, Waldeck's first group encountered a detachment of Montaigu's infantry entrenched in the gardens north of the village. The Allied and French artillery opened a general bombardment that lasted around one hour until 3:00 A.M. Possessing superiority in artillery, the French gained the upper hand and destroyed four twelve-pound cannon, two howitzers, and several caissons. Meanwhile, Waldeck's second group advanced one mile south against a French detachment at Forchies-la-Marche, southwest of Trazegnies. After the initial assault on Trazegnies failed, Waldeck launched his infantry against the French detachment holding the high ground north of the village. Latour led the infantry of the first line in the attack and forced the French to retire.³⁹ According to Sergeant Louis Fricasse of Montaigu's division, the French

³⁷ Kléber to Jourdan, 26 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

³⁸ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

³⁹ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

retreated from Trazegnies after depleting their artillery munitions.⁴⁰ Regardless, Montaigu led his division five miles southeast to Monceau-sur-Sambre and Marchienne-au-Pont. While his light troops cleared the Monceau Wood, Waldeck's infantry advanced in columns and drove an outnumbered French infantry detachment from Goutroux. The Allied cavalry followed while the artillery shelled Montaigu's division at Marchienne-au-Pont. Thus, by 9:00 A.M., Waldeck's first attack created a salient in Kléber's triangular line through a combination of artillery fire and infantry assaults.⁴¹

While Waldeck assailed Trazegnies at 2:00 A.M., Frederic debouched from Chapelle-lez-Herlaimont with his column of 7,400 troops. After marching directly south for four miles, the Allies reached Anderlues without encountering any resistance. Around 3:00 A.M., Frederick steered his column due east and assailed a small detachment from Daurier's brigade at Fontaine-L'Évêque. Sensing the onslaught of Allied forces to the north, Daurier shifted the bulk of his 6,000 troops further east to guard the Sambre crossings south of Marchienne-au-Pont.⁴² Frederick advanced his column east to the Château of Wespes on Kléber's left flank. A firefight ensued between the French and Allied artillery. The Allied infantry captured the Château of Wespes, while the light infantry fought the French in the Landelies Wood. William followed Frederick's column to establish camp further west at Anderlues, where his scouts soon discovered that the French possessed Charleroi. He reported the distressing news to

⁴⁰ Fricasse, *Journal de marche*, 27.

⁴¹ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34; Kléber to Jourdan, 26 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34; SHAT, M1 608, 2; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 335.

⁴² "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

Coburg sometime after 12:00 P.M.⁴³ Regardless, the Prince of Orange's initial attack on Jourdan's left wing achieved Coburg's first objective.

Approximately twenty miles east of Courcelles, the situation proved even more perilous for the French right wing. On 25 June, Beaulieu's men camped on a series of heights east of Lambusart. The field marshal divided his 15,500 troops into three main groups. He personally commanded the first group of seven battalions, three companies, and ten squadrons northeast of Velaine between Bothey and Tongrines. Beaulieu entrusted the second group of three grenadier battalions, three companies of Tyrolean Chasseurs, and eight squadrons to Field Marshal Hannibal von Schmetzing. He placed the force northeast of Lambusart near Balâtre. Finally, General Major Johann Zoph directed two battalions, four companies, and three squadrons further south between the hamlets of Spy and Onoz. According to Beaulieu's directives, the first group would march directly west to attack Lambusart while Schmetzing assailed Baulet and cleared the surrounding woods. Zoph would proceed east along the Sambre towards Charleroi. In addition to the three groups of the main column, Beaulieu ordered Colonel Leopold von Welsch to lead one battalion, 500 *Esclavons* (Slovenian troops), and sixty hussars west from Namur along the right bank of the Sambre. Welsch would attack French detachments between the Sambre and Meuse Rivers and, if possible, advance to Charleroi from the southeast.⁴⁴

To confront Beaulieu's column, Marceau's two weak divisions of 11,500 troops formerly belonging to the Ardennes Army held entrenched positions around Lambusart.

⁴³ Witzleben, *Coburg*, 301-303.

⁴⁴ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34; Witzleben, *Coburg*, 304.

Marceau established an advance guard two miles northeast of the village at Velaine, Wanfercée, and Baulet. As noted, the French fortified these positions after crossing the Sambre on 18 June. Marceau's main body stretched from the Sambre opposite Auvelais northwest to the Campinaire Height south of Lefebvre's division at Fleurus. The right wing's base of operations was Lambusart, which the French shielded with several field works.⁴⁵

Beaulieu opened the march at 2:30 A.M. on 26 June.⁴⁶ Around 3:00 A.M., Zoph led his small group toward Velaine, Beaulieu cleared the surrounding woods with the main force, and Schmerzing's group attacked Baulet. The Austrians assailed Baulet with three Tyrolean companies and one battalion of Hungarian Grenadiers. Beaulieu led two battalions into the woods around Velaine, which the French protected with several flèches and cannon.⁴⁷ According to Marceau, he "personally went on the field to take preventive measures and to resist all the enemy's efforts to force the position."⁴⁸ However, Beaulieu's numbers forced the French to withdraw from the woods and town of Velaine after only thirty minutes of resistance. Beaulieu sent one battalion and one hussar squadron to assist Zoph with occupying the town. Marceau's advance posts retreated to the Copiaux Wood, moving into a second defensive line of flèches and entrenchments.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Marceau to Jourdan, SHAT, B1 34; SHAT, M1 608, 2; "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34; Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:159-160; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 359.

⁴⁶ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

⁴⁷ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 360-361.

⁴⁸ Marceau to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁴⁹ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

After capturing Velaine, Beaulieu ordered Zoph to advance south to the Sambre to prevent the French from crossing the river at Tamines and Pont-de-Loup. The field marshal placed two battalions and two squadrons in reserve between Velaine and the Copiaux Wood to serve as a reserve for the main attack. He formed a group of three battalions, three companies, 100 volunteers, and two squadrons to lead the principal assault against the field works positioned along the woods west of Velaine. Supported by a considerable artillery battery, the Austrians advanced toward the position. Under heavy fire, they attacked in column but withdrew several times. At 10:30 A.M., Beaulieu's reserves allowed the Austrians to capture the Copiaux Wood northeast of Lambusart. Consequently, Beaulieu sent his infantry battalions and two cavalry squadrons to attack the French camp one-half mile east of Lambusart. Commanded by an Austrian colonel named Mobile, Beaulieu's cavalry drove a French force of four battalions and four squadrons from the camp.⁵⁰

Marceau ordered his infantry to enter Lambusart while his cavalry withdrew directly west of the village. However, Beaulieu's squadrons, reinforced by two additional groups to 3,000 troopers, continued their pursuit and forced the French horse to retreat up a height. After reforming, the French charged Mobile's squadrons but soon broke. Instead of entering Lambusart, most of Marceau's infantry panicked and fled south to the Sambre, crossing the river at Tamines and Tergnée.⁵¹ At Lambusart, Marceau managed to make a stand "with several officers and some troops," according to Sault.⁵²

⁵⁰ Witzleben, *Coburg*, 305.

⁵¹ SHAT, M1 608, 2; "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

⁵² Sault, *Mémoires*, 1:162.

As he admitted to Jourdan, “the retreat was not orderly.”⁵³ Like First Fleurus, the citizen-soldiers of the French right wing utterly collapsed.

As Jourdan’s left and right wings suffered reverses, the situation in the center proved crucial. Morlot’s division of 9,000 men at Pont-à-Mignetoux linked Jourdan’s center to Kléber’s left wing. Duhesme’s division from Kléber’s wing camped seven miles south of Morlot at Jumet.⁵⁴ Coburg ordered Quasdanovich’s column of approximately 8,580 troops and fourteen guns to drive between Jourdan’s left and center. On 25 June, Quasdanovich departed Nivelles and marched six miles southeast to Quatre-Bras, where his troops made camp. The next day, his advance guard approached Frasnes-lez-Gosselies from the north at 4:00 A.M. Morlot placed a detachment of troops and erected a barricade at Frasnes-lez-Gosselies. Despite the resistance, the field marshal easily captured the village. After the French advance posts retreated, Quasdanovich formed battle columns south of Frasnes-lez-Gosselies and marched in the direction of Pont-à-Mignetoux. Dubois arrived with several squadrons and two light artillery companies and to delay Quasdanovich’s advance for two and one-half hours.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, Morlot, who spent the early morning observing the battle from an aerostat, came back to earth around 6:30 A.M. to direct his division’s defense of Pont-à-Mignetoux. The commander deployed the bulk of his infantry in a field northeast of Pont-à-Mignetoux between Mellet and Frasnes-lez-Gosselies. Additionally, he sent a smaller flanking force west through Thiméon to assail Quasdanovich’s right flank.⁵⁶

⁵³ Marceau to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁵⁴ Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 6:136-137, 143.

⁵⁵ “Official Report of Coburg,” SHAT, B1 34; Dubois to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁵⁶ Morlot to Jourdan, 26 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

Conversely, Quasdanovich formed an attack column of two grenadier battalions, four light artillery companies, and three cannon under the command of a lieutenant colonel named Biderasky. The field marshal ordered Biderasky to capture Thiméon, while the bulk of his own column struck directly south on Mellet and Pont-à-Mignetoux.⁵⁷ Both groups were set on a collision course.

By 7:00 A.M., the retreat of General Paul Grenier's brigade from Championnet's division at Chassart exposed Morlot's right flank. Concurrently, Quasdanovich opened his general assault against Thiméon and Mellet. Seeing the westward march of Morlot's flanking force towards Thiméon, Quasdanovich sent Biderasky's column southwest to Brunehault to intercept. The Austrians attacked the French in column and, despite the "lively resistance," Morlot's flanking force withdrew several miles south.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Quasdanovich led the bulk of his column south against Mellet and bombarded the French battery stationed in the fortified village. After overpowering the French guns, the Austrians carried the position. Morlot's division retreated south in disorder and the commander only reformed his troops after moving south across a creek at Pont-à-Mignetoux. The contending artillery engaged in a general exchange, but the Austrians gained the upper hand. Morlot's division failed to recross the creek to assail either of Quasdanovich's flanks. From 10:00 A.M. until 3:00 P.M., stalemate ensued along this sector of the line.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

⁵⁸ Ibid; Morlot to Jourdan, 26 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁵⁹ SHAT, M1 608, 2; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 344-345; Witzleben, *Coburg*, 310-311.

On 25 June, Kaunitz formed his column of eight battalions, eighteen squadrons, and seventeen cannon at Bruyères. The field marshal marched southwest on the 26th in three main groups totaling 9,440 troops. His advance guard of one battalion and five squadrons led the way south toward Marbais. *Feldmarschalleutnant* Brugglach and General-Major Joseph Kempf von Mansberg followed with Kaunitz's main body. Finally, *Feldmarschalleutnant* Rudolf Ritter von Otto and Prince Charles of Lorraine led the reserve.⁶⁰ From a height south of Marbais, Championnet received reports of Kaunitz's approach throughout the 25th. During the night, he ordered a general reconnaissance across his front from Marbais to Sombreffe. Several patrols informed him of the enemy's strength and positions. At 1:00 A.M. on the 26th, the commander distributed wine to raise the troops' spirits. Four hours later, the sound of cannon fire from Fleurus signaled the commencement of the Allied attack.⁶¹

Grenier's brigade from Championnet's division held an entrenched position three miles northwest of Fleurus at Chassart. A detachment of four battalions, six squadrons, and six cannon occupied a strong flèche.⁶² At 6:00 A.M., Kaunitz's advance guard approached Chassart from the north. Championnet watched the Austrian move "several of his tirailleurs into the field west of Saint-Amand," and heard "numerous shots of musketry."⁶³ Kaunitz's advance guard charged the entrenchments. Despite Grenier's advantageous position, Austrian horse artillery soon forced the French to retreat south. While Grenier withdrew his brigade into another series of field works erected just south

⁶⁰ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

⁶¹ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 59.

⁶² "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34; SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁶³ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 59.

of Chassart, Championnet ordered him to “offer the most vigorous resistance and to hold the position to the last extreme.”⁶⁴ The commander sent the 1st Dragoon Regiment and the 2nd Light Artillery Company to reinforce the brigade.

Excluding Grenier, Championnet’s advance posts further east withstood Kaunitz’s attack for several hours until forced to retreat south to Heppignies at 9:30 A.M. According to Kaunitz, “the considerable number of troops that the enemy had placed on the heights at the village of Heppignies, and his formidable cannonade, halted our advance considerably.”⁶⁵ At Heppignies, Championnet’s division benefitted from the strong redoubt and its eighteen guns. “The cannon fire resounded on all sides,” recalled Championnet, “the attack was general.”⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the French commander found his left and right flanks suffering severely under the Allied attack. Fortunately, Jourdan sent him reinforcements: one demi-brigade from Hatry’s division as well as two cavalry regiments. Championnet directed this crucial manpower to his flanks and managed to salvage the situation. Regardless, Kaunitz’s artillery and effective use of cavalry prevented Championnet from turning the combat in his favor.⁶⁷ At 11:00 A.M., he received distressing news. One of his staff officers informed him of Kléber’s retreat to Marchienne-au-Pont. Soon after, Lefebvre, the commander of the advance guard, reported Marceau’s utter collapse at Lambusart. He notified Championnet that he sent several troops to reinforce the army’s right wing and that he needed his assistance in holding the center of the line. Championnet assured Lefebvre that he would hold his

⁶⁴ Ibid; Witzleben, *Coburg*, 307.

⁶⁵ “Official Report of Coburg,” SHAT, B1 34.

⁶⁶ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 62.

⁶⁷ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

position as long as his resources lasted and that he “could count on a vigorous resistance.”⁶⁸

Between Championnet’s division and Marceau’s wing, Lefebvre led the advance guard north of the village of Fleurus to link Jourdan’s right wing and center. As noted, prior to the battle, the troops constructed several field works at Fleurus and the small hamlets north and south of the village.⁶⁹ Opposite Lefebvre, Coburg directed Charles to lead his column south from Villers-la-Ville on the 25th and assail Fleurus the following day. Charles’s column of 8,450 troops contained seven battalions, sixteen squadrons, and eighteen artillery guns. Although his position as Archduke of Austria gave him the option of overall command, his lack of experience compelled him to serve under Coburg.⁷⁰

Before dawn on the 26th, Charles led his column south, making contact with Lefebvre’s advance posts just north of Fleurus. Godinot observed the Austrian advance guard approaching from the north at 3:00 A.M. and readied the troops to defend their positions. Thus, Charles “found the entire line under arms and ready to receive his column.”⁷¹ At 4:00 A.M., Lefebvre watched the Austrians deployed north of the French forward posts. Charles directed the first attack against the right flank of Lefebvre’s division, around the same time that Beaulieu opened the assault on Velaine further east. Charles’s attack soon embroiled the entire line. According to Lefebvre, the skirmishers

⁶⁸ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 62; Lefebvre to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁶⁹ Wirth, *Lefebvre*, 81-83.

⁷⁰ “Official Report of Coburg,” SHAT, B1 34.

⁷¹ SHAT, B1 302.

offered a “vigorous resistance.”⁷² Nevertheless, after Charles concentrated his main body against the light troops, the musket and artillery fire became overwhelming. As Soult noted, the French light troops quickly retreated to the entrenchments at Fleurus.⁷³ From that point, the combat between Charles and Lefebvre became a terrible artillery duel broken by several Austrian attempts to assail the French field works. The numerous hedges and gardens surrounding the village offered effective defensive obstacles. Forming line and offering effective musket fire, Lefebvre’s troops resisted Charles’s repeated assaults until 11:00 A.M. At that point, the overwhelming Austrian artillery forced the advance guard to withdraw south between Fleurus and Lambusart to the Campinaire Height.⁷⁴

As Lefebvre’s division retreated from Fleurus, Marceau’s divisions broke on his right. The right wing commander requested that Lefebvre send reinforcements as soon as possible. “I quickly sent him support,” wrote Lefebvre, “despite that I was engaged against the same force as he.”⁷⁵ As Marceau’s divisions retreated in complete disorder south of the Sambre, Lefebvre’s reinforcements could not arrive soon enough. The commander entrusted Soult to lead several battalions and one half-company of light artillery to join Marceau between the Lepinoy Wood and the hamlet of Baulet.⁷⁶ Jourdan also ordered three battalions from Hatry’s division to reinforce Marceau. The 23rd Cavalry Regiment broke while covering the retreat of Marceau’s division south of the

⁷² Lefebvre to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁷³ Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:160.

⁷⁴ SHAT, M1 608, 2; Lefebvre to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34; SHAT, B1 302.

⁷⁵ Lefebvre to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁷⁶ Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:161.

Sambre, while the 54th Line Regiment stood alone against Beaulieu's forces attacking Lambusart.⁷⁷ Lefebvre described the ordeal of the 54th Line at Lambusart:

They resisted alone at the moment the enemy cavalry charged them and were completely defeated, for they preferred to die defending their post, rather than abandon it like the cowards for whom death would be guaranteed. More than 300 men remained in the position, 114 were able to escape the fury of these barbarians with four officers and the commander; and yet he and one captain who remained had their horses killed from under them, and the commander was also wounded. The battalions sent to help them arrived at that moment, as did those of General Hatry, and soon they managed to deliver the rest of this brave and unlucky regiment from the rage of the Austrian tigers.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, Charles captured Fleurus and advanced south to confront Lefebvre's division at the Campinaire Height. Further south, Beaulieu organized his column to unleash another assault on the French forces struggling to hold Lambusart.⁷⁹

Soult summarized the first hours of Second Fleurus in terms that capture the unease within the French camp: "Becoming general at the beginning, the battle was disadvantageous to us for twelve hours, no person could know what the outcome would be."⁸⁰ Indeed, the French faced the very real possibility of losing the battle and retreating south of the Sambre yet again. Observing the situation from the aerostat shortly before noon, Jourdan watched with consternation as Coburg's attack compromised both of his flanks. The commander felt confident that Kléber could defend the line of the Piéton with Duhesme's fresh division. The right wing, however, would prove crucial. "Realizing that if the enemy succeeded in turning my right the battle would be lost,"

⁷⁷ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁷⁸ Lefebvre to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁷⁹ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

⁸⁰ Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:160.

recalled Jourdan, “I immediately sent reinforcements to bolster that sector.”⁸¹ In contrast to the French, the Allied camp remained confident of an imminent victory. Coburg passively monitored his army’s progress from his headquarters near Marbais. The Allied commander remained ignorant of Charleroi’s fall and felt certain of his ability to save the fortress. By all measures, his plan of attack thus far succeeded perfectly. He saw no reason to shift his forces or point of attack and apparently sent no orders to his column commanders until the end of the battle. He believed that constant pressure either would break the French center or one of the wings. More importantly, he did not think that Jourdan would be able to plug any gaps in his line.⁸²

Although remarkably successful throughout the first half of the day, the situation changed for the Allied army after 12:00 P.M. In particular, events on the French left flank turned the tide of the battle. After conducting his successful advance towards the Piéton Stream and Marchienne-au-Pont, the Prince of Orange recalled that “our position became very critical, because we feared for the safety of our left flank and rear.”⁸³ Despite the gains made by Waldeck and Frederick, Duhesme’s division remained unscathed at Jumet, posing an imminent threat to their left flank and rear. William expected Quasdanovich’s assault from the north to drive the French from Gosselies and ultimately assail Duhesme’s division further south at Jumet. However, Morlot’s division succeeded in holding the line against the field marshal and allowed Duhesme’s division to intervene against William.⁸⁴

⁸¹ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

⁸² “Official Report of Coburg,” SHAT, B1 34; Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 381.

⁸³ “Official Report of Coburg,” SHAT, B1 34.

⁸⁴ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

Around 9:00 A.M., Kléber, who remained near Roux on the Piéton, feared that Montaigu's division would deplete its munitions. He ordered three battalions from Duhesme's division to lead one twelve-pound gun, two howitzers, and six caissons to reinforce Montaigu at Courcelles. Shortly after the reinforcements departed Roux, Kléber discovered the virtual rout of Montaigu's force. As the three battalions and few guns were "too weak to attack the enemy themselves," Kléber prudently retracted their order to advance to Courcelles.⁸⁵ As Waldeck's column proceeded to Marchienne-au-Pont, Kléber now faced the task of defending the Piéton Stream. If the Allies crossed the left bank of the stream, they could threaten Morlot's rear and completely turn Jourdan's left flank. The 34th Gendarme Division guarded the bridge at Roux while the 32nd Light Infantry Battalion and the 1st Battalion of the Orne defended a bridge at the Courcelles-Gosselies road further north. To supplement these forces, Kléber ordered General of Brigade Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte to extend the line south to Marchienne-au-Pont, establishing detachments at every crossing point. With units from the 71st Demi-Brigade, Bernadotte positioned these posts by 11:00 A.M.⁸⁶

Having implemented measures to defend the Piéton crossings, Kléber arranged a counterattack against the Prince of Orange. For the moment, he sought to drive back Waldeck's group while Daurier held Frederic at Fontaine-L'Évêque. He ordered Duhesme to lead one of his brigades of around 5,000 troops west through Courcelles to capture Trazegnies. Concurrently, Kléber would personally direct three battalions, two squadrons, and several guns (approximately 3,000 men) southwest to attack Waldeck in

⁸⁵ Kléber to Jourdan, 26 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁸⁶ Bernadotte to Kléber, 26 June 1794, SHAT, B1 140.

the Monceau Wood. After this initial assault, Bernadotte would follow on Kléber's right flank and attack between Courcelles and Monceau.⁸⁷ Around 11:30 A.M., Kléber moved his force west and occupied Baymont, one mile north of Marchienne-au-Pont. At noon, he ordered his artillery to open fire on Waldeck's batteries at Monceau-sur-Sambre. Within the next hour, the French forces on the Piéton steadily advanced west against Waldeck and prepared to commence a general attack at 2:00 P.M. Despite his early success, William noted with regret that "around 2:00 P.M. the situation changed face."⁸⁸

Kléber led his detachment of 3,000 troops southwest across the Piéton to relieve the French troops defending the army's point of retreat at Marchienne-au-Pont. After a short advance, he spotted the enemy in the Monceau Wood and viewed Waldeck's cavalry atop the Calvaire Height. He also discovered that Waldeck's artillery had destroyed the bridge at Marchienne-au-Pont. Kléber ordered his skirmishers to approach the Monceau Wood from the east while his own artillery pounded the enemy. Shortly after opening the attack, he observed Waldeck's batteries decreasing their rate of fire. Believing that Waldeck was withdrawing, but not wanting to isolate the French troops at Marchienne-au-Pont by a rapid advance, Kléber sent a detachment from the 12th Regiment of *Chasseurs à Cheval* to ascertain the town's status. The troopers soon returned with news that 600 French soldiers and two guns defended the crossing and that the bridge had been repaired. Apparently satisfied, he ordered his infantry and cavalry forward to attack Waldeck. In the distance, Kléber could make out Bernadotte's brigade attacking the enemy in force. Seeking to overwhelm Waldeck, Kléber ordered his troops

⁸⁷ Kléber to Jourdan, 26 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁸⁸ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

to increase the speed of the advance. His skirmishers entered the Monceau Wood, which he believed Waldeck defended with several thousand men and a large battery. After initially engaging, the Allied troops withdrew northwest from Monceau to Forchies-la-Marche.⁸⁹

While Kléber directed his detachment against Monceau, Bernadotte followed further north towards a wood east of Courcelles and west of Roux. There, Waldeck established seven batteries in a series of defiles and a hamlet west of the Piéton Stream.⁹⁰ Initially, Bernadotte decided on a frontal attack with his skirmishers while a *bataillon en masse* sustained the advance. In addition, he ordered four companies to assail the enemy's left flank. However, after learning that Waldeck sent 3,000 Dutch infantry and four cavalry squadrons to capture the road from Courcelles to Ransart, Bernadotte feared exposing his right flank to an enemy attack. Thus, rather than using the four companies as a flanking force, he ordered them to defend Roux while he launched his principal assault through the Courcelles Wood. While the advance opened in a lively fashion, Waldeck's fourteen-pound guns overpowered Bernadotte's standard four-pound light pieces. The commander prudently suspended the charge until a division of gendarmes arrived from the rear to bolster his force. Rather than attacking in front, Bernadotte aimed to attack the enemy's left flank. He ordered his 2nd Infantry Battalion to charge Waldeck's batteries along with several hundred cavalry. The French launched two

⁸⁹ Kléber to Jourdan, 26 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34; "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

⁹⁰ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

charges against the batteries, both of which failed. After the second charge, the French cavalry retreated in disorder.⁹¹

Although the French failed to achieve a breakthrough against Waldeck's batteries at Courcelles, the Prince of Orange could not long resist the general attack across his column's front. While Kléber and Bernadotte advanced on Waldeck's right flank and center, Duhesme led around 5,000 troops west towards Trazegnies, which Waldeck defended with only ten cannon. Without infantry, Waldeck could not delay Duhesme's advance in this sector. As his left flank collapsed and his center barely withstood the French attack, Waldeck's Dutch troops abandoned the Courcelles Wood to Bernadotte despite the failure of repeated French infantry and cavalry charges to break the position.⁹²

Further south, Daurier's brigade continued resisting Frederic's group near Fontaine-L'Évêque. General of Brigade Poncet received orders from Kléber to lead his troops west to the Leernes Heights to assist Daurier. From Leernes, Poncet's skirmishers cleared the Alnes Wood west of Marchienne-au-Pont and then took Anderlues through a bayonet attack.⁹³ At 3:00 P.M., Frederick withdrew in good order to the hills northwest of Anderlues, before retreating west to Haine-Saint-Paul two hours later. "We saw clearly that the enemy was now in position and that he could send a group of his forces against our flank," wrote the Prince of Orange. "Entirely convinced that a long resistance was futile and that it would strongly compromise my troops, I ordered the retreat to the heights of Forchies-la-Marche and it was conducted in the best order."⁹⁴ Thus, by 4:00

⁹¹ Bernadotte to Kléber, 26 June 1794, SHAT, B1 140.

⁹² "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

⁹³ Kléber to Jourdan, 26 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁹⁴ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

P.M, Kléber had salvaged the situation on the left wing; however, exhaustion prevented a pursuit and the Allied troops left the field in good order.

At Lambusart, the French right wing remained the crucial sector of Jourdan's entire line. Around 12:00 P.M., the French concentrated in three main areas. Lefebvre positioned the main body of his division south of Fleurus on the Campinaire Height.⁹⁵ Soult's detachment comprising one demi-brigade and one cavalry regiment held Lambusart and the surrounding woods along with one demi-brigade from Hatry's division and the debris of Marceau's divisions. Foreshadowing the end of the battle of Waterloo twenty-one years later, the majority of Marceau's troops fled south across the Sambre.⁹⁶ Although the Allied attack severely weakened the French line, the Campinaire-Lambusart sector represented their strongest means of defense owing to the considerable number of field works. Given Charles's inexperience, Beaulieu assumed overall command of Coburg's fourth and fifth columns. From Fleurus, the units directly under Charles would assault Lefebvre's division at Campinaire, while Beaulieu worked to take Lambusart. Although Charleroi and the Sambre crossing at Châtelet remained his primary objective, the field marshal could not simply ignore Lambusart and march directly southwest without exposing his right flank and rear.⁹⁷ Thus, the outcome of the battle depended on the fate of Lambusart and Campinaire.

Beaulieu initially outlined three principal groups to attack the Campinaire-Lambusart sector. Charles's column would lead the attack against the Campinaire

⁹⁵ Lefebvre to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

⁹⁶ Marceau to Jourdan, 26 June 1794, SHAT B1 34; Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:162-163.

⁹⁷ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34; Witzleben, *Coburg*, 303.

Height. Beaulieu instructed the archduke to soften the French line with artillery fire before launching his infantry in column against the entrenchments. For maximum shock, Charles would also use his cavalry in the attack. Beaulieu's own group would assault Lambusart. Meanwhile, an intermediary force of two battalions from Charles's column would link the two main groups east of the Lambusart-Campinaire sector. Initially, Charles's column made little progress against Campinaire. However, Beaulieu's troops benefitted from the broken and wooded terrain east of Lambusart, which shielded them from the brunt of the French artillery. The field marshal managed to insert several battalions into the eastern portion of the village. There, his troops fought the French house by house, engaging in hand-to-hand street combat that, along with the artillery fire, soon set the village ablaze. According to Beaulieu, a "barrier of flames" prevented his troops from advancing deeper into Lambusart.⁹⁸

Beaulieu quickly deduced that taking both Lambusart and Campinaire exceeded his capability. Accordingly, the field marshal determined to redirect his principal attack against Lefebvre's division at Campinaire. He left a covering force of one grenadier battalion, eight companies, nine squadrons, and several guns to harass the French at Lambusart, while he directed his main body north to join Charles east of Campinaire. Along the road from Lambusart to Fleurus, the French had constructed some of their most formidable field works. To assail the entrenchments, Beaulieu formed his column into three smaller attack columns and placed his artillery within the intervals of each

⁹⁸ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

battalion. Altogether, Beaulieu and Charles led approximately 12,000 troops against the 9,000 French entrenched around the Campinaire Height at 3:00 P.M.⁹⁹

Lefebvre's only hope rested on his ability to defend Campinaire. If the position broke, his division would be forced to retreat, possibly to Charleroi and south of the Sambre. Jourdan's entire line would be jeopardized. The advance guard observed the massing of the forces belonging to Charles and Beaulieu east of their entrenchments.¹⁰⁰ Godinot noted that after a brief intermission, the artillery fire hammered his troops at 3:00 P.M. The Austrians approached the French field works in infantry columns interspersed by cavalry and artillery. Although shelled by the French, the Allied troops steadily advanced. Despite the onslaught of canister from the French batteries, the field marshal's columns increased the pace of their approach and prepared to charge the French entrenchments to the sound of their drums. General of Brigade Jean François Leval ordered his infantry to hold their fire until the enemy came within fifteen paces. According to Godinot: "The most terrible spectacle was observed from one end of the line to the other. Never has artillery fire been so lively. A unanimous cry was heard from the right to the left of the line: *point de retraite!*"¹⁰¹ Soult recalled that despite the enemy's approach and the casualties inflicted by their artillery, "the enthusiasm of the troops increased with the danger."¹⁰²

As Beaulieu's columns advanced, the downward slope of the crest running east from Fleurus favored the French artillery and infantry. "Three times Beaulieu's troops

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Lefebvre to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

¹⁰¹ SHAT, B1 302.

¹⁰² Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:164-165.

arrived within pistol range,” wrote Jourdan, “and three times they were repulsed by the cannon fire and the musketry with considerable loss. As soon as they turned their backs, they were charged by the squadrons that debouched from the lines.”¹⁰³ The sustained artillery fire soon caused the village of Fleurus to burst into flames. Lefebvre described the horrific scene as a “gigantic volcano that seemed to have erupted from the earth to devour all.”¹⁰⁴ After Beaulieu’s repeated efforts to assail the position failed, he made a desperate attempt to outflank the French batteries with ten squadrons. According to Soult, the French repulsed every charge.¹⁰⁵ At 5:00 P.M., Beaulieu’s failed efforts to break through the Campinaire-Lambusart sector signaled the salvation of Jourdan’s right wing.

Meanwhile, Jourdan’s center continued its struggle against the columns of Quasdanovich and Kaunitz. Morlot’s division held a position south of Pont-a-Mignetoux, where French artillery kept Quasdanovich’s column in check. Several attempts by the French to cross the creek failed. At 3:00 P.M., Jourdan directed Morlot to withdraw south on Gosselies.¹⁰⁶ Hoping to pursue, Quasdanovich ordered Biderasky to lead two grenadier battalions, two infantry divisions, and six cannon to Thiméon, where he would cross south of the Piéton Stream to envelope Morlot’s left flank. By 4:00 P.M., Quasdanovich had made little progress against Morlot when an aide-de-camp suddenly arrived from Coburg’s headquarters. The Allied commander ordered Quasdanovich to retreat: Coburg finally received news of Charleroi’s surrender.

¹⁰³ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Lefebvre to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

¹⁰⁵ Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:166.

¹⁰⁶ Morlot to Jourdan, 26 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

Apparently, the commander believed the risk of sustaining the combat against Jourdan outweighed the potential benefits of winning the battle and recapturing the fortress. Thus, between 4:00 and 5:00 P.M. he issued orders for his column commanders to retreat.¹⁰⁷

Further east of Morlot, Championnet defended Heppignies against Kaunitz's column throughout the day. At 12:00 P.M., Kaunitz received word of Charles's progress against Fleurus. This news bolstered Kaunitz's determination to drive Championnet from the position. He resolved to attack Heppignies and Wangenies. An Austrian battery of eighteen cannon opened fire on the French entrenchments to soften the line before their infantry and cavalry advanced to the sound of the drums. After short engagements, Brugglach succeeded in turning Championnet's line northwest of Heppignies, where Grenier's brigade struggled to hold its ground.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, Legrand stopped Kaunitz's right wing further east at Wangenies. To support Grenier, Championnet ordered Dubois to lead the 6th Dragoon Regiment and the 10th Cavalry Regiment to assail Kaunitz's left flank. However, the Allied commander concentrated his artillery on his left. At 2:30 P.M., Dubois unknowingly directed his units along with the 4th Cavalry Regiment into the teeth of the Austrian guns. After suffering from the enemy artillery, Dubois's charge was repulsed by the musketry of Brugglach's infantry.¹⁰⁹ "Never have I seen such an obstinate combat," recalled Dubois. "The French infantry had retreated and I was alone in the field with three regiments. The enemy was initially thrown into rout, but their

¹⁰⁷ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 64-66.

infantry emerged from behind a ravine and stopped our success. I was enveloped and surrounded by the slaves. Only the God of Republicans saved me.”¹¹⁰ Kaunitz directed Charles of Lorraine to lead one carabineer regiment, one hussar squadron, one squadron of regular cavalry, and several cannon to chase Dubois. The French cavalry suffered around 200 casualties.¹¹¹

In the context of this setback, the confusion of battle ruffled Championnet’s disposition. Brugglach took Heppignies around 3:00 P.M. and advanced against Championnet’s main defensive line less than one mile south. From the southeast, Championnet heard an intense cannon fire. He worried that Lefebvre’s division might be preparing to retreat south of the Sambre. If this occurred, his right flank and rear would be exposed as at First Fleurus and he would be forced to retreat. According to Championnet’s memoirs, he made several attempts to contact Lefebvre and ascertain the condition of the advance guard. After hearing the artillery fire, Championnet sent one detachment of dragoons to Lefebvre’s headquarters. Receiving no news after thirty minutes, the impatient commander dispatched a staff officer. Still, no news arrived. Next, Championnet directed one dragoon and one aide-de-camp to proceed “with all diligence” to ascertain the condition of Lefebvre’s division. As the dragoon crossed a stream near the hamlet of Lepinoy, he encountered an infantry column from the advance guard. According to the dragoon, the infantrymen reported that Lefebvre’s division retreated on Châtelet. After Championnet received the news, Jourdan and Representatives Gillet and Guyton arrived to interrogate the dragoon. Unable to

¹¹⁰ Dubois to Jourdan, 26 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

¹¹¹ “Official Report of Coburg,” SHAT, B1 34.

determine the veracity of the dragoon's report, but seeing the division's own advance posts destroyed by superior enemy forces and noticing the increasing silence from the southeast, Championnet determined to retreat.¹¹²

According to Championnet, Legrand and Grenier's brigades already had retreated when one of his staff officers finally returned after having been wounded to deliver the news that Lefebvre held his position at the village of Lambusart. Jourdan ordered Championnet to abort his division's withdrawal and immediately counter-attack with the bayonet.¹¹³ Dubois assembled the bulk of his troopers to support the attack. Around 3:45 P.M., the French advanced on Heppignies, Wangenies, and Saint-Bernard. According to Championnet, less than one hour after ordering the counterattack, "the field was clear and the victory assured."¹¹⁴ Unbeknownst to the French, the withdrawal of Kaunitz's division occurred not because of their counter-attack, but because Coburg ordered the column to retreat shortly after 3:00 P.M. Assuming the orders reached Kaunitz within thirty minutes after departing Coburg's headquarters, it seems likely that the timing of the Austrian withdrawal corresponded exactly to the French counterattack. According to Kaunitz, the Austrian troops retained a "good countenance" and "retired in the best order and with inconsiderable losses."¹¹⁵ After a few groups of French infantry attempted a weak pursuit, the Austrian cavalry assailed them and even forced several French battalions to form square to prevent being overwhelmed.

¹¹² Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 66-67.

¹¹³ SHAT, M1 608, 2.

¹¹⁴ Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 68.

¹¹⁵ "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

As the battle concluded on the French left and center, Beaulieu also received orders to retreat, probably just before 5:00 P.M. Prior to the Austrian retreat, both sides benefitted from a respite to reform their exhausted troops. According to Soult, the French troops had engaged in “fifteen hours of the most desperate combat I have seen in my entire life. The troops’ physical strength was severely weakened. But their energy was always the same. They wanted to finish and demanded that they pursue the enemy to secure the victory.”¹¹⁶

On the other side, Beaulieu and Charles managed to reorganize their columns for one last attack against the French entrenchments despite Coburg’s orders to retreat. As their infantry advanced in columns, several hundred cavalry, including troopers from the King’s German Legion, embroiled themselves in the advance and caused much confusion in the Allied line.¹¹⁷ Taking advantage of this, Lefebvre directed his reserve against Lambusart while he formed his right in battalion columns and ordered them to attack the left flank of the Austrians east of the village. Marceau led several battalions from the right wing against Beaulieu’s flank, along with one brigade from Hatry’s division. “I placed myself at the head of the 80th Demi-Brigade,” recalled Lefebvre, “leading it against Lambusart, and soon, beating the charge, I forced the enemy to retreat from there shamefully.”¹¹⁸ Lefebvre directed his skirmishers into the woods east of the village while the enemy cavalry charged his infantry. Forced to form a massive square, the 80th Demi-Brigade repelled the Austrian troopers. While the Austrian cavalry attempted to regroup,

¹¹⁶ Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:168.

¹¹⁷ “Official Report of Coburg,” SHAT, B1 34.

¹¹⁸ Lefebvre to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

two French battalions advanced in line and unloaded an effective volley, forcing them to retire.¹¹⁹

As the fighting between Lefebvre's division and Beaulieu's cavalry occurred at Lambusart, Beaulieu already had commenced the retreat of his and Charles's columns northeast towards Gembloux, per Coburg's orders. Zoph's troops retreated to Bossière while Beaulieu marched further north to Grand-Manil. Charles led his column further west to Marbais. Austrian sources describe the retreat as universally tranquil because the French lacked the strength to pursue.¹²⁰ Lefebvre's report confirms the poor condition of the French after the battle: "At 6:00 P.M., while the fires were still burning, we perceived that the enemy was retreating; it was too late to pursue him energetically; the artillery was, for the most part, dismounted, the battalions crushed by fatigue, and the horses unable to run."¹²¹ Soult attributed the lack of pursuit to the "absolute need for repose felt by the troops."¹²² The day after the battle, Lefebvre's division, like the other French units, rested and cleaned the debris from the field, regretfully counting the vast number of corpses. Estimates for casualties vary between 2,000 to 7,000 for both sides.¹²³

Jourdan won the battle of Second Fleurus by turning the Army of the Sambre and Meuse into an effective fighting force. Although the surrender of Charleroi convinced Coburg of the futility of further resistance, this obscures the fact that his goal was to

¹¹⁹ Ibid; "Official Report of Coburg," SHAT, B1 34.

¹²⁰ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 371-372.

¹²¹ Lefebvre to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

¹²² Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:170.

¹²³ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2, provides the lower figure of 2,600 for the French; Jomini, *Histoire Critique et Militaire*, 5:151-152, states that both sides lost between 4,000-5,000; Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:170, grants the French 5,000 and the Allies 7,000.

inflict a decisive defeat on the French in addition to saving Charleroi.¹²⁴ Nonetheless, the French only barely managed to withstand the repeated assaults of the Austrian and Dutch troops. According to Langeron, “the decisive and important battle of Fleurus was won by our soldiers and lost by our general.”¹²⁵ Coburg offered a variety of explanations for the defeat, which shed light on his decision-making. The Allied commander based his decision on French numerical superiority, the natural advantages of the French defensive position, and their substantial artillery.¹²⁶ Considering these disadvantages – ones that Coburg failed to comprehend prior to the battle – the impact of Charleroi’s fall becomes clear. Certainly, Coburg could have reformed his left wing and assaulted Kléber. An earlier concentration against Fleurus and Campinaire might have broken Lefebvre’s division. Charles believed that another sustained effort against Lambusart would have enabled the Austrians to save Charleroi. According to Jomini, had Coburg concentrated against one or two positions such as Gosselies and Fleurus, he would have successfully punctured Jourdan’s frail line. However, after 5:00 P.M., success became more unlikely as the risks of further combat increased.¹²⁷

Thus, while the French deserve credit for the victory, triumphalist depictions of the battle grossly exaggerate the contingency involved. Soult noted that even after learning of Charleroi’s fall, Coburg could still have hoped for victory.¹²⁸ Prussian observers regretted that the Allied retreat left the French with the “illusion of success.”¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2:164.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Pingaud, *L'invasion Austro-Prussienne*, 77.

¹²⁶ “Official Report of Coburg,” SHAT, B1 34.

¹²⁷ Witzleben, *Coburg*, 320.

¹²⁸ Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:193.

¹²⁹ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 374-375.

In reality, the French suffered a number of setbacks during the battle. For instance, Montaigu's division completely mishandled the defense of Courcelles during the morning. Against Waldeck's Dutch troops, the French citizen-soldiers retreated in much disorder to Marchienne-au-Pont. The French left wing achieved success due only to its numerical superiority of nearly two-to-one. Duhesme's division remained inactive throughout the first half of the battle and acted as an effective reserve after William's troops exhausted themselves in their advance. Further east, the French right wing completely collapsed early in the combat. Marceau's troops from the Ardennes Army lacked the cohesion and tactical ability of the troops from the Army of the Moselle.

Fortuitously for the French, Jourdan possessed a reserve strong enough to recover the right flank and hold Lambusart. Lefebvre's advance guard won the battle for the French by defending Campinaire and Lambusart, despite ceding Fleurus. The divisions of Championnet and Morlot failed to withstand the attacks of Quasdanovich and Kaunitz, and only succeeded after the Allied commanders received the order to retreat.¹³⁰ After the Allies commenced the retreat, the French proved unable to pursue because Jourdan committed his reserve piece-meal in order to manage crises as they developed rather than holding his reserve to deliver a decisive blow at the conclusion of the battle. Having depleted his reserve, Jourdan found his troops too exhausted to pursue Coburg's army.

While the French won Second Fleurus, their victory resulted from an adherence to traditional military virtues such as discipline, organization, leadership, and flexible tactics rather than a revolutionary approach to warfare. The process of creating a professional

¹³⁰ Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire*, 5:152.

army began in 1793 with the *amalgame* and the greater emphasis on training camps and drill. Especially in the Moselle Army, the French realized that only discipline would allow the amateur citizen-soldiers to fight the professional troops of the Old Regime effectively. After Jourdan forged the Sambre and Meuse Army, these principles continued to guide the work of the generals and the representatives on mission. On the battlefield, the army benefitted from greater training and discipline to employ flexible tactics that suited terrain and circumstance. Although the revolutionary government linked shock tactics to republicanism, the army sought to utilize the 1791 Regulations whenever possible. By 1794, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse proved capable of fighting in closed formations such as line, column, and square, while also working effectively in open order formations. These tactics were not revolutionary; rather, they evolved from debates within Old Regime military circles. The process of military evolution continued in the Sambre and Meuse Army after Second Fleurus and brought the French success throughout the rest of the 1794 campaign.

CHAPTER 8

A REVOLUTIONARY ARMY?

The Old Regime Inheritance of the Sambre and Meuse Army

Jean-Baptiste Mauzaisse's famous 1837 painting of the battle of Second Fleurus evokes a triumphalist interpretation of the victory. Placed in the center of the painting, Jourdan sits gallantly atop a white horse, holding a saber in his right hand and inspiring the soldiers below him. Generals Championnet and Kléber, both of whom died before the imperial years, stand confidently behind his left shoulder, ready to give their all for the nation. Over Jourdan's right shoulder glares Saint-Just, holding in his breast pocket a list of doomed generals and officers ready to present to the Committee of Public Safety if the outcome proved unfortunate. In the background, the French aerostat towers over the field, symbolizing to all the mighty achievement of French arms on that memorable day.

Of course, Mauzaisse was more interested in capturing the patriotic emotion of the battle than in presenting historical reality. Jourdan's exact role at Fleurus remains unclear due to the lack of specificity in the sources. He probably spent most of the day in the rear at Ransart, where he transferred units from his reserve to plug gaps in the line. In the early morning, Jourdan and Morlot observed the battle from the balloon, which the French floated slightly east of Jumet. Kléber and Championnet were not at Jourdan's side during the battle – the reports and memoirs clearly place them at the head of their respective divisions. Saint-Just was far in the rear, settling affairs at Charleroi, but his shadow probably influenced the decision-making of the generals. Nonetheless, the

victory at Fleurus did not result from a burst of patriotic fervor and the power of the “Indivisible Republic.”¹

Contemporary observers and historians have debated the contribution of the aerostat to French success at Second Fleurus. The balloon, named *L'Entreprenant*, arrived at Charleroi from Maubeuge on 23 June in time to participate in the siege. On the 26th, it provided the French a panoramic view of the battlefield. R.R. Palmer correctly views the aerostat as a symbol of the Committee’s “eagerness to apply the latest scientific discoveries to the art of war.”² According to Palmer, the balloon encouraged the French soldiers, while striking fear in the hearts of the Austrians. Of course, this fails to explain why the Austrian troops continued to fight tenaciously until their generals ordered them to retreat.

On the opposite extreme, Soult and Championnet ridiculed the contribution of the aerostat, preferring instead to explain the victory by the martial virtue of the “citizen-soldiers.” As Soult reflected, “that ridiculous invention does not deserve credit for playing an important role at Fleurus, it was entirely an embarrassment. The sole causes of our victory were the valor of the troops, the wise arrangements of the commander, and the unshakable firmness of the other generals.”³ In an odd omission, Jourdan failed to mention the aerostat in his memoirs and reports to the Committee of Public Safety. Several years later, he informed the War Ministry that balloons lacked utility in the field

¹ Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, 2:98.

² Palmer, *Twelve who Ruled*, 354. It is puzzling that the balloon is not mentioned in Ken Alder’s interesting study of the French engineers, Ken Alder, *Engineering the Revolution: Arms and Enlightenment in France, 1763-1815* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).

³ Soult, *Mémoires*, 1:171.

armies and that they should find for them more useful functions.⁴ Despite its questionable usefulness, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse carried the balloon in the conquest of Belgium and across the Rhine River into Germany. The Austrians captured the balloon in 1796 and placed it in Vienna's Imperial War Museum.⁵ Like many supposed innovations of Revolutionary France, the aerostat proved more novel than effective.

Like many of the French innovations in 1794, the French also inherited the aerostat from the Old Regime. The first successful balloon flight was that of the famous Montgolfier brothers in 1783. In 1785, several people flew as high as 10,000 feet in more sophisticated aerial vehicles. Two aeronauts crossed the Straits of Dover in a balloon voyage that same year. Carnot, an early advocate of the French air corps, first discovered the potential of balloons in 1784 as an engineer in the Royal Army. He wrote a report in support of them to the French Academy of Sciences.⁶ Thus, the balloons were not a product of the Revolution, but rather exemplify the tendency of the revolutionaries to take credit for Old Regime innovations.

As typical of revolutionary regimes, the French proved eager to distance themselves from the past. The revolutionaries portrayed their achievements as epitomes of the modern, while viewing the Old Regime as archaic and inefficient. Nonetheless, as S.P. MacKenzie articulates: "There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the changes wrought were not as sweeping or novel as is commonly supposed."⁷ In the key areas of

⁴ Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 379.

⁵ As Biro sarcastically remarked: "Circumference of balloon, or aerostat, as it was called: 100 ft. Elevation during the battle of Fleurus: 500 ft. Time aloft: 9 hrs. Subsequent history: captured by the Austrians two years later. Disposition: museum." Biro, *German Policy of Revolutionary France*, 1:238.

⁶ Palmer, *Twelve who Ruled*, 355.

⁷ MacKenzie, *Revolutionary Armies*, 46.

tactics, discipline, organization, and leadership, numerous continuities and evolutionary changes figured prominently in the success of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, undermining the notion of a revolution in military affairs.

Popular opinion holds that the enthusiastic yet poorly trained citizen-soldiers of Year Two only could perform effectively in column or as skirmishers. However, rather than undermining their tactical effectiveness, these limitations somehow allowed the French to overcome the constraints of eighteenth century linear warfare.⁸ Thus, largely through necessity, the French brokered a tactical revolution.⁹ However, historians have long questioned this view. Colin, for instance, proposed that the Moselle Army fought in line rather than column and rarely employed skirmishers. According to Colin, the officers trained and drilled the troops in camps and garrisons according to the ordinances established by the 1791 Regulation.¹⁰ Both views suggest that the French only utilized a single tactical formation exclusive of any variety. Thus, proponents of the revolutionary view favor column or skirmishers, while professional military writers such as Colin favor the line.

Lynn convincingly rejects the idea that the French employed a single tactical formation. Rather, he shows that the Army of the North utilized a flexible tactical system: one that allowed the French to change tactics based on terrain and circumstance. While the column predominated, Lynn found evidence for the line and square in numerous combats from 1791-1794.¹¹ However, he suggests that this flexible tactical

⁸ Michelet, *Les soldats de la Révolution*, 23-35.

⁹ Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, 98-99.

¹⁰ Colin, *Tactique et discipline*, 50-58.

¹¹ Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 278-279.

system was new and unique to the French citizen-soldier. The evidence questions Lynn's assertion of French innovation.

As Nosworthy and Quimby demonstrate, the 1791 Regulation – which established tactical flexibility – was not a revolutionary document. Far from rejecting eighteenth century tactics, the Regulation represented the culmination of a debate that raged in the French army since the War of the Spanish Succession.¹² Throughout the eighteenth century, French and other European military theorists debated the merits of column and line. Two groups appeared from this debate: proponents of *l'ordre profond* (those who favored shock action) and *l'ordre mince* (those who favored firepower). Like the Revolutionaries who professed that the French citizen-soldier excelled in attacking, French theorists such as Jean Charles Chevalier de Folard, Maurice de Saxe, and François-Jean de Mesnil-Durand believed that shock action especially suited the French national character. Refuting these romanticized conceptions, practical-minded writers such as Jacques Antoine Hippolyte Comte de Guibert stated the need for both shock and firepower depending on the situation. Eventually, the theorists of the late Old Regime arrived at a compromise: *l'ordre mixte*. Allowing for column and line, mixed order tactics achieved tactical flexibility before the Revolution and were finally codified in 1791.¹³

Numerous examples abound of flexible tactics in action. Despite the political emotion of the bayonet, the majority of French officers remained committed to the

¹² Nosworthy, *With Musket, Cannon, and Sword*, 163, 177; Quimby, *Background of Napoleon Warfare*, 306.

¹³ Steven Ross, *From Flintlock to Musket*, 53.

flexible and professional tactical system of the 1791 Regulation. Schauenbourg trained the troops of the Moselle Army in column for marching and line for attack.

Kaiserslautern demonstrated the flaws in Hoche's commitment to the bayonet after his zeal and blind faith in shock compelled him to launch a series of inadvisable attacks over three days. Evidence suggests that the army tried to employ flexible tactics with varying degrees of success in 1793, even under Hoche. Ambert's troops, for instance, tried to form square on the third day at Kaiserslautern and the army employed the line formation in the attack at Wissembourg.

In 1794, the Moselle Army benefitted from further training under Jourdan and effectively employed flexible tactics during the Arlon and Fleurus campaigns. Jourdan rejected revolutionary shock tactics as ineffective. Referring to General Fromentin, Jourdan complained: "He ignored the first elements of the art of war and literally believed what is ceaselessly repeated from the podium of the Convention and the Jacobins – that all the talent of a general consists of charging at the head of his troops against the enemy, wherever he may be found."¹⁴ Prior to the Fleurus campaign, Jourdan emphasized to Ernouf the importance of ensuring that the troops were properly trained and capable of reloading their muskets. The troops from the Army of the North usually approached in column, attacked in line, and then pursued in column according to the 1791 Regulation. Duhesme's division did this at both Fleurus battles and achieved success.¹⁵ The performance of Lefebvre's division at second Fleurus provides another clear example of French tactical flexibility. As Archduke Charles's column opened its

¹⁴ Quoted in MacKenzie, *Revolutionary Armies*, 44.

¹⁵ Kléber to Jourdan, 17 June 1794, 26 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

assault, Lefebvre's regular infantry remained in their defensive entrenchments while French skirmishers held forward posts. After the Austrians drove the French skirmishers back, the infantry obstructed the Austrians' advance with musketry while their artillery provided further defensive firepower. Fighting of this sort continued throughout the rest of the day, until the last Austrian attack failed to crack the French entrenchments. As Coburg's left wing began to retreat at 5:00 P.M., the French organized a counterassault that included the infantry attacking in column along with a considerable cavalry charge.¹⁶

Despite Lynn's assertion of French innovation and uniqueness, it is clear that French tactics were not significantly different from the tactics used by Old Regime armies in the 1790s. At the second battle of Kaiserslautern in May 1794, for instance, the Prussian army under Mollendorf attacked Moreaux's forces in column and repulsed the French.¹⁷ Most significantly, Coburg's infantry repeatedly charged the French lines in attack columns at Second Fleurus. Despite the French field works and artillery, the Austrian "slave-soldiers" charged again and again, refuting any notion that only French "citizen-soldiers" possessed the necessary commitment to employ shock. Thus, the tactics used by the French in 1794 seem less innovative and unique than historians typically believe.

The spirit of the French citizen-soldier is normally presented as pioneering. According to the patriotic myth, French troops were citizens who fought for a larger cause than the soldiers of the Old Regime. Thus, disciplinary measures proved unnecessary because the men were already committed. Spurred on by political

¹⁶ Lefebvre to Jourdan, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.

¹⁷ Moreaux, *René Moreaux*, 134-137.

pamphlets, the troops would become patriotic political agents. On the battlefield, their supposedly higher *élan* would invalidate the fear-based discipline of the Old Regime slave-soldiers. As Soboul wrote: “In the year II the army of the Republic was a truly revolutionary army, intimately tied to the popular classes of society and an instrument of defense for the social and political conquests of these classes. Its inflexible morale, supported by an enthusiasm emanating from the very depths of the people, allowed it to face up to the enemy in the most difficult conditions, and then to achieve victory.”¹⁸

If this popular myth corresponded to reality, the question remains: why did the Committee of Public Safety resort to draconian disciplinary measures in 1794? As observed in the Moselle Army, this “bourgeois army” of 1791 – composed of the patriotic volunteers that Bertaud praises – faced serious desertion during the Trier campaign of December 1792.¹⁹ Desertion continued through 1794 and represented one of the great drains on the Republic’s military power. Furthermore, the tactical effectiveness of the raw recruits often paled in comparison to veterans of the Royal Army. The *amalgame* demonstrated the regime’s recognition of this fact. The Committee of Public Safety sought to unify the army, in part, to achieve a more tactically cohesive and disciplined army.²⁰

In the Moselle Army, and later the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, the spirit of the troops could not secure victory. Delaage’s soldiers demonstrated this at the first battle of Arlon in June 1793, when the men of the right wing routed despite their reported

¹⁸ Soboul, *Les soldats de l’an II*, 6.

¹⁹ Bertaud, *The Army of the Revolution*, 65-71.

²⁰ Reinhard, *Le Grand Carnot*, 2:75.

enthusiasm. Only thorough training and strict discipline – values of the Old Regime – enabled the recruits to stand against professional troops. By 1794, the representatives on mission aimed to create a professional army – no longer believing that amateur but spirited troops could prove effective. Saint-Just famously enacted harsh disciplinary measures in the Moselle and Rhine Armies in late 1793, while Representatives Gillet and Guyton introduced a draconian system of military justice in the Sambre and Meuse Army, aiming to coerce both the troops and the officer corps. The performance of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse in 1794 demonstrates the value of drill, training, and discipline. Despite their outward contempt for the Old Regime slave-soldiers, the French sought to emulate their military professionalism after realizing the weakness of their own spirited amateurism.

The French logistical system had much to do with maintaining discipline in the field army. While often depicted as innovative, the French system of “living off the land” was truly born of necessity.²¹ During the Fleurus campaign, the French attempted to supply the army through normal methods established during the Old Regime. These included depots, supply lines, and magazines.²² The French used the Meuse River as their main line of operation and determined to take Namur and Liège in order to secure their communication and supply. However, the state failed to meet the demand and gradually resorted to requisitions. Old Regime powers routinely enacted similar requisitions and contributions in times of war exhaustion. Furthermore, European rulers

²¹ Alan Forrest, “Logistics of Revolutionary War in France,” in Chickering and Forster, *War in an Age of Revolution*, 177-196.

²² Martin van Crevald, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 36.

including Louis XIV and Frederick the Great regularly waged offensive campaigns to force enemy states to pay for war. As the French realized, pillaging undermined discipline and Revolutionary ideals. Thus, as in Old Regime armies, the French forbade pillaging and punished culprits harshly.

Georges Lefebvre cited military organization as the Republic's "chief innovation" in 1794. While correctly praising Jourdan for his adoption of the divisional system, Lefebvre overlooked the evolutionary process of organizational change that began during the eighteenth century.²³ As armies increased in size, organizational reforms struggled to maintain pace. During the middle of the century, Frederick the Great rarely commanded more than 50,000 men in a single battle.²⁴ After the *levée en masse*, French armies swelled to an almost unprecedented size. By the end of 1794, Jourdan commanded nearly 100,000 troops in a battle. In order to cope with these massive armies, the French pursued organizational reforms initiated during the Old Regime.

The combat division emerged in the French army in the Seven Years War under Victor-François Duc de Broglie. French military writers such as Pierre-Joseph Bourcet proposed the permanent combat division as a necessary military unit above the regiment and brigade.²⁵ In 1794, the French fielded combined-arms divisions that grouped two infantry brigades together with an artillery park, one cavalry regiment, and a divisional staff. Although divisions brought the French considerable advantages, they did not prove immediately invincible to the less formalized regimental organization of the Old Regime.

²³ Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, 99.

²⁴ Christopher Duffy, *Frederick the Great: A Military Life* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

²⁵ Robert B. Bruce, Iain Dickie, Kevin Kiley, Michael F. Pavkovic, and Frederick C. Schneid, *Fighting Techniques of the Napoleonic Age, 1792-1815: Equipment, Combat Skills, and Tactics* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2008), 141-142; Quimby, *Background of Napoleonic Warfare*, 175-184.

Furthermore, they developed at a different pace in each army. Combined-arms divisions did not appear in the Army of Italy until 1796.²⁶ Thus, the evolution of the divisional system was not linear: it witnessed several periods of stalemated broken by bursts of change.

As noted, the French adopted demi-brigades to increase the tactical cohesion of the citizen-army. The process of *embrigadement* was not complete by 1794, and a new wave of demi-brigades had to be created in a second *amalgame* starting in 1796.²⁷ Despite the efforts of the representatives on mission, many units remained un-brigaded during the Fleurus campaign. The impact of this on French tactical cohesion at the Fleurus battles remains unclear. Representative Gillet struggled throughout the process, mainly because other necessary responsibilities – such as supply – delayed his work.

Increasing army size forced the French to enact changes that eventually produced the corps system. As early as 1793, Jourdan organized the Army of the North into wing commands at Wattignies. In 1794, the wing commands he devised for the Sambre and Meuse Army became permanent structures. As army size increased, the scale of battle grew and the commander's ability to oversee operations decreased. Thus, Jourdan entrusted commanders – Kléber and Marceau in the case of the Fleurus campaign – to command his left and right wings, while he personally directed the center. Nonetheless, this organizational system did not immediately inaugurate operational warfare. Armies increased in size through the early modern period and forced their leaders to adapt

²⁶ Steven Ross, "The Development of the Combat Division in Eighteenth-Century French Armies," *French Historical Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring, 1965): pp. 84-94.

²⁷ Rothenberg, *Art of Warfare*, 102-104.

gradually.²⁸ As Claus Telp recognizes, despite the increased ability of the French to employ maneuver for the purpose of seeking battle, the birth of modern operational art appeared only with Napoleon's corps system.²⁹ Thus, the organizational wing commands that Jourdan created mark a crucial – and overlooked – stage in the evolutionary process that began with the divisional system and ended with the army corps, but they were not the culmination of Revolutionary organizational innovations.

New men commanded the French armies, to be sure, and as noted this was revolutionary to war and society. However, the impact of these new leaders on warfare can be overstated. Most gained military experience before the Revolution and many served as officers. The overwhelming majority of the commanders in the Army of the Sambre and Meuse had some form of prior military service in the Old Regime army. Most notably, Jourdan served as a private in the American Revolutionary War. Kléber was commissioned in Austrian military service and Lefebvre had been a sergeant in the French Guards. Schérer possessed a vast military career prior to the Revolution, having served in the Austrian, French, and Dutch armies, even achieving the position of lieutenant-colonel while in Dutch service. Hatry reached colonel in the French Royal Army. Like Jourdan, generals such as Marceau, Championnet, and Morlot served in the

²⁸ Anderson, *Warfare and Society*, 4; Chickering, *War in an Age of Revolution*, 32; Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars: An International History* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 1-14; Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 46-61.

²⁹ Telp, *Evolution of Operational Art*, 45.

ranks prior to 1789.³⁰ Owing to their military background, they were committed to military norms such as discipline and training.

According to traditional views, the new generation of French commanders rejected the slow and methodical campaigns of the Old Regime age of limited warfare. Certainly, the rhetoric of the revolutionaries aimed to achieve battles of annihilation and decisive offensives. Sieges and maneuver would no longer stymie military operations because the new logistics freed the French from lines of operations and depot systems.³¹ In contrast, Jourdan's command suggests a continuation of eighteenth century practices. He commonly employed defensive tactics, remained committed to sieges, and typically dispersed his army rather than concentrating to deliver the decisive blow. During the entire Fleurus Campaign, Jourdan and the Committee of Public Safety pursued a methodical siege campaign aimed more at capturing Charleroi than defeating an enemy army. Despite numerical superiority and the exhortation of the Committee to seek decisive engagements, Jourdan did not aggressively seek the enemy army in offensive battles. Although Jourdan did not innovate a new art of war, he proved an effective military manager and, unlike many before him, he retained command of the army for several years after the Fleurus campaign.

After Second Fleurus, the Allies retreated north and east, the Dutch and British eventually fleeing to Holland, while the Austrians struggled to defend Belgium alone. At the beginning of July, Jourdan and the Sambre and Meuse Army entered Brussels.

³⁰ Peter Wetzler has accumulated short biographical entries for nearly every officer in the Army of the Sambre and Meuse for 1794, Wetzler, *War and Subsistence*, 269-293.

³¹ Telp, *Evolution of Operational Art*, 35-37.

Rather than rapidly pursuing the retreating Austrians, the Committee ordered Jourdan to divide the army to capture several geographic points. Thus, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse embarked on another siege campaign that lasted through August 1794. After General Schérer finally captured Landrécies, he returned to the main field army to assist Jourdan in driving the Austrians from the Low Countries. The French defeated the Austrians at the battles of the Ourthe and Roer in September and October respectively, while conducting the siege of Maastricht. At the Ourthe, the Austrian troops offered an impressive resistance, but were completely surprised by a successful feint attack launched by Jourdan the day before the battle. Demoralized after a year of setbacks and poor leadership, the Austrians offered meager resistance at the Roer and, by the end of the year, had completely ceded the left bank of the Rhine to the French. Despite the success of the 1794 campaign in the Low Countries, the army had not achieved a revolution in warfare. As demonstrated by the campaigns of 1795 and 1796 in Germany, the Old Regime Austrian Army could still hold its own against the forces of Revolutionary France.

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