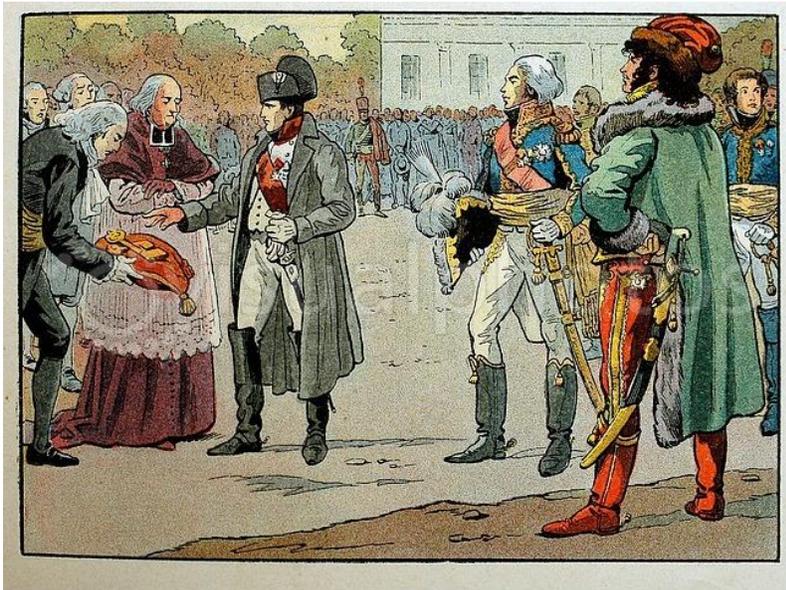


La Bataille de Schoengraben...aka Hollenbrun

Murat's Movements After Ulm And The Fall of Vienna



Prince Joachim Murat, Marshal of France, and brother-in-law to the Emperor Napoleon, was known for not only his personal bravery and his stylish flamboyance, but also for his flamboyance of attitude and his bravado in making his decisions—often exceeding both his capacity and his authority. This was clearly a character flaw that would lead to his unfortunate death in 1815, but Murat still faced his glory years. In 1805, while he was a prince of the Empire, Murat was not yet

the Grand Duke of Berg or the King of Naples. His stature was such, along with the rest of the imperial nobility, that in that early year of the Napoleonic era, Murat had not yet achieved enough success on the European stage to warrant the confidence necessary to carry the diplomatic day.

In the campaign following the Capitulation at Ulm, which destroyed the larger part of the main Austrian army under the unfortunate General Mack in October, 1805, Murat had been able to capture Vienna in November of that year with his usual panache. The French would win a series of smaller battles on their way to the Austrian capitol, and the fall of Vienna would demonstrate that the Austrians were just about finished. However, the Austrian ally, Russia, was mobilizing with its usual glacier-like alacrity. Nearly a 100,000 Russians would be ready to join the remnants of the Austrian forces to oppose Napoleon's efforts to destroy the Third Coalition.

On November 13, 1805, Prince Murat—along with Marshal Lannes--would capture a bridge over the Danube at Vienna by convincing the Coalition forces that an armistice had been reached, when in fact, no such agreement had been discussed, much less reached between the French Imperial forces and the Russian and Austrian armies. The establishment of this crucial bridgehead on the north side of the Danube would allow the French to pursue the Russian army.

However, Murat's success would tempt him to again try to conclude a *coup de main* on the Coalition forces, and pin the Russians down till Napoleon and the main French army could join the battle. Murat would again attempt to utilize cleverness rather than earnestness to outsmart the Coalition just three days later on November 16 with a similar ruse, claiming to the Russian forces that an armistice had been achieved. This act of bravado, on the part of Murat, had placed the French in an excellent position to conclude the Napoleon's campaign if they could press the Russians under General Mikhail Kutuzov to engage the French before they were ready. At least that is what Murat thought.

The French Position Deteriorates

However, this time, the French could not take solace in Murat's machinations; because the primary Russian army under Kutuzov was still intact in Moravia and in fact that army was waiting for another army to join the as yet undamaged Russian force. Kutuzov wanted to join his forces with another piece of the Russian army, those troops under Wilhelm von Buxhowden, yet another non-Russian, Russian general, who was a German Balt from Livonia. Buxhowden was marching his army south in an attempt to link up with Kutuzov's force, now hovering around Moravia in what would be called today the eastern Czech Republic.

Emperor Alexander and the local Russian commander, Pyotr Bagration, who was an Armenian, knew exactly what the strategic situation was. Kutuzov was only too ready to play along with Murat's game—Kutuzov only wanted time to consummate his juncture with Buxhowden. So as Murat was playing at Foreign Minister, the Russians were moving away from the main French forces and towards joining the two parts of the army. Marshal Jean Lannes, who along with Marshal Jean de Dieu Soult, commanded troops in Murat's command, had warned Murat against talking armistice with the Russians. However, Murat ignored Lannes' counsel and continued with the diplomatic patter.

The French position was fragile. Winter was fast approaching, and the French were already extended deep into Coalition territory. The French had already begun to suffer from the attrition that comes necessarily from a long campaign far away from La Grande Armée's supply depots. The French troops in the Lower Austria area only totaled 80,000, and with the need for garrisons and line-of-communication troops, the total would continue to decline. The Russians and the Austrian remnants, though not united, totaled over 90,000. Unlike the Coalition, Napoleon could not afford to suffer a defeat in his campaign...it would mean the end of his empire and the end of his rule.

Napoleon Orders Murat To Attack

When Napoleon learned of the brash Murat's attempt at diplomacy rather than a vigorous pursuit of the Russian forces in front of him, he was furious...as preserved in Napoleon's correspondence and revealed in a letter to his brother-in-law,... "I cannot find words to express my displeasure. You only command my vanguard and have no right to agree to an armistice without my orders. You will cost me the fruits of a campaign. End the armistice at once, and attack the enemy. Inform him that the general who has signed this has no power to make it, that only the Russian Emperor has the right, and that when the Russian Emperor ratifies this

agreement, I will also ratify it. But it is only a ruse. March, destroy the Russian army. You are in a position to take his baggage and artillery.”

Murat, now with the direct orders of Napoleon in hand, begins to move his command to attack. He has 30,000 troops of all arms and begins the battle from the village of Schoengrabern in lower Austria between 4 pm and 5 pm on November 16.

The reports from the battle remain sketchy, but it does appear Murat wanted to flank the Russians, who were assembled around Grund, just east of the French, with around 8,000 mixed arms troops. As Murat begins his flanking move to the left of their starting positions in Schoengrabern, Russian artillery from the heights west of Grund fires into the French-held village, setting the church and around 60 homes ablaze. The French assault is stymied in large part due to extensive vineyards just east of the town that cover most of the terrain between Schoengrabern and Grund. The effect of the vineyards was to limit substantially the coordinated French attacks. The attacks from Lannes on the right and Soult on the left started and stopped. The Russian fire was withering and their defense was fanatical in an evening when the light was gone quickly. Murat, who was a master at directing cavalry, was far less capable when providing infantry with orders. His attacks at Schoengrabern, like elsewhere where he commanded infantry, would start and stop, and would prove not very effective.

Then, General Nicolas Oudinot along with his grenadiers, was able to attack the Russian center. General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas (father of the famous French writer Alexandre Dumas) in his recollection of the battle, described that the brave Oudinot had reached pistol range of the Russian leading his attack. However, Oudinot was seriously wounded with a bullet to the thigh. The fallen Oudinot's attack appears to have convinced Bagration that the Russian position was untenable and he broke off the six-hour long battle. After the battle, Napoleon assigned General Gerard Duroc to take over command of Oudinot's grenadiers, and he led them with great success at Austerlitz.

The Russians had fought brilliantly. Even though they lost between 3000 and 4000 troops, Bagration's delaying tactics had allowed Kutuzov to slip away from Napoleon and join Buxhowden in Brunn, Moravia on November 18. The combined Russian armies, including Bagration's battered command, would now exceed the size of Napoleon's forces in the weeks before Austerlitz.