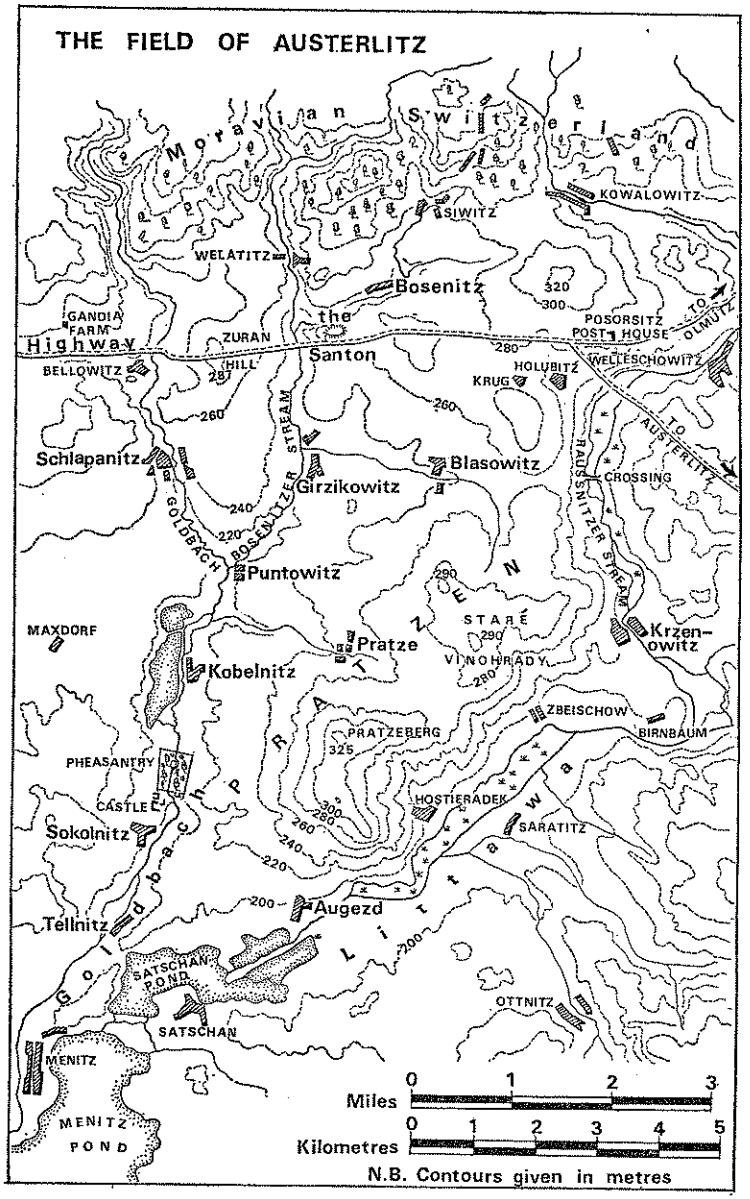
CHAPTER 7

GROUND, FORCES AND PLANS

FOR centuries the tract of open land between Brünn and Austerlitz had known the comings and goings of armies and sovereigns. The fortress-town of Brünn and its grim citadel of Spielberg had helped to save the Austrian monarchy from the Prussians in the last century. At the hamlet of Raussnitz, a dozen miles to the east, the reforming Emperor Joseph II had deigned to descend from his coach and try his hand at a peasant's plough. A pillar was raised to commemorate the event. Joseph's mother, the great Maria Theresa, had been known to visit the tasteful palace at Austerlitz, a short distance to the south, and watch the peasants of Prince Kaunitz perform their country dances.

Now, in December, 1805, all attention was focused on a stretch of this countryside measuring roughly four miles from east to west and nine miles from north to south. The only feature of immediately apparent significance was the northern edge of the field, which was formed by the low wooded hills of the 'Moravian Switzerland', which approached the Olmütz-Brünn highway as it marched from east to west.

The rest of the field is best described with reference to the plateau of Pratzen, which formed an irregular triangle bounded to the north by the highway, to the west by the Goldbach stream and its tributaries, and to the south-east and east by the valleys of the Littawa and its tributary the Raussnitz stream. So famous in military history, the Pratzen presented a surprisingly modest



appearance, being a straggling ridge which only seemed of significance when seen from the marshy level of the Littawa. On the other side, towards the west, the plateau fell away towards the Goldbach and its tributaries in a series of gentle salients and re-entrants. Two villages sheltered in the folds of the hill. One was Blasowitz, just over a mile south of the highway. The other was the hamlet of Pratze, which nestled between the 'high' points of the Staré Vinohrady (298 m, literally 'Old Vineyards') to the north, and the Pratzeberg (325 m) to the south. Except for some vineyards north of the Staré Vinohrady, the Pratzen plateau was open country which offered full access to all arms.

Along the western side of the field, the watercourses of the Goldbach and its tributary the Bosenitzer stream snaked out of Moravian Switzerland and united at the village of Puntowitz. From here the Goldbach wriggled southwards along a damp valley of marshes, thickets and lakes. Along their length the streams were bordered by wretched hamlets of wide muddy streets and single-storey thatched houses. From north to south we number off Bellowitz and Schlapanitz on the upper Goldbach, and Girzikowitz on the Bosenitzer stream. Below the junction at Puntowitz we encounter the hamlet of Kobelnitz, where the Goldbach bordered a long stagnant pond which stretched for about a mile to the south. Below the Kobelnitz pond the stream flowed through the prominent pheasantry or the game park of Sokolnitz—a dark mass of trees and bushes which was enclosed by a low brick wall. The parent castle of Sokolnitz was a solidly-built country house, set about with massive old barns. Further south again, the village of Sokolnitz crowned a muddy bank on the west side of the Goldbach. After nine hundred yards of soggy meadows, one encountered the village of Tellnitz, which stood on the east bank, and formed the last group of habitations before the Goldbach joined the Littawa in a series of wide but shallow fish ponds—the famous 'lakes' of Napoleonic legend.

On 2 December, 1805, the ponds and the stagnant stretches of the watercourses were covered with melting sheets of ice of varying thickness, and in the slight thaw the earthy banks became extremely slippery. The Goldbach line proved all the more effective an obstacle because an observer on the Pratzen

could not always see beyond the screen of houses, bushes and orchards.

One feature of the field bulked especially large in Napoleon's plans. This was the prominent hillock (see p. 72) situated beside the highway just east of the point where it crossed the Bosenitzer stream. It was known to the Austrians as the 'Maria-Schneeberg', but the French termed it the 'Santon', for it was crowned with a little chapel which reminded the veterans of the tombs they had seen in Egypt. The Santon rose nearly fifty feet above the surrounding valleys, and gave the French an offensive bridgehead on the far side of the Bosenitzer stream. 'This is what rendered the position so valuable, for it was useful for both defensive and offensive purposes. Master of this position, the Emperor could use it as a base of operations, whether he intended to act in the valley of Bellowitz, that of Puntowitz, or even in that of Blasowitz.'[1]

For the battle of 2 December Napoleon had at his disposal 139 pieces of artillery and a nominal 73–75,000 men. The effective force, however, may well have stood at as little as 60,000, for a sizeable proportion of the establishment was either in no fit state to fight, or fallen by the wayside or had even deserted. We are unlikely to establish the precise figures, for colonels were notoriously unwilling to admit to Napoleon that their units were under-strength.

We shall now enumerate briefly the composition of Napoleon's army from left to right, or north to south (see the detailed description of forces on pp. 181–4). Beginning with the main concentration along the highway, we encounter:

V Corps (Lannes; 12,700 men and 20 guns)
Imperial Guard (Bessières; 5,500 men and 24 guns)
Grenadier division (Oudinot; 5,700 men)
I Corps (Bernadotte; 13,000 men and 24 guns)
Cavalry Reserve Corps (Murat; 7,400 men)

Further south along the Goldbach was positioned the IV Corps (Soult; 23,600 men and 35 guns). Arriving from the direction of Vienna, the III Corps (Davout) could put into the field only the infantry division of Friant (3,800 men and 9 guns) and the

supporting dragoon division of Bourcier (2,500 men and 3 guns).

Napoleon's ideas about the coming action underwent a number of subtle changes, and culminated in a final master plan which by no means corresponded with the sequence of the battle as it was actually fought.

What we shall term the 'First Plan' was the Emperor's original design to entice the allies to attack his right centre, and then pinch them out from either side with Davout attacking from the south, and the main army irrupting from the north against the hostile right and rear. As the light faded on 1 December it became increasingly evident that the subsidiary attack from the south was becoming less and less feasible. Not only was it clear that Davout would take the field with little more than a dog-tired remnant of III Corps, but every report indicated that the allies were themselves sliding further and further to the south.

These considerations led Napoleon to formulate his 'Second Plan', which was enshrined in a set of *Dispositions Générales* dictated towards eight in the evening, and supplemented by various verbal orders. Davout was now to make directly from Gross-Raigern to Turas, on the plain behind the Goldbach, with the more modest objectives of expelling any enemy who might have reached that far, and of joining the IV Corps of Marshal Soult, which formed the right wing of the main body. By the same token, the blow of the main body of the *Grande Armée* assumed all the greater importance. As soon as the allied host had descended from the Pratzen heights, the French would launch something like an oblique attack *à la Prusse*, with the right wing taking the lead. Napoleon presupposed that the French would be pushing over ground that had been abandoned by the allies, and so the *Dispositions Générales* were concerned above all with measures of traffic control, designed to prevent the component parts of the mass from getting in one another's way.

According to this 'Second Plan', Soult's IV Corps was to pass swiftly and silently over the valley between Puntowitz and Girzikowitz and win as much terrain as possible on the now empty plateau of Pratzen. The rest of the army stretched in retired echelon to the left – next in line was the mass of cavalry, which was to form in column so as to present the least possible space

between the two corps of Soult and Lannes. Oudinot's grenadiers and Bernadotte's I Corps were ordered to press close behind Lannes, and the Guard was to be held in support close by Napoleon's command post on the Zuran Hill.

Having made his dispositions, Napoleon saw no point in waiting around in a state of gloomy apprehension, and so for an hour or so he took his ease at supper with a motley group of commanders and staff – Murat, Junot, Caulaincourt, Mouton, Rapp, Lemarois, Lebrun, Macon, Thiard, Ségur and the surgeon Yvan. Napoleon's meals were usually a hurried affair, but this time he lingered over his fried potatoes and onions (a favourite dish), and he deliberately turned the talk away from the war, as if mocking the apprehensions of the company. In order to bring the well-read Junot into the conversation, he launched into an attack on the modern dramatists: 'But just look at Corneille, and consider his tremendous power of imagination! He ought to have been a statesman!'[2] After a while Napoleon turned in wistful mood to his hopes of an Oriental empire, which had been dashed at Acre in 1799, and he complained that the French did not like to be far from home. Junot ventured to protest, but the brutal old Republican General Mouton broke in to say that no one should be deluded by the present eagerness of the *Grande Armée* for battle. The soldiers just wanted to settle the campaign once and for all, and then go back to France. Napoleon had to agree, and he got up from the table exclaiming 'meanwhile, let's go and fight!'[3] The time was nine in the evening.

Napoleon stretched his legs by making a tour through the bivouacs. He seems to have found everything in order, but he was perturbed by firing to the south, and ordered his staff to investigate. Returning to the Zuran he threw himself down on some bales of straw, and left word that he was to be awakened upon any news of importance. At midnight General Savary galloped back from the right and found Napoleon so fast asleep 'that I had to shake him to wake him up'.[4] Savary reported that the allies had evicted the *tirailleurs de Pô* from Tellnitz, and that they were heaping up considerable forces behind.

The matter demanded further investigation on the spot, and Napoleon called Soult and set out with a small party for the right.

The enemy appeared to have halted their advance, but in attempting to see the line of their watch fires Napoleon ran into a party of cossacks and was chased over the Goldbach. Some of the horses stuck in the mud, and surgeon Yvan had to be extricated by Napoleon's companions.

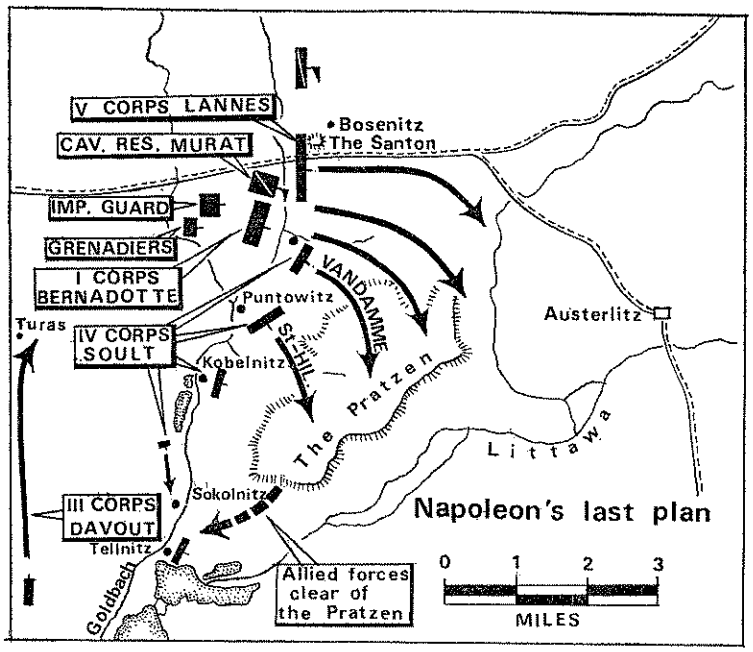
Napoleon made his way back towards the Zuran on foot, passing among his troops as they huddled around the embers of their fires on this freezing night. He was recognized in the bivouacs of the Guard, whereupon one of the grenadiers took up some straw from his bedding and twisted it into a torch to light him on his way. Within moments the Emperor and his companions were surrounded with troops who shouted with delight and held their improvised torches aloft. Flaming wisps of straw rained down on the scene, and the officers called out in some alarm 'Watch out for your cartridge pouches!'[5] Napoleon was deeply moved, after a little preliminary annoyance at the display.

It took a little time for the rest of the army to awaken to what was happening. Nearby in the bivouacs of Berthier's staff, the younger officers had been enlivened by the arrival of a friend with tidings from France.

> 'Everything was calculated to raise our spirits to the utmost—the news and the little pictures from our families, with perhaps a few love letters . . . the Tokay wine which we sucked from the barrel with straws, the crackling camp fire, and the feeling that we were going to win the battle on the next day. But little by little sleep stole up on us, and the singing died away. Sublimely happy we stretched out under a sky of glittering stars, wrapped in our cloaks and lying on a little straw. We were asleep or already dreaming when suddenly we were aroused by shouts of joy and a blaze of brilliant illumination.'[6]

Napoleon finally returned to the Zuran Hill in a sea of light, and on entering his wigwam he exclaimed, 'this is the finest evening of my life!'[7]

The various impressions of the night strongly indicated that the allies were going to make their main effort even further south along the Goldbach than Napoleon had expected. He responded by formulating his 'Third Plan', a blanket term for the individual



instructions which were issued in the early hours of the morning, and confirmed in the final orders group with the marshals just before the battle.

Essentially a modification of the 'Second Plan', the new scheme teased out the *Grande Armée* a little further to the south, slightly weakening the huge concentration along the axis of the highway.

Soult's IV Corps was the formation most immediately affected. During the night the whole of the 3rd Line had ultimately been committed on the right flank, where it recaptured the village of Tellnitz from a force of Austrian *chevaulégers*. To lend further support in this direction, the 26th Light was ordered to march on Sokolnitz, and the 18th and 75th Line and the Corsican sharpshooter battalion were positioned in front of Kobelnitz. Most important of all, the entire division of Saint-Hilaire was drawn out of its position in the second line and re-inserted on the right of the main body of IV Corps, ready to pass the Goldbach valley in the neighbourhood of Puntowitz. Thus approximately two-thirds

of the corps was strung out along four miles of the lower Goldbach.

Part of the main army was re-shuffled accordingly. Bernadotte's I Corps remained in reserve, but was shifted a few hundred yards further south behind the leftmost division (Vandamme's) of IV Corps. It now became all the more important for Murat with the cavalry reserve to act as a mobile liaison among the elements of the centre. Along the axis of the highway, Lannes was deprived of I Corps' support. This scarcely seemed to matter, for the allied concentration on the southern flank of the field indicated that Lannes and Soult would have a clear sweep across virtually undefended terrain.

Away on the southern flank Davout's depleted III Corps seems to have been almost forgotten. It was only after the battle was already joined that he received orders to bear to the right and reinforce IV Corps in its defence of the lower Goldbach.

Except on the northern flank, the allied arrangements and plans corresponded reasonably well with the picture which had been built up by Napoleon. Tsar Alexander and his nominal commander in chief, Lieutenant-General Kutuzov, had under their orders a total of between 80,000 and 87,000 troops, with 278 pieces of ordnance. At full establishment the Russian contingent should have amounted to something like 62,400 infantry, 12,800 regular cavalry, 6,500 gunners and 4,000 cossacks. However the Russians had lost 5,840 men by direct enemy action during Kutuzov's retreat, not to mention the many sick, deserters and stragglers. Indeed the dozen battalions which had fought at Schöngrabern could muster only some 300 men each. The gunners had been reduced to 5,000, and at the best of times the cossacks were reckoned to be of little use in open battle.

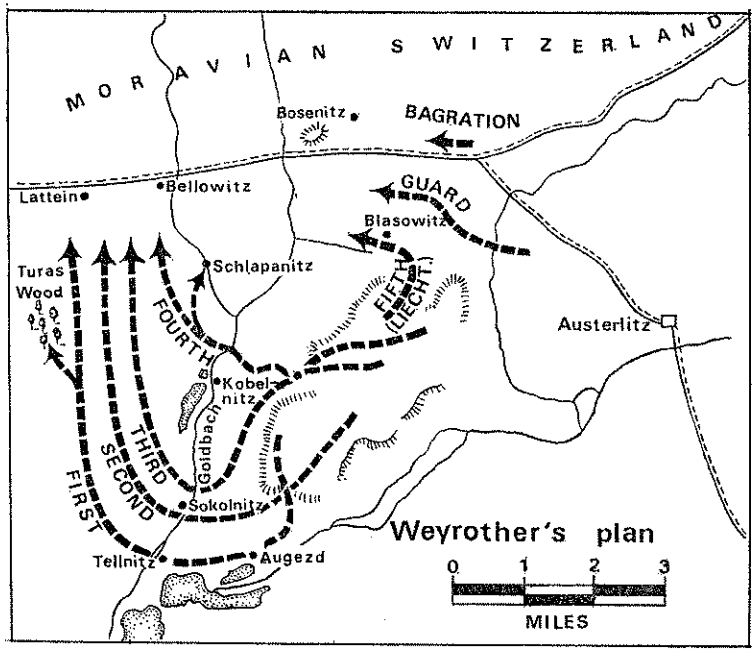
The Austrian element came under the overall command of Lieutenant-General Prince Liechtenstein. The force comprised twenty-and-a-half battalions and forty-five squadrons, which by Stutterheim's calculations came to 15,715 men. Some of the whitecoats were veterans of the Bavarian campaign, burning to avenge the shame of Ulm, but the rest had been hastily raised in the neighbourhood of Vienna from the sweepings of the streets and the alms-houses.

Altogether the rival armies were well matched. If the allies had the crude advantage in numbers, we must also take into account their exhaustion and disunity, the clumsiness of their movements, and their generally low morale—for which the optimistic delusions of Alexander's cronies could offer no real compensation.

For three days now the allied host had manœuvred in open country in the close proximity of the *Grande Armée*. 'They completely ignored the fact that everything on a battlefield comes down to a question of space and time. They seemed to forget that they were dealing with the greatest commander in the world, and they failed to recognize that even his apparently unconsidered actions were the direct reflection of some very deep thinking.'[8] On 1 December the army finally came to rest along the summit and rearward slopes of the Pratzen (see pp. 80–1). The confidence of Weyrother and the Russian staff officers was fed by a reconnaissance carried out by General-Adjutant Prince Dolgoruky, who put the French force with reasonable accuracy at 60,000 men, which was patently inferior to that of the allies. The conduct of the French cavalry and the words of Napoleon himself indicated a generally timorous frame of mind. Moreover the allies had the help of an exact knowledge of the ground, for the Austrians had carried out large-scale manœuvres on the same terrain in 1804. Even after the battle Weyrother was prepared to maintain that 'all the advantages lay on the side of the allied army'. He explained that the French right wing was badly outflanked, and that in retreating north through the valley of the upper Goldbach it should have become entangled with the mass of infantry on the French left, bearing the whole lot away in wild disorder.[9]

In the course of the day Weyrother and his Russian friends, therefore, argued in favour of an offensive designed to turn the French right. The details were to be settled later, but in the evening Alexander and his entourage rode over some of the ground of the proposed march.

> 'We encountered a detachment of Croats. They were intoning one of those dirge-like and melancholy songs of theirs. The music, the cold and the mist put us in a gloomy mood. Somebody said that tomorrow was a Monday, a day which the Russians consider



unlucky. At that moment the Tsar's horse slipped and fell on a tussock of grass, and Alexander was thrown from the saddle. The accident was unimportant in itself, but there were people who took it as an ill omen.'[10]

However, Prince Dolgoruky's one anxiety was that the *Grande Armée* might slip away before it came under attack. He betook himself to Colonel O'Rourke at the advance posts along the Goldbach, and told him to mark narrowly the direction of any retreat. On the far right the coming of darkness found Bagration's leading troops on the hill to the south of Kowalowitz.

'Not far behind the entire army was in bivouacs. To our front we could see a few enemy fires, which seemed to indicate the line of their advanced pickets. Everything was silent in the direction of the hostile army, and we were nearly all convinced that the enemy were retreating. At about midnight fires suddenly blazed into life

across the foot of the heights on which we were standing,* and we could see their bivouacs extending across a wide stretch of ground. Obviously the enemy were not bothering to conceal their retreat, or so it seemed to many of us. But some people had their doubts.'[11]

This was about the time when the senior commanders were assembling in a spacious room in Kutuzov's headquarters in a peasant house at Krzenowitz. The scene has been set by General Langeron:

'General Weyrother came in. He had an immense map, showing the neighbourhood of Brünn and Austerlitz in the greatest precision and detail. He spread it on the large table, and read his dispositions to us in a loud voice, and with a boastful manner which betrayed smug self-satisfaction. He might have been a form-master reading a lesson to his pupils, though he was far from being a good teacher. We had found Kutuzov half asleep in a chair when we arrived at his house, and by the time we came to leave he had dozed off completely. Buxhöwden was standing. He listened to what was being said, though it must have gone in one ear and out the other. Miloradovich spoke not a word. Prebyshevsky kept in the background, and only Dokhturov examined the map with any attention.'[12]

In brief, Weyrother proposed a 'left-flanking' movement, by which the army would first pass the Goldbach valley on a wide frontage. Having gained the French right, or southern flank, the allies were to pivot on the area of Kobelnitz–Puntowitz and 'throw and pursue'[13] the enemy northwards across the highway and into the wilds of the Moravian Switzerland.

The attack was to be carried out in the same unwieldy mixed columns by which the army had been moving across Moravia in the last few days. The initiative was to be taken by a detachment of Austrians and a main striking force of four columns, numbered in order from the left or south. On the right centre the Russian Imperial Guard was to remain in reserve. Finally on the extreme right the original advance guard under Bagration would hold the highway—a fact which escaped Napoleon's attention.

In detail Weyrother specified that the rôle of left marker was to

* The famous torchlight procession.

be assumed by the Austrian Lieutenant-General Kienmayer, who would force the lower Goldbach with a detachment of five battalions and twenty squadrons of Austrians and two small regiments of cossacks (6,780 men—this figure, like the following figures, presents the over-optimistic nominal establishment). Throughout the advance Kienmayer's job was to stick by the left flank of the first column, covering it from all interference by the enemy.

The first column of the main army consisted of a powerful force of 13,650 Russian infantry commanded by Lieutenant-General Dokhturov. This capable soldier was to gain the Goldbach crossing at Tellnitz, then swing to the right to align himself with the second column. The latter force was made up of 11,700 Russian foot, led by Lieutenant-General Langeron, the French *émigré*. Langeron was to pass the Goldbach between Tellnitz and Sokolnitz, while Lieutenant-General Prebyshevsky's third column (7,700 Russians) seized the castle of Sokolnitz and fanned over the ground behind. All three columns were supposed to come under the general supervision of Lieutenant-General Buxhöwden.

The Generals Kollowrath and Miloradovich jointly commanded an Austro-Russian fourth column of 23,900 infantry, which was to pass the Goldbach to the north of the Kobelnitz pond.

All being well, the allies would be across the Goldbach on a frontage of more than four miles, 'and once the first column has detached four battalions to seize and hold the little wood of Turas, the remainder of the first column, together with the other three columns, will advance between this wood and Schlapanitz and crash into the right flank of the enemy. Three battalions of the fourth column will simultaneously gain the village of Schlapanitz.'[13] The passage of the Goldbach was therefore considered as a mere preliminary to the decisive attack.

The rest of the army would lend support in a variety of ways. Lieutenant-General Johann Liechtenstein was to keep the bulk of the allied cavalry in a fifth column (5,375), and deploy in the neighbourhood of Blasowitz to hold the French cavalry in check, and cover the deployment of the infantry to the south with its horse artillery. To the right rear Grand Duke Constantine was to

draw up the Russian Imperial Guard (10,530) behind Blasowitz and Krug, 'and act as a support to Prince Liechtenstein's cavalry and the left wing of Prince Bagration'. The Guard therefore constituted the only effective reserve—a notably small one for such a large army.

On the far right Bagration and the old advance guard of a nominal 13,700 troops were to remain on the defensive, guarding the baggage of the army, and covering the fork where the road to Austerlitz and Hungary branched away from the Brünn-Olmütz highway, 'but as soon as Prince Bagration observes the advance of our left wing, he must attack on his own account and throw back the extreme left wing of the enemy, which by then will be giving way. He must also strive to unite with the remaining columns of our army.'[14]

The fashion among commentators has been to dismiss Weyrother's *Disposition* as a military monstrosity, engendered by eighteenth-century notions of pseudo-scientific warfare. In fact the form of the paper was unexceptionable, and would gain high marks as an operational order in a military academy today. It set out the situation of the enemy clearly enough, it defined the tasks of the columns with the minimum necessary detail, and it concluded with a set of co-ordinating instructions.

With the advantage of hindsight, however, we can detect a number of radical flaws in Weyrother's thinking:

1. He failed to allow for the possibility of the French putting up a fight along the Goldbach, let alone launching a counter-attack.
2. He presupposed that the allied army was capable of acting with precision and *ensemble*.
3. He assumed that his *Disposition* would be transmitted with reasonable speed, and that it would be read by Russian commanders who were capable of following the simplest instructions.

Since the document was drawn up in German, the Russian staff officer Major Toll had first to dash off a translation in Russian before the adjutants could make their copies and bear them to the generals. It was almost three in the morning before Toll could get to work, and the battle had begun before some of

the generals had so much as received their copies, 'but this is not all, the plan itself and the resolution to attack the French *was not made known to the Emperor until the very morning,* because it was said, *il sera temps que l'Empereur le sache demain matin*'.[15] The other Emperor, Francis of Austria, did not know what was supposed to have happened until weeks after the action had been fought and lost.

Langeron (according to his own account) told Weyrother that he had made no provision for the danger of the French anticipating him by attacking Pratze village. This sounds very much like wisdom after the event. The only other protest was entered by Bagration, and then in the closed circle of his officers. After receiving a copy of the *Disposition*, he objected to the passive rôle that he had been assigned: 'I don't see why I should stand idly by, and watch the enemy send reinforcements from their left wing to their right.'[16] Bagration was not to know what a vital part he was going to play in the unfolding of the battle, placed as he was in the way of the V Corps hammer blow.

The more typical response among the Russians was one of incomprehension. The xenophobic artillery colonel, Ermolov, recalls seeing General-Adjutant Uvarov return with a plan written on 'several sheets, crowded with difficult names of villages, lakes, streams, and distances and heights. We were not permitted to make a transcription, for the plan had to be read by a good many commanders, and there were very few copies available. I must confess that when I heard it read out, I understood very little of what was intended.'[17]

In the French camp by three in the morning 'there was nothing more to be heard. In one sense it was a lull before the storm, but at the same time our divisions were already gathering in the greatest silence under a clear and freezing sky.'[18] During the next three hours the regiments stumbled through the darkness to their forming-up positions. Napoleon was mounted on one of his favourite Arab horses, and his demeanour was alert and confident. Everywhere the tension was almost tangible.

> 'On the approach of first light there arose such a dense mist that you could scarcely see ten paces. This gave us time to form up under cover, and our army had been so well trained in the camp of Boulogne that we could count on every soldier having his arms and equipment in good order . . . all over the field the silence was unbroken, and you could scarcely believe that so many troops and so many guns were assembled in so small an area . . .'[19] 'there was something holy about this extraordinary hush, after the mad commotion of the evening before—it was as if we bowed our heads in dignified submission before the will of God. Yet it was also the harbinger of a storm of fury and bloodshed that was to be the making and breaking of empires.'[20]

CHAPTER 8

'A STORM OF FURY AND BLOODSHED', 2 DECEMBER, 1805

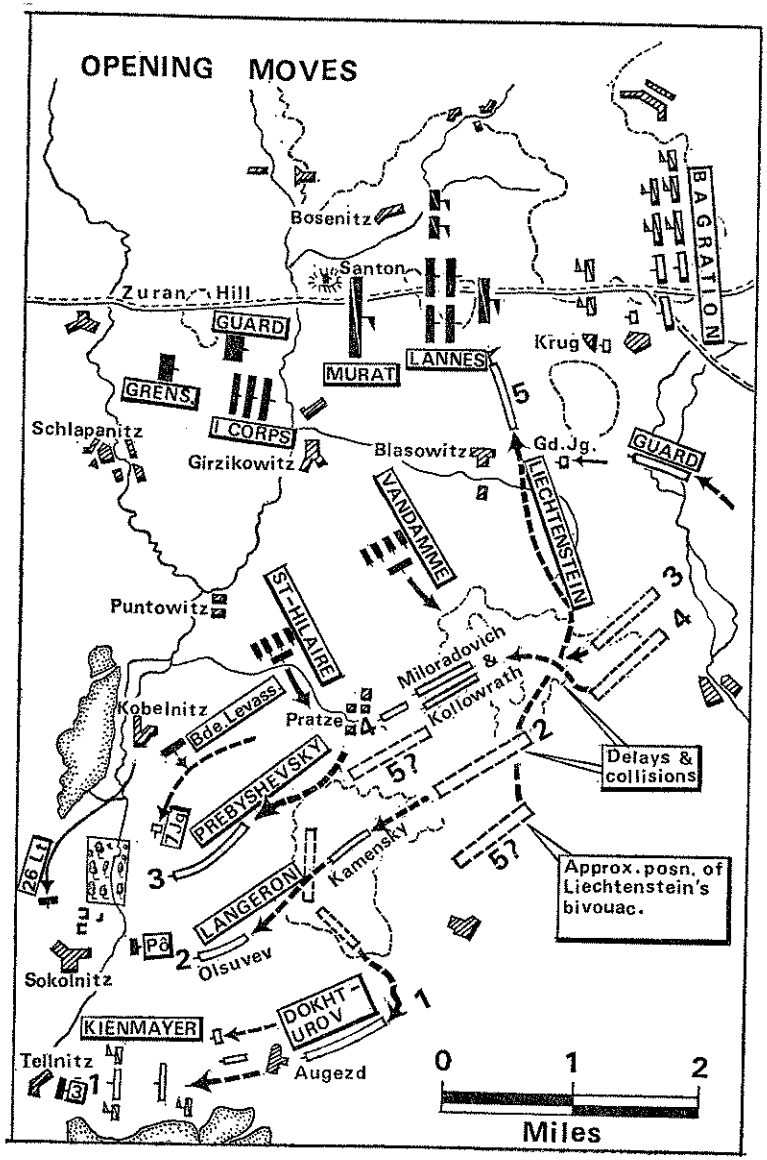
I OPENING MOVES

FIRST light found Napoleon on the Zuran Hill, where he had arranged to meet the marshals for a final briefing. He took a hurried breakfast without bothering to sit down, then buckled on his sword and exclaimed to the adjutants, 'And now, gentlemen, let's go and do great things!'[1]

The officers ran to their horses to summon the marshals, and before long all the corps commanders (save Davout) came galloping with their aides-de-camp to the mound. 'Thus was assembled the most formidable collection of men you could imagine. What a wonderful sight! . . . Just consider how many leaders, justly celebrated in their various ways, came together around the most famous commander of ancient or modern history.'[2]

The *Grande Armée* was already formed in column and ready to move, but Napoleon did not wish to declare himself before the allies had committed themselves irrevocably on the lower Goldbach. A lively action was already developing at Tellnitz (see p. 89), and an encouraging report arrived to the effect that the last of the allied troops were descending from the Pratzen, which now seemed open to the French advance. It was about half past seven.

'The Emperor gave the marshals their various instructions, then dispatched them with the command "On your way!" Their heads



were high, and their eyes were shining, and each of them in turn saluted and was gone in an instant.'[3]

Napoleon kept Soult longest, and asked, 'How long do your troops need to get to the top of the Pratzen?' The marshal replied that he required no more than twenty minutes. 'Very well,' said Napoleon, 'we'll wait another quarter of an hour.'[4] He wished to take full advantage of the heavy mist which promised to conceal the troops for some time yet. After fifteen minutes had elapsed, Napoleon gave the order to depart. Advancing to the best viewpoint on the Zuran he cried out 'One sharp blow and the war's over!'[5]

Meanwhile scenes of some confusion were occurring on the crest and steep rearward slopes of the Pratzen, where daylight revealed that the allied columns were jammed together in the most awkward fashion (see p. 81). On the far left of the line Kienmayer got his little command under way between half past six and seven, and he was lucky enough to enjoy a free run all the way to his objective at Tellnitz. Nevertheless, his punctuality profited him little, for he was in action for more than an hour before the first column (Dokhturov's) arrived to support him. The worst of the muddle was caused by Liechtenstein's cavalry which awakened to find itself stranded behind the bivouacs of the middle columns. Liechtenstein had as yet received no written orders, but realizing that he should have been much further to the right he simply barged his way through the rest of the army. In the process the second column (Langeron's) was apparently cut in two, and the fourth column was forced to wait until the cavalry had trailed across its front.*

After enjoying a passable breakfast, the Emperors Alexander and Francis rode through the mist and emerged on the sunlit upper slopes of the Staré Vinohrady, which commanded an extensive panorama on all sides. The allied columns appeared small and scattered in this intimidating landscape, and the Russian Imperial Guard seemed to be drawing away dangerously to the right. 'Anxiety was plainly written on the face of the Austrian

* However the map to the Austrian *Relation* shows him starting from immediately south-east of Pratze, where he would have got in the way of the fourth column, but could not have severed the second column.

general (evidently Weyrother), and the officers and even the soldiers were troubled as well. Only the gunner officers seemed to be immune from the general depression, having an absolute faith in the efficacy of their pieces.'[6]

In front the troops of the fourth column were standing motionless with unloaded muskets, and Kutuzov was looking on with his sword still in its scabbard. The cavalry had by now cleared out of the way, but Kutuzov, as if paralysed by some presentiment, was reluctant to commit the force to battle. Perhaps the war-weary old Muscovite was reflecting on the apparent uselessness of his troops, twelve battalions of worn-out Russians who had fought under his command on the Danube, and fifteen battalions of Austrians, of which nine had been raised in extreme haste.

Alexander began one of the most famous exchanges in military history: 'Mikhail Larionovich! Why haven't you begun your advance?' 'Your Highness', replied Kutuzov, 'I am waiting for all the columns of the army to get into position.' Alexander retorted, 'But we are not on the Empress's Meadow, where we do not begin a parade until all the regiments are formed up!' 'Your Highness! If I have not begun, it is because we are not on parade, and not on the Empress's Meadow. However, if such be Your Highness's order.'[7] Thus between half past eight and nine, the whole of the left wing of the allied army was finally on the march. The lack of co-ordination was already all too apparent. Lieutenant-Colonel Ermolov explains that,

> 'the infantry columns consisted of a large number of regiments of foot, unaccompanied by so much as a single cavalryman. Some of the columns therefore had no means of knowing what was going on ahead, or of finding out the location or doings of the neighbouring forces which were supposed to co-operate with them. I myself saw how General Miloradovich begged the commander of a regiment for just twenty hussars to convey vital messages. Not one column owned an advance guard,* and the general advance guard of the whole army (Bagration's command) was on the far right and, in fact, not far ahead of anybody else . . . Thus the columns advanced in false security. Wide intervals yawned between them,

* Apart from the first.

for we assumed they would deploy into line of battle on the approach of the enemy.'[8]

By this time the Goldbach valley was reverberating with the noise of combat from the south. The first passage of arms of the whole battle was enacted at about seven far on the allied left, where a few squadrons of Kienmayer's hussars were scouting towards Tellnitz. The little village was situated on the eastern, or 'allied' side of the Goldbach, and it was important for Kienmayer to seize it to open the way for the first column of the main army. The hussars found the prospect unenticing, for the village lurked behind a low ridge, and was set about with little vineyards and orchards that swarmed with French light infantry (*voltigeurs* of the 3rd Line). Away to the left, the Austrians could see a small force of French cavalry (Margaron's command) hovering on the far bank.

Kienmayer responded by throwing in penny-packet attacks of the kind which so attracted Napoleon's scorn. While a regiment of hussars kept watch on either flank, the Austrians committed two waves of infantry from their wild eastern provinces. General Carneville led the way with the 2nd Regiment of Székler Infantry, which pushed into the vineyards to the accompaniment of sounding music and crackling musketry. The troops came under a murderous fire, and before long Kienmayer was forced to commit the remainder of his infantry, namely the 1st Regiment of Széklers and the Broder Croats.

In the course of an hour the Austrians delivered perhaps as many as five attacks, leaving the greater part of the Széklers dead or wounded on the ground. On the French side, the whole burden of the defence rested on the solitary 3rd Line. Its gallant fight indicated how determined the regimental commanders were to dispute the line of the lower Goldbach. Napoleon himself does not seem to have expected the ground to be held for very long.

The 1200 surviving Frenchmen were evicted from Tellnitz only after General Buxhöwden sent a battalion of the 7th *Jaeger* from the first column to support the Austrians in a new attack. Having made his first (and almost his only) intervention in the battle, Buxhöwden was content to occupy Tellnitz and wait for the other columns to come into line.

The sounds of the little battle at Tellnitz attracted the attention of General Legrand, who commanded the right-hand division of Soult's corps at Kobelnitz. He at once took off with the 26th Light and hastened south in the company of General Merle. He had scarcely reached the slope above Sokolnitz when he saw a powerful Russian column descending from the Pratzen. The enemy force was in fact the leading brigade of Langeron's column. The first battalion of the 26th arrived in the nick of time to support the few hundred sharpshooters of the *tirailleurs du Pô*, who until then had been the only forces covering this sector. The second battalion soon pushed in on either side of the first, which brought defenders of Sokolnitz to 1,800 men.

Only now did the third allied column arrive on the scene. Prebyshevsky's force had set off in fine style by way of Pratze village. On the advice of his guides he had then cut across ploughed fields (which can scarcely have speeded his march), and on approaching Sokolnitz he found that French troops were already ensconced in the village and flooding towards the castle. The time was about half past eight. Prebyshevsky had already detached a battalion of the 7th *Jaeger* to safeguard his right flank, and these gentlemen were now assailed by Levasseur's brigade in front of Kobelnitz, and were thrown in some confusion on to the wall of the pheasantry at Sokolnitz. If the Russians wanted their passage at Sokolnitz, they would clearly have to fight their way through.

To the rear, combat was being joined in an entirely unexpected fashion. In Napoleon's thinking the delaying action on the lower Goldbach was entirely subordinate to his plans for the northern sector of the field, where the mass of the *Grande Armée* was to wheel against the open right flank of the allied forces, now apparently committed against the Tellnitz-Sokolnitz line. Soult was to lead the way by directing two of his divisions over the Pratzen plateau, which was seemingly abandoned by the allies.

General Saint-Hilaire's division made up the right-hand half of Soult's striking force, and was in position in front of Puntowitz. The companion division, Vandamme's, stood a few hundred yards to the north-east in front of Girzikowitz. The order had gone out to issue triple rations (almost half a pint) of the

gut-busting military brandy, and the troops of Saint-Hilaire's command were further inflamed by the oratory of Soult in person. 'The marshal rode past the regiments, addressing each in turn with that sense of military occasion which he possessed so well. The troops now burst with eagerness and enthusiasm. "Do you remember how you beat the Russians in Switzerland?" he enquired of the 10th Light. Back came the reply "Nobody's likely to forget it today!" '[9]

While the troops were still waiting 'the sun began to disperse the dense fog. The high ground was the first to clear, and we could see the Pratzen plateau, which was being uncovered by the enemy columns as they marched against our flank. At the foot of the plateau, however, the smoke of the camp fires and the mist still hung heavily over the valley, concealing from the Russians our centre, which was drawn up in columns ready to attack them.'[10] Some time after half past eight the two divisions advanced into the mist 'with great coolness, and at a slow pace'.[11] At first the battalion columns were closely packed together, but the intervals grew in depth and width when the units began to climb the gentle slopes. At about the 240-metre contour line the troops emerged from the mist into the celebrated sun of the morning of Austerlitz, 'pure and radiant like a perfect spring day'.[12] Led by the 10th Light, Saint-Hilaire's division made for the summit of the Pratzeberg, overlooking the church and little streets of Pratze village. Vandamme meanwhile directed his command on the unmistakable outline of the Staré Vinohrady, which rose a mile to the north of Pratze.

Unknown to the French, a substantial allied force was still struggling towards them from the far side of the plateau. By Napoleon's calculations (and Weyrother's own plan) the Pratzen should now have been traversed by all the columns which were making for the Goldbach passages. These logical timetables failed to allow for the chapter of accidents which delayed the march of the fourth column—first the obstruction caused by Liechtenstein's cavalry, and then the paralysing hesitations of General Kutuzov.

It had taken an Imperial command to set the force in motion (see p. 103). The troops were marching in the old-fashioned formation of columns of half-platoons. Lieutenant-Colonel

Monakhtin commanded a small so-called 'advance guard' of three battalions of Russians and a handful of the Austrian Erzherzog Johann Dragoons. Kollowrath and Miloradovich trailed behind with the main body of Austrian and Russian infantry.

Major Toll was sounding the way ahead in the company of a single cossack. As he rode down through Pratze village he espied some troops moving over the ground beyond. He took them for the rearmost elements of Prebyshevsky's column, and he continued confidently on his way until musket balls began to whistle about his ears. Toll galloped back in alarm, and soon the allies came under attack from the front and from the right. Thus was joined the vital battle for the Pratzen plateau.

All the time the French had powerful forces piled in an apparently irresistible mass on the northermost sector of the field. Lannes had the two divisions (Suchet's and Caffarelli's) of his V Corps astride the highway, and he was thickly hedged about with cavalry. Bernadotte's I Corps was making ready to close up in the area of Girzikowitz. Finally the Guard and Oudinot's grenadiers stood in general reserve to the rear.

Here again Napoleon's presuppositions proved to be false. Where he had counted on a clear sweep against the allied right flank and rear, he was in fact confronted by Prince Bagration with the former advance guard of the allies, lurking behind low hills out of the Imperial view.

Bagration had been dissatisfied from the start with the waiting rôle which had been allotted to him by Weyrother's plan (see p. 98). The noise of battle from the south made him more restless still, and towards ten in the morning (the estimates vary greatly) he began to move forward on a wide front, with his three powerful regiments of Russian infantry marching athwart the highway, and hussars and *jaeger* thrown out on the flanks. Lannes' V Corps was set in motion at about the same time, and before long the rival forces could make out their enemies at a distance of a couple of miles.

The one gap in the allied line stretched to the south of Bagration's command, in the sector which was supposed to have been plugged by Liechtenstein's cavalry. Liechtenstein hastened to

remedy this, now that he had disentangled himself from the main army. For the sake of speed he had to send his cavalry ahead in two instalments—the main body of 4,000 Russian horse commanded by Generals Uvarov, Essen II and Shepelev, then three regiments of Austrian cuirassiers under Lieutenant-General Hohenlohe. To the rear the Russian Imperial Guard was making its dignified way towards Blasowitz, unaware of the impending drama.

By ten in the morning, therefore, the action was general along most of the seven-mile front of battle. It is useful to take stock of what had happened so far. If everything had unfolded according to the rival plans, the battling forces should by now have been wheeling in a clockwise direction, as each sought to turn the right flank of the other. The powerful French forces on the northern sector were massed together like a stubby hour hand on a dial, pivoting on the area of Puntowitz and making ready to sweep from 'twelve' to 'three'. Conversely the allied columns may be compared with an elongated minute hand, pivoting on the Staré Vinohrady and moving jerkily from 'six' to 'seven'. All too soon the whole machinery jolted to a halt. The movement of the French stuck fast in the presence of enemy forces which, against all expectation, were discovered on the Pratzen and along the highway. The allies suffered much the same experience to the south, where the courageous defenders of Tellnitz and Sokolnitz had jammed the precise mechanism of the Weyrother plan.

For the sake of clarity we shall look in turn at the individual battles that were fought on the Goldbach, on the Pratzen plateau, and in the area of the highway to the north. Lastly we shall witness the defeat of the Russian Imperial Guard, which set in train a sequence of events that drew the hitherto isolated combats together in horrible fashion, and culminated in the rout of the allied army.

II THE STRUGGLE ON THE LOWER GOLDBACH

We left Kienmayer and Dokhturov in possession of Tellnitz, which gave the allies their lowest crossing on the Goldbach. They

were not left in peace for long. Up till then the French resistance had been sustained by far-flung elements of Soult's IV Corps. Almost forgotten in all the excitement had been the footsore division of General Friant, which had led the epic march of Davout's III Corps from Vienna, and arrived a few hours earlier at Gross-Raigern. In the process the effective fighting force had been reduced to 3,200.

The leading brigade, that of General Heudelet (108th Line and the *voltigeurs* of the 15th Light) struggled to its feet in the early hours of the morning, and between half past five and six it marched for the village of Turas, where Heudelet was supposed to join the corps of Soult. On the way the brigade was diverted by two messages. The first was an order from Napoleon, which reached Davout at Rebeschowitz and ordered him to make instead for Sokolnitz. On the way thither, word came from General Margaron that Sokolnitz stood in no immediate danger, whereas the 3rd Line was under heavy pressure at Tellnitz. Davout accordingly sent the 1st Dragoons hastening ahead to Tellnitz, with Heudelet's brigade following in their tracks. Jean-Pierre Blaise, a corporal in the 108th Line, recalls that

> 'when we arrived within cannon shot of the battlefield, we heard a tremendous exchange of musketry between the Russians and the 3rd Line, and we began to encounter a great number of wounded of the latter regiment. At this moment they made us double forward. Thus I was prevented from biting into a leg of goose which I had ready on top of my knapsack. I had intended to eat it there and then, knowing full well that I would scarcely have the leisure later in the day.'[13]

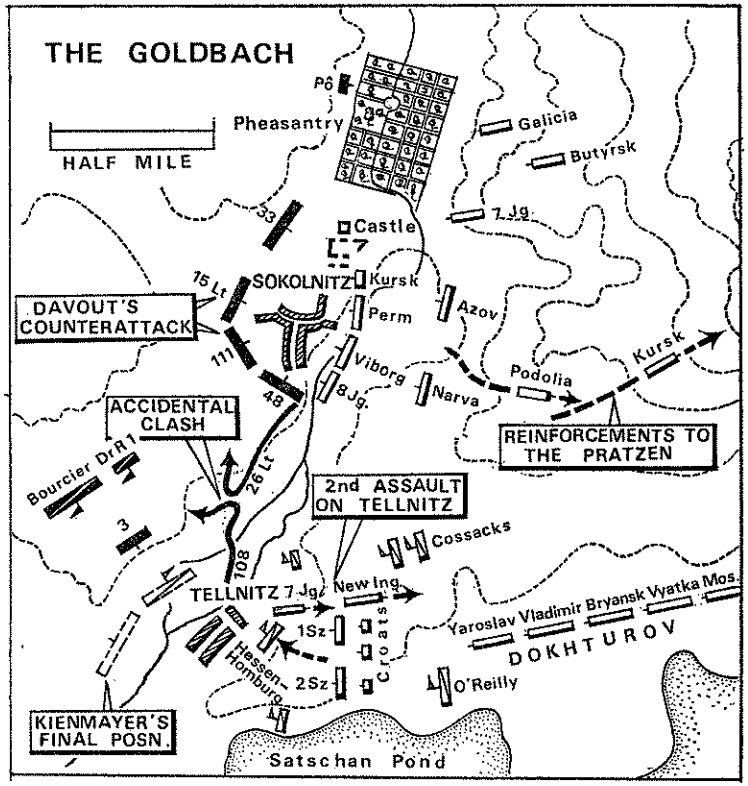
The French bore down on Tellnitz towards nine in the morning. Kienmayer saw them coming, and opened fire with his own guns and those of the first Russian column. 'The discharge of the artillery, together with the continuous fire of musketry, made such a cloud of smoke that you could not see beyond a few paces.'[14] Under cover of the smoke the French burst against the left flank of the battalion of the 7th *Jaeger*, and drove the allies from part of the village. The New Ingermanland Regiment came up to lend support, but merely got entangled with the fugitives in the murk.

While the French *voltigeurs* fanned out in the vineyards, the 108th Line threatened to burst from the eastern exit of Tellnitz. 'However the movement was seen by Colonel Baron Mohr, commander of the Hessen-Homburg Hussars, which was standing in reserve in the rear. He immediately launched an attack, cutting down most of the force of enemy infantry, and scattering the rest.'[15] The Austrian hussars laid about them with all the greater zeal because they mistook the 108th for Bavarians, whom they hated. Kienmayer promptly reoccupied the village with his Austrian infantry and two battalions of the Russians, which had meanwhile been restored to order.

The routed 108th tried to break out to the north along the meadows of the Goldbach, but in the mist and confusion they came under a destructive fire from their comrades of the 26th Light, who were in turn escaping from Sokolnitz. The troops began to recoil into the houses, and the fire ceased only when Captain Livadot of the 108th raised the unmistakable profile of his company eagle.

The two Austrian cavalry regiments now passed through Tellnitz without opposition and formed up on the west side of the Goldbach in line of battle. The first line of Dokhturov's column positioned itself behind, and the second took its place on the east bank. Bourcier brought up his dragoon division in some haste from Gross-Raigern to contain the allied breakthrough, but the Austrians and Russians were content to stand where they were and await the progress of the second and third columns against Sokolnitz.

An exceptionally hot fight was now in progress at the latter village, where the 26th Light had arrived just minutes before the Russian columns began to converge on the scene (see p. 105). Langeron was anxious to keep the second column in line with the rest of the army, and orientating himself on the head of the first column to his left he reached the Goldbach opposite Sokolnitz at about half past eight. Since Prebyshevsky and the third column had not yet put in an appearance on the right, he was content to line up his *jaeger* and his thirty-odd guns and pepper Sokolnitz with musketry, canister and roundshot. Colonel Pouget of the 26th Light describes how he was



'much annoyed . . . at the restlessness of my horse, which was startled by the bullets as they whistled around its ears and between its legs, and prevented me from going to where I knew I was needed. Major Brillat offered me his own horse, which I eagerly accepted. At the instant I dismounted I was engulfed in a shower of earth and pebbles, which flew into my face with such force that I was covered in blood and almost blinded.'[16]

On arriving opposite Sokolnitz castle and the northern part of the village (see p. 105), Prebyskevsky could see that he would have to make his passage by force. He accordingly instructed his command to 'form dense columns by platoons and regiments, so as to facilitate whatever movements might prove necessary'.[17]

Major-General Müller III went ahead with two battalions of the 7th *Jaeger* and the Galicia Regiment, and he cleared the extensive castle buildings in short order. The defenders rallied with their guns on a gentle hill to the rear, and Müller was wounded when the battle flared up anew. Major-General Strik promptly took over the command, and drove the French back with the support of the Narva and Butyrsk regiments, which came through the castle compound to help him.

Some of these troops were diverted to the left into Sokolnitz to open a communication with Langeron, who was assailing the village on its southern flank. Langeron committed about 5,000 men to the assault, namely the 8th *Jaeger*, the regiments of Viborg and Perm, and one battalion of the regiment of Kursk. Still battling to hold the village, a large part of the 26th Light was therefore trapped between Prebyshevsky and Langeron. The French lost one hundred men as prisoners as they fought their way to the rear, and they had to abandon two of their guns on the hill behind the village. The rest of the 26th was cut off to the south of Sokolnitz, and in seeking to escape towards Tellnitz the troops collided with the fugitives of the 108th Line (see p. 110).

Sokolnitz village seemed to have been cleared for good, and the leading elements of the two Russian columns pressed through the streets, mingling in some confusion. To the rear a number of mysterious movements were taking place on the Pratzen, and as a precautionary measure Prebyshevsky ordered Lieutenant-General Wimpfen to remain in reserve on the east side of the Goldbach with the Podolia, Azov and Narva Regiments and observe what was happening behind. However the combat at Sokolnitz was very far from complete.

Having been forced to wage a miniature battle to clear a single French regiment from Sokolnitz, the allies were hard put to it to hold their ground when, after ten o'clock, the veteran General Friant threw in the second and third brigades of his division (Lochet's and Kister's). General Lochet in person led the 48th Line in a furious attack which swept over the hill in front of the village and penetrated some way into the streets. Two colours and six pieces were taken in the process. The 111th Line, the remaining regiment of Lochet's brigade, arrived to lend support a little

further to the north, and drove back 'a huge mass of leaderless men who were advancing in disorder and uttering horrible cries'.[18]

The Russians returned to the attack, driving the 111th away, and containing the 48th in the southern part of the village, where the troops held out for three-quarters of an hour in the houses and barns. In an attempt to disengage the 48th, Friant now fed in the two regiments of Kister's brigade on the left. The conscripts of the 15th Light fought with unexpected bravery, and broke into the north-western angle of the village. During the combat Sergeant-Majors Broudes and Deschamps 'had to defend their eagles against several Russian NCOs and grenadiers who were doing their level best to seize them. These two heroes each knocked down a number of the enemy by the weight of their eagles, and thus managed to save these standards for their regiment'.[19] Just to their left their companions of the 33rd Line advanced boldly into the patch of ground between the village and the castle.

The vastly superior Russians counter-attacked at every point, but were never able to evict the 48th from its toehold in the south, or to break through the light screen of French forces which hung about the village on the other sides. Thus by the early afternoon the main allied striking force of three columns, or about 33,000 men in all, was still jammed against the lower Goldbach well short of its objectives. Meanwhile events on the Pratzen were already turning the battle decisively to Napoleon's advantage.

III THE BATTLE ON THE PRATZEN

We return to the totally unexpected collision between the divisions of Saint-Hilaire and Vandamme, the spearhead of the *Grande Armée*, and the Austro-Russian fourth column as it toiled over the Pratzen plateau. The allied 'advance guard' (a party of Erzherzog Johann Dragoons, two battalions of the Novgorod Musketeers and a battalion of the Apsheron Musketeers) was still descending towards Pratze village when Major Toll galloped back to give his warning. With commendable speed the leading infantry rushed through the village and over the bridge which crossed a steep-banked stream beyond. The French skirmishers gave way, and

General Miloradovich sent one battalion of the Novgorod Regiment to hold the height south of Pratze, and posted the other immediately outside the village, lying flat on the bank above the stream. Two guns closed up the right flank.

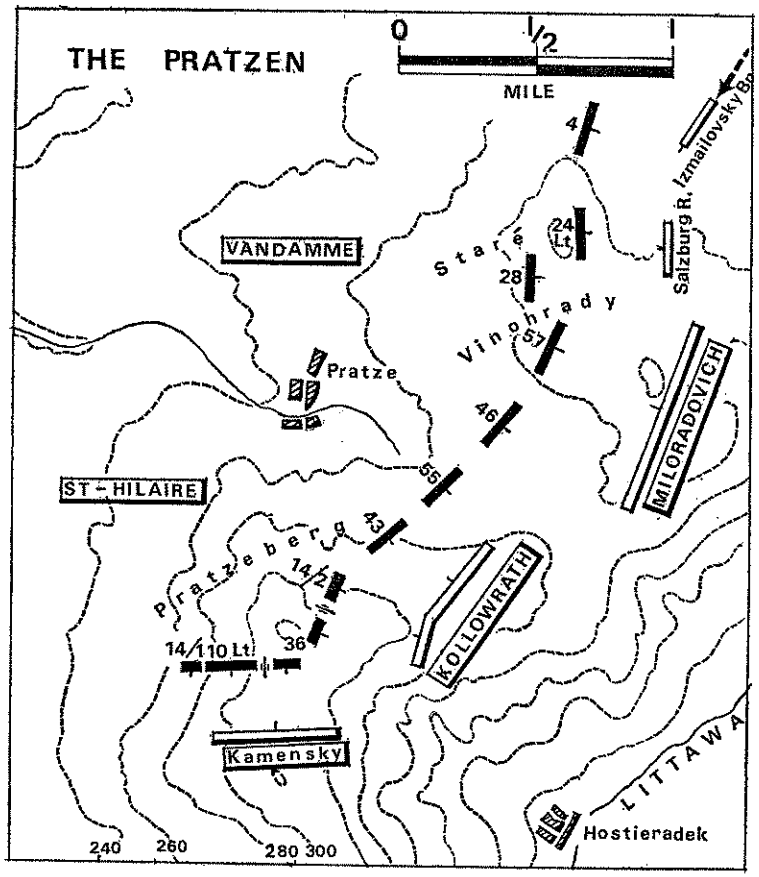
News of the encounter was rushed to Kutuzov and Alexander on the Staré Vinohrady, who could now see for themselves that French columns were ready to advance along the whole central and northern sectors of the field. The Austrian staff colonel Baron Wimpfen at once appreciated the danger to the rear of the first three allied columns, and pointed out 'that our most important objective must be to win the heights to the left of Pratze and occupy them as rapidly as possible'.[20]

Kutuzov accordingly split the fourth column in two. The leading element, consisting of the main body of the Austrian infantry under Kollowrath, was to hasten ahead and gain the summit of the Pratzeberg, south of Pratze village. Miloradovich with the advance guard and the remaining battalions of the first line was to commit his troops in Pratze village and over the Staré Vinohrady to the north. Miloradovich was certainly ready to put on a tremendous show for the Tsar's benefit:

> 'He was mounted on a splendid English horse with a handy turn of speed. He galloped back and forth along the front, maintaining a high velocity amid all the bullets and shot. He yelled, swore and grumbled at the soldiers, and always positioned himself between them and the enemy.'[21]

Thus the fourth column was teased into a straggling line, with Kollowrath arriving squarely in the path of Saint-Hilaire's advance, and Miloradovich getting involved in Vandamme's as well.

Meanwhile Saint-Hilaire's division was tramping up the gentle incline. The 10th Light led the way under the command of General Morand, a reliable but limited officer with a notably small head. General Thiébault came up behind with his brigade of three battalions. Thiébault had been told that he could expect to encounter no more than a chain of allied outposts on the Pratzeberg, but he had the foresight to keep his forces in line of columns, ready to support Morand as necessary. Only the first battalion of



the 14th Line was detached under Colonel Mazas for the purpose of sweeping Pratze village.

The Russians actually got the better of the first clash of arms. On their right the first Novgorod battalion at Pratze stood up at the instant when Colonel Mazas came to a halt at the stream, and poured in a destructive volley at point-blank range. The main body of the Russian line came into action almost at the same time, and Captain Morozov twice led the Little Russia Grenadiers and the grenadier battalion of the Apsheron regiment to the attack with the bayonet, and overran two French guns.

Thiébault was soon at hand to restore order. He pointed the 36th Line at the village, with the second battalion of the 14th Line to its left, and ordered the three battalions to attack without more ado. The French deployed at the run, and they swept across the stream and through the village with such *élan* that the Novgorod battalions gave way and carried the Apsheron grenadiers with them in their flight.

In these horrible minutes Generals Repninski and Berg were wounded and rendered *hors de combat*. The fugitives fled past Alexander regardless of his exhortations, and while he was trying to stay the flight Kutuzov was grazed in the cheek by a musket shot. The Tsar sent his physician, Dr James Wylie, to tend him. 'Would you thank His Highness,' Kutuzov told Wylie, 'and assure him that I am not badly wounded.' Then, indicating the French breakthrough, he added, 'that's where we're really hurt!'[22] Kutuzov continued to give orders until the French were so close that he could see their faces. Finally he made off to the left to Kollowrath's command, his face streaming with blood.

To the south, the height of the Pratzeberg was still very much disputed ground. Here too we can trace the apparently endless consequences of Lichtenstein's passage through the army (see p. 102). Just as the fourth column was delayed by the cavalry in its march over the Pratzen, so the second column (Langeron's) seems to have been cut in two and the rearmost brigade held back from descending from Sokolnitz. This force consisted of the Fanagoria Grenadiers and the Ryazan Musketeers, commanded by General Kamensky I. The general had still not reached the plain of the lower Goldbach when he looked around and saw French columns pouring over the Pratzen. He at once turned the two regiments about and led them back up the slope against the right flank of Saint-Hilaire's breakthrough. The enterprising Russians flooded around the 10th Light, and Morand's little command was saved from destruction only when Saint-Hilaire in person brought up the first battalion of the 14th Line at the run and inserted it on the right.

The French enjoyed only a short respite before Thiébault became aware that a number of unidentified regiments were bearing down on his brigade from the other side, the east.

> 'When I saw them I halted my three remaining battalions... General Saint-Hilaire rejoined me, and we took up our telescopes to examine the masses that were coming towards us. Nothing seemed to indicate that they were hostile. Soon we could hear their music, and a little later one of their officers came up to extreme shouting distance and called out at the top of his voice "Don't shoot! We're Bavarians!" He returned to his regiments, as soon as he was satisfied we had heard him. "What are we going to do now?" General Saint-Hilaire asked. "General!" I exclaimed "I've got my doubts about these Bavarians. I'm still more suspicious about that officer. After all, he didn't dare to come up to us." '[23]

As a precautionary measure Thiébault shook the entire brigade into a single line and bent it at right angles, so that the right-hand arm faced south towards Kamensky, and the eastern arm confronted the newcomers. In the process the 36th Line was brought up to cover Morand's left and form the angle, while the second battalion of the 14th Line was positioned on the left of the line. At this juncture six 12-pounder cannon—the entire artillery reserve of IV Corps—arrived at the direct command of Marshal Soult. These powerful pieces were placed on either flank of the 36th Line.

Still unsure as to the identity of the sinister regiments to the east Thiébault crawled forward to reconnoitre at closer range. He lighted upon Morand, who was engaged on the same errand. All their doubts were removed when an officer detached himself from Kamensky's brigade and held a brief conference with a counterpart from the strange force. Thiébault and Morand hastened back to their regiments, now certain that they were going to come under attack from two directions.

The hostile units were in fact the two brigades of the Austrian generals Jurczik and Rottermund.

> 'Judging by the composition of these forces, you would have put very little reliance on them. The men were drawn from the two extremes of military uselessness—namely invalids, and the totally untrained recruits of the sixth battalions.'[24]

In the event this unpromising material fought with surprising vigour, for Weyrother and a sizeable gaggle of staff officers

were at hand to lend help, and the presence of Kutuzov put the Austrians on their mettle.

The French guns were loaded with superimposed canister and shot, ready to open fire at a little more than one hundred paces, and the musketeers aimed at the belts of the advancing troops. Thiébault describes how he

> 'allowed these formidable masses to approach to within the predetermined range, whereupon I unmasked my nine cannon and my whole line of battle opened an extraordinarily destructive fire . . . You can imagine how pleased I was when every discharge from my cannon opened great square holes in the enemy lines, and when their four regiments dispersed in mobs of fugitives.'[25]

According to the Austrian account, however, their first attack reduced the French to fighting in open order, and two French officers actually came out to parley.[26] The apparent invitation was not taken up, since the battle was already raging very hotly, and the Austrians suspected that the enemy were playing for time.[27] The French survived only because they made such good use of ground, and because in their dark uniforms they looked so much like Russians that the Austrian gunners hesitated to open fire.

To the allies it seemed that

> 'Only a general attack with the bayonet could decide the possession of the summit, and thus enable us to exploit the advantages we had already gained. To this end the Austrian infantry and Kamensky's brigade joined up, and launched an attack on a wide front. The Russians came on with their usual battle cries, but the French met them with a powerful and sustained musketry fire, which worked to deadly effect in the compact ranks of the allied infantry. The impetus of the first onrush was reduced to a slow advance, supported by musketry. However the courage of the troops was hardened by the exhortations and personal example of the generals and all the other staff officers. Thus the French were forced to give way, and the heroic Russian brigade and the attached battalions of the Austrians . . . were led to the summit of the heights.'[28]

In this supreme effort Jurczik was severely wounded, and Weyrother had his horse shot from under him. Particular credit was earned by Prince Volkonsky (Alexander's future chief of staff) who three times led the Fanagoria Grenadiers to the attack.

On the French side Saint-Hilaire proposed to his brigade commanders that they ought to withdraw to some more tenable position. On hearing these words Colonel Pouset of the 10th Light burst into the group with one bound of his horse and cried out, 'General, don't pull us back! . . . Retreat one step, and we're destroyed. There's only one honourable way out—go bald-headed at whoever is in front of us, and above all don't give the enemy time to see just how few we are!'[29] The French therefore held their ground, and half an hour of assaults by the yelling Russians failed to dislodge them from the Pratzeberg. 'In these terrible encounters, whole battalions of Russians got themselves killed without a single man leaving the ranks. Their bodies were left in the same alignment as their parent battalions.'[30] On specific orders the French bayoneted the wounded without mercy.

Down in the plain of the Goldbach the commander of the allied second column, Lieutenant-General Langeron, had refused to credit a report to the effect that French forces had been seen on the Pratzen. He was sure that the troops must be Austrians, though he could not imagine why they were going in that direction. Almost immediately word came from Kamensky, confirming that the French indeed had powerful forces on the Pratzen. Langeron rode up the plateau in person and reached Kamensky's brigade while it was still engaged against the French at a range of 200 paces. The Russian troops replied to the scourging of canister and musketry with a slow and inaccurate fire.

> 'The troops had fought on for almost two hours, which is all the more admirable when you consider that they were unaccustomed to warfare, that they had been attacked by surprise in the rear, and that they must have been shrinking from the noise of the cannon, which many of them must have heard for the first time.'[31]

Langeron returned to the plain and took personal command of the two unengaged battalions of the Kursk Regiment, which were the first troops he could find. He climbed the slope with the little band, and arrived at the top after Kamensky had finally been

broken. The supporting regiment of Podolia was still lagging behind, and so the regiment of Kursk received the undivided attention of the French. Saint-Hilaire took the Russians in front, while the brigade of Levasseur, which had meanwhile come up from the plain, fell on their flank. The regiment was overwhelmed in a matter of minutes, losing 1,600 men and its colours and guns, whilst the Podolia Regiment was pushed back to the Sokolnitz pheasantry.

Langeron escaped from the massacre and rode once more down the slope, this time to inform Buxhöwden, whom he found immobile on a mound south-east of Sokolnitz.

> 'His face was flushed, and it seemed to me that he was no longer in possession of his wits or senses. I told him what had happened on the Pratzen, and that we had been turned and surrounded by the enemy. He replied rather rudely: "My dear general, you appear to see enemies all over the place." I was disrespectful enough to rejoin: "And you, *monsieur le comte*, are in no state to see the enemy anywhere!" '[32]

Thus the allies had now irrevocably lost the Pratzeberg, together with most of their artillery, 'which was entangled in the deep clay that prevails in that part of the country'.[33]

Meanwhile the peppery General Vandamme had gained a rapid and apparently decisive success over the allies on the Staré Vinohrady, the northern prolongation of the Pratzen. Like his counterpart Saint-Hilaire to the south, he thinned out his division in a single frontage, placing the brigade of Férey in the centre, and moving the brigades of Varé and Schinner respectively up to the right and left.

In his first push Vandamme helped Saint-Hilaire to dispose of Miloradovich's Russians (see p. 114). However at the rear, or right of the allied column, the powerful Austrian regiment of Salzburg escaped relatively unscathed, and it clung stubbornly on to the Staré Vinohrady until Vandamme was compelled to put in a concerted attack by Férey's brigade, supported by the 55th Line to the right, and Schinner's brigade to the left. Only now were the gallant whitecoats pushed off the dominating feature, having suffered a significantly high proportion of casualties at close range.

This was the virtual end of the allied fourth column. In the words of Miloradovich, 'up till then the troops had put up a stubborn fight. But now the cumulative effect of the catastrophic situation, their own exhaustion, the lack of cartridges, the disadvantageous lie of the land, and the enemy fire which came in from every side, all made them give way in disorder.'[34]

Vandamme's hold on the plateau was soon to be challenged by no less an opponent than the Russian Imperial Guard. All the same, he and Saint-Hilaire had thoroughly cleared the fourth column from this vital ground. More important still, they had virtually destroyed the central direction of the allied army.

General Kutuzov had been caught up in succession with the little battles of Miloradovich and Kollowrath. He ended the day with Kamensky's brigade, and retired with it to Hostieradek in the Littawa valley. After the battle he had to confess that he was not able to report on the conduct of the officers, 'since my location on that day did not permit me to see in person what was happening elsewhere on the field'.[35]

Alexander was separated from Kutuzov in the first confusion around the Staré Vinohrady. His ministers and courtiers disappeared like smoke, and the glittering generals and aides melted away on various errands, leaving him in the company of his physician Wylie, two mounted attendants and two cossacks. The Tsar was now powerless to influence the course of events, except perhaps by showing an example of courage in what was his first battle. A howitzer shell was seen to explode a short distance to his rear, and at another moment a shot ploughed into the ground just two paces in front of him, covering him with earth. We shall catch only one more glimpse of Alexander before he departs from the field.

In contrast with the disruption in the allied command, Napoleon kept himself thoroughly conversant with what was going on. He spent the first hours on the Zuran hill, which gave him a view of a wide sweep of the field from the Moravian Switzerland to the summit of the Pratzeberg. He 'showed extreme composure throughout the battle, and the stony calm of his face hardly altered for a second'.[36] Every now and then he received details of one or another of the actions from couriers who came galloping

up on sweating horses. He sent the appropriate orders back, after consulting a sheet of paper on which were entered the names of all the divisions and brigades.

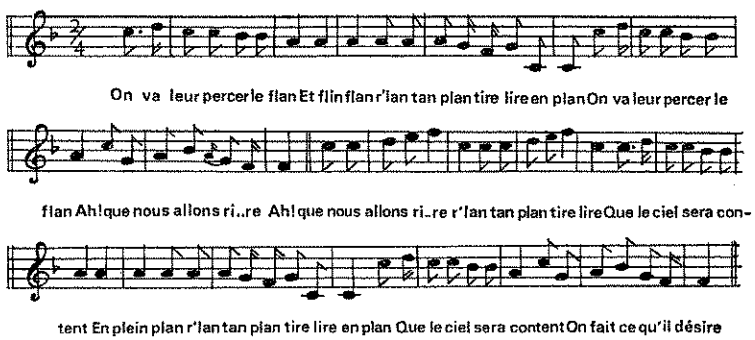
Napoleon lost sight of developments in the centre once Vandamme had crowned the Staré Vinohrady. Moreover the sky was beginning to cloud over, and some time after eleven he rode forward on his little Arab horse to gain the summit. Almost the whole reserve advanced with him to occupy the ground which had been won, namely the cavalry and infantry of the Guard, Oudinot's grenadiers and Bernadotte's I Corps.

Napoleon had chosen Ségur to carry the appropriate orders to Bernadotte, with the special commission to see that they were actually carried out. Ségur found that the marshal was 'disturbed and anxious. He had told his troops to be calm, but he was setting a pretty bad example.'[37] As Napoleon half expected, Bernadotte got his corps on the move only under protest.

There was no hesitation about the advance of the Imperial Guard. It marched by closed divisional columns, in 'full parade uniform, with bearskin caps and plumes flying in the wind, and uncased eagles and pennons . . . in this order we crossed the plain and climbed the far heights to cries of *Vive l'Empereur!*'[38]

The musicians were present in full force at the centre of each battalion, and Grenadier Coignet admired the performance of his own chief bandsman,

> 'an old campaigner of at least sixty. They were playing a song we knew very well:



> As a form of accompaniment, the drummers under their drum-major Sénot beat the charge fit to burst their instruments. The drumming and the music intermingled, and the effect was enough to galvanize a paralytic.'[39]

Napoleon arrived at the Staré Vinohrady in time to witness the dramatic 'attack' of the Russian Imperial Guard, which threatened to disrupt the whole development of the battle (see p. 135). By now, however, we have run ahead of our story. We must first turn to the events on the far northern flank of the field, where Bagration and Lannes were waging a bitter, private war.

IV BAGRATION'S BATTLE

We last saw the rival forces of Bagration and the V Corps as they advanced towards one another along the axis of the highway, while Liechtenstein's cavalry came hastening over the plateau from the south to lend help to the Russians.

Liechtenstein opened a heavy fire from the batteries of horse and reserve artillery which he had brought with him, and he did what he could to deploy the cavalry over the dangerous gap which separated Bagration's force from the main allied army. To Liechtenstein's left or rear, Lieutenant-General Hohenlohe detached the Austrian cuirassier regiment of Lothringen in the direction of the Staré Vinohrady, where sinister movements were already to be seen. In his centre the battalion of Guard *Jaeger* came up from the reserve to occupy the village of Blasowitz (see p. 133). Finally the main body of about 4,000 Russian horse held straight on and launched a spoiling attack against Lannes' corps and the supporting cavalry. Almost immediately, however, the Russians were 'thrown back by a salvo of canister, murderously supported by the musketry of the enemy foot and the carbines of their cavalry'.[40]

It took the combined efforts of Generals Uvarov and Essen to restore the shaken regiments to order and prepare a new attack. This good work was largely frustrated by the impetuosity of the

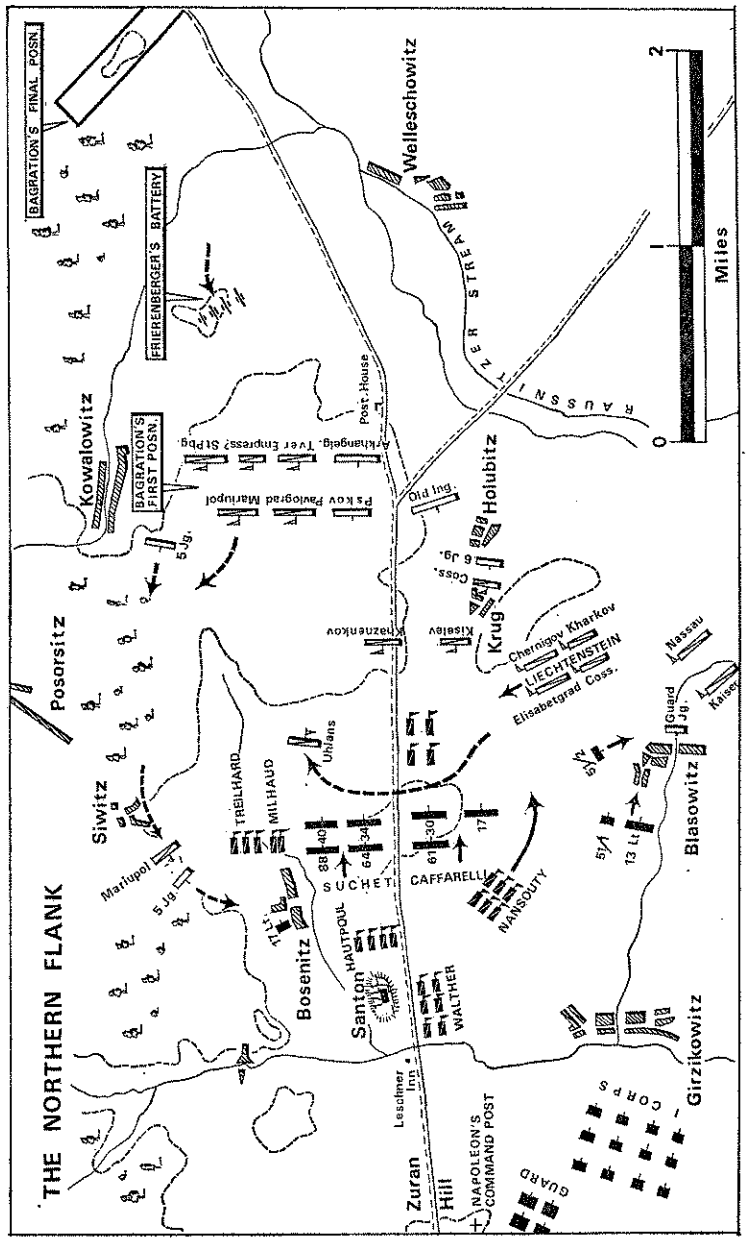
Grand Duke Constantine Uhlans, who threw themselves without support against the front and right flank of Kellermann's division of light cavalry. The French horse scattered in a gratifying fashion, but when the lancers closed with the enemy infantry they met a rolling fire at point blank range. They rampaged along the front of the infantry divisions of Caffarelli and Suchet from one end to the other, meeting fire all the way, and finally disappeared along the highway. The regiment lost 400 men in the process, and its commander Müller-Zakomelsky fell into the hands of the French, together with sixteen of the officers.

Now that he was free of the lancers, Kellermann advanced the left-hand regiments of his division. This immediately provoked a series of counter-attacks on the part of the Russian cavalry, which (according to French accounts) descended upon Kellermann and Caffarelli in overwhelming force.

> 'At this juncture you could appreciate just how much military training and experience can affect the course of an action. The troops of Caffarelli's division . . . opened up their intervals as coolly as if they had been on a parade ground. Immediately Kellermann's cavalry passed through they closed up again and opened fire on the enemy.'[41]

Kellermann moved forward once more, only to be assailed by the Pavlograd Hussars and the Tver and St Petersburg Dragoons, which had been lurking behind Bagration's infantry. This was probably the scene witnessed by a French lieutenant of horse artillery, who describes how he suddenly found the Russian cavalry surging around his guns:

> 'The soldiers threw themselves beneath the ammunition carts and the pieces, while the gunners defended themselves with their rammers. For a time the infantry was unable to shoot, because the mass of Kellermann's cavalry stood in the way, but once the field was clear they opened a rolling fire at thirty paces. At that moment I was at bay among my draught-horses, fighting hand to hand with a Russian officer. He had severed the little finger of my right hand with a blow of his sword, but all at once his horse collapsed, struck by a musket ball. The officer cast himself at my stirrups and



cried out, "We are heroes after all, aren't we?" He repeated these words several times and kept by my side, regarding himself as my prisoner.'[42]

Murat himself was caught up in the fighting, and for a time he and his staff had to hack about them with their sabres. Only the intervention of the heavy cavalry division of Nansouty could possibly restore the balance. This formidable body was brought out of its reserve position behind V Corps and fed into the battle on the southern flank of Caffarelli's division.

The brigade of carabiniers was the first into action. They braved a destructive fire from Russian artillery, and then, when Nansouty judged they had come sufficiently near he ordered *au trot* and immediately afterwards sounded the charge, 'which was carried out with such precision and co-ordination that you might have thought they were drilling in front of an inspector general'.[43] The noise of the clash was heard all over the field. The first line of allied horse crumbled, whereupon the 2nd and 3rd Cuirassiers came up to help their unarmoured brothers in the carabiniers to overthrow the head of Liechtenstein's column, which was formed of the Elisabetgrad Hussars and the Chernigov Dragoons.

Nansouty recalled his victorious command to draw breath behind the infantry. However the 3rd Cuirassiers experienced some difficulty in extricating themselves, and Liechtenstein seized the chance to throw himself once more on the exposed right flank of Caffarelli's infantry. Without attempting to form square the French troops held Liechtenstein back with blasts of musketry until Nansouty once more appeared in their support.

This time Nansouty formed his division in two parallel columns of platoons, and fed them through the gaps in the infantry at a fast trot. The troopers thereupon deployed in front of Caffarelli, with the carabinier brigade and the 2nd Cuirassiers in the first line, and the 3rd, 9th and 12th Cuirassiers in the rear. The French rolled forward, and the weight of their cuirassiers once more proved decisive in the *mêlée*. The offensive power of Liechtenstein's cavalry was now badly weakened.

Events had also taken an unfavourable turn just to the south in the area of Blasowitz. In that part of the world Liechtenstein had a

battery of horse artillery and the two uncommitted regiments of Austrian cuirassiers. They lent support to the Russian Guard *Jaeger* in the village, and helped to fill the void which still yawned between Bagration and the fourth column. At about half past ten Lannes sent forward the 13th Light and the first battalion of the 51st Line to clear the ill-assorted allied force out of the way. Four companies of the 13th Light accordingly advanced in skirmishing order, but were promptly repelled by the *jaeger*.

If we believe the French accounts, the defenders were now routed from Blasowitz by the second battalion of the 13th Light. In fact the *jaeger* and the Austrian horse gunners needed no prompting to abandon the place without more ado, for they saw that Vandamme's powerful French column was deploying on the Staré Vinohrady. On the way back the *jaeger* were badly mauled by the second battalion of the 51st Line, which had meanwhile worked around to the north of the village. Worse still, the French established a battery on the Staré Vinohrady and opened a destructive fire along the length of the Austrian cavalry. Hohenlohe tried to rid himself of the nuisance by bringing up the regiments of Kaiser and Nassau to support the Lothringen Regiment. The three units now moved threateningly on the Staré Vinohrady, but they became entangled in the vineyards and were halted by enemy fire.

Meanwhile Bagration had committed his force along the axis of the highway. His three regiments of line infantry extended across the road, with regiments of dragoons, hussars and cossacks swarming on their front and flanks. On the more distant flanks the 5th *Jaeger* were pushed ahead to Siwitz, while the 6th *Jaeger* occupied Krug to the south of the highway.

'The terrain on either side of the Olmütz highway was advantageous to the enemy (the French), in that the plateau, on which Prince Bagration's corps stood, descended in a broad and gentle slope towards the Leschner Inn (on the Bosenitzer stream), which prevented the movements of the enemy from being discovered from the front of this corps. From the Santon, however, the enemy could make out the smallest motions of the Russians.'[44]

Marching to encounter Bagration, the young conscripts of Lannes' corps came under a cross fire of artillery which mowed down 400 of their number in a matter of minutes. Lannes took up the artillery duel by unmasking fifteen guns of his own. The Russians came off the worse, for their numerous unicorns were outranged by the French long guns, and all their pieces had to be dragged around by main force, whereas Lannes kept his horse teams well forward and moved his artillery about in a sprightly fashion.

Bagration now put in a powerful attack against Lannes' left wing and the vital Santon mound. Two battalions of the 5th *Jaeger* descended on the scattered French pickets among the woods and vineyards in the direction of Welatitz:

> 'The outposts were overthrown in short order, and only the artillery fire from the enemy left wing prevented the fugitives from being totally wiped out by the cossacks and the Mariupol Hussars, which came hastening up. *Jaeger* and cossacks pressed into Bosenitz itself . . . and surprised a mob of marauders, some of whom were brought back prisoner, and the rest cut down on the spot.'[45]

This impudent attack put at stake the honour of the 17th Light, which Napoleon had commissioned to hold this ground to the utmost. The second battalion accordingly descended from the Santon, and turned the Russians out of Bosenitz about as quickly as they had entered.

Towards noon Lannes was in a position to undertake a general offensive. South of the highway, Caffarelli's division advanced to exploit the success at Blasowitz (see p. 127). General Ulanius put up what resistance he could with the 6th *Jaeger* and detachments of the Tver Dragoons and Pavlograd Hussars, but he was swept in turn from Krug and Holubitz.

The 30th and 17th line regiments could now be sent to the left to support Suchet's division, which was pitted against Bagration's main force of infantry north of the highway. The rival infantry were reasonably well matched at about 5,000 each, but to begin with the French cavalry faced odds of more than two to one.

Every now and then Kellermann's light cavalry or Walther's dragoons would come scampering back from one of their encounters, and try to escape through the gaps in the French infantry. Fortunately for them the counter-attacks of the allied horse were badly co-ordinated. Ermolov complained that 'our cavalry, like the rest of our forces, acted largely on its own account, without any attempt at mutual support. And thus from one wing to another our forces came into action by detachments, and one after another they were put into disorder, overthrown and chased off the field.'[46] The ground in front of the 34th Line was littered with dead and wounded Russian horsemen.

However, the Russian infantry stood firm in compact masses, and the Russian musketry and canister put the French to one of their severest tests in the whole battle. Suchet reported:

> 'Drawn up in lines, our infantry withstood the canister fire with total composure, filling up the files as soon as they had been struck down. The Emperor's order was carried out to the letter (*see p. 83*), and for perhaps the first time in this war, most of the wounded made their way to the dressing stations unaided.'[47]

The sorely-tried 34th Line suffered the further ordeal of seeing General Valhubert fall in front of them, struck down by a shot which shattered his thigh. He refused to have himself carried away: 'I can die just as well here; if one man falls, it doesn't mean we have to lose six.'[48]

It is impossible to reconstruct a wholly convincing sequence of events from the bald statements of Bagration, and the detailed but improbable reports of French victories. What is fairly clear is that the French push along the highway threatened to sever Bagration altogether from the main army to the south. On the far northern flank, the light cavalry of Treilhard and Milhaud chased the 5th *Jaeger* and a swarm of cossacks from the valley of Siwitz. In the centre, the efforts of Kellermann's light cavalry and Walther's dragoons were now backed by the heavyweights of d'Hautpoul's division of cuirassiers. A final cavalry action began on the heights north-east of Posorsitz. General Sébastiani was wounded in the midst of his brigade of dragoons, but the encounter ended with the Russian horse falling back to the valley of Kowalowitz.

The cuirassiers were now free to turn their attention to the right flank of Bagration's infantry. The Russians held the horse at bay with platoon fire, but Suchet meanwhile brought up the superior force of his infantry brigades, and once the impotent cuirassiers were out of the way he drove the Russians from the field in increasing disorder. The exhausted Pavlograd Hussars sought to cover the retreat, and they suffered heavily in the process.

As the French won ground so they began to come across the personal effects which the Russians had deposited before the battle.

> 'We entered into possession of 10,000 [*sic*] knapsacks, which were drawn up in line. The booty was immense at first sight, but all we got were 10,000 little black boxes of two-leaved reliquaries, with the image of St. Nicholas [*sic*] bearing the infant Christ above the waters, and 10,000 pieces of black bread, made of straw and bran rather than barley and wheat. Such were their simple and pious possessions.'[49]

Suchet claims that this final attack killed 2,000 Russians and captured sixteen of their guns.

Bagration established some of his more battleworthy forces in a blocking position on high ground near Welleschowitz, and began to array the rest on the heights of Raussnitz—the cavalry in the first line and the severely-depleted infantry to the rear. He had already abandoned the important fork near the Posorsitz post-house, and was now in danger of being driven up the Olmütz road and clear away from the main army to the south. Providence now decreed that the Austrian Major Frierenberger should arrive on the scene with a train of twelve cannon:

> 'these guns had been sent to the army from Olmütz, and they reached Raussnitz at the moment when fugitives came pouring back to confirm the frightful news of the various disasters experienced by the army. The commander pushed his train along the Brünn highway, and, although he had no real covering force, he positioned the battery . . . on the most advantageous site on the already-mentioned high ground to the right of Welleschowitz. The army he faced was a victorious one. It had deployed at the

> Posorsitz post house, and was now in full advance, shooting with its powerful artillery against whatever Russian troops and batteries came into view. The Austrian battery now opened up in its turn against the main battery of the French and their leading troops. The Austrians shot with such extraordinary skill that they compelled the enemy to pull back their batteries in a matter of minutes. Some of the hostile pieces were silenced altogether, and the advance of the whole French left wing was held back. This success was doubly important: it freed Prince Bagration's corps from the pursuit of the enemy, who were now in greatly superior force, and at the same time it denied the French all possibility of executing an attack down the road to Hungary.'[50]

Bagration was now free to rejoin the main army. He had done more than had been expected of him in Weyrother's plan, far more in fact than was conceded by historians until the patient researcher Michel de Lombarès (1947) revealed how much Napoleon's plan of battle demanded an almost unresisted sweep across the northernmost flank of the field.

The march of events had left a knot of Russian cavalry stranded to the south of the highway. This was the brigade of General-Adjutant Uvarov, consisting of the Kharkov and Chernigov Dragoons, the Elisabetgrad Hussars and Lieutenant-Colonel Ermolov's battery of horse artillery. Bagration on the right was falling back, the Austrian cuirassiers had disappeared somewhere over to the left, and powerful masses of French infantry and artillery were bearing down in a threatening fashion before them. After the battle, Uvarov penned a glowing report of his accomplishment in bringing his command back over the Raussnitz stream, and then standing firm under heavy pressure on the heights on the eastern side, thereby enabling the army to make good its escape.[51] Ermolov paints the episode in rather different colours:

> 'The losses were greatly increased when our forces crowded against an extremely boggy stream (the Raussnitz stream), which could be passed only by a few bridges. Our fugitive cavalry tried to get across by wading, and many of the men and horses were drowned. I was abandoned by the regiment to which I was attached, but I

planted my battery in the hope of holding off the enemy, who were pursuing our horse. I extricated one gun from the press of our own cavalry, but we were able to get off only a few rounds before the enemy captured the piece. My men were cut down in the process and I myself was taken prisoner. General-Adjutant Uvarov's division, standing at the bridges, now had the time to appreciate that it had been fleeing from only a small force of the French, and that the main enemy force was still positioned on the heights, not having ventured into the valley. Our pursuers were put to flight and destroyed. So it was that I was freed from my brief captivity, when a dangerously short distance from the French lines. I rejoined the remnants of my shattered battery, and found the division milling about in disorder at the foot of the little hill where the tsar was standing . . . hardly anyone remained of his retinue. His features were lined with deep sorrow, and his eyes were full of tears.'[52]

It is probably convenient to sum up the course of the battle so far:

1. In the south the main allied striking force was still stuck fast on the line of the lower Goldbach.
2. The divisions of Saint-Hilaire and Vandamme had established themselves in the centre on the Pratzen plateau, after their unexpected encounter with the laggardly fourth column of the allies.
3. In their lonely battle to the north, Bagration and Liechtenstein had monopolized the attention of Lannes' V Corps, but were now in retreat.

The Russian Imperial Guard was the last allied formation which had still to be committed to the fight. If its intervention did not bring about the decisive moment of the day (this honour probably belongs to the action on the Pratzeberg) it certainly provided the battle with its most dramatic episode, threatening as it did the French hold on the Pratzen heights, and precipitating by its failure the ruin of the allied army.

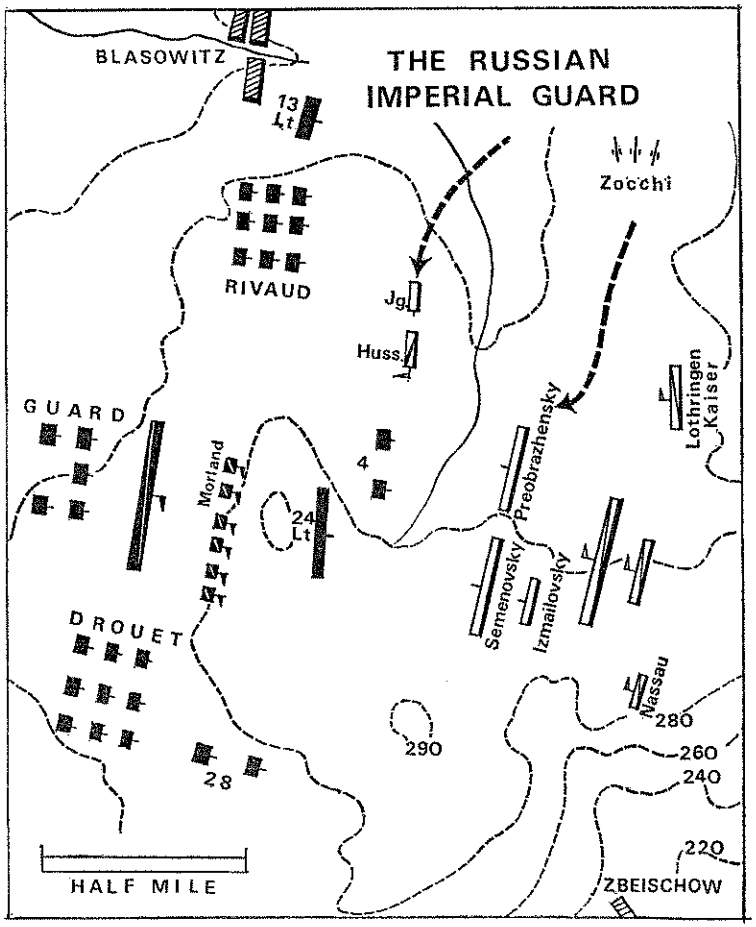
Towards the middle of the morning the Grand Duke Constantine Pavlovich was leading the 10,000-odd men of the Russian Imperial Guard in the direction of the high ground south-east of Blasowitz. He had the Preobrazhensky and Semenovsky regiments in his first line, the Izmailovsky Regiment and the battalion of Guard *Jaeger* in the second line, and the cavalry in a rearward line and a reserve.

Constantine was immaculate in a white uniform and black helmet, as befitted a brother of the Tsar. It was galling for a man of his high birth and violent temperament to know so little of what was going on. Towards Blasowitz there were some troops and a battery of artillery, which he took to be part of Liechtenstein's force. He was disabused when the guns opened fire and tore away a file of the Preobrazhensky Regiment. Constantine sent forward his *jaeger* to occupy the place. A battalion of the Semenovsky Regiment followed in their tracks as reinforcements, but the Russians were soon forced to abandon the position as untenable (see p. 127). At about the same time word came from Alexander begging Constantine to send some help to the Pratzen. Colonel Khrapovitsky marched thither with a battalion of the Izmailovsky Regiment, and arrived in time to be caught up in the rout of the fourth column.

All of this brought home to Constantine the fact that the Guard represented the only allied force on the right centre of the field, and that he was now in the forefront of the battle. No further orders came his way, but the detailed Austrian account tells us that he decided that he must recoil to his left rear and establish contact with the beaten fourth column *behind* the Raussnitz stream. Towards half past eleven he accordingly began his march. He covered his right flank and rear by leaving Captain Zocchi with a battery of Austrian reserve artillery on a height above the upper Raussnitz stream, and throwing out the *jaeger* in a screen facing Blasowitz.

Constantine's move afforded welcome relief to the three Austrian cuirassier regiments of Lieutenant-General Hohenlohe (see p. 127), which slipped around the rear of the column and made for Krzenowitz. The further progress of the Guard was

however, threatened by the advance of Vandamme's division over the Staré Vinohrady, and Constantine was forced to send the Semenovsky and Preobrazhensky regiments and the *jaeger* to occupy the eastward prolongation of the feature. The Guard cavalry was brought up on either flank, and the grateful Hohenlohe did a kind of about turn, placing the cuirassier regiments of Lothringen and Kaiser on the right rear, and the cuirassier regiment of Nassau on the left towards Zbeischow.



The Guard's show of force was fundamentally a defensive ploy, designed to hold back the French 'so that it could then peel away its front bit by bit and file away through Krzenowitz'.[58] However, a violent fire of musketry broke out on both sides, and on the right flank the *jaeger* battalion and the Guard Hussars found themselves hotly engaged against compact lines of French infantry which were advancing through the vineyards on the northern slopes of the Staré Vinohrady. These hostile forces comprised the left-hand brigade of Vandamme's division (4th and 28th Line and 24th Light). Against his original intention, Constantine was forced to respond by launching a full-scale attack on the Staré Vinohrady.

The Preobrazhensky and Semenovsky Regiments advanced steadily up the slope, then covered the last 300 paces at the run. Though breathless and greatly weakened by musketry, the Russians broke the first line at bayonet point, and were checked in front of the second line only by a terrible artillery fire. Now the finest cavalry of the Russian army arrived to take up the quarrel, led by the 1,000 men of the Guard Cuirassiers, and spurred on by Constantine's cry: 'For God, the Tsar and Russia!'

At this moment Vandamme was sitting on an overturned cart, having his wounds attended. He was unsure of the identity of the approaching column, and sent Major Auguste Bigarré of the 4th Line to investigate at closer range. At the edge of the plateau Bigarré could see a mass of glittering cavalry advancing towards him at a smart trot. He galloped back to the first battalion of the 4th and ordered it to form square to meet the shock. However, the Russians cunningly deployed at long musket range and unmasked six light pieces, which lashed the compact formation of the 4th with canister. Vandamme sent the 24th Light to lend assistance, but he was anticipated by Constantine, who launched two of his regiments against the isolated battalion.

> 'This first charge failed to penetrate the square, being received by a discharge of musketry at point-blank range. Before we managed to reload, however, a third Russian regiment carried out a fresh charge, sweeping over the square and back again, and cutting down more than 200 men of the regiment. It was in this *mêlée* that a Russian officer seized the battalion eagle from the hands of

Sergeant-Major Saint-Cyr, who relinquished this trophy only after he had received a dozen wounds on his head and arms. Two of his comrades had carried the eagle before him, and both had been killed—one by the Russian canister, and one by a pistol shot.'[54]

Thus the allies gained their one trophy of the battle.

Perhaps hoping to learn from the experiences of the 4th, the companion regiment, the 24th Light, now deployed into line. However, this strung-out formation left it exposed to the great mass of the Guard cavalry, which this time pushed straight on and rode over the regiment.

Riding from his first standpoint on the Zuran hill, Napoleon arrived on the Staré Vinohrady in time to see a cloud of infantry pouring towards him in disorder. ' "What on earth is that?" said Napoleon. "Your Majesty", cried Marshal Berthier, "what a splendid crowd of prisoners they are bringing back for you!" '[55] However, it soon became evident that the troops were fleeing Frenchmen, and that they were repeatedly looking over their shoulders—an indication that hostile cavalry could not be far behind. Such was the force of habit that when the troops streamed past Napoleon they panted out feeble cries of *Vive l'Empereur!* Even Napoleon had to smile at the incongruity of the scene.

The job of plugging the breach fell upon Bessières, as commander of the recently-arrived French Imperial Guard. He sent Colonel Morland hastening forward with two squadrons of the *chasseurs à cheval*, supported on his right by General Ordener and three battalions of *grenadiers à cheval*, and Prince Borghese with a further squadron of the *chasseurs*. Colonel Doguereau's pieces of horse artillery bounced forward to join in the fight.

The moustachioed giants of the Semenovsky Regiment fought back with musketry and battalion guns, and bayoneted a French officer who pushed his way into their ranks. At the same time, their brothers of the Preobrazhensky Regiment took a heavy toll of the French cavalry which tried to attack them in the vineyards north of the Staré Vinohrady.

The French were still engaged in this profitless activity when the remaining regiments of the Russian Imperial Guard were committed to the action, namely the *Chevalier Garde* and the Guard

Cossacks. The Russians attacked from three sides, and the fourth and fifth squadrons of the *Chevalier Garde* hewed with notable effect into the flank of the French cavalry which was engaged with the Semenovsky Regiment.

Napoleon and Bessières now fed the fresh second-line regiments of the Guard cavalry into the action. The stocky General Rapp, the Emperor's senior aide-de-camp, scouted ahead with one squadron of Mamelukes and two squadrons of *chasseurs*. While still out of cannon range he could see the extent of the disaster:

'The cavalry was in the midst of our squares, and was cutting down our soldiers. A little to the rear we could see the masses of infantry and cavalry which formed the enemy reserve. The Russians broke contact and rushed against me, while four pieces of their horse artillery came up at the gallop and unlimbered. I advanced in good order, with brave Colonel Morland on my left, and General Dallemagne to my right. I told my men: "Over there you can see our brothers and friends being trodden underfoot. Avenge our comrades! Avenge our standards!" We threw ourselves on the artillery and took it, and in the same onslaught we overthrew the enemy cavalry, which awaited us at the halt. It fled in disorder, and we all rode over the wreckage of our broken squares.'[56]

The tactics of the Mamelukes proved to be murderously effective. Being 'wonderful horsemen, they could make their mounts do exactly what they wanted. They could sever a head with a single blow of their curved sabres, and with their sharp-edged stirrups they cut into the soldiers' backs.'[57] A Frenchman points out that the Russian infantry made the mistake of levelling their bayonets against the horses' chests. The animals were infuriated by the goading and lashed out with their hooves, breaking into the ranks. 'We would have been beaten, if the Russians had instead aimed their bayonets at the horses' heads, as we did at the Battle of the Pyramids (1798). When he is pricked in the head the horse rears up, unseating his rider.'[58]

However, the *chasseurs* fared rather badly against the huge Russian cavalrymen, who were fighting like maniacs, and Napoleon was forced to send in a squadron of the *grenadiers à cheval.* One of the grenadiers of the foot Guard describes how these

'black horsemen' swept past 'like lightning and crashed into the enemy. For a quarter of an hour there was a frightful *mêlée*, and fifteen minutes seemed like a century. We could see nothing through the smoke and dust, and we were afraid that our comrades were going to be cut up. We therefore advanced slowly behind them, knowing that if they were beaten it would be our turn next.'[59]

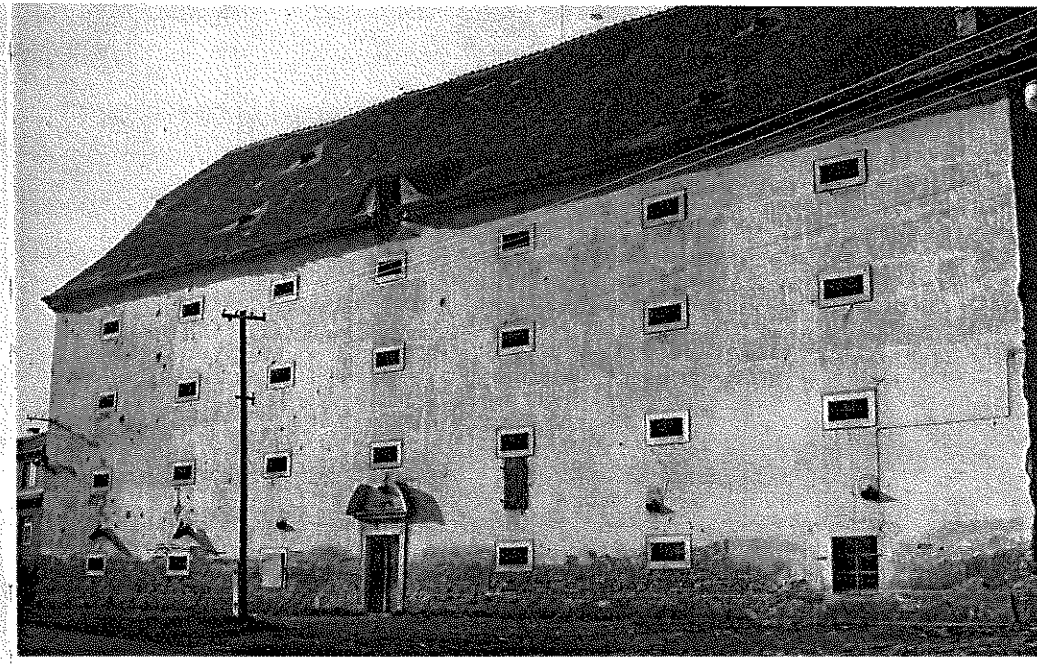
To the right General Drouet was bringing up the leading division of Bernadotte's I Corps. Drouet had been marching at Soult's request to reinforce Saint-Hilaire, but he was diverted to the centre at the direct order of Napoleon. The division was moving by columns of half battalion, and at one juncture the Russian cavalry impudently rushed through the intervals and attacked the *chasseurs*, who were rallying to the rear. Drouet greeted the horsemen with blasts of musketry on their return journey, and toppled a good many from their saddles.

The infantry of the Russian Guard was unable to open fire for fear of hitting their own horsemen, and amidst scenes of bitter hand-to-hand fighting, the cavalry was finally pushed towards the Littawa valley. The defeat of the *Chevalier Garde* was particularly horrible:

> 'This regiment was composed of the most brilliant young men of the Russian nobility, who liked to boast of their superiority over the French. This circumstance became known to our men, who were therefore determined to get their own back, and especially the *grenadiers à cheval*, who skewered them with their enormous swords and cried out: "Here's something for the St. Petersburg ladies to cry about!" '[60]

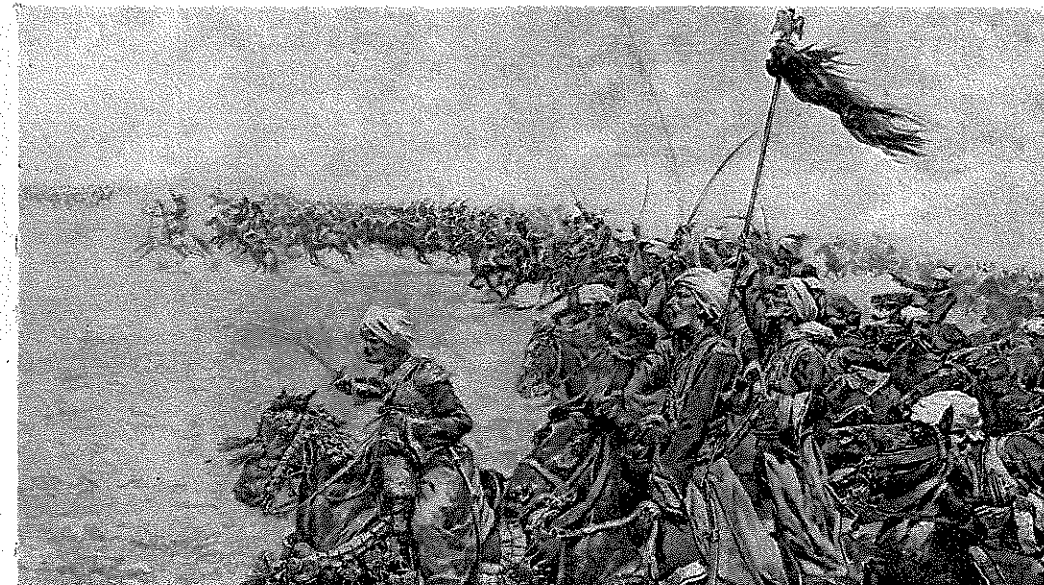
Marshal Bernadotte afterwards claimed the credit for Drouet's move, but his only major contribution to the events of the day was to halt his corps on the heights above Krzenowitz. Thus the remains of the Russian Imperial Guard were able to file away to safety through the village, covered by the three regiments of Austrian cuirassiers.

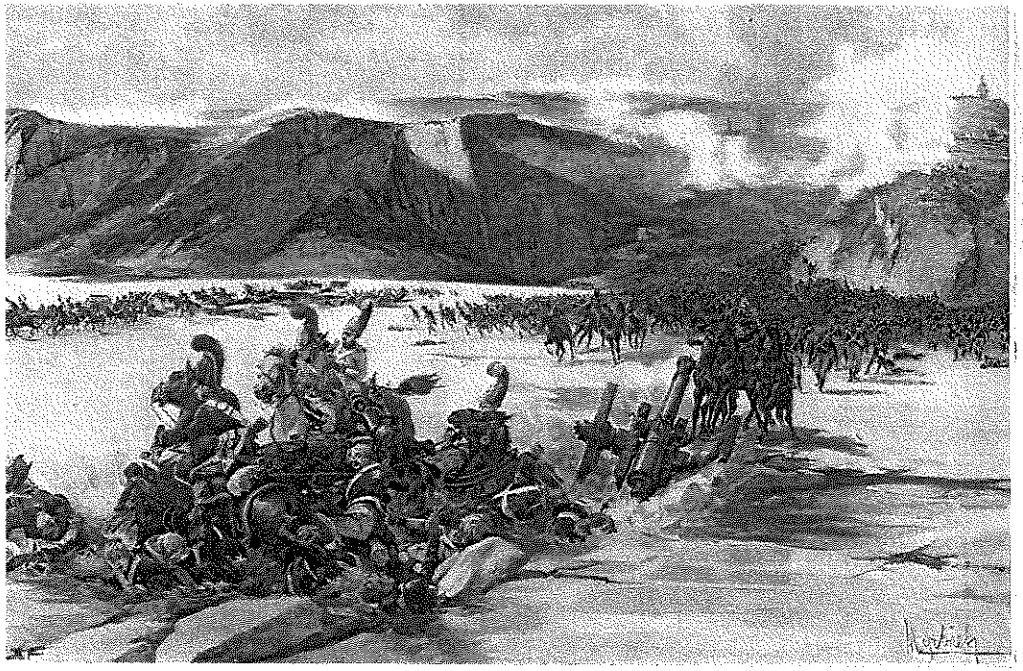
Rapp and another of the aides-de-camp had already presented their reports to the emperor:



15. One of the massive barns at Sokolnitz Castle.

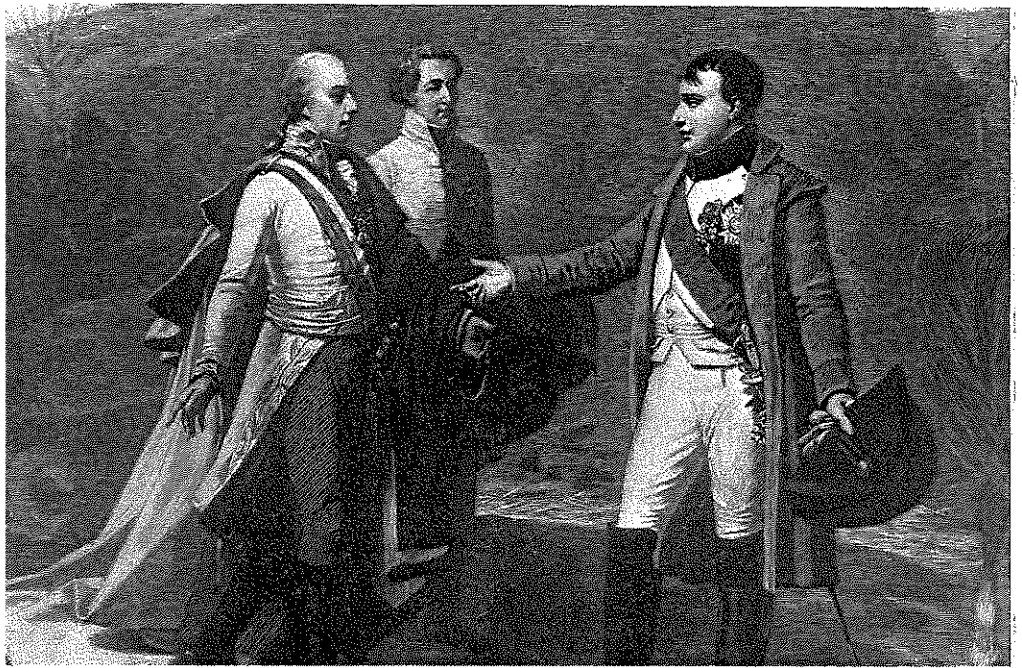
16. The charge of the Mamelukes of the French Imperial Guard.





18. The legend of the ponds—the allies plunge to their destruction beneath frowning cliffs.

19. Francis and Napoleon meet at the Spálény Mill.



> 'The return journey proved to be even more dangerous than the attack, for our route was under heavy howitzer fire. A *chasseur* of the Guard, who was returning wounded . . . disappeared with his horse when a shell exploded in the animal's belly. Their flesh was blown away, leaving nothing but the shattered bones of the two victims.'[61]

Rapp reached the Staré Vinohrady at the gallop, looking very warlike with his fiery gaze and bloody, dented sabre. Napoleon was standing on horseback on the beaten ground of the summit, with Bessières at his side, and his aides Ségur, Caulaincourt, Lebrun and Thiard standing respectfully to the rear. 'Rapp . . . declared in a loud voice, "Sir, I allowed myself to make off with your *chasseurs*; we have overthrown and crushed the Russian Guard, and taken its artillery!" "Very good, I saw it", replied the emperor, "but I notice you are wounded." Rapp answered, "It's nothing, sir, just a scratch!" '[62]

Morland had been fatally wounded in the action, but the man responsible, Prince Repnin of the fourth squadron of the *Chevalier Garde*, was now presented to Napoleon as a captive. Napoleon's Egyptian servant, Roustam, was clutching another trophy, in the shape of a Russian standard:

> 'This individual . . . was known in the Guard for his courage and ferocity. During the charge he set off in pursuit of Grand Duke Constantine, who got rid of him only by firing his pistol, which badly wounded his horse. Roustam was upset that the only thing he had to offer the emperor was a standard. He presented the object to Napoleon, announcing in his strange jargon, "Ah! If me catch Constantine, me cut off head, and me bring to emperor!" . . . Napoleon was furious and replied, "Be silent, you ghastly savage!" '[63]

Everything confirmed the extent of the victory. All sorts of horrible sights presented themselves to Napoleon's gaze as he rode over the scenes of combat on the Pratzen:

> 'The location of that terrible shock was marked by a whole rank of Alexander's young and unfortunate *Chevalier Garde*, who had

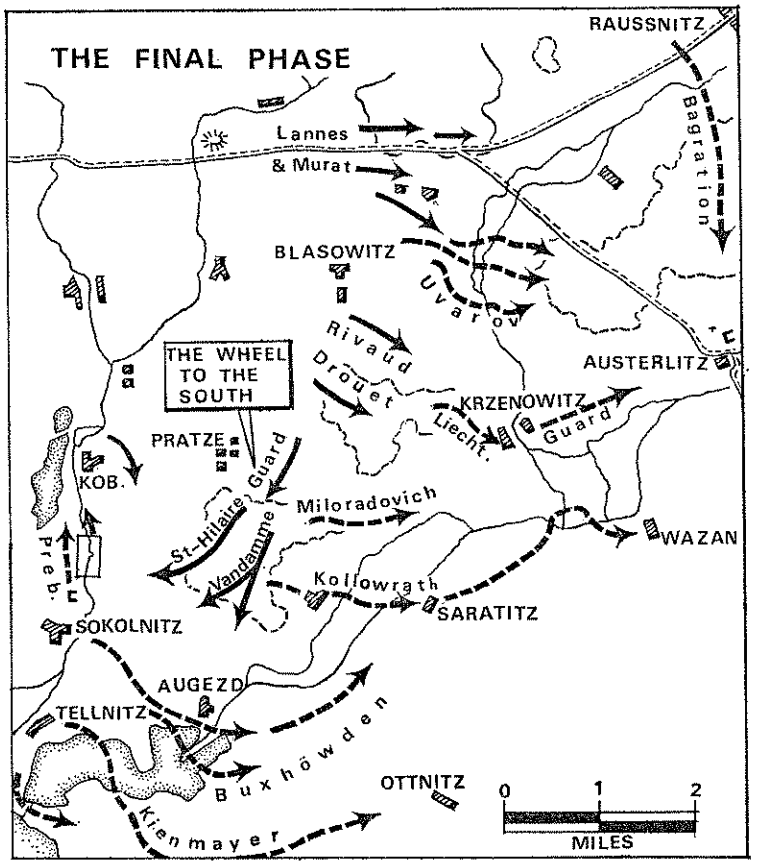
been struck down from in front and were now stretched out on the ground'[64] '. . . Everywhere on this vast battlefield the earth was covered with Russian bodies, and whole companies were heaped in bloody piles along their original alignments. Among the great quantity of green-coated corpses were to be seen a number of blue uniforms, but so few that the French themselves were taken aback.'[65]

At this moment a young artillery officer called Apraksin was brought before the Emperor by one of the *chasseurs*: 'he struggled, wept, and twisted his hands in despair, crying out, "I've lost my battery! I've been shamed in front of the whole world! I want to die!" Napoleon spoke consolingly to him. "Be calm, young man! There is no disgrace in being beaten by the French." '[66]

VI THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ALLIED LEFT WING

By his obstinate fight Bagration had prevented the left wing of the *Grande Armée* from fulfilling its mission of turning the right flank and rear of the Russo-Austrian host. In the centre, however, the litter of corpses and wreckage on the Pratzen testified to the defeat of the allied fourth column and the Russian Imperial Guard. Napoleon now made a decisive intervention in the course of the battle. Since the grand sweep from the far left was no longer feasible, he opted for a kind of 'little solution', which nevertheless implied the destruction of more than one third of the allied army. His available striking force would now wheel to the right on the conquered Pratzen, and sweep south against the rear of the three enemy columns still battling on the lower Goldbach. The main responsiblity for the blow rested on the IV Corps, and Saint-Hilaire and Vandamme hurriedly conferred over the details.

The deadly attack began to take shape after two in the afternoon. Saint-Hilaire's division, supported by the centre brigade (46th and 57th Line) of Vandamme's division, peeled off to the right and descended the slopes in the direction of Sokolnitz. The remainder of Vandamme's force marched straight for the wall-like southern edge of the Pratzen plateau, overlooking the allied path



of escape. Levasseur's brigade of Legrand's division now emerged from the area of Kobelnitz and swung into line with Saint-Hilaire's right, while Legrand in person brought up the 26th Light and 3rd Line to prolong Saint-Hilaire's left. The dragoon division of Boyé followed close behind Vandamme, and one of Oudinot's grenadier brigades came up in the rear. Thus the French force on the Pratzen consisted of two spearheads—the divisions of Saint-Hilaire and Vandamme—and powerful mixed supports and reserves. In the rear Napoleon and the Guard were moving up from the Staré Vinohrady.

Throughout these developments, Friant's division of Davout's III Corps had been clinging stubbornly on to the southern and western exits of Sokolnitz, where they kept the Russian second and third columns tightly bottled up. It so happened that Friant launched a general counter-attack just when the French forces on the Pratzen were poised to fall on the enemy from behind.

To lend the necessary weight to his attack Friant withdrew the 33rd Line from his extreme left and used it to lead the assault against the western salient of the village. The long-suffering 48th Line simultaneously gained ground at the southern edge of Sokolnitz, while the French *tirailleurs* swarmed through the little gardens and began to infiltrate the castle complex.

> 'The main street of Sokolnitz was very wide, and four or five hundred paces long. This extensive area was entirely covered with the dead and wounded of both sides. The corpses were heaped up on one another, and it was almost impossible to ride across the tangle of weapons and broken human bodies.'[67]

Nothing could have been less welcome to Prebyshevsky and Langeron than the news that further enemy forces were descending from the Pratzen against their rear. The bulk of Saint-Hilaire's division bore straight down on the low brick wall and the massed greenery of the Sokolnitz pheasantry, but General Thiébault with the 36th Line executed a circuit to the south and joined Friant's division for the attack on the castle. On Saint-Hilaire's right, Levasseur's brigade was making for the meadows which extended between the pheasantry and Kobelnitz.

The giant pincer movement had the effect of severing the Russians around Sokolnitz into three parts:

1. Langeron and part of his column (the 8th *Jaeger* and the regiment of Viborg) escaped to the south.
2. Another force (the Perm Musketeers of the second column, together with part of the 7th *Jaeger* from the third column) was driven north-westwards clear away from the rest of the army. In the process some of the Russians were crushed against enclosure walls, while others defended themselves like madmen in the castle and its massive farm buildings. Thiébault describes how

> 'The avenues, the stables, the barns, the outhouses and the parent manor—all acted as little forts for the Russians, who were putting up a desperate fight. In this great slaughter the Russians had to be beaten down man by man. I saw individuals defending themselves as confidently as if they had been in the midst of their battalions. I noticed others, ready to collapse from multiple wounds, loading their muskets as coolly as on the drill square.'[68]

The survivors staged another stand on the higher ground behind the castle, and a party of dedicated gunners caught the 36th Line with a final blast at a range of fifty paces. A score of the French were blown away, and Thiébault himself took a canister ball in his right shoulder.

3. The last clump of Russian forces at Sokolnitz comprised the Galicia and Butyrsk Regiments, which had been fighting in the area of the pheasantry, together with the reserve which had been standing in the open ground to the east, namely part of the regiment of Narva, and the heavily-depleted regiments of Azov and Podolia. Prebyshevsky was present in person, accompanied by Major-Generals Strik and Selekhov. Prebyshevsky was aware that he was cut off to the south, but he could discover so little about the course of the battle elsewhere that he conceived the idea of breaking out to the north, hoping to find the fourth column at its objective of Kobelnitz. He did not know that it was two or more miles away, retiring in disorder to the east.

On the way to this supposed refuge, Prebyshevsky's command was assailed on the right flank by the brigades of Morand and Levasseur, in the rear by the 36th Line, and on the left flank by part of Oudinot's grenadiers. The Russians lost men at every step as they fled along the pheasantry walls, and in the fading light the rest were overhauled on the hard-frozen ice of the upper Kobelnitz pond. Volleys of musketry and canister were sweeping in, and the generals and officers could no longer keep the men in any kind of order. As Prebyshevsky later reported to Alexander,

> 'We had endured the most intense fire for eight hours . . . One of my subordinate commanders had been killed, another wounded, and the rest were reduced to confusion by the vicious salvoes of canister which came in from three sides. We ran out of cartridges,

and we had no hope of support. With all of this we fought on against the enemy to the limit of our strength, according to the loyalty we owe to Your Imperial Highness.'[69]

In these dire moments a number of NCOs and men had the presence of mind to tear the colours from the staffs and hide them beneath their uniforms.

General Lochet and a battalion of the 36th Line pushed their way towards Prebyshevsky with the ambition of taking him prisoner. They had only a short distance to go when Colonel Franceschi hurled himself in the way with a knot of the 8th Hussars. Lochet gave vent to an agonized cry of *Merde!* while the enterprising hussar pointed his sabre at Prebyshevsky and ordered him to tell his men to lay down their arms. Thus 'four thousand infantry surrendered without more ado to a handful of hussars'.[70]

The aide-de-camp Lejeune was riding with a fellow officer and a score of dragoons to report the successes to Napoleon. On the way they crossed the débris of a Russian column. 'One of their generals, dressed very simply, tried to bar our way with a few troops. We pushed straight at them. I pierced the general's arm with my sword, while Sopranzy seized the bridle of his horse, and we dragged him into our ranks.'[71] The captive turned out to be no less than Lieutenant-General Wimpfen, who had been separated from the main body of the reserve, and was trying to escape with a party of men from the Narva Regiment.

All the rest of the allied forces were cut off to the south of Sokolnitz, in other words the remnant of Langeron's column, and the commands of Dokhturov and Kienmayer. The escape of these formations was threatened not only by Davout and Saint-Hilaire, pressing respectively from the west and north, but much more dangerously by Vandamme's infantry and Boyé's Third Division of Dragoons, which threatened to cut across the rear.

Napoleon meanwhile had ridden over the Pratzen, and joined Vandamme and Soult at the Chapel of St Anthony, some way down the southern slopes. At his feet lay the village of Augezd, which offered the only apparent path of retreat for the allies as they flooded from the right to left across the darkening plain.

Beyond them again stretched two level and white expanses—the legendary frozen ponds of Satschan and Menitz.

There was a maddening delay in reaching out for Augezd, for Vandamme's troops were arriving in dribs and drabs, and a mass of Russian artillery (variously estimated at between twenty-four and fifty pieces) was pelting the hillside with shot and shell. For a time the French were unable to reply. They had about twenty-five guns of their own trundling across the plateau, but the train was slow to arrive. On the way it was actually threatened by a party of the Austrian Erzherzog Johann Dragoons. These men had led the advance of the allied fourth column, and they had been roaming the Pratzen ever since.[72]

At last a lone battalion of the 28th Line led the way by descending to the east of Augezd and cutting the road to Hostieradek. Finally the main force (the 24th Light, the 4th Line and the remaining battalion of the 28th) swept past on either side of the chapel and descended on Augezd 'like a torrent'.[73] It was taken after a short but violent exchange of fire, and Colonel Sulima of the 8th *Jaeger* was counted among the many prisoners. The Russian gunners stood by their pieces to the last, and fired at such short range that some of the French troops were scorched by the flames. One of Vandamme's battalions arrived at the spot scarcely 150 men strong. Ségur exclaimed in astonishment, and Vandamme rejoined, 'Yes, I know. But you can't make omelettes without breaking eggs!'[74]

The allies were threatened with imminent annihilation. Up till now a small detachment at Tellnitz had screened the retreat of the bulk of the first column and the survivors of the second. This gallant force stood under the immediate direction of Dokhturov and Kienmayer, and comprised the cossacks and the Austrian left-wing cavalry, together with a handful of Croatian, Székler and Russian infantry. With characteristic professionalism the two generals began to pull their forces out of the village and prosecute a fighting retreat around to the south and east, trusting to the firmness of the frozen ponds.

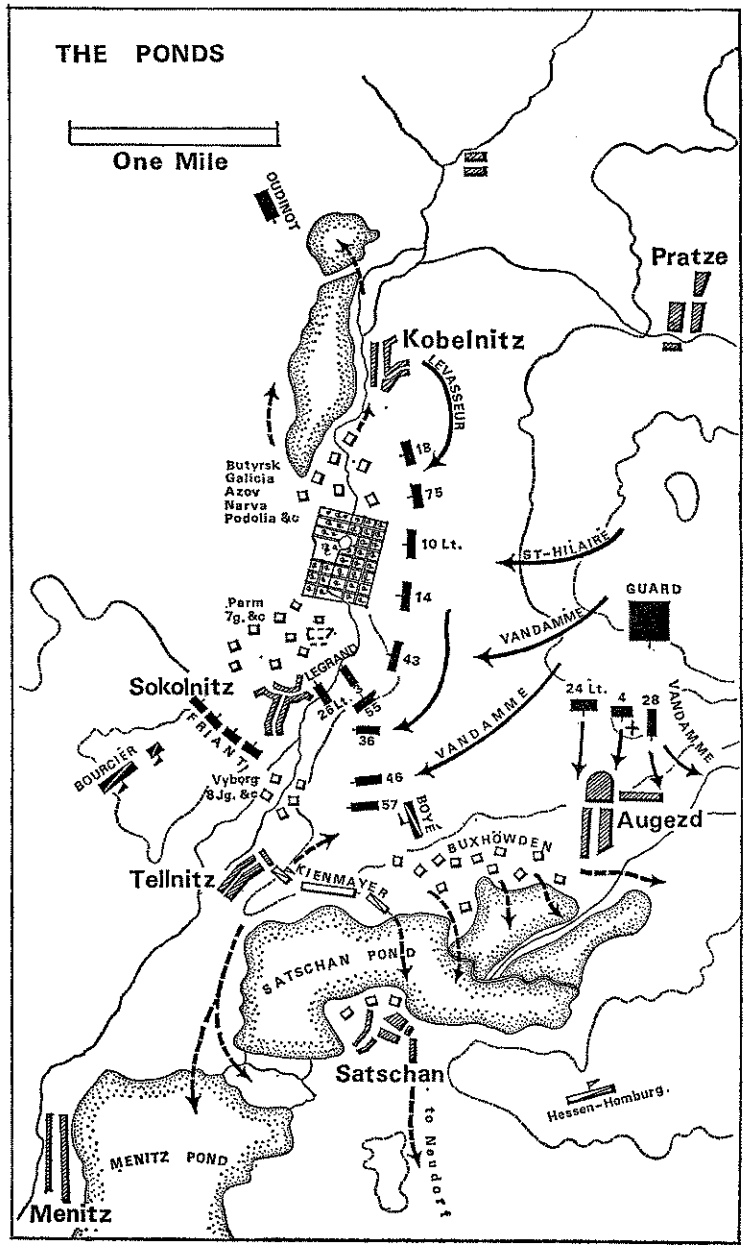
'Lieutenant-General Kienmayer's Austrian cavalry took the lead. The infantry followed in a single column, breaking off in succession

from the left wing, and retired along the narrow spur between the village of Tellnitz and the Satschan pond. They maintained good order, even though they were under a continuous fire of musketry and canister. Tellnitz was now abandoned, and Prince Moritz Liechtenstein formed the rearguard with a force of Austrian cavalry, together with some cossacks which had joined them. The O'Reilly *Chevaulégers* Regiment drove back the pursuing enemy cavalry, and kept up an accurate fire with its battery of horse artillery, silencing several French guns; the regiment's action covered the retreat of the infantry, which was carried out in good order over the Satschan pond and so on towards Neudorf.'[75]

Kienmayer took precautions against any disturbance from the direction of Augezd: three battalions remained for a time in Satschan village, and the Hessen–Homburg Hussars were arrayed on the low ridge between that place and Ottnitz.

The ineffectual French cavalry was in fact the entire Third Dragoon Division of General Boyé. Napoleon had naturally expected great things when the dragoons first descended the slopes towards Tellnitz, and he was furious to see them fall tamely back to the Pratzen. 'This put the emperor in an evil temper. He caught sight of a general staff officer who had accompanied the division. "Go back there", said the emperor, "and tell the general in command from me that he's no bloody good!" A fine mission for an aide-de-camp!'[76] General Gardane was nominated to take over the division, and the spare staff officers dashed off to take part in a new attack. From the Russian sources it seems that in the dust and murk the French ran into a deadly fire from fifteen or twenty pieces of Russian artillery, commanded by Colonel Sievers. In turn the French unmasked six cannon of the Guard Horse Artillery, which delivered a salvo at point-blank range into the Austrian cavalry.

The effort was much too late. The 'Tellnitz' detachment was making good its escape, and all the French had to show were some Austrian prisoners. Captain Thiard indentified 'some of the O'Reilly *Chevaulégers*, which was one of the finest regiments of the Austrian army, together with some Croats, with their blue pants and felt shakoes. I interrogated them upon the emperor's order. When I asked the name of their commanding general they



replied "Kienmayer". Soldiers recall a name as easily as this when they consider themselves fortunate to come under the man's command.'[77]

The remainder of the left wing ended the day with much less dignity. Buxhöwden was in possession of an order from Kutuzov to extricate his command from the Goldbach. He at first intended to break through to the fourth column along the north bank of the Littawa. This ambition was frustrated by the progress of the French at Augezd, and Buxhöwden decided instead to cut across to the south bank by way of the rickety bridge just below that place. He and his staff were among the first to make the passage, as we might expect. The guns and caissons that followed broke the bridge and stuck fast, leaving almost the whole of the Russian artillery stranded on the north bank, ready to be picked up by the French. The Russian infantry accordingly made straight across the Satschan pond, the surface of which was blackened by the thousands of fleeing men.

Some of the artillery of the 'Tellnitz' detachment was meanwhile filing over the causeway between the two ponds. Unfortunately,

> 'the mass of men retreating over the ice of the Satschan pond attracted the fire of the enemy cannon on the chapel hill at Augezd* to the area of the causeway. An ammunition cart was struck by a howitzer shell on the causeway and blew up, provoking a jam among the pieces which were travelling up behind. Some of the artillery of the column was therefore left on the field, and part of the infantry now made their retreat across the ice of the Menitz pond; luckily the surface was frozen so hard that it bore the weight of the mass of troops without breaking. Just two men and a few of the horses fell through. Their bodies were found afterwards, when the ponds were drained.'[78]

During these minutes 'the sun sank beneath the dense clouds along the horizon, and at the same moment the snow began to fall, like the curtain descending in a theatre at the close of the last act'.[79]

Such was the slender basis for the extraordinary claim of the

* The guns in question were probably nearer than this.

30th Bulletin of the *Grande Armée*, that 20,000 Russian troops flung themselves into the ponds and drowned. On the French side the Comte de Comeau was close enough to see what had happened. He points out that most of the Russians actually swarmed around the edges, and that 'even if a few platoons paddled in the water, it was not deep enough to have drowned them'.[80]

If the Russians were merely rounded up by the French, rather than engulfed in the icy water, their losses still ran into many thousands. Napoleon now rode down to the plain in the company of Marshals Soult and Bessières. At his approach the officers and soldiers raised their headgear on their swords and bayonets and shouted with joy. 'No longer could you recognize the conscripts among the old warriors. The experiences of this day had been worth ten years' campaigning.'[81]

Fire ceased all over the field by half past four, and in the first hours of darkness the weary French settled down on the same ground which had been held by the allies just before the battle. On the northern flank Bagration had fallen back to a blocking position at Raussnitz (see p. 130). Then, hearing that the army was to retire on Hungary, he abandoned the Olmütz highway and the baggage and cut across to Austerlitz. He arrived there late in the evening, and met Miloradovich with the Russian survivors of the fourth column. Liechtenstein's cavalry and the Russian Imperial Guard were also kept well in hand, and they spent the night in front of Austerlitz on the heights overlooking the Raussnitz stream.

Less happily, Kutuzov, Kollowrath and Kamensky were forced to by-pass Austerlitz to the south and make their retreat by way of Wazan and Hodiegitz. Buxhöwden trailed up behind them along the south bank of the Littawa. He had just two battalions with him—a sorry remnant of the 33,000 or so troops he had commanded in the morning. Prince Czartoryski saw him come in. 'The poor general had lost his hat, and his uniform was in disarray. As soon as he caught sight of me he cried out, "I've been abandoned! I've been sacrificed!" '[82]

The village of Czeitsch on the road to Hungary was designated the rallying point for the whole army. The losses of the Russians appeared even greater than they really were, for so many troops

were scattered in the darkness across the countryside. The artillery and knapsacks had been abandoned on the field, and the wretched country tracks dissolved in the sleet and icy rain which had been falling since half past three in the afternoon. 'So much confusion and disorder never attended any retreat.'[83]

Nothing was known of the whereabouts of Alexander, though it was reported that he had been wounded in the battle and rushed away in a coach. The defeated Tsar was first detected by Major Toll, who was astonished to see Alexander riding back across country, accompanied only by the surgeon Wylie and the head groom Iene. Toll followed at some distance, anxious for the Tsar's safety, but not wishing to intrude on his privacy. After a while Alexander dismounted and sat on the damp ground beneath a tree, where he covered his face with a cloth and burst into tears. His two companions stood by in embarrassment, but Toll came quietly to his side and spoke some consoling words. Alexander got to his feet, silently embraced Toll, and rode on to Hodiegitz. The village was full of wounded soldiers, but in all the confusion a captain of horse was able to find Kutuzov and bring him to Alexander for a hurried conference. There were no carriages to be had, and so Alexander had to plunge on through the darkness and rain. Seven miles travelling brought him to Urchitz, where he collapsed on a pile of straw in a peasant's hut, and was lulled to an exhausted sleep by camomile and opium and a draught of wine.

After their stupendous victory the French were content to take their rest. Not only had Bagration broken free of Lannes, but he had been allowed to pass unmolested across the nose of Bernadotte's I Corps, poised on the slopes above the Raussnitz stream. Murat received no fresh orders from Napoleon, and so the bulk of the French cavalry remained inactive on the left centre of the army.

The French troops made themselves as comfortable as they could on the hideous field. Many of them were far too excited to sleep, and spent the night re-living the events of the day, and debating what name the victory would bear. There was general admiration for the uncomplaining Russian wounded, who clung together in heaps, or dragged themselves to the warmth of the French fires.

Napoleon, Berthier and Soult rode slowly from the region of the ponds to the highway in the north, picking their way with difficulty over the wreckage of the battlefield:

> 'It was night already, and Napoleon ordered his entire suite to remain silent, so that we could hear the cries of the wounded. Whenever he heard one of these unfortunates he went to his side, dismounted, and made him drink a glass of brandy from the store which followed him everywhere . . . the squadron of his escort spent the whole night stripping the Russian corpses of their great-coats, with which to cover the wounded.'[84]

Towards ten Napoleon reached the little Posorsitz post house, which the Russians had used as a dressing station. The Emperor and his senior officers crowded into the two rooms and dried their steaming clothes at a huge fire, while the nearest soldiers brought in food from their bivouacs. Napoleon began to dictate a proclamation, but in his weariness he chose to complete the address on the following day:

> 'Soldiers, I am pleased with you! You have, on this day of Austerlitz, justified everything that I had expected of your boldness, and you have honoured your eagles with an immortal glory. In less than four hours an army of 100,000 men [*sic*], commanded by the emperors of Russia and Austria, has been cut down or scattered. Such enemy as escaped your bayonets have been drowned in the lakes . . . Soldiers, when I have accomplished everything that is necessary for the happiness and prosperity of your land, I shall lead you back to France. There you will be the objects of my most tender care. My people will greet you with joy, and it will be enough for you to say "I was at the Battle of Austerlitz", and they will reply "There stands a hero!" '

VII EXPLOITATION AND ARMISTICE

Emperor Francis (for so long absent from our story) met Alexander and Kutuzov at Czeitsch at noon on 3 December to debate what was to happen next. The choices were severely limited, for the French were across the road to Olmütz, and Alexander was

CHAPTER 9

NAPOLEON'S GREATEST VICTORY

I THE PRICE

IT is generally reckoned that the total allied losses in casualties, prisoners and missing amounted to some 27,000 men, or in other terms the very high proportion of about one-third of their effectives. A few details can be supplied. The Russian lists (excluding all the Guard save the Guard Cuirassiers) give us totals of 19,886 for the cavalry and infantry, and 3,616 for the artillery.[1] Altogether eighteen convoys of prisoners passed through Brünn, comprising 9,767 Russians and 1,686 Austrians.[2] There remains a difference of 13,735 between the reported number of Russian prisoners and the total Russian loss. After making allowance for the prisoners from the Guard, it is reasonable to suppose that a high proportion of the remainder must have been killed. The passage of time has lent the events at Austerlitz a certain glamour and excitement, but it is sobering to reflect that so many men who were alive at the beginning of the day were dispatched to literally 'God knows what'.

From the total loss of about 3,500 Austrians we must deduct the 1,686 prisoners. The balance of about 1,800 casualties and missing leads us to suppose that the 33rd Bulletin of the *Grande Armée* was not far wrong in putting the Austrian dead at 600. It is likely that the Austrians sustained most of their losses at the peak of the combat, whereas the Russians lost proportionately more at the end of the day, when they were reduced to mobs.

Many of the men were probably rendered *hors de combat* by wounds, and then bayoneted to death by the French.

The resourceful Kienmayer managed to bring off his guns. Otherwise the first, second and third columns lost their entire artillery, which helped to bring the loss in allied ordnance to 180 pieces. Between forty-five and fifty colours and standards also fell to the French.

The losses of the *Grande Armée* were extraordinarily light, amounting to a total of some 8,000. This figure is made up of 1,305 killed, 573 captured, and about 6,940 wounded. Certain divisions bore more than their fair share of the butcher's bill, as might have been expected from the course of the fighting: Friant lost 1,900 men, Saint-Hilaire 1,776 and Vandamme 1,456. However, the regimental lists show some curious discrepancies. The 24th Light suffered no less than 126 killed and 364 wounded, whereas the 4th Line, which was ridden over just as comprehensively by the cavalry of the Russian Guard, managed to escape with just eighteen dead.

II THE JUDGMENTS

After the shattering blow of Austerlitz, Major Toll could not at first understand how it was that Weyrother's precise and apparently well-considered plan had precipitated such a disaster.[3] What had gone wrong? Most of the survivors seem to have hit fairly soon upon the fundamental reason, namely that their army was not up to the tactical outflanking move which had been demanded of it.[4]

Informed contemporaries were able to enter into a number of particulars. Sir Arthur Paget believed that the day was lost once the allies found the French established on the crossings of the lower Goldbach. 'This unexpected reception led to the most fatal consequences.'[5] Langeron rightly dismissed the theory that Napoleon must have discovered the allied plans: 'It is just possible, but, whatever people say, he could easily have deduced them from his military experience and his *coup d'oeil*.'[6] He could see almost the whole extent of the allied bivouac fires, which was