

Austria, Prussia and the Wars of Liberation, 1813-1814.

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is to clarify the relative roles of Austria and Prussia during the Wars of Liberation of 1813 and 1814. It uses the very latest research concerning the military strategy adopted and emphasises the input of Radetzky, using his hand-written account of the campaign, a document previously ignored by historians, despite the general's position as chief-of-staff of the allied coalition. The fact is that Anglo-American historians have failed to investigate the politics of the military alliance of 1813-14 that constituted the Fourth Coalition. Myself apart, the only historian to examine that alliance with any regard to the Austrian viewpoint has been, Gordon A. Craig in a brief but excellent analysis published as long ago as 1966¹. German historians have done little better. They simply neglect the Austrian archives.

The Napoleonic Wars cannot be understood without knowing how they were militarily concluded. How could Napoleon's domination of Europe come to a sudden end after nine months of fighting in 1812-1813, given that in the spring campaign of 1813, he had re-established his domination of the Continent by defeating the Russian and Prussian armies at Lützen and Bautzen? It was only Austria's contribution to the war that made his overthrow possible, although all historical literature in English on the period simply evades this conclusion. It is all, therefore, out of date. British historiography, of course, focuses on the battle of Waterloo. Yet Waterloo was a mere postscript to the 1813-1814 campaigns. Europe had

¹ Gordon A. Craig, 'Problems of Coalition Warfare: the Military Alliance against Napoleon, 1813-14,' in his *War, Politics and Diplomacy. Selected Essays*, London, 1966, pp. 22-45.

already been liberated before Waterloo. The Congress of Vienna had already redrawn much of the map of the world. And even had Napoleon's exhausted army proved victorious at Waterloo, it would have inevitably been crushed soon afterwards by the 600,000 men already mobilised by imperial Austria and Russia plus the German and other states to destroy it.

The role of Blücher at Waterloo, of course, has allowed German historiography to emphasise the role of Prussia in the Wars of Liberation to the exclusion of almost everybody else. Overlooked is the fact that in 1813-1814 two-thirds of Blücher's army were Russians. Overlooked, too, is the fact that the grand strategy of the Coalition was provided by Austria—none of which should undermine Blücher's or indeed Prussia's splendid achievements. Still, Treitschke, and subsequent German historians who took their lead from him, deliberately dismissed the Austrian contribution and their influence is still very strongly present in the history books. That is why this essay pays particular attention to Treitschke's account. It has never really been rebuffed.

Most of the revisionist writing on the Wars has concentrated on the role of the *Landwehr* and differences between the German states. Ironically, on these topics, Treitschke was mostly right. This essay covers these aspects too and tries to reverse, once again, the neglect of the Austrian contribution. It is not, however, in any way, an attempt to disparage German contributions to the defeat of Napoleon, merely an effort to paint accurately the more complicated picture of the Wars of Liberation that should nowadays prevail.

Exposition

The years 2013-2014 mark the bicentenary of the Wars of Liberation, which climaxed in the defeat and abdication of the Emperor Napoleon.

Surprisingly, they constitute a relatively obscure period in Napoleonic historiography and even Napoleonic history, which seems, all too often in the textbooks, to jump from disaster in Russia to defeat at Waterloo. This is especially true of works by historians who seem to know no German or Russian and whose much praised and well-advertised histories include no references to Russian or German sources². Indeed, I can think of at least one historian who has apparently spent a lifetime writing on Napoleon but who seems to have no idea why he was defeated. Among Anglo-Saxon writers only Gordon Craig ever truly examined the campaigns of the War of Liberation in terms of coalition warfare³; even recent German and Austrian historiography shows little interest in the campaigns themselves, despite the very lively disputes they gave rise to in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Yet Napoleon dominated Europe militarily from 1797 till 1813. Even during his Russian campaign he was not defeated in any major battle and indeed, until 1813, had only been defeated once, by the Austrian Archduke Charles in 1809 at Aspern, a defeat he made up for almost immediately by victory at Wagram (where in fact the Austrians again performed extremely well)⁴. Then, almost immediately after his retreat

² David G. Chandler's *The Campaigns of Napoleon. The Mind and Method of History's Greatest Soldier*, New York, 1966, includes only two works in German in his bibliography, which otherwise lists exclusively French and English ones. The Austrian army is written off fairly comprehensively on pp. 666-7, where Radetzky (p.666) gets his only mention in 1,200 pages—"of the men of the second echelon only Radetzky (*sic*) rose above mediocrity." Von Plotho's three volumes on the wars of 1813 and 1814 constitute one of the works in German mentioned in the bibliography—the other is a biography of von Wrede-- but I doubt they were read by Chandler. Schwarzenberg is consistently despised and the section on 1813-1814 appears to have been written without any reference at all to Austrian or German sources. Gunther E. Rothenberg's *The Napoleonic Wars* devotes merely six pages to the 1813-1814 campaign, while Charles Esdaile, like Chandler, doesn't appear to know German and likewise restricts the bibliography in his *Napoleon's Wars. An International History, 1803-1815*, New York, 2008, to works in English and French. His chapter on 1813-1814, therefore, fails to mention Radetzky or even Gneisenau, omits even Trachenberg and has more to say on diplomacy than on the campaigns. Philip G. Dwyer (ed), *Napoleon and Europe*, Harlow, 2001, has nothing on the Wars of Liberation.

³ Gordon A. Craig, '*Problems of Coalition Warfare* etc.

⁴ See Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Emperor's Last Victory. Napoleon and the Battle of Wagram*, London, 2004.

from Russia, he assembled an army of 400,000 and controlled Europe from the Channel to the Elbe. When the Russians and Prussians challenged him in May 1813 at Lützen and Bautzen, he defeated them again, leaving the Russians ready to retreat into Poland to recuperate and abandon their Prussian allies. Scharnhorst, the Prussian military reformer, was fatally wounded at Lützen, where in the words of one leading military historian,⁵ “the enemy collapsed [and] Napoleon once again demonstrated his ability to pin superior numbers, reinforce the decisive point and counter-attack”. After Bautzen, despite superiority in cavalry of three to one and superiority in artillery of two to one, the allies had to relinquish the defensive line of the Oder as well as Breslau. At first no official Prussian bulletin was released after the battle; eventually it was announced that the battle had been ‘broken off’ with no figure given for Prussian losses.⁶ . If he had had sufficient cavalry (he had lost hundreds of thousands of horses in Russia) Napoleon would surely have routed his enemies.⁷ Only Austrian mediation between the allies and with Napoleon saved the day. The Russian army remained in Germany, close to the Austrian border, while Napoleon agreed to an armistice. Yet, in less than a year, Napoleon had been defeated, had abdicated as Emperor, and was on his way to Elba. So how did this happen? Most books do not really explain it.

Germans, however, have their own, peculiar explanation: the German people rose up under Prussian leadership and defeated the tyrant. As

⁵ Rothenberg, *The Napoleonic Wars*, p. 177.

⁶ Georg Nitsche, *Österreichische Soldatentum im Rahmen deutscher Geschichte*, Berlin and Leipzig, 1937, p. 160.

⁷ “The almost total loss of his horses in Russia dealt Napoleon a blow that was to prove fatal... In May 1813, when the campaign began, 17,000 of Napoleon’s cavalymen were still without horses. It was this shortage that was to deprive Napoleon of the chance of defeating the allies and exploiting battlefield successes in the spring of 1813. It was also a key factor in his fatal decision to agree to an armistice in the summer of 1813 in order to put his cavalry arm into proper shape” Dominic Lieven, ‘Russia and the Defeat of Napoleon (1812-14),’ *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Spring 2006 (New Series) pp. 283-308, pp. 306-7.

Johann Gustav Droysen put it in his seminal lectures on the ‘era of the wars of liberation’:⁸ “...for the first time in centuries, the German *Volk*, together and with a deep sense of unity, struggled and won.” Whatever their part—and it shall be examined presently—the Wars of Liberation certainly mark a key moment in history for Germans and in the history of the development of their national self-consciousness. In the words of Helmut Berding:⁹

“The Wars of Liberation constitute a key moment in German national history. Scarcely any other event is so firmly anchored in German historical consciousness—at least until 1945. In recalling the German uprising of 1813 all parts of the population have found themselves in rare unanimity. The uprising against Napoleon was embraced by the participants themselves as an heroic deed of the whole nation and was described on all sides as a liberation struggle or a war of liberation. The patriotic enthusiasm of 1813 enabled the revolt against Napoleonic rule to become an original event in the treasury of political experience of the Germans...[Unlike other episodes of German history] no inner ideological, political or social conflicts were played out. Much more, was it the case that, all parties, who opposed one another before 1814 and between whom after 1814 differences once again manifested themselves most sharply, co-operated against an external enemy, the Napoleonic dictatorship. Those who struggled for liberation presented themselves not as aggressors bent on conquest but as the just defenders of freedom and national independence. The legitimacy of their uprising has never been contested by any party whatsoever.”

Prussians, in particular, claim the wars for themselves. Wilhelm Capelle, for example, the editor of the 1940 edition of *Blücher’s Letters*, wrote in his foreword:¹⁰ “Prussia’s struggle is unique in all history. She was then a state of 4.5 million inhabitants against the Napoleonic world empire with

⁸ Droysen, *Vorlesungen über das Zeitalter der Freiheitskriege*, Gotha, 1886 (2nd edition) Vol. 1, p. 3.

⁹ Helmut Berding, ‘Das Geschichtliche Problem der Freiheitskriege, 1813-1814’, in Karl Otmar Freiherr von Aretin and Gerhard Ritter (eds.), *Historismus und Moderne Geschichtswissenschaft. Europa zwischen Revolution und Restauration, 1797-1815, Drittes Deutsch-Sovjetisches Historikertreffen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, München, 13-18 März 1978*, Stuttgart, 1987, pp. 201-215, p. 201.

¹⁰ Quoted in Walther Heydendorff, *Österreich und Preußen im Spiegel der österreichischen Geschichtsauffassung*, Vienna, 1947, p. 321.

its enormous resources, against Napoleon himself, one of the greatest commanders, the greatest man of will, of all time. Blücher and Gneisenau are the heroes, who next to Scharnhorst and Stein, as men of action, serve before all others as the liberators of Germany from the yoke of the Corsican.” According to the Prussian legend, their great hero, Stein, a key reformer who had fled to Russia from Prussia in 1808 to avoid arrest by Napoleon, pushed Tsar Alexander I into continuing the war against Napoleon into Germany; then King Frederick William III and General Yorck arranged for Prussia to desert Napoleon, first by the Convention of Tauroggen at the end of 1812 and then by the Treaty of Kallisch of February 1813. Then, when Frederick William appealed to his subjects to help him, the students, or the educated youth of the country in particular, flooded recruiting stations to back their king and his reforming ministers, who had progressively rebuilt Prussia after the humiliations of the 1806-7 and who now intended to unite and reform the whole of Germany. Thereafter, with all this popular support, the great Prussian military heroes, Blücher and Gneisenau, led Germany to victory over the French tyrant. The roles of Austria and Russia in the wars are somehow forgotten—along with such facts that almost two-thirds of Blücher’s army was Russian. Already in October 1913 when the centenary of the battle of Leipzig (‘the battle of the nations’ after all) was commemorated, Conrad von Hötzendorf, the Chief of the Austrian General Staff who had been invited to Leipzig for the celebrations noted that Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Swedish guests had been “assigned the role of mere spectators”. He added:¹¹ “The purely German character of the celebration was expressed in the imposing official unveiling of the monument. In keeping with the tone of the festivities, it seemed to reflect that underestimation of Austrian achievements in the Wars of Liberation,

¹¹ Quoted in Walther Heydendorff, *Österreich und Preußen etc.*, Vienna, 1947, pp. 316-317.

which has also slipped into German, particularly Prussian historiography, although success was due thanks only to Austria's entry. Even serious works have failed to mention or distorted the facts.”

Recent historiography, it must be conceded, has quietly demolished the Prussian myth: Stein had nothing to do with Alexander's decision to pursue the war into Germany¹²; Frederick William III was against the Convention of Tauroggen that may even have been forced on Yorck by pressure from his troops.¹³ The king only agreed to the Treaty of Kalisch after negotiations over Poland and the restoration of Prussian territory had been agreed with Russia.¹⁴ Ideally, he would have preferred to remain neutral. It is now crystal clear that there were huge differences between the Prussian reformers concerning both the future of reform and the future of Germany; indeed, they were deeply divided.¹⁵ Many may have hoped that the reforms would serve simply to strengthen the Prussian bureaucracy, not democratise Prussia or help unify Germany.¹⁶ In the end,

¹² See in particular, Hans A. Schmitt, '1812: Stein, Alexander I and the Crusade against Napoleon,' *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (December) 1959, pp. 325-328.

¹³ See *inter alia*, Reinhold Röder, 'Zur Geschichte der Konvention von Turoggen,' in Fritz Straube (ed.), *Das Jahre 1813. Studien zur Geschichte und Wirkung der Befreiungskriege*, East Berlin, 1963, pp. 87-111 and Craig, *op. cit.*, p. 42: which states that the Convention of Tauroggen was "bitterly resented by the King, even after he had yielded to the popular enthusiasm aroused by it and had summoned his people to arms." See, too, Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1840-1945*, new edition, Oxford, 1964, p.59, footnote for the debate among historians on the question whether Tauroggen was an act of insubordination.

¹⁴ Alexsej Leon'tevi Naro nickij, 'Russland und die napoleonische Hegemoniepolitik: Widerstand und Anpassung', in Aretin und Ritter (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 163-184, p. 181: "die Sovjetische Aktenpublikationen zeigen eindeutig ,daß das Zögern von König Friedrich Wilhelm III im Jahre 1813, mit Rußland ein Bündnis einzugehen, nicht so sehr auf seine sattsam Furcht als vielmehr auf die Ansprüche zurückzuführen war, die sein Vertreter Reinhold Friedrich Otto von Schoeler dem russischen Hof hinsichtlich der polnischen Territorien bereits 1812 unterbreitet hatte."

¹⁵ See Walter Simon, 'Variations in Nationalism during the Great reform Period in Prussia,' the *American Historical Review*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (January) 1954, pp. 305-321. Katherine Aaselstad and Karen Hagemann in 'Collaboration, Resistance and Reform: Experiences and Historiographies of the Napoleonic Wars in Central Europe. 1806 and its Aftermath. Revisiting the Period of the Napoleonic Wars in German Central European Historiography,' *Central European History*, Vol. 39 (2006), pp. 547-579, write on p. 561: "Even after World War II, historians of West Germany depicted the early nineteenth century as an era of civic and democratic formation and early nationalism . Newer studies question this interpretation and underline the absence of consensus and the division among such key players as Stein and Hardenberg on principles of representation and government reform. They point out that a broad variety of reasons motivated reforms—patriotism was only one."

¹⁶ See Aaselstad and Hagemann, *op. cit.*, p. 561: "Other scholars have increasingly emphasised the limitations and negative effects of the reforms. As early as 1967 Reinhard Koselleck associated the

it has been argued, the true beneficiaries of free trade and agrarian reforms were the nobles.¹⁷ Frederick William himself distrusted almost all the reformers—including the military leaders. In any case, in the words of John Sheehan, the idea that the Prussian reformers were the leaders of German modernisation is also a myth:¹⁸ “Both the origins and structure of the Prussian reforms strongly resembled developments in the *Mittelstaaten*: in all these states external pressures were decisive; in all of them civil servants played key roles and administrative reform had a special place; everywhere emancipatory measures struck down traditional privileges and encouraged mobility and growth. There was not, as Prussia’s scholarly admirers once argued, anything inauthentic about the changes introduced in the south and west, nor was there anything unique about the changes introduced in Prussia. If anything, the Prussian reforms were more limited in scope and qualified in accomplishment than their counterparts in Bavaria, Baden or Württemberg.”

As for the volunteers of 1813, it turns out that they were not the students and educated youth—who made up about only 10% of *Landwehr* units--but were overwhelmingly (80-90%) peasants, along with day labourers

oppressive Prussian bureaucracy with the wartime reforms. John Gillis later made similar points. Reforms were meant to strengthen and perfect Prussian bureaucracy not to undermine it.” See Reinhard Koselleck, *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution. Allgemeines Landrecht, Verwaltung und soziale Bewegung von 1791 bis 1848*, Stuttgart, 1967 and John R. Gillis, *The Prussian Bureaucracy in Crisis 1840-60. Origins of an Administrative Ethos*, Stanford, 1971. See, too, Robert M. Berdhal, *The Politics of the Prussian Nobility: the Development of a Conservative Ideology, 1770-1848*, Princeton, 1988, which shows how the nobility exploited inconsistent regulations regarding freedom of movement and noble land tax exemptions in rural Prussia and stresses the continued aristocratic dominance of rural life, the civil service and the officer corps.

¹⁷ See the older works for this: Walter M. Simon, *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement, 1807-1819*, Ithica, 1955 and Hans Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy: the Prussian Experience, 1660-1815*, Cambridge, 1958; slightly more positive views can be found in Matthew Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism. The Transformation of Prussian Political Culture, 1806-1848*, Oxford, 2000 and Michael Rowe (ed.), *Collaboration and Resistance in Napoleonic Europe. State Formation in an Age of Upheaval*, Basingstoke, 2003.

¹⁸ John Sheehan, ‘State and nationality in the Napoleonic period.’ In John Breuilly (ed.), *The State of Germany. The national idea in the making, unmaking and remaking of a modern nation –state*, Harlow, 1992, pp. 47-59, p. 53.

and lowly civil servants.¹⁹ In the words of one modern historian:²⁰ “The motives behind this mass movement were not related to democracy, constitutionalism or nationalism but rather reflected patriotic and dynastic considerations. As well as a great deal of francophobia.” It is interesting to note in this context that whereas future German liberals and democrats stuck to the myth of students and bourgeois youth as forming the corps of a popular uprising supposedly fixated on constitutional reform, conservatives and Marxists never cherished such illusions. Bismarck saw discussion of support for constitutional reforms as besides the point “as if the popular movement in 1813 must be ascribed to other reasons and another motive must be needed than the humiliation offered by foreigners in our country.”²¹

In his view, the peasants and others had merely acted out of duty and loyally obeyed the summons of their king. Frederick Engels arrived at the same conclusion, although he expressed it in different terms:²² “Who were these enthusiasts? First the peasants, the stupidest class of people on earth...ready, willing to die to show their loyalty to their masters...Then the students and young people above all, who viewed this war as a war of principles, indeed, even a religious war; for they thought that they had been summoned to fight not merely for the principle of legitimacy, which they called nationality, but also for the Holy Trinity and the Existence of God....Thirdly some enlightened men who mixed these ideas with concepts of ‘freedom’, ‘constitutions’ and ‘a free press’—but these

¹⁹ See Rudolf Ibbeken, *Preußen 1807-1813. Staat und Volk als Idee und Wirklichkeit*, Cologne and Berlin, 1970 and Bernd von Münchow-Pohl, *Zwischen Krieg und Reform*, Untersuchungen zur Bewußtseinlage in Preußen 1809-1812, Göttingen, 1987.

²⁰ Karl H. Wegert, *German Radicals Confront the Common People. Revolutionary Politics and Popular Politics, 1789-1849*, Mainz, 1982, p. 76, ft. 7.

²¹ Quoted in Berding, *op. cit.*, p.206.

²² Quoted in Berding, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

formed by far the minority.” So, in his view, too, most volunteers fought from traditional dynastic motives.

With regard to the rest of Germany, let us quote the modern historian cited above once again:²³ “...There was only a limited popular involvement outside Prussia, in which the youth were involved directly in only a minimum way.” Indeed, most non-Prussian volunteers gained little fighting experience in France at all. The Grand Duke Ludwig of Hesse Darmstadt formed a free corps in late December 1813 and at the end of March 1814 700 men were sent to Lyon. However, Napoleon’s sudden capitulation on 16 April deprived them of the opportunity to fight so that after a brief stay in France the corps returned home. The whole episode lasted a mere hundred days. While in France, however, they were housed in poor quarters in poor parts of the country and were glad to return to ‘good old Germany’, although hardly as German nationalists.²⁴

By 1812, it is true that most South Germans were weary of Napoleon and his wars.²⁵ The considerable losses of German troops conscripted for the 1812 Russian campaign and Napoleon’s demands for their replacement in 1813 then intensified opposition to the French. Prussian propaganda now also circulated in the South but only one private pamphlet has been discovered there which backed the nationalist cause and, significantly, it “accused the Prussian king of betraying the Reich and ‘the German cause’ in 1795 (when he concluded the Peace of Basle, by which Prussia remained neutral till 1806--author)”, a widely-shared view. Hence “even as Prussia presented itself as the inspiration and leader of the Wars of Liberation, longer memories of Prussian self-interest lingered among southern Germans.” In south-west Germany and particularly in the old

²³ Wegert, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77

²⁴ For this episode, see Wegert, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85.

²⁵ For the information in the next paragraph on South Germany, see Ute Plannert, ‘From Collaboration to Resistance: Politics, Experience and Memory of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in Southern Germany,’ *Central European History*, Vol. 39, Nr. 4 (Dec. 2006), pp. 676-705.

territories of Anterior Austria which had been given to Baden, Württemberg and Bavaria by Napoleon, “resurgent enthusiasm for Austria, far more common than any vaguely formed notion of national unity, resounded..,” People looked forward to their restoration as Austrian subjects and to the restoration of the Reich under an Austrian Emperor. Catholic leaders now also strengthened their opposition to the ‘godless heathen’ of France, but again supported the Habsburgs rather than the Hohenzollerns. Meanwhile the King of Bavaria, Maximilian I Josef, after his defection from Napoleon, issued a nationalist manifesto to his people in emulation of Frederick William III. His subjects were to support the independence of the German nation albeit only “in the states...of which...it consists.” However, by Prussian standards, nationalist rhetoric in the South German states was minimal and hateful tirades against France were “the exception, not the norm”. Loyalties in Bavaria remained anchored to the Wittelsbach dynasty and the local military hero was General von Wrede, the Bavarian military commander, not Blücher. Volunteers had to be paid to enlist to fight the French and even then “most Bavarians shed their uniforms and headed home when allied armies crossed the Rhine and invaded France.” Before that happened, conscription in South Germany soared, “yet more men than ever tried to dodge it.” Applications for exemptions stacked up. In Baden recruits laid low and attempted “to defer for months their call-up assignment by shuttling back and forth between different towns”. In Westphalia desertions reached a peak in 1813 and did not decline till the war ended in 1815. So the idea that German nationalism prevailed in either North or South Germany is highly questionable.

Meanwhile, the military significance of the Prussian and other volunteers has also been questioned by historians. One Austrian historian wrote:²⁶ “...the Prussian *Landwehr* lacked the arms and training to be used independently as field troops , so that during Blücher’s retreats in August they nearly all scattered. In linen suits, without coats and knapsacks, for the most part barefoot, part of them armed only with pikes, they can hardly be counted as part of the field army at the start of the campaign. The *Landsturm* cannot even be considered a military formation.” Yet even Treitschke (of whom, more later) was aware of the limits of the volunteers’ contribution and of the lack of nationalist feeling in the South:²⁷

“...to Germany’s misfortune, no feeling of comradeship could arise between the Prussians and the troops of the petty states , and the hateful memories of the bloody battles of the summer campaign remained unforgotten. (When all German states apart from Austria and Prussia were allied and fighting with Napoleon—author). By a disastrous fate it happened that the petty contingents played a small part in the acquirement of the warlike renown of the allies. A considerable proportion of them was used for the investment of Mainz and for the Flanders sieges, which led to little glory. The Saxon volunteers never even saw the enemy.”

On the view of the South Germans regarding the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, he concluded:²⁸

“...the star of the Legion of Honour continued to retain its prestige among the veterans of the middle states. The peasants in Franconia and the Black Forest , who even now continue to tell one another stories of the Archduke Charles and of the campaign of the nineties (when the Austrians defeated the French in Germany while Prussia remained neutral—author) heard little of this war. Not even yet was there known to

²⁶ Heydendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

²⁷ Treitschke’s *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century* Translated by Eden and Cedar Paul with an Introduction by William Harbutt Dawson, London, 1915, Vol. I, *The War of Emancipation*, p.p. 613-614.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 614.

the Germans the reckless unanimity of a general uprising. It was in much later days that historical study and the slowly awaked impulse towards unity, aroused among the South Germans a belated enthusiasm for the Wars of Liberation which was unknown to any similar degree among the contemporaries of that war.”

So, the Germans were hardly united in 1813-14, which was hardly surprising. Prussia for most of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic period had remained neutral, leaving Austria do the fighting. Until 1813 almost all other German states remained allies of Napoleon. It can be no surprise, therefore, that the main enemy for Saxons remained their traditional one, Prussia, and that the main enemy for Bavarians remained their traditional one, Austria.²⁹ Altogether, therefore, the old myth of the Wars of Liberation as an episode of German national, political and class solidarity can be totally discarded.

The role of Prussia as the main protagonist of the war, however, also needs to be questioned but before examining the Wars of Liberation in terms of the campaigns involved, two general points have to be made. First, we should not forget the absolutely fundamental role of Napoleon. He wanted to be emperor of the world³⁰, saw himself as a new Alexander and believed basically that he was militarily invincible. And, until 1813, Aspern apart, as already noted, he had been. The result of Napoleon’s belief in his own invincibility was that he would never make peace or even negotiate honourably on the question. He had no intention of ever surrendering territory, making compromises or coming to terms. He

²⁹ On this theme, see Horst Carl, ‘Der Mythos des Befreiungskrieges. Die “martialische” Nation im Zeitalter der Revolutions- und Befreiungskriege, 1792-1815’, in Dieter Langewiesche and Georg Schmitt (eds.), *Föderative Nation. Deutschlandkonzepte von der Reformation bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, Munich, 2000, pp. 63-82. .

According to Carl, *op. cit.*, p. 81, the Rhineland states were really pro-French, while Saxon hostility to Prussia was spectacularly revealed in May 1815 with the revolt of the Saxon regiments who were to be incorporated into the Prussian army. They remembered their enforced integration into the Prussian army by Frederick the Great during the Seven Years’ War.

³⁰ “I wished for the empire of the world and to ensure it unlimited power was necessary for me.” Napoleon quoted during the Hundred Days in Hans Kohn, ‘Napoleon and the Age of Nationalism,’ *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 22 (March, 1950), pp. 21-37, p. 32.

would rather die, as he told Metternich at Dresden on 26 June 1813, than relinquish a handful of soil. Thus reasonable offers by the Allies of a compromise peace were always rejected. Napoleon, moreover, felt that he would never be accepted by the French as a legitimate ruler in peacetime and that only victory in battle could continue to lend him legitimacy. Other sovereigns, could return home to their thrones and palaces defeated, but not him. Defeat in war would mean the loss of his own throne and those of his family. Metternich, when ambassador in Paris came to the opposite conclusion, namely that the French were war-weary and would be grateful to Napoleon if he made peace. However, Napoleon stuck to his own view.³¹ The allies, therefore, had to grind down the Emperor of the French until he was eventually deserted by his own marshals; the allies themselves, however, never entirely lost the suspicion that Napoleon might be right; that he might indeed win the final battle. Until half-way through the 1814 campaign, therefore, they were more than willing to negotiate. Indeed, after Blücher's defeats in mid-February they wanted a cease-fire.

The second point that must be remembered is that, despite German and Prussian claims that they won the wars, it is crystal clear that without the Russians and Austrians they could never have done so. Napoleon was defeated by a Coalition (traditionally referred to as the Fourth Coalition although recently some historians appear to have adopted a different numerical system). The troops of all nations fought heroically together – particularly at Leipzig—“the battle of the *nations*”—and although Blücher's Silesian Army played an often splendid part, it hardly won the war by itself. In any case, it was almost two-thirds Russian in

³¹ See Alan Sked, *Metternich and Austria. An Evaluation*, Basingstoke, 2008, p. 43 and pp. 45-6.

composition³², and it certainly did not provide the Coalition with its war plan as both Treitschke and Meinecke boastfully asserted.³³ It is important to remember these two general points before taking stock of the Wars themselves.

Perhaps there is one other general point to take into consideration. Why is it that only the campaigns of 1813-14 are held to be the “Wars of Liberation”? Napoleon may have been forced to abdicate in 1814 but the military events leading up to that event surely included the uprisings in Spain and Russia, the Russian campaign and the Peninsular War. Austrians might also well ask why the War of 1809, which saw perhaps a greater and more genuinely spontaneous response from Germans than the campaigns of 1813, should be excluded from the term. Indeed, the very phrase, “The Wars of Liberation”, was surely designed to promote Prussia’s propaganda that she alone defeated Napoleon. Till 1813, in other words, the rest of Europe failed to defeat the tyrant. In 1813, the Prussians did so. “The Wars of Liberation” were used therefore to obliterate the memory of Prussia’s previous neutrality, her abandonment of Austria in 1805 and 1809 and her humiliating defeats of 1806-07--and, of course, to give her an historic claim to unite and lead Germany.

Austria, on the other hand, never seemed interested in a military glory despite the fine records of Montecuccoli, Eugene of Savoy, Daun, Lacy, Laudon, the Archduke Charles, Schwarzenberg and Radetzky. The latter indeed wrote a memorandum on 1 December 1809 complaining that since Austria always assumed peace to be the norm, war always came as

³² For a breakdown, see Rudolf von Friederich, *Geschichte der Hebstfeldzuges 1813*, Berlin, 1904, Vol. I, p. 224. Of Blücher’s 104,974 men, 66,490 were Russian and 38,484 were Prussian.

³³ Treitschke, *op. cit.*, p.559. For Meinecke, see Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Age of Liberation, 1795-1815, with an Introduction by Peter Paret*, Berkeley, 1977, p. 118.

a surprise to her and never ever found her prepared.³⁴ However, she had prepared for war in 1809, when Metternich as Ambassador in Paris had even bribed Talleyrand to give her Napoleon's war plans. In the event, despite this, and despite Aspern, the Archduke Charles, who himself had voted against declaring war, proved unable to achieve victory.³⁵

None the less, when the Archduke crossed the Inn in 1809³⁶ at the head of the Austrian army, popular enthusiasm had never been greater, despite (perhaps because of) defeat in 1805 and the events of 1806-7. His proclamation to the Austrian army began with the words, "the freedom of Europe has taken refuge under your banners" and like Gentz's *Summons to the German People*, which climaxed in the words, "Our cause is Germany's! Under Austria Germany was happy and independent. Germans! Accept the help we offer you! Cooperate in our salvation!", his words found an echo among the German intellectual elite. Von Kleist wrote: "Any German commits treason who does not obey the call of Francis the Second, the old Emperor of the Germans, or who dares to resist him by word or deed." Ernst Moritz Arndt proclaimed: "The House of Habsburg should rule, for we want a German ruler!" Stein himself, calling the Emperor the Protector of Germany (Napoleon's official title!—author), exclaimed: "All who love the good and the noble, should assemble under the Austrian flags." Blücher went into a rage at Prussia's neutrality while Gneisenau lamented the "poor nation which is going under on account of your princes", princes whom Arndt denounced as criminals on account of "their dirty provincialism, cowardly fear of the

³⁴ See 'Ein Memoire Radetzky's, das Heerenwesen Österreichs beleuchtend, aus dem Jahre 1809,' *Mitteilungen des k.k. Kriegsarchivs* (1884), pp. 361-370.

³⁵ See Sked, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

³⁶ For the German response to Austria's war effort in 1809, see Heydendorff, *op. cit.*, pp. 294-299. But see, too, Helmut Bock, *Ferdinand Schill*, Berlin, 1998, Dietmar Stutzer, *Andreas Hofer und die Bayern in Tyrol*, Munich, 1983, Wolfgang Pfaundler, *Der Tyroler Freiheitskampf 1809 unter Andreas Hofer. Zeitgenössische Augenzeugenberichten und Dokumente*, Munich, 1984, and F. Gunther Eyck, 'Loyal Rebels'. *Andreas Hofer and the Tyrolean Uprising of 1809*, Lanham, New York, 1986.

present and patriotic indifference”. However, rebellion was triggered off spontaneously here and there. Major von Schill left Berlin on 28 April for the war with his regiment of hussars but was defeated on 31 May by the troops subordinated to the French at Stralsund. In Hessen colonel von Dörnberg rebelled, in Franconia the Prussian Major von Nostitz founded a Frankish-Austrian Legion, while Duke Frederick William of Brunswick attacked Saxony from Bohemia, drove its King, a member of the Confederation of the Rhine, out of Dresden, and waged a small war in Thuringia along with the Austrians under Kiehmayer. In Hessian Marburg Colonel Emerich rebelled and in the small territories of the Hoch-und Deutschmeister, in Mergentheim, which Napoleon had awarded to Württemberg, the good farmers rose up and could only be put down with great cruelty. In the old Austrian anterior lands from Freiburg to the Bodensee, the old spirit of loyalty prevailed, while the lake farmers in the former Landgraf of Nellenburg, around Stockach were forced to atone for their uprising of 7 July 1809 with harsh punishments. Most spectacular of all, of course, were the uprisings in Tyrol and Vorarlberg against Napoleon’s Bavarian allies. Andreas Hofer, in fact, led at least three uprisings in the Tyrol before his final defeat. Prussian historians, including Treitschke, later falsely accused Francis I of abandoning the Tyrolese (in fact, he imposed a condition in the peace treaty with Napoleon that obliged Bavaria to concede an amnesty to the rebels—all that was surely possible after his own military defeat.) No Austrian historian, on the other hand, ever accused Frederick William III of accepting with indifference the fate of the survivors of Schill’s free corps, of whom 11 officers were shot on 11 September in Wesel, while 557 men were made galley slaves.

The Austrians in 1809, it should be pointed out, also made use of a *Landwehr*. This was not something suddenly invented in 1813 by the

Prussians as seems to be commonly believed. In the words of Gunther E. Rothenberg:³⁷

“The *Landwehr* was part of the great effort made by Austria in 1809... It was a considerable effort and for the first time in history words like ‘fatherland’ and ‘liberty’ were used to animate the spirits of the army. The troops fought exceedingly well...though some 50 *Landwehr* battalions were brought back to service in 1813, they served as fillers.”

Research shows that the *Landwehr* was established by an imperial patent of 9 June 1808. Francis I appealed to ‘love of fatherland’ as all former soldiers and all men between the ages of 18 and 45 in Bohemia, Moravia and Austria were called to the colours. Austria mustered 594,210 men of whom 25% were *Landwehr* troops. Field troops amounted to 283,400 men. According to this research, though, enthusiasm for the *Landwehr* affected groups of people never affected before:³⁸ “It was primarily the educated men of the noble and middle classes, who belonged to these groups.” A huge propaganda, driven by the press, academics, clerics, writers, poets and foreigners—some of whom have already been quoted—was aimed at them. Given the famous indifference of people like Goethe and Hegel to events in 1813, it might appear, therefore, that what was supposed to have happened in Germany in 1813 on account of Prussia, more closely approached reality in 1809 on account of Austria!

³⁷ Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon*, London, 1977 p. 172, writes: “The *Landwehr* was part of the great effort made by Austria in 1809. That year saw a great army raised though official estimates of 600,000 did not materialise. Actual field strength amounted to 265,000 effectives, including 15,000 *Landwehr*. Major combat elements included 35 regiments of cavalry, 78 regiments of infantry, 9 Jäger battalions and 4 regiments of field artillery. During the campaign Austria was in fact slightly superior to the French in the number of guns, though not in the weight of its fire. It was a considerable effort and for the first time in history words like ‘fatherland’ and ‘liberty’ were used to animate the spirits of the army. The troops fought exceedingly well, but after Aspern Charles lost his nerve, while patriotic zeal expanded after Wagram. ...the *Landwehr* was deactivated. Neither the Emperor Francis nor Prince Metternich...relished the idea of an armed populace. The Emperor resolved to undertake no further military adventures with which he connected the *Landwehr*, but placed his faith in the regular military establishment and though some 50 *Landwehr* battalions were brought back to service in 1813, they served only as fillers. Regulars fought the battles of 1813-14.”

³⁸ See Karen Hagemann, “‘Be Proud and Firm Citizens of Austria!’ Patriotism and Masculinity in Texts of the “Political Romantics” written during the Austria’s Anti-Napoleonic Wars,.’ *German Studies Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (February) 2006, p. 41-62. This seems to be based on Ernst Zohetbauer, *Die Landwehr gegen Napoleon. Österreichs erste Militz und der Nationalkrieg von 1809*, Vienna, 1999.

Historians of Germany, of course, still steeped anachronistically in the Prussian tradition, usually fail to credit Austria for her efforts in 1809, efforts which are usually written off as just another Austrian military failure. In fact, little attempt is made at all in textbooks of the period 1789-1815 to understand Austrian history during the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Most students, as a result, have no idea of the persistence of the Austrian effort or of the shabby record of Prussia. Nor do they realise that the reason why Austria was able continually to resist the French whatever the erstwhile outcomes, was her basic *strength*. The very wise words of Charles Ingrao should be borne in mind in this respect:³⁹

“Having weathered the turbulence caused by the opposition to Joseph II, the Habsburg Monarchy...was well prepared to face the formidable military , economic and cultural challenges of the next generation. Thanks to the industrial infrastructure of the *Erblande*, Lombardy and Belgium, it was economically comparable to the continent’s other major states and was poised to enter the industrial revolution. Its intellectual life had re-joined the intellectual mainstream for the first time since the advent of the Counter-Reformation. Its systems of education and justice were models for the rest of the continent. Although its political and administrative system did not approach the ideal envisioned by Joseph II, it was far more efficient, honest and responsive than most other European governments. It had also become a strong vehicle for raising large amounts of revenue. The 87.5 million fl. that poured into the *Hofkammer*’s coffers in 1788 was nearly twice that of its Prussian rival and almost equal to the £12 million raised by the British exchequer at the height of the War of American Independence. Although Louis XVI still collected appreciably more revenue than his Habsburg brother-in-law, the emperor had much more money at his disposal after debt service than did bankrupt France. If the government was still mired in debt, it was no longer because of an incompetent administration system, but because of the *Hofkriegsrat*’s talent for pushing the military’s size beyond the *Hofkammer*’s ability to pay. With a wartime strength of roughly 400,000 men, it now had the largest standing army that Europe had seen since the age of Louis XIV. Relative to other states and societies on the continent, the Habsburg monarchy was neither weak, nor backward nor in decline.”

³⁹ Charles W. Ingrao, *The habsburg Monarchy, 1618-1815*, 2nd. edition, Cambridge, 2000, p. 219.

Austria's army, according to Ingrao, using figures tabulated by P. M. G. Dickson, comprised of about 315,000 front-line troops, 75,000 *Grenzer*, and 20,000 artillery, engineer and other special units. Its peacetime strength in 1791 of 300,000 was considerably higher than the peacetime establishments of Prussia (195,000), Russia (224,000) and France (182,000).⁴⁰

All of this must be borne in mind when considering the history of the Wars of Liberation, for as far as German or Prussian historians are concerned, Austria deserves no credit for victory over France in the campaigns of 1813-14. Meinecke in his account of *The Age of German Liberation, 1795-1815* wrote: "Austria's joining the coalition...certainly brought about a highly desirable accretion of military strength, but her presence also caused a measure of political paralysis, which affected the conduct of operations." In this, he was taking his lead from Treitschke's now well-established interpretation: "The accession of Austria brought no increase to the moral energies of the coalition. The imperial troops fought bravely as they had always done; but they knew little of the stormy enthusiasm of the Northern German people, less even than the Russians...The spirit of 1809 was not revived ...The great gulf between the mental life of the Austrians and that of the other Germans, was not bridged over by the War of Liberation. It was only for the sake of decency, only lest Austria should be seen to lag too far behind Prussia, that Emperor Francis arranged for the formation of a legion of volunteers from the Empire, a corps that never attained to any importance. The traditional hopeless inertia in the leadership and administration of the Austrian army, once more aroused the mockery of the French soldiers..."

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 219, ft. 1.

The truth was very different. Austria's participation provided the numerical superiority which was a fundamental if not the decisive factor in defeating Napoleon. Metternich, of course, dominated the diplomacy which both kept the coalition together diplomatically and persuaded Napoleon's German allies to defect. Radetzky supplied the plan of campaign which finished off Napoleon in less than nine months after a military dominance of Europe that had lasted fifteen years. Schwarzenberg held the coalition together militarily before winning the crucial battle against him after the Prussians, who had been boasting that they alone would end the military career of the Emperor of the French, allowed him to escape.⁴¹

The allied army of the Fourth Coalition received as its commander-in-chief Prince Karl zu Schwarzenberg, an outstanding cavalry commander and able diplomat whose charm and tact kept the quarrelling armies and generals together. Schwarzenberg knew Napoleon very well. He had served as Austrian ambassador to France and had led the Austrian auxiliary corps in Russia in 1812, which had had, despite later accusations of inactivity, a good fighting record there, having fought five large and fifty small battles and having marched 2,800 kilometres. It lost over half its strength with 6,300 dead and 11,000 wounded.⁴² Metternich, of course, at the end of the Russian campaign refused to allow it to follow the Prussian example and to make an alliance with the Russians.

It was during the period of the ceasefire—from 4 June till 17 August—that Metternich shifted Austrian policy from mediation to armed mediation and thence to armed intervention and military opposition. It was also during this period that the Austrian Chief of the General Staff, General Count Radetzky, put a new Austrian army together from raw

⁴¹ See below.

⁴² See Heydendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 303 and compare Rothenberg, *The Napoleonic Wars*, p. 174.

recruits and arranged a plan of campaign as Allied Chief of Staff that expelled Napoleon from Germany and France in less than nine months. Prussian historiography would later complain that Austria acted slowly—this despite the fact that Napoleon had dominated Europe militarily since 1797, during most of which period Prussia had been benevolently neutral towards France! There is insufficient space to provide much information on Radetzky's previous career. Suffice it to say that he lived for the offensive and had built up such a reputation internationally during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars that Rudolf von Friedrich, head of the historical section of the Prussian General Staff, could write in the first of his three volume official military history of the Wars of Liberation in 1913, that by 1813 Radetzky had become “a decisive leader who possessed a military experience like perhaps no other general of his time, including the French”, a description that almost made him the equal of Napoleon himself.⁴³

Radetzky had arranged for the 30,000 Austrian auxiliary corps in Russia to be replaced within the 150,000 maximum set for the Austrian army laid down by Napoleon after its defeat in 1809. He had also applied unusual methods to build up the Austrian army secretly to almost 300,000 men once Metternich's diplomacy had extracted Austria from its French alliance. Some 200,000 were concentrated in Bohemia, the Army of Inner Austria mustered 37,000 and there were another 37,000 troops along the Danube. There was also the *Landwehr* (13,000 men) and an army in Italy. By the end of August Austria had 479,000 troops under arms with 289,000 combatants. Previously, the Finance Minister, Count Wallis, had stated that Austria would not have the resources to fight a war for thirty years. That maxim plus Napoleon's 150,000 limit had forced

⁴³ Von Friederich, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-7. But see Alan Sked, *Radetzky. Imperial Victor and Military Genius*, London, 2011, chapter one for his background.

Radetzky to improvise the “cadre system” –retaining officers and NCOs to train a mass army if and when more men could be conscripted later. That day had now arrived but hundreds of thousands of new recruits needed to be trained very quickly. Metternich’s achievement in getting Napoleon to extend the armistice date to 17 August was a godsend.⁴⁴

Once war broke out, the Allies had 800,000 men against Napoleon’s 600,000 which in combat terms meant 570,000 against 410,000. Metternich used Austrian numerical superiority to win the crucial military posts for the Empire. He said:⁴⁵ “The most important thing is to use the more precise language in military dispositions and against everyone to uphold the maxim that we for our part use to Tsar Alexander and which consists of this: that that power which puts 300,000 men into the field, is the leading one, and that all the others are mere auxiliaries.”

Was victory then merely a matter of numbers? Tim Blanning, basing himself on Gunther Rothenberg, has suggested this.⁴⁶ Yet the truth was far more complicated. In the first place, it is very difficult to know how many troops each army had at any given time. Many experienced contemporary observers refused to believe official figures. Lord Cathcart, for example, one of the official British commissioners to the allied armies, wrote that Austria never at any time contributed more than 50,000 troops to the field!⁴⁷ Müffling, the Quartermaster General of Blücher’s Silesian Army, told Radetzky that the Russian official figures were exaggerated and that only the Russian commander and his chief of staff

⁴⁴ For details, see Alan Sked, *Radetzky*. pp. 34-36.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Oskar Regele, *Radetzky.Leben,Leistung, Erbe*, Vienna and Munich, 1957, p. 120.

⁴⁶ Tim Blanning, *The Pursuit of Glory. Europe, 1648-1815*, London, 2007, p. 641.

⁴⁷ Colonel, the Hon. George Cathcart, *Commentaries on the War in Russia and Germany in 1812 and 1813*, London, 1850, p. 195. Cathcart, who had been brought up in Russia where his father had been ambassador, spoke fluent Russian and was British commissioner to the Russian army. He was violently pro-Russian and anti-Austrian. His colleague Stewart, commissioner to the Prussian army commented: Cathcart will be more of a Russian than an Englishman soon, he is so bigoted to his Emperor.” (See Sir Charles Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh, 1812-1815. Britain and the Reconstruction of Europe*, London 1950, p. 140.

knew the real ones.⁴⁸ Friedrich in his description of the various fighting corps regularly points to deficiencies in numbers (lack of complete regiments, battalions, companies and squadrons).⁴⁹ Secondly, allied military organisation now copied Napoleon's—army corps, field armies and huge artillery duels. Thirdly, intelligence was sorely lacking. At crucial points nobody knew where the enemy was⁵⁰, especially Napoleon before Leipzig; indeed, armies often had no idea where their allies were (Blücher's army, for example, deliberately—and almost fatally-- cut its communications with Schwarzenberg at key points in France)⁵¹. Fourthly while armies fought, diplomats still hoped to reach a settlement with Napoleon, whose record as a military genius still frightened the allied heads of state—hence the Frankfurt proposals, the Congress of Châtillon, and the attempted cease-fire after Blücher's defeats in mid-February 1814. Fifthly, there were terrible rivalries in the military camps. The Prussian military leaders were distrusted as political radicals by their king, Frederick William III. The Tsar wanted to be commander-in-chief himself, despite his poor military judgement—something that Metternich simply would not contemplate. The Silesian Army also wanted to win the war by itself, while the Russians and Prussians accused the Austrians of moving too slowly and not really striving for victory.⁵² Schwarzenberg, therefore, had difficulty in enforcing his orders, particularly on the

⁴⁸ Anonymous, (but really by Heller von Hellwand, with whom Radetzky had arranged for this ghost-written autobiography to be published on his death), *Der k.k. österreichische Feldmarschall Graf Radetzky. Eine biographische Skizze nach dem eigenen Dictaten und der Correspondenz des Feldmarschalls von einem österreichischen Veteranen*, Stuttgart and Augsburg, 1857, p. 149: “As far as the Russians are concerned, it has become a habit always to claim that their forces are always stronger than they really are and no general, apart from their commander and quartermaster general knows their actual strength.”

⁴⁹ Friederich, *op. cit.* Vol. I.

⁵⁰ For Napoleon, see below, but Müffling wrote: “It must be observed that however well Blücher's espionage was organised in Germany, here in France it could succeed but little in procuring intelligence by means of spies.” The French liked the money offered but were too afraid of Napoleon. See Baron Karl von Müffling, *The Memoirs of Baron von Müffling. A Prussian Officer in the Napoleonic Wars*, London, 1997, p. 388.

⁵¹ See below.

⁵² See below.

Russian commanders and particularly at the start of the campaign. He told his wife that he was “surrounded by the feeble-minded, all sorts of fools, eccentric schemers, intriguers, asses, babblers, criticasters; in short vermin in countless numbers gnaw at me and torment me to the marrow of my bones.” The only reason why he stayed in the job was that “the objective is so solemn, so holy, and the position is such, that I believe anyone else in my place could only achieve less.”⁵³ Still, he almost resigned, telling Francis I:⁵⁴

“General Barclay (the Russian commander-in-chief—author) has no sense at all of obedience or of business and is jealous to the highest degree. This leads to the great misfortune that no reliance can be placed on him or his troops with any precision at all but also that Generals Wittgenstein and Kleist (key corps commanders—author) receive my orders too late or often in such a contradictory fashion that already all the worst sorts of consequences ensue. All of this, combined with a thousand unavoidable troubles, make it quite impossible for me to take responsibility for the results of an undertaking in which the welfare and the existence of the Monarchy is at stake.”

At one point even Metternich wrote to Stadion, the previous Austrian foreign minister, in despair:⁵⁵ “You have absolutely no idea what we are made to suffer at supreme headquarters. I cannot bear it any longer and the Emperor is already ill. They are all mad and belong in the mad-house. We are always being represented as wanting to sell out the Monarchy as

⁵³ Johann Friedrich Novak (ed.), *Briefe des Feldmarschalls Fürsten Schwarzenberg and seine Frau, 1799-1816*, Vienna and Leipzig, 1913, pp. 332-3.

⁵⁴ Quoted in H. Kerchnawe and Alois Veltzé, *Feldmarschall Karl Fürst zu Schwarzenberg, der Führer der Verbündeten in den Befreiungskriegen*, Vienna and Leipzig, 1913, p. 166.

⁵⁵ Viktor Bibl, *Radetzky. Soldat und Feldherr*, Vienna, 1955, pp. 191-192.

if we had no greater wish than to be defeated and dishonoured, as if Austria revered foreign slavery, in short as if we were idiots. I believe, however, that we alone are sane.”

Part of the insanity was that travelling in the allied camp were the three allied sovereigns—Francis I of Austria, Alexander I of Russia and Frederick William III of Prussia—each with a whole cohort of personal military advisers. These sovereigns, moreover, were all absolute monarchs and it took all Schwarzenberg’s charm to keep them in line. Regular military councils had to be summoned to agree strategy between them and out of 17, Schwarzenberg got his way in 9 and had to claw back his authority with Metternich’s help after the others.⁵⁶ Agreeing military strategy, therefore, could be difficult. Yet the operations plan drawn up by Radetzky still managed to push Napoleon from Dresden to Paris within nine months after fifteen years of military dominance.

Before looking at that plan, let me say a few words about Metternich, whose diplomacy has been thoroughly investigated and who was clearly the diplomatic leader of the coalition. He it was who stopped the Russians and Prussians from falling apart after Bautzen. He it was who extracted Austria from the French alliance until she was able to offer armed mediation with Napoleon’s permission. He it was who got the armistice extended giving Radetzky vital extra time to train the Austrian army. He it was who kept open the possibility of peace with Napoleon having no desire to replace French with Russian dominance. And he it was who strung along the Prussians, allowing Hardenberg in particular to believe that Austria would eventually agree to some sort of federation in Germany that would incorporate Austro-Prussian dualism, while in the

⁵⁶ Nitsche, *op. cit.*, p. 178. Metternich boasted after one such council: “When in one of these war councils summoned by Prince Schwarzenberg, at which Tsar Alexander was present, it proved impossible to reach agreement between the different views of the commanders ...I spoke on behalf of the plan of Prince Schwarzenberg as having the greater assurance of success...My verdict was declared conclusive.” Czech State Archives, Prague, *Acta Clementina*, Carton 26.

meantime signing treaties with Napoleon's defecting South German allies, Bavaria at their head, conceding them complete independence. Hardenberg believed that complete independence referred only to complete independence from Napoleon. In the end, it became clear that Austria had no interest in a federal union or in taking territories on the Upper Rhine; in fact, Metternich abandoned Austria's previous Schwabian territories (*Vorderösterreich*—Freiburg im Breisgau etc.) to Baden, Bavaria and Württemberg, severing her connection with western Germany, while recovering those territories from Bavaria (Tyrol, Vorarlberg and the Innviertel) which secured her link to northern Italy. During 1813, unlike the other powers, Austria always had to keep an eye on regaining her Italian leadership.⁵⁷

Metternich also disposed of any nationalist threat from Baron von Stein and the German patriots who, with Russian help, at the start of 1813 had put the newly emancipated territories of East Prussia and Mecklenburg under a German Central Administrative Committee. No more territories, of course, were available to share this fate till after the allied victory at Leipzig. However, Metternich, who by now had already negotiated Bavaria's independence, further frustrated the plans of Stein by making his committee responsible, not for managing conquered territory, but for supplying food and munitions to the allied armies. In short, it was deprived of a political role. Thereafter, as is well known, Metternich used Castlereagh, the British foreign secretary, who arrived on the scene just before the invasion of France, to frustrate Tsar Alexander's plans to make

⁵⁷ The latest study, which includes a section on Metternich and Napoleon, is Alan Sked, *Metternich and Austria. An Evaluation*, Basingstoke, 2008. But see, too, Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812-1822*, London, 1957, Enno E. Kraehe, *Metternich and the German Question*, Vol. I, *The Contest with Napoleon, 1799-1814*, Princeton, 1963 and Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1783-1848*, Oxford, 1994. In German, see Karl Obermann, 'Diplomatie und Außenpolitik im Jahre 1813, unter besondere Berücksichtigung der Rolle Metternichs', in Straube (ed.) *op., cit.*, pp. 131-160 and Wilhelm Oncken, *Österreich und Preußen im Befreiungskriege*, 2 Vols., Berlin 1876, reprint, Hildesheim, 1998.

Bernadotte king of France or to give the French some form of self-determination. He also combined with Castlereagh at the Congress of Vienna to stop Prussia gaining the whole of Saxony.⁵⁸

Treitschke records Metternich's actions with a mixture of admiration and contempt. Here he is on Metternich's views of a German constitution:⁵⁹

“Why after all should we have a federal constitution which would only make bad blood? How much simpler would it be if we were to content ourselves with an extensive system of treaties and alliances, which would pledge the sovereign German states to mutual help in case of war!” On Metternich's treatment of Hardenberg:⁶⁰ “Hardenberg...acted as if his dualistic plans had already received the assent of the court of Vienna; and full of confidence, he approved that Austria, as the leading power in South Germany, should treat with the southern states regarding their adhesion to the Coalition. It seemed to him a matter of course that this should be done when Austrian troops were already at the Bavarian frontier. Thus was the fate of the German constitution left in Austria's hands, and this at a moment when the falling away of the Rhenish confederation could no longer alter the fate of the war!” On the Treaty of Ried with Bavaria:⁶¹ “in this way it was decided that Austria was to hold in her own hands the arrangement for the future of Germany.” On Stein's Central Administrative Committee, which in fact was emasculated by decree on 21 October 1813 after the battle of Leipzig:⁶² “As soon as Austria had joined the Alliance Metternich demanded that the suspect authority should be completely transformed, insisting that it was to be nothing more than a military victualling office.” Altogether, Treitschke

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Treitschke, *op. cit.*, p. 577.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 579.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 583.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 580.

concludes:⁶³ “By the Austrian minister’s adroitness, almost all the diplomatists were soon brought over to his way of thinking. All the English statesmen, Castlereagh and Stewart, Cathcart and Aberdeen, admired Metternich’s wise moderation.” Treitschke’s greatest contempt, indeed, is reserved for Castlereagh. Describing events at the Congress of Vienna, he wrote:⁶⁴ “A study of Castlereagh’s letters forces us to ask whether the noble lord really knew where the kingdom of Saxony was....Castlereagh threw himself into the Polish negotiations with all the ardent zeal of his stupidity.”

But back to Metternich. The fact that Treitschke was not at all wrong concerning Metternich’s influence, is best corroborated perhaps by quoting a letter of the young Lady Burghersh, later the Countess of Westmorland, wife of the new British commissioner to the Austrian army, who travelled with the monarchs from October 1813 across Germany and France and who dined with them every evening. She was an acute political observer and in February 1814 wrote to her sister from France:⁶⁵ “How can you ask who is Prince Metternich? I thought everybody knew the fame of so great a person, who is, and has been for years, the mainspring of all that passes on the Continent. He is the Emperor of Austria’s prime minister, and reckoned to be the best and deepest diplomat going. He is wonderfully clever and manages all the emperors, kings and ministers, turning them around his little finger and they are all afraid of him...He is uncommonly agreeable and good-looking.”

Now back to the wars. If their course was dominated diplomatically by Metternich, they were strategically shaped by the military genius of

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 631.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 674-5.

⁶⁵ *Letters of Lady Burghersh (afterwards Countess of Westmorland) From Germany and France During The Campaign of 1813-14*, London, 1893, pp. 160-161.

Radetzky whose operations plan decided the nature of the campaigns of 1813 and 1814 and allowed the heroic efforts of the Russians, Prussians and Austrians together to be crowned with victory. Prussian historians, however, claim that Gneisenau was the brains behind the defeat of Napoleon. Thus Treitschke:⁶⁶ “It was from the Silesian army that proceeded all the great resolves of the alliance and Gneisenau said with perfect justice that posterity would be astonished when it came to learn the secret history of this war.” That secret, according to Treitschke was that “the old hero’s [i.e. Blücher’s—author] plan of campaign had actually proceeded from the head of Gneisenau.”⁶⁷ Meinecke, in his history of the age of German liberation wrote:⁶⁸ “Essentially it was Gneisenau’s strategy that led to the unprecedented result.” Hajo Holborn also calls the “strategic decision” at Leipzig the result of “Gneisenau’s plan”.⁶⁹ Radetzky, who, quite falsely according to Treitschke was anti-Prussian, “had but little influence”.⁷⁰

Curiously, however, the dying Scharnhorst had agreed to Radetzky’s plans when he had outlined them to him in Prague in 1813⁷¹ and Gneisenau always deferred to Radetzky’s superior talents, writing on one occasion:⁷² “You, dear Excellency, know the art of war better than I do...To Your Excellency’s more enlightened views and greater experience of war, therefore, I submit these ideas of mine. If, however, a man such as yourself, general, should oppose my ideas on grounds arising from a higher view of things, I should abandon mine.” In fact, Blücher, Gneisenau and Müffling got on very well with Schwarzenberg and

⁶⁶ Treitschke, *op. cit.*, p. 562.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 559.

⁶⁸ Meinecke, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

⁶⁹ Hajo Hoborn, *A History of Modern Germany, 1648-1840*, Princeton, 1964, p. 430.

⁷⁰ Treitschke, *op. cit.*, p. 555.

⁷¹ Sked, *Radetzky*, p. 43.

⁷² Karl Griewank (ed.), *Gneisenau. Ein Leben in Briefen*, 3rd. edition, Leipzig, 1939, Gneisenau to Radetzky, St. Arnold, 15 January 1814, pp. 282-4.

Radetzky (who had been an admirer of Scharnhorst and always referred to him as “the great Scharnhorst”—causing the Austrian secret police, again quite falsely, to fear that Radetzky was a radical German nationalist!).⁷³ It was Frederick William III and Alexander I who caused trouble for the Austrians. Still, Treitschke held that no one ever listened to Radetzky, that his plan was mad and that Austria added nothing to the Coalition.

So what was Radetzky’s Plan? It is sometimes confused with the Trachenberg Plan drawn up by the Russian, Prussian and Swedish rulers and their staffs at Trachenberg Castle in Silesia on 12 July 1813. This called for one of the three allied armies—the Silesian one, led by Blücher—to withdraw if challenged by Napoleon. Otherwise the three armies were to advance into Germany and unite to defeat the common enemy at the enemy’s camp. The Austrians were not present during the strategic discussions at Trachenberg, although Count Stadion had met with the allied leaders there before the formal talks began.⁷⁴ In any case, the plan adopted by the allies—and everyone was quickly made aware of it—was not the Trachenberg Plan but the Radetzky Plan. (Barclay de Tolly, the Russian commander on 10 August made clear to Blücher, for example, that⁷⁵ “according to both the Trachenberg Plan as well as the Operation Plan later drawn up by the imperial Austrian Court, a combined royal Prussian and imperial Russian army will enter

⁷³ See Bibl, *Radetzky. Soldat und Feldherr*, Vienna, 1955, p. 145. On 2 August 1813 an Austrian government official, Michael Ambruster, wrote a letter to the Police Ministry complaining of Radetzky’s strong pro-German views and recommending that he should speak only of ‘Austrian patriotism’, speak of Germany as rarely as possible and not to refer to ‘German freedom’ as understood by future enemies such as members of the *Tüngenbund*.

⁷⁴ For a very detailed reconstruction of events at Trachenberg based on Stadion’s reports and other documents, see Karl Woynar, ‘Österreichs Beziehungen zu Schweden und Dänemark vornehmlich seine Politik bei der Vereinigung Norwegens mit Schwedens in den Jahren 1813 and 1814. Mit Benützung von Akten der k.u.k. Haus-Hof-und Staatsarchiv in Wien,’ in *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte*, Vol. 77 (1891), pp. 379-537.

⁷⁵ Quoted from the *Kriegsarchiv der großen Generalstabs* in Berlin by Gustav Roloff in, ‘Die Entstehung des Operationsplan für den Herbstfeldzug von 1813’ in the *Militär-Wochenblatt* (1892), issues 58 and 60, pp. 1564-72 and 1612-18, p. 1618, ft. 1.

Bohemia...” So all those concerned at the time were well aware of the differences.) What happened seems to have been this. Radetzky drew up his own version of an operations plan a week or so before the Trachenberg meeting and submitted it to Schwarzenberg on 7 July. It was then submitted to Francis I on 12 July and the Emperor approved it. Meanwhile the protocols of the Trachenberg discussions (‘the Trachenberg Plan’⁷⁶) had arrived at Austrian headquarters and were seen by Radetzky who “found no reason nonetheless to change his mind.”⁷⁷ Hence Radetzky’s plan, “changed in inessential points only”, was approved by Schwarzenberg and Francis and sent three days later to the Allies at Reichenbach. The man who brought it, Colonel Latour of the Austrian General Staff, was instructed to take the plan to Alexander I and to go into detail on a few points. In the event Alexander and the Prussians accepted the Radetzky Plan “without debate”⁷⁸. According to von Friedrich, whose account of allied planning is the better of the only two serious accounts that exist:⁷⁹ “Given their (the allies—author) political dependency on Austria, it was deemed expedient not to put military obstacles in her path. Perhaps the key thing now was a quick adhesion of Austria to the Alliance which they did not want to delay with disagreements.” Von Friedrich, however, is at pains to stress the differences between the two plans and to stress that everyone who mattered knew about them although no documents regarding negotiations over Radetzky’s plan ever came to light in Vienna’s or any other archives. This is what led von Friedrich to conclude that negotiations were carried out verbally and quickly (in fact “without debate”). Gustav

⁷⁶ The Trachenberg Protocols as taken down in French are given by Cathcart, *op. cit.*, as Appendix VI, pp. 372-3. Von Friederich, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92, gives them in German.

⁷⁷ Von Friederich, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁷⁸ Von Friederich, *op.cit.*, covers the history of the planning process better than anyone else in chapter three, pp. 71-99, of his first volume. This quote is from p. 97.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 97. The other impressive account is Roloff, *op. cit.*

Roloff, the other authority on the planning process, makes precisely the same point.⁸⁰

The key difference between the plans was that under Radetzky's all three armies were to refuse battle with Napoleon and to retreat if he attacked. Meanwhile the armies of his corps commanders were fair game, as were his supply lines. If Napoleon did succeed in finding one of the three allied armies, then the other two were to come to its aid by attacking the French on their flanks and rear. All of this was in keeping with the advice ironically of Napoleon's former marshal, Moreau, who by 1813 was serving as an adviser to Alexander I. According to Moreau:⁸¹ "Expect a defeat whenever the Emperor attacks in person. Attack and fight his lieutenants whenever you can. Once they are beaten, assemble all your forces against Napoleon and give him no respite." The allies expected Napoleon to attack them first, but when this did not happen, the plan was to attack him on the Saxon Plain from Bohemia and eventually to encircle him, force him into a final battle and defeat him –as happened at Leipzig in mid-October. Radetzky in his notes on the 1813 and 1814 campaigns written soon after the end of the wars, described how in July 1813 he had worked this out in discussions with the Russian General Toll.⁸² The allied armies were to enter the Saxon plain "and after hopefully winning a battle", were "immediately to head for the Upper Rhine, cross over the same, so as to be able to pursue operations with the left-wing in front of Paris." He added:⁸³ "General Toll, who initially intended a planned advance towards the Middle Rhine, agreed to Radetzky's proposal, as soon as the operations were more closely examined, which demonstrated

⁸⁰ Roloff, *op. cit.*, p. 1615. According to Roloff, Radetzky's views were probably already reasonably well known but in any case the allies would have done anything to accommodate the Austrians.

⁸¹ Quoted in Felix Markham, *Napoleon*, New York, 1966, p. 206.

⁸² Radetzky, *Notaten für die Feldzüge 1813 und 1814*, Radetzky Nachlaß, Vienna, *Kriegsarchiv*. This is a 200 page handwritten account of the campaigns by their chief of staff.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

the advantage of approaching this via Belfort and Langres”—which was almost exactly what happened.

Clausewitz⁸⁴ and subsequent Prussian commentators, including von Friedrich and Treitschke, condemned Radetzky's plan despite its huge success. Rather than forcing Napoleon to wear out his army manoeuvring between the three allied ones, the Prussians wanted a quick decisive battle making use of their superior forces. Decisive encounters, of course, had never worked in the past against Napoleon yet this criticism still echoes in the general textbooks, where the allied advance is always described as slow (yes, slow!) on account of Austrian lethargy and lack of will. Treitschke called Radetzky's plan 'lamentable', 'mean-spirited and antediluvian'⁸⁵. Von Friedrich damned it as defensive and a return to eighteenth century warfare. Like Clausewitz, he claimed that such a strategy of attrition meant that the lessons of Napoleonic warfare had been lost on the allied leaders, who should have looked for Napoleon's weak spot and won a 'battle of annihilation'.⁸⁶ He wrote:⁸⁷ "if we summarise Radetzky's train of thought briefly it is that by dividing the enemy's forces and through their ceaseless disturbance (*unausgesetzte Beunruhigung*), by avoiding a battle with a superior enemy, and in undertaking a determined offensive when the enemy is shown to be weaker, the only means can be found to fight a commander like Napoleon successfully in order, gradually, to arrive at the great moment of decision. Only when the French army is encircled on both banks of the Elbe in a semi-circle by all three allied armies, [when this French army is] physically and morally exhausted by ceaseless marches hither and thither, depressed through a lack of provisions, when it is brought to the point

⁸⁴ On Clausewitz's 'biased and second-hand criticism' of Schwarzenberg and his failure to understand a strategy of attrition, see Gordon A Craig's *War, Politics and Diplomacy*, p. 27 and pp. 73-74.

⁸⁵ Treitschke, *op. cit.*, p. 617.

⁸⁶ Von Friedrich, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

through defeats, strains and hunger, so that numerically it is no longer a match for the allies, only then, in Radetzky's view, will the moment arrive to unite all forces in a major battle. This then was Radetzky's plan." And von Friedrich thought it inferior to the Trachenberg one and out-of-date in its strategic concepts. Yet at the end of his very full chapter on war planning, he was forced to concede:⁸⁸ "The question how it was possible that such a system of military leadership could lead to a stunning outcome against a master of the art of war, will, therefore, have to be the subject of a later, thorough examination." The truth was that, despite all the Prussian bluster, Radetzky's plan cleared Napoleon out of Germany and France in less than nine months. And Blücher, as will be seen, suffered severely, when he attempted to ignore it.

The 1813 and 1814 campaigns were turbulent ones. Almost all the leading generals –including Schwarzenberg and Radetzky-- were wounded and the three monarchs themselves, not to mention Napoleon, Blücher and Gneisenau, were almost captured by the enemy at key points. Battles were bloody—especially at Leipzig on 16-19 October which saw 361,000 allied troops face 202,000 French. The French lost 60,000 men, the allies 54,000.⁸⁹ But Radetzky's plan had worked and Alexander von Plotho, then Germany's leading contemporary military historian, who very quickly wrote a best-selling three-volume history of the campaigns, believed that it would be a model for all future coalition armies.⁹⁰

On the other hand, there had been great difficulties in executing Radetzky's strategy. Alexander I of Russia, for example, wanted to be allied commander-in-chief and his Russian commanders, especially at the beginning of the campaigns (for example, at the battle for Dresden) did

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁸⁹ For the most recent account, see Sked, *Radetzky*, chapter two.

⁹⁰ Carl von Plotho, *Der Krieg in Deutschland und Frankreich in den Jahren 1813 und 1814*, 3 Vols., Berlin 1817, Vol. 2, pp. 5-6.

not always obey Schwarzenberg's orders.⁹¹ In the words of Sir Robert Wilson, a key British military officer and commissioner, wrote of the Tsar in August 1813:⁹² "I never saw a man more anxious to obtain [the supreme command] nor did I ever see disappointment more strongly expressed than when it was not offered to him." Then on 22 October 1813, after Leipzig, Wilson reported that Alexander I had again demanded to be made commander-in-chief, although "this Metternich peremptorily told him could never be."⁹³ The details were as follows:⁹⁴ "He (Alexander I) indeed proposed himself as General-in-chief yesterday but professing not to understand the *métier* sufficiently he said he would have a council to direct him. Metternich frankly told him that he never would obtain the consent of Austria; that he had declared himself moreover unqualified, and that a council on the field of battle was a project that would never be productive of any other result than misfortune and disgrace." Alexander, surrounded him with a council of military advisers anyway, some of them French, some of them foreigners like Napoleon's former associates Marshal Moreau and Baron Jomini, later famous for his military commentaries of the wars. Moreau, was killed by a cannon ball at Dresden, only feet away from the Tsar; Jomini, according to Müffling, gave such poor advice at Dresden that he was never listened to again; the battle itself was marked by the refusal of the Russian commanders to follow Schwarzenberg's orders.

Alexander I himself, it should be remembered, had caused military defeat at Austerlitz by insisting on starting the battle before the arrival of reinforcements. During the Moscow campaign his generals had arranged

⁹¹ See Schwarzenberg's letter to Francis I, quoted above.

⁹² The Rev. Herbert Randolph MA (ed.) *Private Diary of Travels, Personal Services, and Public Events during Mission and Employment With The European Armies in Campaigns of 1812, 1813, 1814. from the Invasion of Russia to the Capture of Paris.* By General Sir Robert Wilson CMT, 2 Vols., London, 1861, Vol. 2, p. 86.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 183-4.

for him to be in St. Petersburg. His record during the spring campaign had been unhelpful and it would be equally unhelpful during the Wars of Liberation. First, he tried to get the Main Army to retreat from Switzerland in January 1814 after it had entered that country en route to France. Yet, given the need for Austria to secure its Italian flank and the recent military aid given by the Swiss to Napoleon, it would not really have been wise to leave Switzerland as an unreliable actor in the allied rear. Fortunately, Metternich was able to come to a diplomatic agreement with the Swiss that overcame Alexander's posturing.⁹⁵ By February, irritated by the diplomacy around the Châtillon congress, the Tsar was threatening –with the apparent support of Gneisenau—to leave the Main Army, meet up with Blücher and march on Paris himself. Francis I of Austria was forced to explain to him:⁹⁶ “While Your Majesty is on the march to Blücher, you will be of no use either here or there and will risk being met en route by the enemy and being destroyed by superior force.” So he stayed put. When news arrived that Blücher had been defeated by Napoleon three times running in mid-February, Alexander then demanded a cease-fire with Napoleon.⁹⁷ Shortly after that he threw a tantrum when Metternich and Castlereagh opposed his scheme to put Bernadotte (a former French marshal who had always hesitated to fight the French in Germany and who would not invade France itself in January 1814) on the throne of France (Alexander hated the Bourbons). An incensed Metternich now threatened to stop the war:⁹⁸ “ It has never entered our mind,” he declared, “ to sacrifice a single man to put Bernadotte on the throne of France. Do you think I am mad?” When Castlereagh asked who would support Bernadotte, the Tsar accused him

⁹⁵ For the Swiss episode and Radetzky's memorandum on it, see Wilhelm Oncken, *Das Zeitalter der Revolution, des Kaiserreichs und der Befreiungskriege*, 2 Vols., Berlin, 1884-86, Vol. 2., pp. 720-21.

⁹⁶ Quoted by Radetzky in his *Notaten*.

⁹⁷ The panic can be felt in Radetzky's account of the ultimately failed negotiations in his *Notaten*.

⁹⁸ Karl Fürst Schwarzenberg, *Feldmarschall Fürst Schwarzenberg*, Vienna, 1964, p. 277.

of misrepresenting the policy of the British government.⁹⁹ Metternich and Castlereagh were also astonished by Alexander's suggestion that perhaps a French assembly could choose a ruler. (Suppose they chose a Jacobin?) In their view, only the Bourbons could replace the Corsican. Alexander's final blunder, before Metternich and Francis I could reach a re-conquered Paris, was to agree to make Napoleon ruler of Elba, just off the coast of France. This provided an excellent base for his return in 1815.

The Prussians constituted a different kind of problem, despite attempts by Treitschke and German historiography to make them the true heroes of the campaigns. Blücher was an old war-horse who despised the French and always wanted to attack them. He was also quite mad and at times thought he was pregnant with an elephant or that his head was made of stone. He was only semi-literate and had little understanding of maps. He lost his temper easily and was very reliant on his chief-of-staff, Gneisenau, and quarter-master general, Müffling, to keep his army together. His army was two-thirds Russian and his corps commanders all hated each other. Yet Blücher had a truly excellent war and was even to end up as co-victor at Waterloo with Wellington in 1815.¹⁰⁰ When first told of the Radetzky Plan by the Russian military commanders, he blatantly refused to contemplate retreat.¹⁰¹ Yet, when attacked by Napoleon at the start of the 1813 campaign, he retreated all the way back to where he had started and thereafter, for the most part, did indeed follow the plan. When he did not—as in France in February 1814—he suffered greatly. He played the key part at Leipzig and although he believed that he could have pursued and captured Napoleon afterwards,

⁹⁹ See Sir Charles Webster, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-213.

¹⁰⁰ On Blücher see Andrew Uffindell, *The Great Generals of the Napoleonic Wars And Their Battles, 1805-1815*, Staplehurst, 2003, chapter 8.

¹⁰¹ Von Friederich, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

his orders were changed by the allied sovereigns, while his army, in any case, according to Müffling, had no desire to chase the French.¹⁰²

Gneisenau and Blücher wanted to cross the Rhine immediately after Leipzig. So, too, did Radetzky and Schwarzenberg. Yet Francis I and Frederick William III opposed the move. While Radetzky managed to persuade Francis to change his mind, the Prussian army leaders and their king fell out. One, admittedly indirect, reason for this was the success of the Radetzky Plan.

During the autumn campaign of 1813 in Germany, the battle of Dresden aside, Napoleon had had very few successes. For the most part, he had marched hither and thither trying to find Blücher or Bernadotte's armies without success. Either they withdrew or his intelligence let him down. Radetzky, for his part, was well pleased. As early as 4 September he wrote:¹⁰³ "The Emperor Napoleon has been prevented from using or totally developing his talents as a commander and his military forces against any of the three main armies. He has lost a whole army corps...., The excellence of the operations plan, despite several hard experiences, has been proved by its execution." On 14 September, Radetzky again approved of keeping the three allied armies apart. Together, he wrote, they would form "a helpless colossus" or "an army of Xerxes".¹⁰⁴ Given the huge success of the plan with the victory at Leipzig, the same principles were drawn up again for the operations plan in France, although now there would be only two main armies (the Bohemian or Main Army and the Silesian Army, since Bernadotte would not cross the

¹⁰² For the sovereigns' decision to change his orders, see Radetzky's *Notaten*. For the lack of spirit in the Prussian army for any pursuit, see Müffling, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

¹⁰³ Radetzky, *Denkschriften militärisch-politisch Inhalts aus dem handschriftlichen Nachlaß des k.k. österreichischen Feldmarschalls Grafen Radetzky*, Stuttgart and Augsburg, 1858, (*Entwurf für die künftigen Operationen*, Tepliktz, 4 September, 1813), pp. 164-5.

¹⁰⁴ Radetzky, *Denkschriften*, pp. 171-3.

Rhine and Bülow, his brilliant corps commander was operating in the Netherlands). Its key points ran:¹⁰⁵

“4. To undertake battle only when the enemy has divided his forces or superiority is decidedly on the part of the allies, but to avoid battle when enemy forces are united and directed towards the points threatened by the allies.

5. In cases when the enemy turns en masse against one or other army, this army is to retreat, the others, however, are to advance with great enthusiasm.

6. The rendez-vous of all armies is to be the enemy headquarters, all armies have the task of reaching it, as actually happened at Leipzig.”

Before the plan could be implemented, however, the Rhine had to be crossed. However, Frederick William, clearly so impressed by what had already been achieved, did not see the point of pressing on and never forgave Gneisenau for *agreeing* to do so. Thus, on 16 November 1816, Gneisenau wrote to Clausewitz (then Bülow’s chief of staff) quoting the king on a Rhine crossing:¹⁰⁶ “That was never the aim. So why should people now have this crazy idea for the first time? What business is it of ours what happens on the other side? Why should we entertain the laughable idea of marching on Paris?” For the King of Prussia, the War of Liberation was already at an end and presumably Napoleon could keep his throne. Frederick William’s biographer has written that the very prospect of invading France made the king shudder:¹⁰⁷ “We risk spoiling everything and losing the best fruits that crowned the beautiful success of

¹⁰⁵ This is the nearest thing to the original Radetzky Plan, since it obviously copies it, although the original has never been found. This is to be found in Theodor von Bernhardt, *Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem Leben des kaiserl. Russ. Generals von Infanterie Carl Friedrich Grafen von Toll*, 5 Vols., Leipzig, 1858, Vol. 4, *Beilage II*, pp. 814-816.

¹⁰⁶ Griewank, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-273, Gneisenau to Clausewitz, , 16 November 1813.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Stamm-Kuhlmann, *König in Preußens großer Zeit. Friedrich Wilhelm III, der Melancholiker auf dem Thron*, Siedler Verlag, no date or place of publication, p. 304.

our previous efforts.” Such talk depressed the Prussian crown prince and Prussia’s generals turned to the Tsar for leadership.¹⁰⁸ Schwarzenberg grew to despise Frederick William—“the king is a rough, course, unfeeling fellow who is to me as loathsome as the poor, brave Prussians are pleasant and estimable.”¹⁰⁹ Radetzky thought that Frederick William’s attitude was caused by Prussia’s previous disasters (he had been present as Crown Prince of Prussia at Valmy in 1792 when Prussia last invaded France and as monarch had suffered the humiliations of 1806-07), so that the Prussian king now “simply opposed everything” when any decision had to be taken.¹¹⁰

When the war was taken to France and Blücher was attacked by Napoleon at Brienne and La Rothière at the turn of January and February 1814, the king arrived to rebuke the Prussian commander with the sneer: “So the French Emperor made you a very unpleasant visit!” According to Gneisenau, Blücher was astonished and did not know how to reply. He thought that he had got the better of Napoleon.¹¹¹ Later in the campaign, Gneisenau’s own relations with the king would so deteriorate that he informed Hardenberg, the Prussian Chancellor, that he wished at the end of the wars to withdraw from military service altogether since he could no longer work with Frederick William. However, since he still needed money to support his family, he wanted to be considered for the post of Postmaster General!¹¹² (Treitschke’s assertion that the Russian generals all worshipped Frederick William is probably nonsense.¹¹³ Although he supported Alexander’s claim to be supreme commander, nobody seemed

¹⁰⁸ “They felt obliged to follow the will of the Emperor Alexander,” wrote Radetzky in his *Notaten*.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Roger Parkinson, *The Hussar General. The Life of Blücher. Man of Waterloo*, London, 1975, p. 137.

¹¹⁰ Radetzky, *Notaten*.

¹¹¹ See Griewank (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 288-9, Gneisenau to Hardenberg, Brienne, 2 February, 1814.

¹¹² See Griewank (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 266-7. Gneisenau first made his request on 31 October 1813

¹¹³ Treitschke, *op. cit.*, p. 613: “The Russian troops had a hero-worship for King Frederick William who knew how to speak to them in their mother tongue...”

to like him. Whether his knowledge of Russian mattered, it is difficult to know.)

After the battle of Brienne an allied war council agreed that the two allied armies should separate. The main one (100,000 men) should proceed along the Seine , while Blücher and his Silesian Army should follow the Marne. However, it was “laid down as a principle not to let Napoleon out of sight. If he attacked one army, the other should mount a quick operation against Paris and each should avoid an encounter with a larger army.”¹¹⁴ The principles of the Radetzky Plan still applied in France.

But Napoleon was lost sight of by the Silesian Army, which, out of hubris, thought it could ignore the Main Army and just march on Paris, even with 40,000 men. It even broke off communications with Schwarzenberg, leading Radetzky to write that he “remained uninformed of the intentions of the Silesian Army”.¹¹⁵ Gneisenau writing to Clausewitz, confessed:¹¹⁶ “I was asked to abandon communications with the Grand Army. I gave into this request.” Napoleon, on the other hand, knew of the whereabouts of Blücher’s corps and defeated them one after the other at Champaubert, Montmirail and Vauchamps in mid-February. The Silesian Army lost 15,000 men and news of its defeats created panic among the allied sovereigns who asked Napoleon, albeit in vain, for a ceasefire. (He had, after all, called his agreement to the ceasefire of 4 June 1813 “the dumbest decision of my life”.¹¹⁷ Still, for a moment he pretended to consider negotiating another.) Instead, Napoleon simply toughened his peace terms for the Châtillon Congress which was still in session.

¹¹⁴ Radetzky, *Notaten*.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Griewank (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 294-300, Gneisenau to Clausewitz, Paris, 28 April 1814.

¹¹⁷ Bibl, *Radetzky*, p. 130.

According to Treitschke, Blücher's army was defeated only because Schwarzenberg "after slow marches and repeated rests , moved southward on the left bank of the Seine, so that a huge gap was left between his forces and Blücher's army." Indeed, he writes that just before the defeats by Napoleon, "a secret order of the Emperor Francis" , an order which was "tantamount to treachery" commanded Schwarzenberg to stand still, to preserve the "wavering peace negotiations". Gneisenau's confession was not mentioned. However, the passage contains a footnote which reads "no such order was issued". Presumably, Treitschke discovered the truth at the last minute and could not change his manuscript.¹¹⁸

If Schwarzenberg did move more slowly than the "Silesian zealots" (Treitschke's term¹¹⁹), he had very good reasons:¹²⁰ first, the three monarchs were travelling with his headquarters and he could not risk their lives or capture; secondly, unlike Blücher, he had no protective army on his left flank, although according to allied intelligence Marshal Augerau was collecting an army in the South of France and was about to head north to attack the allies. This threat was taken so seriously that an Army of the South was created out of Schwarzenberg's own army, put under the command of the Prince of Hessen-Homburg, given half of Schwarzenberg's troops and sent to Dijon. The imperial guards and reserves, thirdly, were all with Schwarzenberg and these could only be risked in extreme necessity. Fourthly, food supplies were dwindling amidst increasing local peasant resistance at a time when no reserves could be sent from Germany or Austria, while, finally, as Müffling himself complained, it was proving impossible to garner any intelligence

¹¹⁸ Treitschke, *op. cit.*, p. 634.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 633.

¹²⁰ Razdetzky explains these in detail in his *Notaten*.

from the French locals concerning Napoleon's own whereabouts. In any case, Blücher's mistakes were his own.

After his defeats it was thought that the two armies might re-unite, although Blücher sent word that he was too far away. He had restored his numbers to 55,000 and it was arranged for troops from Bülow and Bernadotte's forces in the Netherlands to reinforce him and bring his numbers over 100,000. Gneisenau could then boast:¹²¹ "I have no doubt we can dethrone Napoleon...We alone can put an end to this war". The final battle would be "neither bloody or dangerous". Indeed, by mid-March 1814, this seemed eminently possible. However, when Napoleon attacked Blücher at Craonne on 7 March, the French Emperor escaped relatively unscathed, the Prussians putting the blame on a Russian cavalry commander.¹²² Then, when Blücher retreated to a strong, prepared position at Laon for the decisive encounter two days later on 9 March, things again went wrong. Blücher's nerves gave way and he had to retire to bed. He also acquired an eye infection and partial loss of sight. Müffling, his quartermaster-general also had a nervous collapse and was also in and out of bed. So responsibility for the battle fell to Gneisenau, Prussia's supposed military genius, who, after interrogating a French prisoner, who lied to him and exaggerated the strength of Napoleon's forces, also lost his nerve. In fact, he issued orders to his troops not to pursue the retreating Napoleon, informing an astonished Müffling:¹²³ "The disposition you have planned is too bold and might bring us to destruction. All the four corps who have been sent out must be recalled immediately." General Yorck submitted his resignation. General Sacken

¹²¹ Griewank (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 286-288. Gneisenau to Stein, Dammartin le St. Pierre, 27 January 1814 and pp. 290-293, Gneisenau to Hardenberg, Laon, 10 March, 1814.

¹²² "Had Winzingerode done his duty, the fate of France would have been decided. " See Griewank (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 290-293, Gneisenau to Hardenberg, Laon, 10 March, 1814.

¹²³ Müffling, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-8.

asked:¹²⁴ “ Why have they altered the disposition which would have enabled us to give Napoleon his death blow?” The Silesian army was out of action for a week afterwards and its record was covered up by German historians. Usually the battle is described as a resounding victory for Blücher, who wrote the same himself.¹²⁵ The point is, however, that Napoleon was allowed to escape and continue the campaign. Treitschke, realising this, wrote:¹²⁶ “The field marshal [Blücher—author] was ill, exhausted in body and mind by the terrible experiences of these weeks. Since he was no longer in command , hatred and strife filled the headquarters staff.” However, “...in this dissension Gneisenau was merely strengthened in the prudent considerations which had dominated him during recent days ; after so many sacrifices he would not take over the responsibility for a new and sanguinary struggle. It was his patriotic anxiety for Prussia’s future which was responsible for this one great failure of his life as a commander.”¹²⁷ Treitschke’s humanity, of course, is totally partisan and entirely unconvincing.

It was now the task of the Main Army under Schwarzenberg to finish off Napoleon and the decisive battle took place at Arcis-sur-Aube on 18 March. Having already defeated Marshals Oudinot and Macdonald at Bar-sur-Aube and La Fère Champenoise and having reached Troyes, Schwarzenberg sent Francis I and Metternich to Dijon to ensure their safety. He now prepared to meet Napoleon, who apparently was under the impression that the Austrians were retreating. Yet at Arcis-sur-Aube, having witnessed a series of attacks by Bavarians, Austrians and the Russian reserves, the Emperor of the French soon realised his mistake and attempted to commit suicide. His life was saved once by General

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹²⁵ “I decisively defeated Napoleon at Laon”. Blücher to Bonin, Paris, 30 April 1814. See Wilhelm Capelle (ed.) *Briefe des Feldmarschalls Blücher*, Leipzig, 1942, pp. 54-5.

¹²⁶ Treitschke, *op. cit.* p. 644.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 645.

Girardin, who deflected a lance charge. Then his horse fell under him, leaving the Emperor to resort to pistols. He later recalled:¹²⁸ “I did all I could to meet a glorious end. I continuously exposed myself, bullets rained all around me, my clothes were full of them, yet not one touched me. I was condemned to live.” He and Ney left the battlefield with about 12,000 men.

Napoleon now planned to distract the allies by marching along the Marne to the French eastern frontier. The allies, having intercepted his correspondence, merely made a pretence of following him. In fact, their whole army now made for Paris, which was taken after one bloody encounter en route on 25 March and a bloody defence of the city itself by Marshals Marmont and Mercier on 30 March. Napoleon meanwhile returned to Fontainebleau but his marshals refused to continue the struggle and he was forced to abdicate. While Francis I and Metternich returned from Dijon, Alexander I presented himself as the Agamemnon of the Coalition and gave Napoleon Elba. Yet the wars had been won more in spite of him than because of him. The armies of all three powers had distinguished themselves but the Austrian contribution has been forgotten. Metternich’s diplomatic genius has perhaps been recognised, but Radetzky’s Plan and Schwarzenberg’s dogged leadership have been excised from historical memory. Gneisenau was to be chosen by German historians as the hero of the campaigns, but to give the man his due, just as he had acknowledged Radetzky’s superiority as a general, he also paid tribute to Schwarzenberg’s qualities as a commander, writing to him in June 1814:¹²⁹

“What Your Excellency achieved in the most violent of all wars in history, given the unmentionable, innumerable difficulties you had to

¹²⁸ Quoted in Parkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-196.

¹²⁹ Quoted in Schwarzenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

struggle with, how very much Your Excellency through your most kind and gentle conduct, mollified, unified and disarmed jealousy, resentment, suspicion, unruly ambition, proud ignorance, and audacious arrogance and how you led the contesting elements towards a common goal, posterity will speak of with admiration and I will not be the last among contemporaries to take part in this homage to Your Excellency.”

Napoleon’s escape from Elba and the Waterloo campaign, however, -- not to mention Prussia’s and Germany’s viciously mendacious historiography— would efface Schwarzenberg’s reputation from history more or less for ever. It is time for his, Radetzky’s and the Austrian record in general to be restored.
