

Tactical considerations and their implementation for the Battle of Aspern and the Hungarian Insurrection.

When Archduke Charles was appointed to head the army, his aim was to create new structures and modernize the armament. The innovations were very positively received by the war party and the supporters of an offensive Austria, including Empress Ludovica, strongly enforced its rule to contain Napoleon's rule and especially to eradicate the disgrace of 1805.

Even before the innovations began to take effect, people believed they were ready to be able to attack Napoleon. Archduke Charles's initial resistance was quickly broken because loyalty to his brother and emperor, Francis I, prevailed.

It was the general belief of both the politicians around Count Stadion and the military that the French could be defeated at the first attempt. The population was influenced positively with extensive propaganda. They counted the moment of surprise when Napoleon's army of more than 800,000 men were stationed in Spain, Italy, France and Germany. However, Napoleon was informed by Andreossy on January 13th that war would soon begin. It happened that Napoleon himself could be present during battles in Bavaria and his tactical superiority came into full effect again.

The defeated Austrian army had to retreat across Bohemia. The poet Heinrich von Kleist, who observed the Battle of Aspern from the mountain of Bisamberg said: The Austrians are returning back to the old order of battle they had in Bavaria.

To imitate Napoleon's war tactics and to suffer an ignominious break in the process. Napoleon's goal was to either destroy the Austrian imperial family or weaken it so that there could be no danger of a new uprising for years.

The order of Napoleon to march directly on the capital Vienna, which he also did and achieved in a very short time. Archduke Charles could not follow him. The attempts to disrupt the town Linz did not achieve much, the army was too weak and the return via Bohemia was very long. In order to regain his old troop strength, he had to command untrained men from the Bohemian countryside, who only could learn the basic concepts of soldiering. As Napoleon arrived in Vienna the city's resistance was only slight and was soon completely abandoned, since the majority of the Austrian army was still in long distance and help was not expected soon. Archduke Maximilian gave up the defense of Vienna too quickly and therefore had to endure harsh criticism. Both Napoleon and Archduke Charles recognized that another military encounter was inevitable to create clear conditions that should reorganize the political landscape of Europe.

The behavior of the French soldiers in Vienna was initially exemplary and any violations were immediately severely punished. Attention was also paid to the continued existence of cultural life; composer Joseph Haydn was particularly held in

high esteem. When Archduke Charles arrived on the opposite bank of the Danube, a cat-and-mouse game began for his own sake to disguise intentions and, if possible, to lure the opponent into a trap.

However, the starting point for Archduke Charles was extremely bad. A new defeat would actually have called the imperial family and Austria into a disaster, at least for a long time, plunged into political insignificance. Reinforcements, like that Napoleon could expect were not in sight for him. Smaller Austrian armies had lost so much of their morale and combat effectiveness through defeat that they could not be the reinforcement they hoped for.

For Napoleon, Vienna would have been the absolute climax of his quest for power. The transition into an island north of Vienna was the first attempt to test the vigilance of the Austrian army. The more army moves from Bisamberg to the Marchfeld plain the more he could expand, the higher his combat effectiveness became, since maneuvering in the open field.

The Marchfeld plain was dominated by the Austrian army. For now it was for him to be defensive. Napoleon, who pushed for an early battle, was different and impatient for a suitable crossing point over the Danube. Archduke Charles, who was mostly ill-advised by General Wimpffen, interpreted the exploratory rides to Hungary as a diversionary tactic and was convinced that the French army's crossing would take place north of Vienna. When the crossing finally became apparent at Kaiser-Ebersdorf, east of Vienna, the Austrian intelligence service was so poorly informed that the French troop strength could not be estimated. Even when Field Marshal Hiller recognized the seriousness of the situation and reported it, Archduke Charles was not yet ready to draw the consequences from this. First after reports from Wimpffen, his opinion changed. Wimpffen was of the opinion that the attack would take place along the Danube towards Nußdorf into the north of Vienna. His deployment plan was made towards this, and it was clear to him that Aspern would be the main point of attack; three of the five columns had this place as their target. When Archduke Charles gave his corps commander the order to move, the majority expected him to receive enthusiastic approval, but it was immediately again dampened by Charles saying "The key to ours is to have Bisamberg always in position." So now offensive, but always with the possibility of an orderly retreat." Napoleon was surprised that Archduke Charles opened the attack on his own initiative not yet prepared for it either. "General Donau" also voted against him. The towns of Aspern and Eßling were well suited to being developed into fortresses to become something that has so far been neglected. Danger could come especially from the 1,5 miles wide area between Aspern and Eßling. Napoleon could never have withstood a unified attack by the Austrians, but this never happened. The Austrians began their attacks on Aspern. Archduke Charles ordered Hiller to immediately set off with the vanguard and attack the French without waiting for the main force. The 1. column under Hiller increased its marching speed to such an extent that it was ready to attack while Bellegarde's avantgarde was still far behind at Hirschstetten. No consideration was given to the different lengths of the approach route. Napoleon should be "busy" for now. Only half an hour later more than 2,000 men from the Hohenfeld Brigade from the 2nd column reached Aspern. The Gyulai's first success

confirmed that the defenders were surprised. The intervention of 6 battalions under General Molitor (approx. 2200 men) made it possible to defeat the Austrians to drive them out of Aspern again. Molitor admired the inexhaustible fighting spirit of the Austrians, despite the high losses they didn't want to give up.

In Ebling, Marshal Lannes did not allow such surprise attacks, because an extensive chain of posts informed him in detail about all the preparations of the advancing Austrian columns. For Archduke Charles it was still unclear how Napoleon would accept the attack. For now everything focused on Aspern and while the fighting here was becoming more and more intense and with increasing troop strength, at around 3:30 a.m. a cavalry fight that lasted about half an hour developed north of the road Aspern-Ebling. This battle revealed Napoleon's tactics for the first time, to divide the widely spread line of the Austrian army and as already successfully practiced in Austerlitz in 1805, then fought separately.

The command structure of the Austrian army was not sufficiently proved towards independence. Splitting the battle chain would involve the Archduke's personal involvement. The first encounter between the cavalry recognized the inexperience of the Austrian cuirassiers and General Liechtenstein had great difficulty correcting the organizational deficiencies that occurred. The French cuirassiers were supported by artillery stationed in Ebling, fought back, although it is unclear whether Napoleon did not withdraw them due to a broken bridge. It is also unclear why the Kronprinz and Hohenzollern Cuirassiers did not intervene in the fight. This first cavalry fight takes place in Austrian literature only by a little mention, but it was already the start of much larger ones and of the number of riders and the extraordinary intensity.

The positions of some corps were therefore not fit for purpose as planned. The Grenadiers were too far behind and the 2nd corps was too close to Aspern.

Liechtenstein traditionally positioned its cavalry behind the infantry and was therefore condemned to watch the coming cavalry attacks. An hour later, under the command of Marshal Bessières, the Marulaz light cavalry supported by 6 cuirassier regiments (4700 in all) attacked the infantry of the 3rd column (19,630 men, 665 light cavalry and 62 guns.) under Hohenzollern. The pressure on Aspern from the 1st and 2nd columns was now so big that the 3rd column, which was advancing towards the center and threatening Aspern from the flank, could become a serious danger to the French army.

Napoleon had still difficulties with the supply of troops and material. The next attack was completely different of the cuirassiers, who advanced at a slow pace in complete silence. Through great effort from the officers of the 3rd column, who repeatedly warned the soldiers only by firing on command did the infantry manage to avoid cavalry attacks and to repel Bessière's cuirassiers. Open battalion masses were closed quickly in the event of attacks and a wall of bayonets stretched out all sides.

Archduke Charles was full of praise for the braveness of the 3rd column.

The situation seemed to be quite favorable for him, especially in the center, but there was no offensive action position of the 3rd column. Hiller couldn't stay on the Austrians' right wing without reinforcements. After Liechtenstein advanced from behind Hohenzollern's infantry and filled the gap between the 3rd and 4th columns, the Austrian ring was completely closed around 7 p.m. and the situation was

problematic for Napoleon. Now one more close attack and the fate of the French army would have been sealed. This opportunity was not taken and the French were able to regroup for new attacks. From 9 o'clock in the evening the fighting subsided, Napoleon could be satisfied with the outcome of the first day. The threat to the 3rd column was neutralized and the Austrians be prevented from further advance. At 10 a.m. Archduke Charles went back to his headquarters; he was satisfied with the outcome of the first day but he believed to have fought against most of Napoleon's army and even counted with a partial withdrawal, only to come out again the next day with new forces. From the repeated destruction of bridges he was not informed by the observatory at Bisamberg. Only on the morning of May 22, prisoners talked about the problems. The 2nd day had to be the final one and bring a decision. A capture of Eßling would require complete concentration brought to the center and thus a general offensive towards Lobau.

For Napoleon, in turn, the possession of Aspern and Eßling was the basic condition for one large-scale offensive in the center. Masséna was supposed to recapture Aspern at 3 a.m. Several divisions were also placed near to him. Boudet should continue to defend Eßling and is supported by the infantry division Demont and the light cavalry division Colbert. Lannes takes over the center. In the 1st meeting Saint Hilaire, Claparède and Tharreau, in the 2nd meeting under the command of Bessières Nansouty, Duc du Padua (who replaced d'Espagne) and Marulaz. This attack group reached a strength of 23,000 men and 7,000 cavalry. Reinforced with new troops, Napoleon wanted to force victory through this advance in the center. A left turn would drive the 1st and 2nd columns up the Danube. Archduke Charles stood faced with changed conditions and wanted to behave defensively for now. The fights early morning were very successful for Napoleon. Aspern was conquered again. The first attack on Eßling, carried out in thick fog, also drove the Austrians back. When Archduke Charles learned of troop concentrations in the center, he tried to relieve the 3rd and 4th columns by recapturing Aspern. As the fog cleared around 7 a.m., the expected breakthrough attempt took place and can be seen as the climax of the battle. It weighed for almost two hours and both sides were only partially satisfied with what had been achieved. The French because they failed to break through despite the defensive arch. The Austrians reached far into Marchfeld plain but they suffered an enormous loss of people and material, which made them sensitive to further tasks. Ségur accuses Archduke Charles of being too stubborn about both villages, because there he used up his strength for attacks that had no real effect and could bring a decision. However, this criticism finds little support, rather Prince Rosenberg is criticized by historians for not fulfilling his task as expected. There should be a verbal argument between Archduke Charles and General Dedovich. After the order for the final attack on Eßling explained to Dedovich that the French would have to withdraw soon because the Austria's left wing would soon cut off the place and cause additional casualties would be useless. Archduke Charles replied: "You will attack with your division or I'll have you shot." In fact, there were only partial successes in the Eßling area. The Austrians' left flank was never seriously threatened since Marshal Lannes masterfully understood the strategically excellent location of the place almost exclusively to be used for defense. The Austrian Artillery under Colonel Smola,

played a key role in the French breakthrough attempt. However, 53,000 cannon shots were not enough to cause a defeat of the French army, which in turn had 24,300 artillery and 1,600,000 Infantry rounds responded. When the report of the bridge breaking came after 8 a.m., Napoleon had the offensive ended around 9 a.m. The fighting had stalled and the ammunition supply stopped working. There had to get some ammunition to be taken across the Danube in rowing boats. The fatigue of the soldiers was already too big, they could hardly be motivated for further attacks. This caused Napoleon to order a retreat at around 11 a.m., it was for the next time not to expect any help from Lobau island, both bridges over the Danube were strongly damaged and the third bridge over the Stadler Arm also had to be repaired again and again. Archduke Charles had the grenadiers advance from their waiting position much too late in front line. Much time took line-up and formation changes. Difficulties between Field Marshal Lindenau and Major Rothkirch led to inaction. A captain in the Zach Infantry describes the situation: "Our entire central arch now advanced at the same time with a clanging game and general shouts of joy and "Inexorably pushed back the enemy line." How the French assessed the situation Berthier's statement at the war council at 8 o'clock in the evening clearly shows: "Sure, withdrawal is a necessity, everyone agrees on that. Nothing is capable to snatch the honor of the day from the Archduke. Ammunition replacement impossible, that's what we're left with only the cover of night to go to the Lobau". The statement is also significant of General Serrurier's seriously wounded adjutant in Vienna: "I never have seen one like this, the Austrians stand like walls and fight like lions." The French soldiers hold out on the increasingly flooding island before the bridges were passable again. Why didn't Charles listen to the generals Liechtenstein and Hiller? Liechtenstein wanted 30,000 men to pursue the French in the Lobau, although he expected 10,000 of his own losses, but he was convinced to be able to completely destroy the French. Also the desire to go to Hungary to be allowed and attack Napoleon from the flank with new troops, was not fulfilled. Was this a victory? Archduke Charles demanded an early peace agreement with Napoleon and for now it seemed as if Emperor Francis agreed, but especially Foreign Minister Count Phillip Stadion was against it. Criticism of not prosecuting the French became increasingly mentioned. The poet Heinrich von Kleist visited the battlefield together with the historian Dahlmann. As his letters show, he was a zealous advocate of a "German" uprising against Napoleon. On October 21st, a disappointed Kleist wrote in Prague: "There - on October 14th peace will be made! What peace! All hopes sank with him. A peace has been concluded that mutilates Austria, disempowered, put in permanent bondage."

There was great disappointment among some military officers, and there was no lack of blame, which further reinforced the general negative mood.

And now few words about the Hungarian insurrection.

Owing to Austria's war preparations during 1808, the Hungarian Imperial Diet decided on 28 August to call up the Insurrection. They were to be assembled in the cities of Raab, Keszthely, and others. While Hungarian troops served in the Austrian

standing army under Emperor Francis and the Court War Council, the Insurrection was raised when “in open war the regular army is not capable of holding back the enemy and an imminent invasion of the empire threatens.” “On the other hand, Article 21 of the 1715 law clearly stated that the Insurrection would thereafter be organized separately under the overall command of the Palatine, and it cannot stand directly at the disposal of the Imperial Court War Council.” Article 12 of the 1791 law stated “Executive power must be exercised in Hungary in accord with the laws; the king and his estates hold legislative authority in common; wherefore Hungary may never be ruled through edicts.” Key for the Insurrection was that by law it was only permitted to fulfill purely defensive roles and could only be activated when the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary and therefore the Hungarian population were threatened. It was also allowed by law to leave for home after a battle end. In March 1809, the Palatine visited the trans-Danubian counties to encourage the nobility to battle and to swear them to the defense of the thousand-year constitution and the Hungarian kingdom. This proved effective as the nobility received the king’s representative with great enthusiasm. For the nobility in the counties, the defense of their constitutional freedom meant also the maintenance of their noble privileges. From the spring of 1809, the county administrations received special tasks owing to the Austrian preparations for war. The nobility in general had to be organized, individual nobles had to be registered, and those suitable to military service had to be selected, trained and equipped. As far as the cavalry was concerned, the county officials fulfilled these tasks relatively quickly. But the infantry battalions could only be raised with difficulty, as the nobility did not even want to serve in the infantry as officers. The nobles bore the costs themselves, though in some cases these were covered by the counties or the treasury. A sense of patriotic sacrifice also advanced the careers of those who participated in the Noble Insurrection’s administration and medical services. The events of 1809 contributed to enhanced social prestige and respect for the participants. Their efforts, however, were not recognized by the following, more liberal generation, as it was pressing for bourgeois revolution. It is a concise and dramatic formulation of the national mourning after the defeat in the freedom struggle in 1809. With Lajos Kossuth in the lead, the veterans of 1809 came under attack as representatives of the old order and thus as enemies. The Hungarian Insurrection army was abandoned in 1811. Many questions remained unanswered. Hungary fell into a deep repression. This could even be seen replicated in art. The painter Viktor Madaras showed this in his painting *The Lamentation of Laszlo Hunyadi*. It is not necessary to demand that completely newly organized and untrained troops should withstand the greatest amount of grenade and grapeshot fire, said Count Stephan Szechenyi, the man who created Hungary, and continued ultimately, the noble insurgents were the cause of the outcome of the battle. The wellknown poet Jokai Mor wrote The whole campaign of 1809 was carried out with a folk song. When, thirty-five days after the battle of Raab, Archduke Josef appeared again with forty-four squadrons of insurgent cavalry to wipe off this stain from the coat of arms of the country with his flagging flags, dividing the same battlefield into a barrage of divinity, which had witnessed the defeat, the sword was drawn in the hand it was announced on the anniversary.

In contemporary Hungary, the initiatives of Martinovics and Berzeviczy remained isolated phenomena. The majority of Hungarian aristocratic society did not support them, but rather the Habsburg dynasty, which opposed revolutionary France and at the same time rejected both Napoleon's aspirations for autocracy and the civil reforms he offered. The nobility put aside its political and economic injustices, retreated behind the redoubts of class nationalism. The Hungarian nobles saw in it the guarantees of the centuries-old aristocratic privileges and the preservation of feudal social relationships. Gecsenyi wrote The Hungarian insurrection, which was called up several times during the French wars, fit into this train of thought and which, as a symbol of paying taxes through one's own blood, secured the aristocratic privileges and the associated tax exemption for centuries.

Many thanks for Your attention.