

# INTRODUCTION



Welcome to *Against the Odds* 2013 Annual. Our featured game is truly a sad situation with Napoléon Bonaparte, his country beleaguered from all sides and his army but a shadow of the *Grande Armée* of old, still aiming to smash the Coalition forces piecemeal before his country is overrun by Counter-Revolutionaries. Besides a complete game in the Marshal Enterprises style, you will find engaging articles to expand your gaming horizons. As always, thanks for picking up this special issue, and if this is your first try for our magazine, check out our subscription offers, because it's our goal to bring you desperate actions by the best designers in the industry today, backed by solid articles to challenge your views of history and gaming.

*Andy*

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# VAUCHAMPS VISIONS OF VANISHED VICTORIES

by Marshal Enterprises, with two maps by Terry Leeds



Horace Vernet's "Charge of the Cuirassiers"

The 1814 campaign in France proved one last time, albeit briefly, that Napoléon Bonaparte was the master of military maneuvering. His brilliant scurrings throughout northeastern and central France in February of 1814 had created an illusion, if only for a few weeks, that the master was back. The victory at Vauchamps was his greatest triumph of the campaign. That victory helped create a perception—though probably just that and with little chance of it actually being true—that Napoléon had somehow turned his fortune around, he and the French empire would miraculously be able to survive the disasters of 1812 and 1813, and that Napoléon would maintain his place as *empereur*.

The military struggle for the French in 1814 was far different than the experience that Napoléon had had in the last five years. From the Austrian Campaign in 1809, to the massive French invasion of Russia in 1812, and culminating in the German campaigns in 1813, the armies on both sides had become larger and more unwieldy with each new campaign. Napoléon's military finesse had clearly dulled in the last several years. However, the new reality of reduced resources for Napoléon would force the French to fight as they did during the Wars of Revolution—Napoléon becoming the master of maneuver once again. Napoléon was able to relearn how to husband French men and materiel rather than to waste troops in brutal slugfests which exhausted both the national treasury and national will. Even in 1814, both friends and foes were reminded of the great victories in Italy that had made Napoléon's reputation nearly 20 years earlier. In fact, this temporary flurry of victories in February 1814 would give him and his French supporters a false sense of security and seal his defeat by allowing the perception to develop that he was just one victory away from maintaining the Empire and foiling the reactionary European powers from restoring the Bourbon *Ancien Regime*.

Vauchamps was the final victory in the famous Six Days sequence from February 9 to February 14, 1814. The victories created panic in the Coalition ranks and brought the illusion of potential victory to the French. General Henri-Gatien Bertrand, Napoléon's trusted Grand Master of the Palace and all-around trouble shooter in 1814, wrote to his wife Fanny in one of his frequent letters, revealing the thoughts of the Napoleonic inner circle, "This campaign will certainly be considered one of the most astonishing that the emperor has ever conducted." But the price of the victory was the erosion of the Emperor's attitude of sobriety he had had about his future after the failures of 1813. He had actually entertained thoughts of coming to terms with the Coalition, which would allow him to keep his throne and France relatively intact. In fact, his instructions to his chief negotiator, General Armand-Augustin-Louis Caulaincourt, prior to the Six Days battles, was to attempt to negotiate the best deal France might be able to get considering the wretched French position. However, after those battles, Napoléon was hoping for a more complete victory and the instructions were to negotiate as if victory was

close at hand. Paris was buoyed by the scope of the successes, and there was hope that victory could still be had. Napoléon again let the rush created by the Vauchamps and the other improbable victories go to his head, and again the popular acclaim was allowed to overwhelm Napoléon's common sense and inner-voice that the jig was up. So the seduction of the Vauchamps victory in many ways was destructive of the overall French efforts, because it fueled a French fantasy of an overall victory, which never could occur.

### STRATEGIC SITUATION FRANCE JANUARY 1814

So how did the French move from the despair of January and early February to the blinding euphoria of mid-February victories? The Coalition had decided, after preliminary informal armistice discussions with the French and amongst themselves, that the war would be carried from Germany into France. The Coalition had launched a series of invasions of France into nearly every corner of the French Empire, but most importantly, the largest invasion came from across the Rhine on New Year's Day, 1814. Both Field Marshal Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher's Army of Silesia and Field Marshal Karl Philipp Schwarzenberg's Army of Bohemia moved into northeastern France with nearly 300,000 men. More were assembling in Germany as troops returning from the sieges of the French fortresses in Germany and Poland were just then making their appearance into the primary battle arena. The two armies started their slow but unstoppable march on Paris.

Napoléon had spent the month of January rebuilding his broken army and attending to protecting his political status in the French capital. On January 25, Napoléon said good-bye to his wife and son (he would never see either again), named his brother Joseph as the commander of Paris, and left for the front. He opened the 1814 campaign with a sharp defeat of Blücher at Brienne, about 200 kilometers southeast of Paris. The Brienne victory, which caught