

KULM VANDAMME'S ORDEAL



by ANDY NUNEZ

PRELUDE

1812 had been a bad year for Dominique-Joseph René Vandamme. The Count of Unseborg had marched east with the Grande Armée that summer for a final showdown with Tsar Alexander of Russia. He had been attached to the wing commanded by Jerome Bonaparte, the Emperor's brother. Jerome was a better lover than a fighter, much to his brother's chagrin. He had fallen in love with a sweet lady from Baltimore, Maryland, named Betsy Patterson, married her, and produced an heir, also named Jérôme. Much to Napoleon Bonaparte's displeasure, he had married a commoner and Jérôme was forced to end his marriage so that he could wed Catharina of Wurttemberg and take over that small Germanic state as its king. Jerome had a poor reputation with finances and once almost had to fight a duel over a lady's honor.

He and Vandamme did not get along, and it wasn't too far into the campaign that the latter was relieved of command and sent back home. Vandamme went home and spent nearly a year at his lands near the town of Cassel in France, enjoying life and family. Then, Napoleon returned with the ragged, worn-down remnants of the magnificent Grand Armée of nearly half a million that went into Russia. While winter turned toward spring in 1813, Napoleon's nominal allies, Prussia and Austria-Hungary, maneuvered to get around the onerous peace treaties the French emperor had laid upon them in 1807 and 1809.

While those countries' leaders dithered over details and tried to appear to be loyal to France, Tsar Alexander of Russia was busy rebuilding his army. Though he had savaged the French all the way back to the borders of Prussia, his own forces were worn down by the pursuit through the terrible

winter of 1812. England was standing by with open purse strings while English and Spanish troops kicked French and Bonapartist Spanish forces around the Iberian Peninsula. A lesser man than Napoleon Bonaparte would have pulled his remaining forces back within the borders of France and sued for peace.

Napoleon being Napoleon, however, would have none of that. He was still in possession of what is now Germany, and he was going to make a fight of it. However, losses among general officers had been heavy. Several were out on extended leave from exhaustion after battling their way through the white Hell of what is now Belarus, surviving only by a miracle. So it was that Vandamme, the man who insulted Napoleon for not making him a marshal, was recalled to the colors. Always a fighter like his emperor, Vandamme was only too happy to mount up and ride east. There, his new command was to be three new divisions forming in the area between the Weser and the Elbe.

Meanwhile, Napoleon was busy drawing together the forces that would face a renewed effort by his old enemies to send him packing. By early spring, he would have constructed no less than 12 army corps (see the appendix *How Did He Do It?*). It was an amazing effort, but had its limits as most of the men were green conscripts and recruits, while his cavalry was horse poor. Luckily, his foes were equally unready. Tsar Alexander of Russia, personally leading his army, assembled a force of some 110,000 men, counting the Cossacks. Knowing he would need more, he ordered the assembly of a reserve army at Bialystock that he could draw on to replace his losses. It would come in handy as between March and August of 1813, he would draw some 68,000 infantry, 14,000 cavalry and five batteries of artillery.

The Prussians, as seen in the appendix, were less fortunate. General Hans David Ludwig von York, in charge of the Prussian auxiliary corps under the Grand Armee during 1812, went over to the Russians through the Treaty of Tauroggen on December 30, 1812. In order to keep the Russians happy, King Frederick William III had to sign over all the land acquired by Prussia during the Third Partition of Poland. This was the treaty of Kalisch, signed on February 3, 1813, guaranteeing Russian participation in a concerted effort to kick Bonaparte out of the rest of Prussia. As seen in the appendix, the Prussian army had to appear almost as magically as France's. They put together an initial force of 120,000 men that would continue to grow over time, but it was an uneven force, lacking in very basics of supplies and equipment, held together by their hatred of France, wearing whatever came to hand and armed with whatever was available since the musket output and supply as mentioned in the appendix had not reached a high enough level for all 120,000.

The Austrian contingent that returned from Russia took the route back into their territory of Galicia and decided to keep the powder dry and their mouths shut for the time being. After all, Bonaparte was married to the daughter of the Emperor, and it was unclear who would be the winner in a clash between France and the hastily formed forces of Prussia and Russia. Such a stance would also allow them to play the honest broker if negotiations were called for.

KINGS GO FORTH



It is as good a time as any to talk about how Vandamme ended up on the road to Kulm. Not just content to amass an army while the Prussians got their troops drilled and supplied, Tsar Alexander of Russia wanted action. The military commander of the Russian forces spread along the Elbe river was old Mikhail Kutuzov, who served under the great Alexander Suvorov 50 years before and stood at Borodino in September of 1812 giving a good account of himself before withdrawing. The Marshal was being hailed as the savior of Russia, but Alexander thought that he was a bit too shy about moving against the French. Luckily for the Tsar, Marshal Kutuzov died on April 28, 1813 after a brief illness.

The Tsar put up a relatively undistinguished general by the name of Peter Wittgenstein in command of the forces, the exact reasons unknown. Perhaps Alexander thought he was more pliable than the late Kutusov.

The combined Russian/Prussian army that sallied forth after Wittgenstein put the forces in motion, numbered some 86,000 or so. Not one to sit around and wait, Napoleon marched to intercept them with the newly constituted Army of the Main, over 100,000 strong. Marching to join forces was the Emperor's stepson Eugene de Beauharnais, at the head of the army of the Elbe, perhaps 30,000 more or less. Vandamme, however, had other orders. He was to move his forces to quell uprisings from Wesel on the Rhine to Bremen. The situation grew serious and Marshal Louis Davout was sent to take charge of what was becoming the I and II Corps, amassing some 40,000 men against local Prussian irregular forces one tenth that size.

Wittgenstein, for all his lack of command experience, realized that striking the first blow would gain the moral high ground for his troops. The French were still concentrating, so there was a chance to defeat them in detail. Leaving Prussian General Friedrich von Kleist's corps to screen Leipzig, Wittgenstein pulled his assault force together at Pegau and began his movement forward on May 2, hoping to catch Napoleon unawares.

He was right; Napoleon had no real understanding of the Allied forces in the Leipzig area. Deploying Eugene, backed by the cavalry corps of Victor de Latour-Maubourg, to take Leipzig, he spread the rest of his corps into a supporting arc, with Ney at Lutzen, directly in Wittgenstein's path. Besides his own corps, the Russian commander had Gebhard von Blucher, Ludwig Yorck and Ferdinand von Winzingerode swinging in a smaller arc toward Ney's III Corps. Farther south was Mikhail Miloradovich's corps, moving up from Zeitz. These maneuvers set off an action that neither could have foreseen.

Jacques Lauriston's V Corps, picked to take Leipzig itself, started the May 2 mayhem by rushing the bridge over the Elster at Lindenau. During the fierce fighting, the bridge caught fire, but the French poured forth, some even fording the river to flank the Prussian guns guarding the other end of the bridge. Kleist decided that his forces were too disordered to stand and withdrew east to Paunsdorf. This fortunate happenstance allowed the French cavalry to head south, their route paralleled by that of Jacques MacDonald's XI Corps. Ney's men, oblivious to the threat from the east, were foraging for food when suddenly their scattered positions were ringed by enemy troops in large numbers.

Wittgenstein unleashed a ferocious cannonade, to which Ney feebly replied. Three of his guns were put out of action and the whole line had to retreat through the villages between the Sale and Elster Rivers. By the time Ney arrived in person, Napoleon sent word for him to hold at Kaja and himself advanced with the Guard to backstop Ney's pressed corps. Ney was determined to hold and a fierce action developed as reinforcements were still marching to his aid. Ney's horse was killed and he was wounded in the thigh, but he fought on, throwing in Girard's division. Girard personally led a charge to take out the Prussian artillery, waving the eagle of a grenadier regiment, until he was wounded three times.

The fighting was bloody and the Prussians could gain no ground, but time and ammunition were running short for Ney. Leaders on both sides were wounded trying to hold or break lines, including Scharnhorst, who lingered until June 28 before dying. Cossacks nipped at the flanks, trying to grab the artillery until driven off by Ney's cavalry. The Prussians sent in their cavalry and guard units, driving Ney from Kaja, even as Blucher was wounded in the side and had to retire, leaving Yorck in command. Ney's corps was panicky and some of the green troops fled, only to be stopped by the arrival of the Guard light horse regiment, coming up with Marmont's VI Corps. As the frightened youths milled about, the Emperor came to them and encouraged them to go back to the front. As bullets and cannonballs struck all around, his charisma won the day and the III Corps recruits hailed him and went back with Marmont's 20,000 men close behind.

From the north marched MacDonald, while Bertrand's IV Corps slowly picked its way from the south. Napoleon, though the victory was not complete, felt that the initiative was his. While the night drew the conflict to a close, the Emperor turned to one of his staff and remarked "I am once more master of Europe."

His mastery, however, was shaky. He was on the wrong end of the casualty ratio and not all his Marshals showed their best skills. The deficiencies of materiel were evident in his being outgunned in artillery that lacked of both quantity and quality in *l'arme blanche*.

There was nothing to be done, though, except continue to seek a truly decisive battle. The Coalition decamped to Dresden and Napoleon followed. After sending Eugene off to mobilize Italy in the event the Austrians defected, he created an army under Ney, who promptly marched on Torgau, where the Saxons in residence joined him while their commander rode to join Blucher.

The allies kept retreating after Napoleon's army got across the Weisseritz River and the Emperor set up headquarters at Dresden. Napoleon wanted Ney to move on Berlin, but upon discovering that the Coalition was making a stand at Bautzen, bade him turn. The change of direction caused Ney's corps under Lauriston, Jean Reynier and Claude Victor, plus his own, to be strung out. Wittgenstein saw a chance to snip Ney where he was thin and moved on Lauriston with the corps of Yorck and Barclay de Tolly. They missed their chance when Ney arrived and were roughly handled, withdrawing without gain.

Napoleon, in digesting this data, realized that Wittgenstein made a bad move and was anchored at a bad place. He rubbed his hands gleefully as he noted the overextended allied corps, strung along the hills behind the Spree. He envisioned their stand as a trap and conceived a plan to destroy them. Wittgenstein formed two lines and waited. His left was only six miles from the Austrian border. Napoleon wanted to keep his enemies' attention focused on his moves across the Spree while Ney came down from the North to box them against the Bohemian foothills. If all went as planned, Napoleon would have them outnumbered two-to-one and with no place to retreat.

It was late on the 20th when the Spree was breached. Bertrand was northernmost, then Auguste Marmont, MacDonald and Nicholas Charles Oudinot. The Guard and Latour-Maubourg's cavalry were facing Bautzen as a backstop. Jean Compans' division from Marmont stormed across the Spree and Compans found a breach in the walls of Bautzen. A team of volunteers got over the wall and threw open the gates. "Gunner" Marmont, an artilleryman from the days of the Revolution, placed 60 guns upon a hill and was merrily shelling the Russians to encourage them to leave town while Jacques-Etienne MacDonald was working around to the right of Bautzen. Under this threat, the Russians pulled back, fearing encirclement.

The Tsar thought that Napoleon was trying to separate his army from any Austrian help and sent in troops to keep Oudinot at bay; in reality, he was doing Napoleon's herding for him. Ney's orders, however, were delayed and it was early the next morning before he got them. The marshal sent a staffer riding hard to apologize to Napoleon, but the Emperor, taking a fresh look at the Coalition array, penciled a hurried, but detailed note to Ney, desiring him to fall upon the enemy's flank by eleven that morning.

Meanwhile, Oudinot continued to advance, boosting Alexander's fear of being cut off from Austria, so he in turn loaded up Miloradovich until the latter outnumbered

Oudinot, forcing the French to halt. Napoleon was unperturbed. Alexander's focus was on the wrong flank and his reserves were running out. It was time for Ney if the trap were to be sprung. Ney, however, was all caught up in doing what he was told and waited a full hour before advancing, even though the allied line was very weak, deciding to wait for more men to arrive.

The delay resulted in the Coalition suddenly realizing another French army was descending upon them. They hurried troops to that front, but Ney's advance was inexorable and the Prussians had to yield. The red-headed marshal's lines suddenly became entangled with Henri Bertrand's, advancing at a right angle and the two corps became hopelessly jumbled, allowing Blucher to escape encirclement. The attack woke up Alexander to the reality of the situation and he ordered a retreat. A dogged rear-guard and a blinding rainstorm veiled the withdrawal, leaving the Emperor grasping at air.

Again, Napoleon's casualties were much higher than his opponents'. His men were brave, but his enemies were not easily driven off. Also, his scratch-built army suffered from a lack of efficient staff work. As a result, his army was simply too big to be easily coordinated. Worse, General Geraud Duroc, Napoleon's loyal Grand Marshal of the Palace, was killed by a cannonball. Napoleon was shaken and exclaimed to Armand Caulaincourt, "Alas! When will fate relent? When will there be an end to this? Caulaincourt, my eagles will yet triumph, but the happiness which accompanied them has fled." With the decisive victory eluding him once more, he could only hope to keep the enemy off balance. The Coalition leaders, while pointing fingers of blame at each other, did not split and go their separate ways, but stayed together to their next base of operations. The day was won by Napoleon, but indications were growing that the war could not be.

Vandamme, in the meantime, was working up his corps of three divisions so it could join the grouping on the lower Elbe River. Something needed to be done about Hamburg, though. The garrison commander, Baron Claude Carra St. Cyr, had decided to move out of the city to the southwest and a mixed bag of Cossacks and line Russian cavalry moved in.

Napoleon sent word to Vandamme that the city needed to be retaken due to its strategic position. As Vandamme was getting his corps ready to move, he found that Marshal Davout was now his immediate superior. While no love was lost between these two old rivals, they managed to be civil to each other and Vandamme kicked the Russians out of Hamburg on May 30.

THE FALSE ARMISTICE



On the coalition side, Barclay de Tolly replaced Wittgenstein on orders from Alexander, as the coalition was fraying from the setbacks from the Tsar's former pick. It was becoming clear that Russia and Prussia couldn't beat Napoleon with the current forces and were desperate for more allies, like Austria, though there was hope that the French-aligned German states would defect and perhaps even Sweden under Napoleon's former Marshal Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, whom Napoleon had annoyed in 1812 when he occupied Swedish Pomerania, might join up.

What the coalition needed was time, time to properly equip their troops and to at least bring in Austria. Napoleon agreed to the armistice on June 4, a bit reluctantly, since he had the initiative, but even he could see that his newly conscripted, barely trained troops were exhausted, and desertion rates were climbing. Not only that, but he was still trying to increase his cavalry numbers and consolidate his gains. Spoiler alert: he later said that agreeing to the armistice was one of the worse mistakes in his life.

Regardless, it benefited the Sixth Coalition much more than France. The leaders were overjoyed, believing they had hoodwinked Bonaparte. Immediately they began to plot their next moves, while continuing to negotiate. The Austrians, nominally the neutral party, were using Prince Clemens Lothar Metternich, a smooth character who talked peace while Austria increased her army and prepared to take the field.

As the summer wore on, Vandamme found his command was now the French I Corps, 3 divisions strong, some 25,000 men. Napoleon, his army (not counting garrisons) now 440,000 strong, was ready to go when, on August 10, the armistice was broken. Austria and Sweden joined the coalition.

They formed three armies:

1. The Army of Bohemia, a primarily Austrian force under Prince Philip Schwarzenberg.
2. The Army of the North, primarily made up of Prussians, though Bernadotte was in charge.

3. The Army of Silesia, a mixed Prussian/Russian force under the command of Blucher.

Total Forces were somewhere in the neighborhood of 482,000 men.

The coalition leaders, meeting at Trachenberg castle, decided on a strategic plan that would take into consideration the talents of their opponent and the fact that they had a large front to push against, making for a large area for Napoleon to defend. They admitted that Bonaparte was a military genius beyond their abilities, so if it was he leading an advance, whatever army he faced would retreat, which the other two armies would push forward against his marshals, which, while skilled, were not the men who fought the brilliant battles at Austerlitz, Jena, Wagram and Friedland. These were men fatigued by a decade of constant conflict, many still traumatized by their experiences in Russia. Also they would only attack if they determined they were numerically superior.

However, Blucher, true to his nature, jumped the gun and began to advance before the actual end of the armistice, drawing Napoleon away from his central base at Dresden. Seeing that not only was Napoleon leader of the maneuver, but he was also outnumbered, the old Field Marshal reluctantly withdrew.

Vandamme was initially ordered to Stolpen, where Napoleon learned that Wittgenstein was marching a Russian force to join the Army of Bohemia. Accordingly, he changed his mind and diverted I Corps to Rumburg where they would rendezvous with Marshal Laurent Gouvion St. Cyr's 42nd Division and a contingent of 3,000 Imperial Guard cavalry under General Charles Lefebvre-Desnouettes.

Napoleon toyed with the idea of using this force to strike the Russians in transit and strung out, but changed that plan and instead went for Blucher, telling Vandamme to fort up around Rumburg while Marshal Claude Victor's II Corps, along with just-minted Marshal Prince Josef Poniatowski's VIII Corps, a total of some 65,000 men.

Sadly for the French, all this planning went into the toilet when Bonaparte got a hastily scrawled note from St. Cyr. The Army of Bohemia, some 80,000 men, were on their way to Dresden, where only 20,000 defenders were in place. His four divisions remained on the outskirts, giving the Coalition fits. He could also have alerted his fellow Marshals Victor and Vandamme, but he chose instead to communicate directly with Napoleon. Even Marshal Joachim Murat, present with some cavalry, suggested he should retreat to the city's defenses. St. Cyr refused.

DECISION AT DRESDEN



Seeing that Blucher appeared to be following some Fabian strategy, Napoleon created an "Army of the Bober" under MacDonald to watch the Army of Silesia. The Emperor left strict orders for MacDonald to keep his army concentrated and advance only to a certain line. St. Cyr's dispatches were too dire to ignore, so Napoleon wheeled around and decided to turn on Schwarzenberg rather than be boxed in. His new plan was to hit the Army of Bohemia in its eastern flank and roll it up, then advance on Prague. To this end, he left Prince Pontiatowski to guard the approaches around Zittau and called for Ney to join him and turn his corps over to Joseph Souham. He warned MacDonald to stay put and headed for Gorlitz. For some reason, Ney interpreted his orders differently and marched toward Dresden with his corps plus the cavalry corps of Horace-François-Bastien Sebastiani, cutting MacDonald's forces in half. He was not alone in being headstrong.

Blucher realized that pursuit was ending and turned to see what was happening. MacDonald, instead of obeying orders, blundered straight into Blucher along the Katzbach River on the 26th. The Army of the Bober had advanced in three columns, too spread out to rapidly concentrate. MacDonald went ahead and pitched into Blucher anyway, having some initial success until allied reinforcements began to show up. Worse, a horrific rainstorm caused flash flooding, dampening gunpowder and sweeping away bridges over the swollen river. Jacques Puthod's division from V Corps was trapped on the other side of the river and had to surrender. Superior Prussian cavalry and artillery, less affected by the rain, drove MacDonald back, and the French marshal retired toward Dresden leaving 18,000 casualties and 100 guns behind from his 50,000 man force. The effect on Blucher's men was electric. Instead of bursting apart into rabble, the victory turned them into a coherent, motivated force.

Luckily for Napoleon, Schwarzenberg was not making the progress he had hoped for. Historians have seen coalition strategy leading up to August 25 as timid. Views vary on the reasons Schwarzenberg wavered before the rickety defenses of Dresden. Some believe he was waiting for more Austrian troops to arrive and others say that he wanted to attack,

but Alexander talked him out of it. There was also a case to be made that St. Cyr's counterattack on the 25th was so savage that his numbers seemed larger to the Coalition. Regardless, his chance to easily take the city passed. From Górlitz, Napoleon ordered the Guard to take the road and they arrived the evening of the August 25. More troops swiftly came in behind them.

Along the way, Napoleon considered his options. Reports were that St. Cyr could not hold the city another day. He ordered the cavalry corps of Samuel-François L'Heritier to move to Grossenbain and guard the flank and line of communication over the Elbe. This took some of St. Cyr's forces away. Weakening St. Cyr put the Emperor on the horns of a dilemma. He wanted badly to conduct one of his famous *maneuvers sur le derriere* on the Army of Bohemia by way of Pirna. However, St. Cyr was in bad shape and under no circumstances could the supply depots and army parks of Dresden be captured by the coalition. Napoleon had to try to do both, save Dresden and defeat Schwarzenberg decisively.

He funneled the Guard, Marmont and Victor toward Dresden itself while he left Vandamme to continue the flank attack at Pirna. St. Cyr's valiant defense kept the Army of Bohemia's leaders focused on Dresden and not on their flank, believing Napoleon was farther east. Meanwhile, the French army was marching hard all night, with conscripts tumbling prostrate into ditches from exhaustion. Their loyalty to Bonaparte was strong, whether voluntary or not, and by the morning of August 26 Napoleon had upwards of 70,000 men defending Dresden, with another 50,000 approaching.

The Emperor himself arrived at 9:00 AM as the Coalition was coiling and uncoiling in a series of tepid advances, only to be tossed out by St. Cyr's men. The Marshal gave ground grudgingly under Napoleon's approving eye, abandoning his forward positions for the main line around the town, interspersed with earthen lunettes for his artillery. The Allies paused to regroup and the nerves of their leaders were jolted when cries of "Vive l'Empereur" wafted on the breeze from Dresden as the tired defenders acknowledged the arrival of their ruler. The three royals immediately fell into a disagreement about whether to continue the fight or back off as planned since Napoleon was present. Alexander was for pulling back. King Frederick William was for going in. Francis said nothing and revealed nothing. The Coalition had a large advantage in troops. As the debate raged, their subordinates, without any change of orders, went in as planned.

Regardless, this was the battle the coalition thought it wanted. Napoleon's satellite operations were confounded, and the Corsican Ogre was trapped and outnumbered. Schwarzenberg had a large semi-circle of troops hemming in the old part of the city, the *Altstadt* from the north bend of the Elbe to the south end where it came from behind the *Altstadt*. His corps commanders, from left to right were Frederick Bianchi, Hieronymus Karl von Colloredo, Joahn Gabriel Chasteler, Ignac Gyulai, Wittgenstein and Friedrich Kleist. Backstopping these units was the Russian Guard back with the royals along with a Prussian contingent in reserve between Gittersee and the road to Pirna.

Napoleon did a quick tour of the perimeter, then made his plan to hold the city until more men arrived. He formed three special task forces, one under Murat to the west, one with two Guard divisions under Mortier to the East near the Gross-Garten, and Ney in the center with two divisions of the Old Guard. St. Cyr had fought so well that Napoleon left him in charge of the defensive perimeter, which was now back to the five artillery redoubts.

Schwarzenberg had gained a portion of the Gross-Garten, but further progress was stymied by the arrival of French reinforcements and several batteries formed up across the Elbe a little east of the Neustadt were blowing huge holes in his right flank. Colloredo managed to penetrate one of the French artillery redoubts and threatened to overrun another. Things were still touch and go as the afternoon wore on.

At 5:30 PM, Napoleon launched his counterattack. Mortier's two divisions slammed into Kleist and Wittgenstein as they were raked by cannon fire, clearing them from the Gross-Garten. Ney, leading the Old Guard, tossed the Austrians out of their captured redoubt and threatened to unravel the Austrian center. Only by throwing in Austrian grenadiers did Schwarzenberg manage to keep his line intact as the grognards drove his men back at bayonet point.

By dark, the French were nearly back to their morning start positions. Their savage determination outweighed the enemy's superior numbers. As the fighting died across the darkening battlefield, the clatter of boots could be heard in the streets of Neustadt. Victor and Marmont had arrived. Now the odds were better. Schwarzenberg was reinforced by Miloradovich, making it 170,000 allies to 120,000 French.

On the Pirna front, Vandamme got across the Elbe easily, his 40,000 men outweighing Friedrich Eugen, Duke of Württemberg's 12,500. The coalition was forced to divert 26,000 under Alexander Osterman-Tolstoy as Schwarzenberg hoped to contain Vandamme until Napoleon was defeated

the next day (more on this below). Schwarzenberg reshuffled his line to load up his center, leaving 25,000 men with Bianchi on his left and 25,000 with Wittgenstein on his right. If all went well holding Vandamme, the Austrian leader was hoping for another 21,000 under Johann Graf von Klenau to slip past the Pirna operation and boost their forces at Dresden.

Napoleon, not knowing this, laid his own plans. As he pondered, another torrential downpour spilled through the night. The Emperor considered the implications of this awful change of weather and found them to his liking. He hoped for swollen rivers, especially the Weisseritz. Its bridge at Plauen was key to Bianchi's line of communication and its destruction would leave him stranded. The standing water would soon turn to mud as the allies advanced, making any movement a chore.

Taking into consideration Schwarzenberg's likely inability to rapidly reinforce threatened sectors, Napoleon did the opposite of the Austrian and loaded up his wings, looking for a double envelopment. Murat would coordinate some 35,000 men from Victor and Latour-Maubourg on the French right. Marmont and St. Cyr would hold the center with 50,000, leaving the rest to Ney and Mortier as they were to strike out toward Vandamme. The only army reserve was the Old Guard, a terrible risk, but Napoleon felt he had to roll the die if he wanted to smash this combined army and render it ineffective.

Napoleon plowed into the coalition at 6:00 AM on the 27th. Murat's wing plunged into the muddy fields before him, smashing into Bianchi's sodden troops and sending them reeling. Victor's men got to the bridge at Plauen to find it intact so they occupied it, trapping Bianchi's command. To his right, the division of General François Teste plus Latour-Maubourg's cavalry had driven in the Austrian left flank. Cut off, Bianchi's men, broke. They ran to the river, only to find the only bridge in French hands.

Again and again Murat hit resisting formations, pushing them to the riverbanks where many drowned trying to swim across in the strong current. Not long after noon, those still alive surrendered, some 15,000 men. 9,000 lay dead along the retreat paths. The Allied left ceased to exist. It was one of Murat's finest hours. The French left had good luck as well. Mortier and Etienne Nansouty put Wittgenstein on the retreat, kicking him out of the Blasewitz woods, but were stymied for a time by a spirited defense at the hamlet of Seidnitz. Exhausted, the French drove Wittgenstein back a mile and let St. Cyr's artillery punish the Austrians as they rested before renewing the advance.

The center did not fare so well, since the numbers were against the French and Murat could not flank the French center due to the very terrain that cut off Bianchi. As the day dimmed, neither side had achieved their goals, so Napoleon was resigned to battle it out another day. His opponents were less certain. The muddy, chewed ground made any rapid maneuver impossible, so bold thrusts by the still numerically superior coalition were out of the question. Still, Napoleon was likely to attack, so a defensive victory was possible if it could attrition the French.

The day was further clouded by some disastrous events. Napoleon rode from his position near Redoubt IV around 10:00 AM to see how Ney was faring. Once there, he ordered the town of Reick taken to anchor his line. It took two assaults, the last with bayonets as howitzer shells screamed overhead, but it was taken. Wittgenstein's line retired to the area around Torna. Now satisfied that Ney was clearing the French left, he rode back to Redoubt IV, where a tent and bonfire awaited him.

Along the way, he checked on St. Cyr. The sturdy marshal was having little luck. His first two assaults on Leubnitz failed to overcome Miloradovich's Russians. Napoleon ordered a third assault, back by artillery, but it failed. Dissatisfied, Napoleon rode on. Drenched to the skin, he noticed a horse artillery battery unengaged. He stopped his journey back to Redoubt IV and ordered it forward to fire on an enemy battery. He oversaw their placement and the gunners dealt several shot toward the battery, which was near the village of Racknitz. Then they stopped. Napoleon, water running from his famed hat, went forward to ask why.

He was told the opposing battery had withdrawn. Unwilling to see the gunners idle, he indicated a group of horsemen to the left of the village. His men shifted their tubes and a volley belched forth. Luck was certainly with Napoleon then, because the first shot fell among the Tsar's staff. Moreau, whose horse was in front of Alexander's, was hit. The ball went through his right leg above the knee, through the horse, then pulverized his left leg. The Tsar was horrified. Moreau was taken down and carried to a farmhouse where the Tsar's personal surgeon amputated both his legs. All the while, Moreau puffed on a cigar and said to Alexander, "I am done for, but how good it is to die for the good cause, under the eyes of so great a monarch." He held on for a week and was buried in St. Petersburg.

Napoleon, meanwhile, was not ready to declare victory. He left his command post at Redoubt IV around 4 that afternoon to return to Dresden. In his wake glumly marched a thousand Austrian prisoners, including 3 generals and over sixty other officers. Victorious guards shouldered some

15 Austrian battle flags. Exhausted, the Emperor did little in the way of his usually voluminous paperwork. Changing into dry clothes, he dined with the King of Saxony at 7:00 PM. He planned to finish the double envelopment started that day, ordering Ney recalled to the center with elements of the Young Guard and Guard cavalry backed by Guard artillery, to position himself near Redoubt IV. Beyond that, he ordered a fresh assault by Murat against the coalition left, who were perched atop the heights overlooking Tharandt Defile.

Hot food and wine put Napoleon in a better mood. He and the king reflected on the last two days and the Emperor tended to be magnanimous when it came to the actions of his foes. "Today the rain saved the enemy from complete destruction. I had intended to storm the whole line of heights. However, we shall be in Bohemia before my colleagues (the coalition partners) after all". He expected that, once Murat had breached the enemy left, Vandamme's corps would outflank Wittgenstein, bagging the entire Allied army, or at least enough to force the coalition's defeat. As he considered this he became suddenly melancholy. "I am well satisfied with the results of the day, but when I am not present, things go wrong." The term "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (from the book of Samuel) comes readily to mind.

Shaken to his core by the nearness of the Angel of Death, Alexander returned from seeing Moreau off to find the Coalition leaders in disagreement over their next course of action. Alexander's staff planned a counterattack to separate Mortier and Nansouty from the rest of the French line. Barclay de Tolly was against it, citing the weariness of his artillerymen. They could get the guns down the slope to support the attack, he stated, but if there was a retreat, they would never get them back up through the mud and would be lost. Schwarzenberg reported to the monarchs that food and ammunition was running out. Also, the men had lost so many shoes to the gluey mud that many were barefoot for lack of replacements.

Morale was bad and the Coalition was on the wrong end of the casualty ratio this time around. While the French had suffered some 10,000 casualties, the allies had lost 38,000. The King of Prussia was defiant, eager to renew the conflict, but the rest were cautious. When news came in of Vandamme's success at Pirna, the issue was decided. A retreat was planned while good roads were still available. A small rear guard would keep up appearances and the rest of the army would slip away in three columns. They were aided by a thick mist which formed after the rain ceased, so it was not until 9 the next morning that Napoleon realized his foe had cleared out and he called for a pursuit.

Napoleon's triumph, however, was marred by news of his other forces. Defeats of Oudinot and MacDonald gave Napoleon pause to consider his line of communications to France.

And what of Vandamme? Let's look at his actions in more detail.

FROM VICTORY TO DISASTER

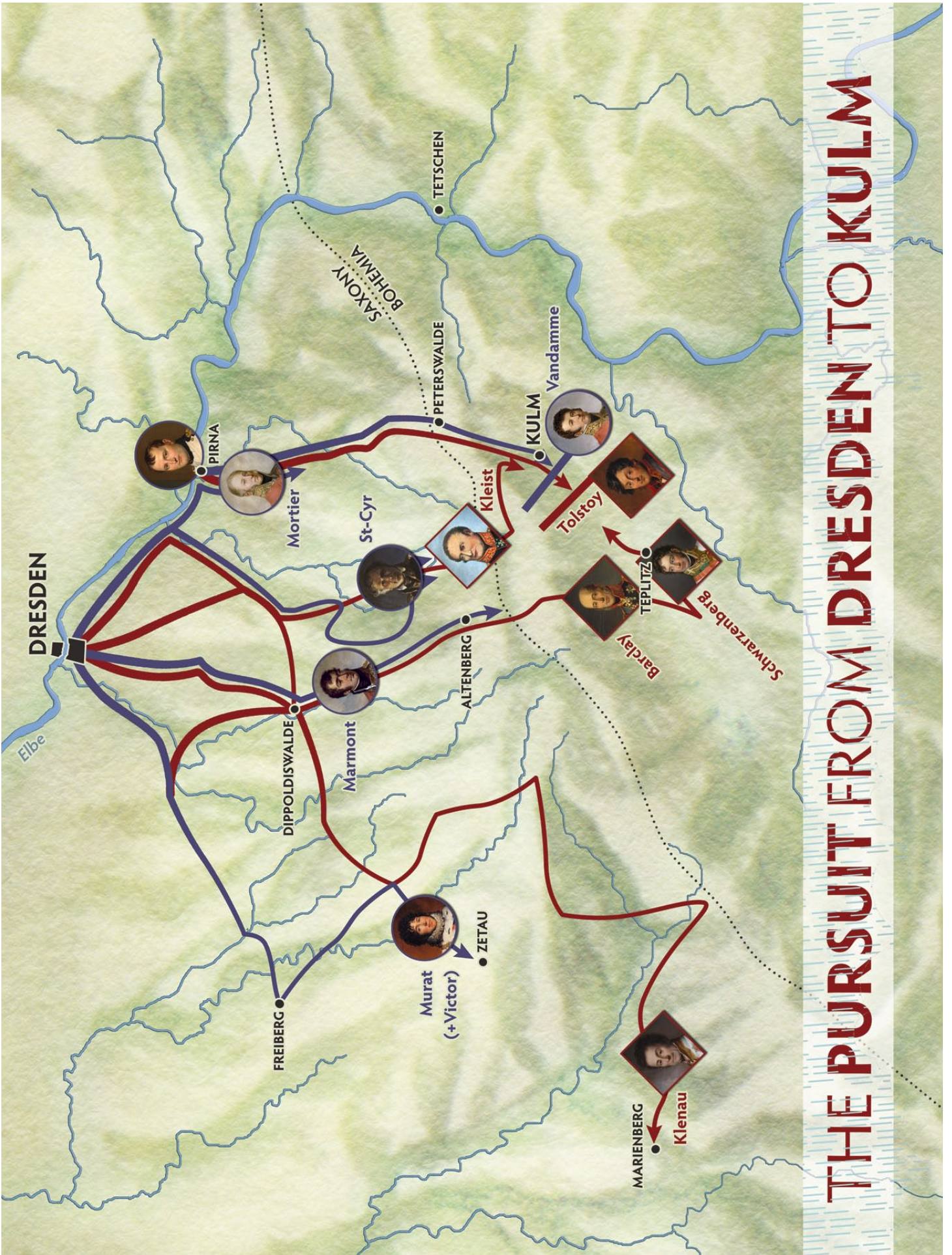


Vandamme looked at his orders from the Emperor and scratched his head. He was supposed to march on the towns of Basra (not the one in Iraq) and Hellendorf, then block the passes and hit the enemy from the rear. He had to accomplish this without his 12-pounder heavy guns, sent to Dresden. He asked for them back, but marched anyway, without waiting for a reply.

It is unknown exactly what engineering resources Vandamme possessed, but he managed a bridgehead across the Elbe and confronted the Russians, who turned out to be the entire Second Corps, along with the 14th Division, a few squadrons of Russian cavalry, including Cossacks, and plenty of Russian cannons, all under Prince Eugen of Wurttemberg, perhaps 13,000 in all. Buoyed by news that the Emperor had arrived at Dresden, the mostly new troops crossed the Elbe with renewed vigor.

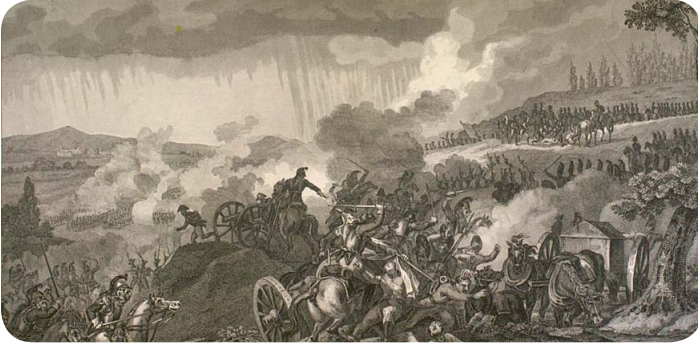
Wurttemberg, on the other hand, was having a case of nerves. Vandamme outnumbered him and help from his superiors would be long in arriving. It was only by chance that Grand Duke Constantine, the Tsar's brother and commander of the Russian cavalry, was marching toward Dresden and graciously lent Wurttemberg the Empress' Own Cuirassier Regiment, led by Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg (Spoiler Alert – he lived to become king of Belgium), but Constantine wanted them back that night.

Wurttemberg extemporized on the spot, realizing that Vandamme's forces would take some time to mass, hampered by the very woody terrain that helped cover their crossing. Setting up his artillery, his gunners banged away at the French as they formed up. Thus peppered, early assaults failed. The sun went down and Prince Eugen had to make a decision. Should he stay or should he go? Withdrawing meant that the retreat route for some, if not all, of the coalition would be blocked. He decided to stay.



THE PURSUIT FROM DRESDEN TO KULM

THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS (NOT)



As noted, a heavy downpour sheeted down as the coalition forces decided to withdraw across the mountains to Bohemia. The roads turned to rivers of mud, making the already-soaked soldiers struggle to take each step. They shouldered their useless muskets and trudged on as Schwarzenberg looked at maps for best routes to the mountain passes.

His escape plan became obsolete as soon as the various commanders realized that the pursuing French were cutting off some routes of the three columns that Schwarzenberg had created for the retreat. The rightmost column, under Barclay de Tolly and von Kleist, veered off and took two roads, the Russians toward Altenberg while the Prussians took the Old Teplitz Road which would have gotten them through the passes by way of Graupen. Fearful of pursuit, the hungry and exhausted troops marched on.

Pursuit was indeed attempted, but, even after Napoleon's boasting, it was piecemeal and tepid. He hustled Adolph Mortier's Young Guard off to Peterswalde, with the idea of joining Vandamme, then Gunner Marmont's VI Corps to Altenberg and finally, Murat's cavalry and Victor's II Corps off Freiberg way. The Emperor got as far as Prina, but, as noted, he began to worry about his rear.

Vandamme, undeterred by rain or Russian artillery, had finally got his entire force, some 37,000 men, across the Elbe, and deployed his forces the morning of August 27th, while Napoleon was fighting at Dresden. Starting on the right was General Joachim-Jerome Quiot du Passage, his brigade detached from the 23rd Division. He guarded the plateau near Prina. Next was the 42nd Infantry Division, formerly of the XIV Corps, commanded by General Regis Barthelemy Mouton-Duvernet, then the 2nd Infantry Division under General Jean-Baptiste Dumonceau, the 1st Infantry Division of General Armand Philippon, assisted by the 1st Light Cavalry Division commanded by General Jean-Baptiste Juvenal Corbineau near Hennerdorf, and finally the brigade of Prince Henry LXI of Kostritz, detached from the 5th Infantry Division, together with the 21st Light Cavalry Brigade under General Martin-Alexis Gobrecht. The last two were in reserve behind 1st Infantry Division.

Backed by 76 pieces of artillery (still, however, without the heavy guns at Dresden), Vandamme was ready to move, except he wasn't sure what was going on around him. Napoleon's continual plan alterations didn't help matters. First it was a clear order, attack the enemy in front of him, but it later changed to advancing to Hellendorf without delay, because Bonaparte was still angling to get around the enemy's rear and attack from there. He was still figuring out what to do with Wurttemberg when a third message arrived on the 28th. This was a complex notice that included not only taking on Wurttemberg and cutting him off, but to clean up the allied supply train, unite with his missing guns, and take up the pontoons at Prina for emplacement elsewhere. Bonaparte did not just want Wurttemberg's equipment, but anything that was rolling along in the rear of the three coalition columns heading, literally, for the hills.

Wurttemberg, for his part, was still valiantly trying to keep Vandamme from blocking the mountain passes through which all that baggage would pass, along with a good number of coalition troops. As mentioned earlier, troops were being sent to augment him. The arrival of elements of the 1st Guards Infantry Division under Major General Baron Gregor von Rosen and the commander of the Guard Corps, General Alesksei Yermolov, was a welcome sight and a sure morale booster as they were elite troops. Three Jaeger regiments and a company of Guard marines added nearly 7,000 men to Wurttemberg's total.

That was the good news. The bad news was the appearance of General "Count" Osterman-Tolstoy (see the sidebar the Vandamme Cover), a brave, but clearly overwhelmed fellow who liked to travel around with a pet white crow and an Eastern Imperial eagle as pets. He was not having one of his better days when he showed up to take overall command of allied right.

Things went downhill on August 27, when he got instructions from Barclay de Tolly to find another way across the mountains if the road via Teplitz was a bad idea. Confused and overwrought, Osterman-Tolstoy gave orders to go overland to catch up to another column heading down the Dippoldiswalde Road. This would likely have opened the door to Vandamme slipping right around the Russians and beating them to the passes to Bohemia.

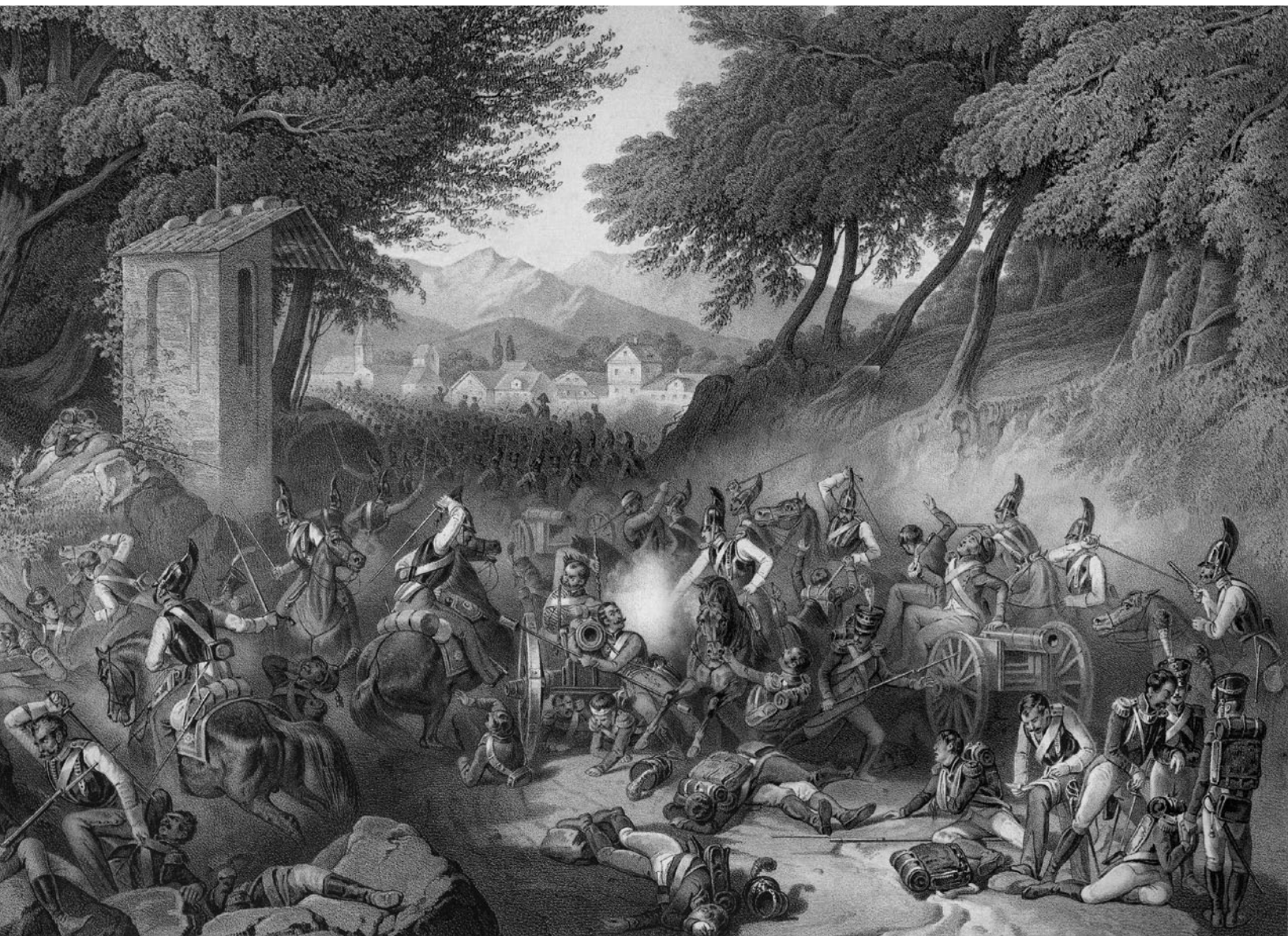
Wurttemberg categorically refused the order, and as he was a first cousin to the Tsar, he could get away with such insubordination, making a strong case for staying and resisting Vandamme. Luckily, he was supported by Yermolov, who waved a very accurate map under Osterman-Tolstoy's nose, showing him exactly what was at stake. It was

a tense confrontation, but the “Count” gave in when Prince Eugen promised to take full responsibility for the outcome. He was helped in his protest by the fact Vandamme hadn’t moved at all on August 27 because he kept getting new orders.

Wurttemberg and company stayed, allowing a lot of the baggage to get into Bohemia. Upon getting his final orders, Vandamme prepared to attack, only to be put off by a spoiling attack near Krieschwitz. It wasn’t until after dark on the 28th that he got as far as Hellendorf, telling Napoleon he had dusted off the Russians and would keep on to Teplitz unless the Emperor disapproved. Napoleon apparently approved because he mentioned Vandamme’s proposed advance to Murat the next day.

NO SUN OF AUSTERLITZ TODAY

The Russians performed a splendid rear-guard retreat all the way to Hellendorf, The rain was replaced by a heavy fog, allowing a Guard Jaeger regiment to slow the French while Wurttemberg put two line regiments in the town to make a fight of it. Vandamme, however, was well forward and saw the action, ordering the brigade of Prince Henry of Reuss to form two columns and assault the town. The Prince had a huge pedigree, but it did him little good. As he was riding with his staff to coordinate the attack a cannonball smashed into his left thigh, blowing it clean off above the knee. He was sent to the rear immediately, but died in agony a few hours later after being borne back to Hennsdorf. Vandamme, not wanting to lose momentum, sent his own chief of staff, General Jean Revest, to take command. It was a sharp action, dragged out longer than Wurttemberg anticipated due to some interference from his superior, who nearly got the whole force in the town bagged by staying too long. Luckily, a well-timed charge by those Empress Ciurassiers gave Revest pause and the infantry withdrew, marching to their next way-point, the town of Nollendorf.



Here is where Vandamme believed something which wasn't true. He assumed, based on earlier correspondence, that St. Cyr (Gouvion, not Carra) and Mortier were on their way to join him, which would have doubled his force. Sadly, St. Cyr got redirected by Napoleon and was moving away from Vandamme, while Mortier was halted with the Emperor at Prina. Murat and Marmont were busy collecting booty rather than pursuit, and so what Vandamme did not realize was that his thrust was unsupported and out of contact with any reinforcement. He was advancing into a vacuum, still following his Emperor's orders.

That night, as the gloom had Osterman-Tolstoy jumping at shadows, he wrote a letter to Emperor Francis of Austria that the French were advancing on Teplitz and his force was inadequate to stop them. This had the desired effect of stampeding Francis, who hastily decamped, taking time to leave word for the Prussian King Frederick William III, who arrived in time to see Francis' dust of departure. The King was usually a mugwump when it came to decision-making. It was his wife, Queen Louisa, who was the decisive one (Napoleon called her "the only real man in Prussia"). Sadly, she had died rather tragically in 1810, but her spirit surely visited her husband at Teplitz, because he suddenly made a decision to send two of his staff to the Russians and implore them to hold the line a bit longer so that not only himself, but their own Tsar, might escape. This electrified Osterman-Tolstoy, who considered that Alexander was also struggling to evade the French.

It was the shot of steel into Osterman-Tolstoy's backbone that was sorely needed. He stopped and arrayed his troops around the villages of Priesten, Straden and Karwitz. There he was joined by the rear-guard under Wurttemberg, and so, a mile or so east of the town of Kulm (modern Chulm in the Czech Republic), they made their stand on that misty morning of August 29.

The terrain was unremarkable, gently sloping meadows surrounded the three tiny villages, themselves mostly made of wooden houses, surrounded by typical gardens with hedges and ditches. The Russian leaders thought that these three hamlets would either break up or channel any French assault. If that failed, then falling back was possible, with some wooded terrain to the south called the Strisowitz Heights, but those heights were quite steep. Otherwise, it was just pasture land, a great place to get lanced if a rout occurred.

Yermolov commanded the left wing around Straden, which had a church and a sawmill. Here he deployed Guard Jaegers and the Murmon Infantry Regiment,

making every building a strongpoint, including the oddly named Leather Chapel. To their rear were the Semenovsky and Izmailovsky Guard Regiments in line formation behind the village, with the Preobrazhensky Guard Regiment as backup. Supporting them were the Guard Light Foot and Heavy batteries, their 24 cannon placed 20 yards or so in front of the Guard Infantry in line behind the village. To the rear of the Semenovsky regiment were four squadrons of the Guard Hussar regiment.

Wurttemberg held the center at Priesten, using some of the Reval Infantry Regiment and the 4th Jager Regiment, with the rest in column behind the village to counterattack as needed. Major General Gotthard August von Helfreich deployed two more regiments, Tenginsk and Tobolsk from 14th Division, also in column. Prince Eugen counted on Light Battery #27 and Position Battery #14, in total 23 guns, positioned in the right rear of the village.

Prince Dimitri Galitzin held the rightmost of the line, stretching from the road that ran through Priesten to the beginning of Karwitz, because his force was all cavalry and needed the open ground to maneuver. His troopers consisted of the Tartar Uhlan Regiment, four squadrons, the Empress Cuirassier Regiment, also four squadrons, and the Illowaiski XII Cossack Regiment. These formed the first line from left to right. In line behind them were 2 squadrons of the Austrian Erzherzog Johann Dragoon Regiment, two squadrons of the Loubny Hussar Regiment and two squadrons of the Sepuchov Uhlan Regiment. Unlimbered before them were the Guard Horse Battery #1, 12 cannon strong.

The total present at that time was a trifle over 15,000 to face Vandamme, who outnumbered them slightly better than two to one. Help, though, was on the way as the King of Prussia went into action.

It was the shot of steel
into Osterman-Tolstoy's
backbone that was
sorely needed.

VANDAMME ATTACKS— DAY ONE

Vandamme was determined to continue as ordered. However, as a fellow said some years back, “It’s what we don’t know that we don’t know” that was his foe. Still, he did not take counsel of his fears and pressed on, his advanced guard rousting the Russian skirmishers out of Kulm. Revest’s brigade was marching through the town with the rest of I Corps in march formation behind him. As Revest formed up his regiments, he placed a battery of 8-pounder guns on the high ground just beyond Kulm to let the Russians know he was in town. Vandamme found a nearby church sitting up a hill and surveyed the landscape from there, which quickly became obscured as the Russians returned fire with the Guard Horse Artillery Battery #1. It was shaping up to be a beautiful day.

Through his spyglass he could clearly see the enemy lines anchored on the little villages. He could also see more troops coming through the defiles behind them wearing Russian green and Austrian white. This gave him the false impression that French troops were in pursuit and that the coalition forces would be trapped between the two forces. He wanted to get things going before the enemy had a chance to rest and organize, so he ordered Revest to advance on Straden.

The brigade deployed in two columns, one for each regiment, 72nd on the left with four battalions and 46th on the right, with only 3 battalions. A bit fuzzy from lack of sleep and training, the troops stepped off in good order behind a skirmish line. They got about halfway to their objective when more Russian guns opened up on them, solid shot rolling and bouncing through their dense formations, smashing men until the iron balls ran out of momentum. Undeterred, the young soldiers kept up the advance and soon the Russian guns sank into the soft ground after rocking back and forth during their cannonade and the aim angled upward so that their fire passed over the ranks.

The reprieve was short-lived. While the French bore down, they were met with smoke-wreathed sheets of flame as the Russian infantry line erupted with musketry, supported by artillery. It was looking bad. General Revest, his horse shot from under him, went forward to keep the men going. They closed on Straden and shoved the Russians back until the Semenovskiy Guard Regiment came forward to counterattack, throwing the French back out of town.



Revest reformed his brigade, his face streaked with blood (not his own). As he did, the 42nd Division arrived and began to form up into a column for each battalion of its three regiments. It was led by General Duvernet, a veteran from all the way back to Arcola in 1796, as Revest moved forward again, heading for the area between Straden and Priesten. The tight columns were perfect for keeping his new recruits in formation, but also perfect for the Russian gunners. While they prepared to move out, Vandamme's cavalry arrived and deployed to cover the French left. Vandamme had more troops coming, but he couldn't wait. If Marmont or Mortier weren't on the other side of the marching coalition columns, he had to finish the battle before they could properly integrate with the Russian position.

Revest's depleted brigade went in again, finding the town burning around them and empty of Russians, who had retired to form another line not far beyond. Pouring through blazing Straden, they went in, but were met by another storm of bullets and canister that blew them backwards. The young men scampered away to find shelter behind the town as smoke obscured them from view.

Duvernet had no better luck. His advance was met by the Tenguinsk and Estonia regiments, plus the elite Grand Duchess Catherine Battalion. Behind them marched the Tobolsk and Tschernigov regiments. Shouting their defiance the lead regiments let go a volley, accompanied by a blast of canister delivered by Light Battery #27 and Position Battery #14. 23 tubes in total. Hundreds fell. Duvernet led them back behind their own guns, where he and Revest set about putting the scattered men back in order for another try.

As they reformed, Philippon's first brigade arrived around two in the afternoon, his second still down the road a piece. Vandamme was in a dilemma. He needed the rest of his corps to make a decent fight of it and get rid of Prince Eugen, but time was not on his side as more men were arriving beyond the three villages. He rode down to meet with the three leaders present. He explained the situation and they nodded in agreement. Vandamme wanted a preparatory barrage before another attempt would be made as Philippon arrayed his brigade. Another battery was unlimbered and the combined guns, under the direct command of the corps' chief of artillery Brigadier Pouilly de Baltus, went into action around three.

It was a devastating barrage, meant to strike fear into the Russians. It did not succeed. Ranks closed about the mangled bodies of their fallen fellows and they tightly gripped their muskets in anticipation of another French assault. The barrage lasted some 20 minutes and then the French came on, stronger than ever with 3 brigades advancing toward the burning town. Revest went into a column two battalions

across, braving the flames toward the Sawmill and Priesten until they hit the line of Russian Guard infantry. Revest's men were temporarily halted until his right column, finished their job working over the defenders at the Sawmill and turned to help their fellows by unleashing a number of volleys. It was too much and the valiant Guards began to retire.

General Yermolov was having none of it. He stood fast and turned them back around. They formed up and presented a glittering line of bayonets as they roared back into Revest's men, sending them reeling back. Duvernet and Philippon's columns pushed on to Priesten. Duvernet, his division now assembled, went forward with elements of three regiments moving forward with the rest back in reserve. He moved from Revest's left between the two villages, sending his cannons to join Balthus's growing artillery park. Attempting to sever the Russian line so it could be defeated in detail, Duvernet's men swerved to strike between Priesten and Straden.

This left Philippon's 1st Brigade to march directly at Priesten. He sent his 12th Infantry to back up Duvernet's attack, the rest making for the village. Brigadier Etienne-François-Raymond Pouchelon led off this attack at the head of 7th Legere Regiment, trying to smother the village by flanking each side with a battalion while two went straight in to clear out the Russian Jager companies defending in the houses along with some of the Revel Infantry Regiment. This they did, only to emerge into the sights of the formed regiments and artillery behind who opened up with a devastating volley that so shredded the French that they were unable assemble to assault that line and had to retreat back to a safe place to regroup.

Wurttemberg chose this opportunity to roll up two batteries to the left of Priesten into the gap left by the retreating Legere troops and hit Duvernet and Pouchelon from the flank with a barrage of canister that gouged great holes in their ranks, forcing them back. Vandamme was not one to quit so easily, though, as Philippon's 2nd Brigade arrived under General Raymond de Montesquiou, Duke of Ferzensac. First, those pesky cannon had to be silenced. The fresh brigade would do it, but he needed to get the rest of his command calmed down and ready for another go before it got dark.

The Russians were fast becoming a spent force. All the foot units had seen action and taken losses. No reserves remained for what Wurttemberg was sure would be another attack. He went to Yermolov and begged him for the uncommitted two battalions of the Izmailovsky Guard Infantry Regiment to go into the line to stop Vandamme. Yermolov was firm. He was not going to spare these two battalions. Wurttemberg persisted. Yermolov became enraged and shouted at Eugen: "The Prince is a German and doesn't give a damn if the

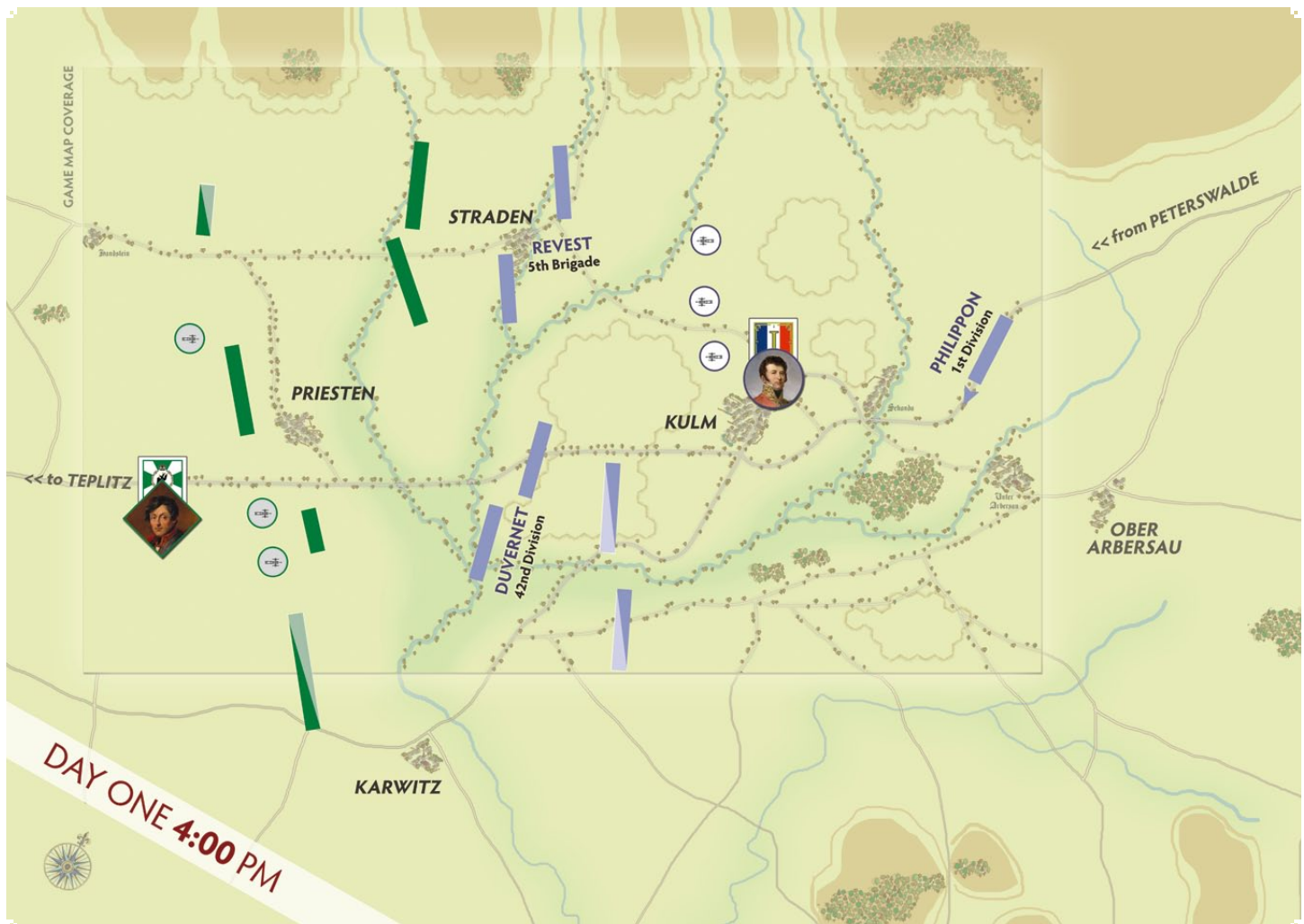
Russian Guard survive or not: but my duty is to save at least something of his guard for the emperor.”

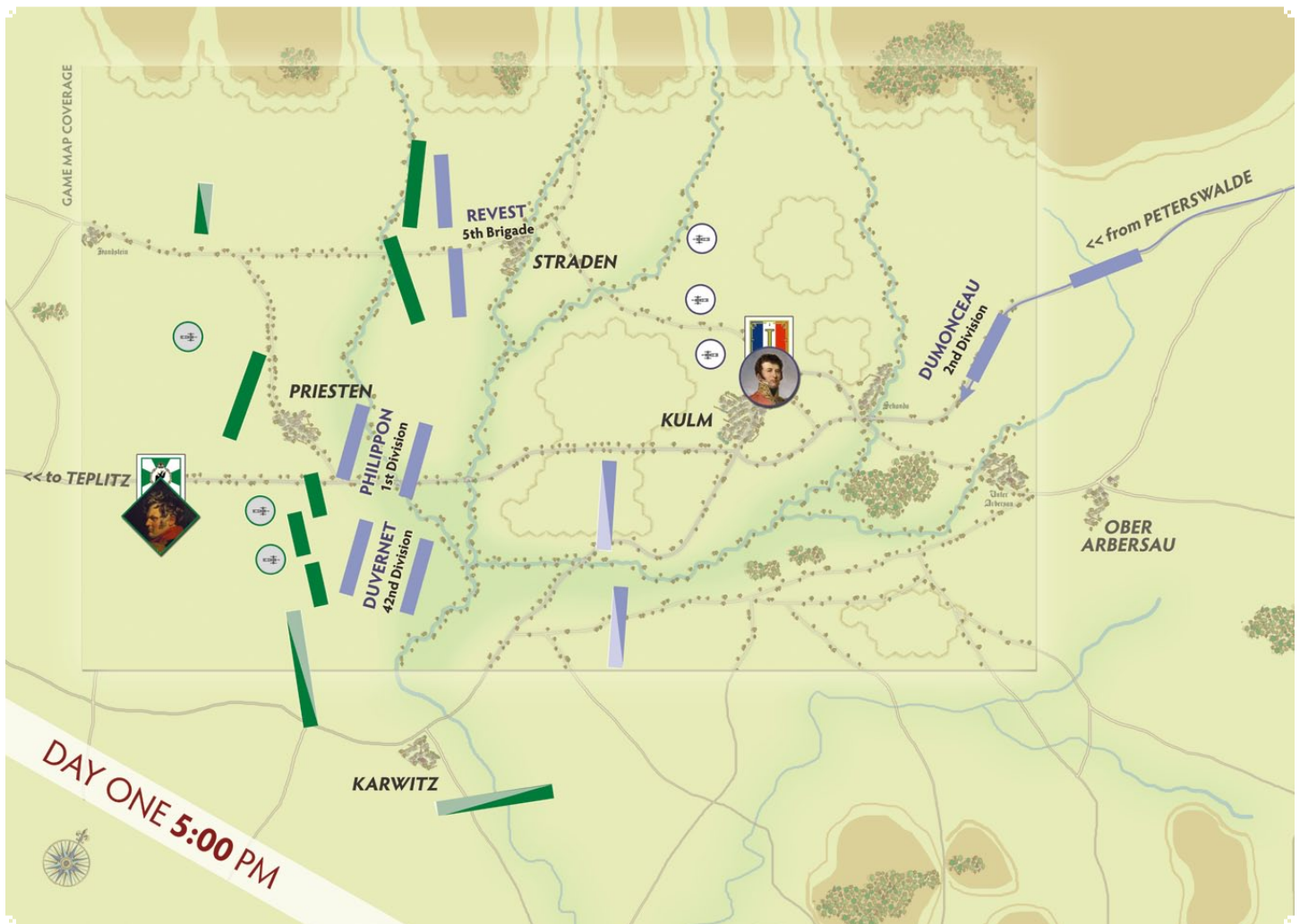
Württemberg would not be dissuaded. Turning his back on the choleric Yermolov and waving his hand in dismissal, he went over to Osterman-Tolstoy and entreated him to override Yermolov. The excitable general had been viewing the battle and was inclined to agree as he saw more and more French columns snaking down the road to Kulm, so he gave the order and the last Russian Imperial Guard Infantry units marched forward, muddy, some with their feet wrapped in rags after the deep mud had sucked off their boots, but determined to make a fight of it.

At 4:00 PM the French advanced once more. This time it was Philippon's Second Brigade, 17th Infantry Regiment (four battalions) and 36th Infantry Regiment (only two of its battalions), directly for Priesten. Duvernet also sent his 2nd Brigade. The two columns consisted of 16th Provisional Infantry Regiment's two battalions against the Leather Chapel and the Sawmill, while two full strength regiments, 76th Infantry and 96th Infantry tried a northern flanking maneuver through a wooded area. Wurttemberg saw their maneuver and rushed Light Battery #14 and

Position Battery #27 west of Priesten where their intense bombardment halted, then drove back this attempt. The direct advance on the Leather Chapel and Sawmill fared no better. They were halted, then driven back as two Guards regiments, the Semonovski and Preobragensky, rushed them.

Württemberg shuffled his artillery around in order to cover the next assault on Priesten, held by the remains of Shakhovskoy's 3rd Division and Helfreich's 14th Division. He rolled the guns up just as Fezensac's brigade closed. It was another slaughter. Muskets and canister turned the leading elements of the French into red ruin. The brigade faltered, giving time for the Izmailovsky Guards' fresh battalions to fix bayonets and charge, supported by whatever units were on either side. Horrific specters splashed with mud and the gore of their compatriots literally screamed out of the gun smoke and slammed into the raw French troops. That was the last straw. The young recruits broke and ran, not stopping until they were safely beyond their own cannon. The French guns roared at the Russians and one of their rounds bounced all the way to Osterman-Tolstoy, ripping away part of his left arm. Still conscious, he was borne to safety, pontificating: "I am satisfied. This is the price I paid for the honor of commanding the Guards."





Osterman-Tolstoy entrusted Yermolov with his plans to keep the French from destroying his command until help arrived and Yermolov carried them out as ordered.



For a time the artillery of the two sides were content to blast each other. Vandamme, still not willing to give it up, sent a series of small probing attacks from his right to try to keep the Russians from getting any real relief while his men tried to eat and recover from the rough handling they received assaulting the Russian positions. Seeing that attacking the Russian left and center wasn't doing anything except killing a lot of his men, the French general decided to try the Russian right, reasoning that the Russians had to be weak

somewhere. He put together an assault force consisting of whatever was still in good order. It was a strong force. Four battalions of Pouchelon's 7th Legere Regiment, part of newly arrived First Brigade of General Jean-Baptiste Dumonceau's 2nd Infantry Division. This was the four battalions of the 13th Legere, placing themselves to the right of their brother Legere units, with a brigade from Corbineau's cavalry division on each flank.

They went into action around 5:00 PM. Just as they crossed the Sernitzbach stream, they were forced to change formation to battalion-sized squares as they saw a mass of Russian cavalry, so far uncommitted, moving in their direction. Corbineau was having none of that, and brought forth the rest of his division and moved on the Russians. Dismayed, the Russians retired and the Legere troops reformed into columns and pushed on. Seemingly cowed, the Russian fire was subdued, and the French soldiers got by the now blazing agglomeration of wooden houses.

The Russian fire had slackened due to lack of ammunition when two companies of the Preobragensky Guard Regiment arrived. In a last ditch attempt to stop the French, the Russians made a bayonet charge, again yelling

like madmen, but they didn't have sufficient weight. It was looking bad, but the action took a turn for the better when, after carefully threading the muddy mountain pass at Graupen, up rode Nikolai Ivanovich Depreradovich, who was the head of the Russian Guard cavalry with news that a large Russian force of all arms was on its way.

According to an eyewitness, he approached the Russian Guard Dragoons who were lined up in the rear and ordered them to charge. Nobody moved because he was unrecognized. He had to show off his chest full of bling before they galloped off, singly at first, and then the whole regiment. The Guard Lancers soon followed, to the protests of Yermolov because he had not ordered the maneuver. The effect was immediate. Corbineau's men were awed and retired out of musket range, leaving the Lancers to maneuver around the French flank. The Legere let off one volley and rushed after their cavalry, who covered them as best they could. The Russian cavalry pursued for a bit, to be sent back by artillery. The Lancers were the most dogged, losing a third of their regiment before retiring.

Vandamme finally had enough. His men were tired and hungry. The butcher's bill was high. Both sides had lost around 5,000 men. On top of that, some 600 French were taken prisoner. Over half the Russian cavalry losses were from Guards units. Less than 10,000 of the original defenders remained, while Vandamme had twice as many left. Vandamme's report that morning to Napoleon of his dire situation had gone unanswered. Lack of food and ammunition was making a second day of fighting dubious unless relief arrived. The general had that sinking feeling that no help was coming and the chance of glory was fading with the sunlight.

THE TABLES TURN—DAY ONE'S NIGHT

Having broken contact with the pursuing French about the time Vandamme was making his next-to-the-last assault, Lieutenant General Emil von Kleist's command was trudging down the old Teplitz road and were starting to arrive at Furstenwalde. It was there that the battle of Kulm turned, as Kleist was approached by an aide-de-camp of King Frederick, who waved the Prussians onward to get through the Teplitz valley to help out the Russians who were hard-pressed by the French. As night fell, another officer from the king arrived, just as Kleist was finishing a reconnoiter of the best way to cross the hills to succor Osterman-Tolstoy and Wurtemberg. This colonel had orders from the king to head south-eastward to Nollendorf.

Based on information coming in, there was a chance he would appear in the French rear. Kleist's ride around the area convinced him that the man was correct, and he was happy to follow the new orders. Further, his chief of staff Lieutenant-Colonel Karl von Grolmann, a student of the campaigns of Frederick the Great, knew this landscape from his readings. It was a gamble, but worth it if Napoleon's pursuit was headed in the wrong direction, as seemed likely. Historians still debate if the outcome of Kleist's march was by accident or design but march he did.

More good news was received at Hanstein. Barclay de Tolly and Schwarzenberg had arrived in the area, soon to be joined by the Tsar himself. The only holdout was the Kaiser of Austria, taking a wait and see attitude at Laun. For the coalition, the eagles were gathering. At Kulm, meanwhile, both sides camped amid the results of the day's battle, the night air rent by the screams of the wounded, many losing limbs with only liquor as an anesthetic as the surgeon plied his bone saw. The area stank from blood, powder, burning buildings and offal. A meal could only be eaten in darkness as the two battlelines were so close that a fire could cause your meal to be interrupted by shot or cannon ball.

Amid this hellscape, Vandamme and his officers held a council. The prospects of relief seemed more remote than ever, and nobody had a good idea of the best way to get out of the mess they were in, being unfamiliar with the terrain. After this consultation, it was decided to hold on and hope the enemy were not significantly reinforced before Napoleon could send them relief. After all, he knew where Vandamme was, why wasn't a column sent?

Officers were sent ahead to Wurtemberg, since Osterman-Tolstoy was incapacitated, and a quick tour of the battlefield in the dim pre-dawn hours allowed a plan to formulate. When Barclay de Tolly arrived, the solution had jelled. The Russian troops would pin Vandamme around Straden and Priesten, while newly arriving Austrian divisions under Field Marshal Count Hieronymus von Colloredo-Mansefeld and Field Marshal Friedrich Freiherr von Bianchi would maneuver around the French left and strike from the vicinity of Karwitz, with the Russian cavalry in support. At some point Kleist would show up in the French rear and bag the lot of them.

Scheduled to start the action at 6:00 AM, the counterattack was delayed a bit while the Austrians maneuvered into position. The shattered Russian Guard infantry were pulled back and sent into reserve status, being replaced by the 2nd Guard Division and the 1st Grenadier Division. This gave the coalition forces roughly 50,000 men all told, backed by 130 cannon. Kleist's arrival would further boost the numbers if he would arrive.

Meanwhile, Vandamme, unaware of these developments, felt buoyed as the rest of his corps had now arrived, giving him 34,000 men and 84 guns. He arrayed his divisions in line from Bohnmisch-Neudorf to the Sawmill. From the left, it was Dumonceau's 1st Brigade under Brigadier François Martin Dunesme, four battalions of the 13th Legere Regiment in the first line and four battalions of the 25th Infantry Regiment in the second. An eight-gun battery covered their front. Two companies of the 13th Legere were in the village itself.

To the right rear of Dunesme sat Corbineau's 1st Light Cavalry Division, and behind them were the reserve, between Kulm and Schanda, consisting of Quiot's Brigade with the two battalions of the 55th Infantry Regiment and the four battalions of the 85th Infantry Regiment lined up across the Teplitz highway. On Quiot's right were the squadrons of Gobrecht's 21st Light Cavalry Brigade with Revest's badly mauled brigade to their rear.

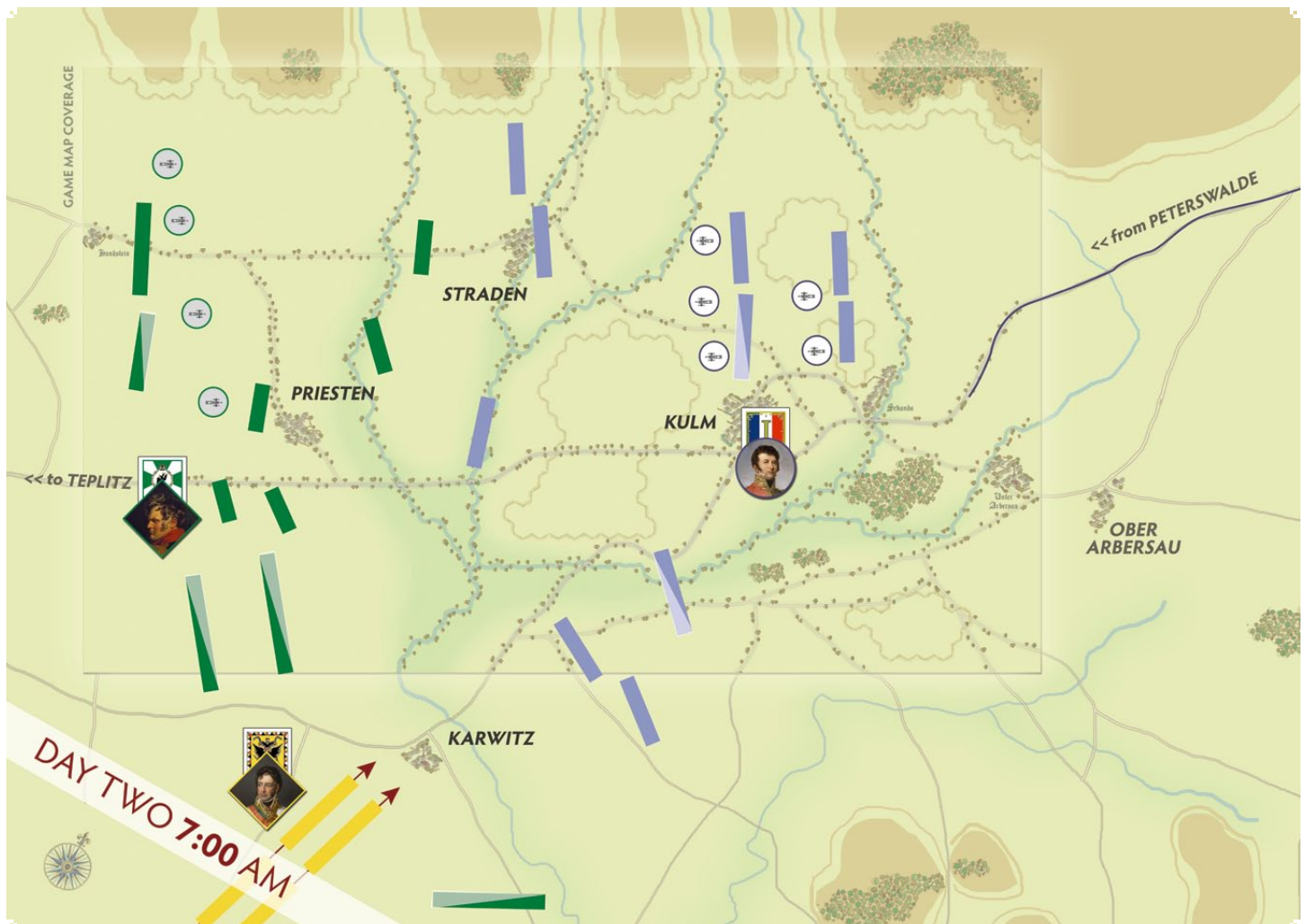
On Gobrecht's right, Dumonceau's 2nd Brigade was formed, under the command of Brigadier Pierre Doucet. During the advance on Kulm, Vandamme had detached a battalion of Doucet's brigade, together with 300 sappers and two guns

to Aussig, to prepare to lay a pontoon bridge there, lined up with the three battalions of the 57th Infantry Regiment and the two battalions of the 51st Infantry Regiment to the left, moving later to the outskirts of Kulm.

Sometime around 6:00 AM, Vandamme's reserve artillery finally showed up. This welcome addition of six heavy 12-pounder cannon and two howitzers plus a horse battery of eight cannon were placed in front of Gobrecht's squadrons. On Corbineau's right Baltus had now formed a gun line containing over 40 cannon and to the right of these again were arrayed Phillipon's 1st and Duvernet's 42nd Divisions, extending the line to Straden and on to the Sawmill.

DAY TWO— WHERE THE EAGLES GATHER

The night sky slowly faded with the coming dawn, leaving a ghoulish landscape of smoldering ashes from the burned villages and the miasma drifting from the stench of rotting offal, the pungent ash on the ground, mingled with ordure. Occasional pot shots crackled along the lines. Unwilling to let the initiative slip from his grasp and unaware of the nighttime reinforcements, Vandamme attacked before the



coalition troops could begin their assault. Based on assumptions from the day before, he considered the enemy left to be the weakest and began there with Duvernet diving in at the quick march.

Softened up by French artillery, the opposing units of the Volhynie and Kremenchug regiments were stunned by the ferocity of the attack and fell back. Duvernet's guns were situated on the heights and were able to continually pour shells into the retreating ranks as they scurried for the safety of the Sawmill. It did them little good. The wounded and the skulkers dove inside as round shot screamed all about them, only to find that their sanctuary was their funeral pyre as either bursting shells or sparks from musket fire set the mill ablaze, incinerating those inside.

The only Russian reserve was the battered 1st Guards Division. Wearily they shouldered their muskets and advanced while artillery was positioned to support them. It was good, but not good enough to stop Duvernet. He would not be denied after yesterday's repulse. He could not see far because in the center a fierce artillery duel was throwing up huge clouds of smoke. Meanwhile the Austrians were about to step off when an aide from Barclay de Tolly implored them to help out the coalition left. Bianchi detached a brigade led by General Phillip August Hessen-Homburg, along with its organic artillery, to redress the sagging northern part of the line.

The brigade marched quickly toward the left, mostly obscured until they drew near and were spotted by the French gunners who were raking over the Russians. The gunners turned their muzzles toward the Austrians and laid into them. Hessen-Homburg urged his men to get moving away from this rain of death and put his own artillery next to the Russians, making a rare attempt at counter-battery fire, something most generals of the period thought was a waste of time because they wanted juicier targets like packed infantry columns or swarms of cavalry.

Hessen-Homburg arranged two-battalion frontages for his regiments, sending a third battalion from each into the woods to try to outflank Vandamme, while the Austrians took up their position to the left of the Russians. Together, the two allied forces moved against Duvernet. The French gunners were indifferent to the nationalities and blasted away. As

the green and white uniformed soldiers advanced, they came within musket range and the French artillery switched to canister. Firing into the advancing lines, the first ranks of the coalition troops spun and twitched as they were struck, but their comrades stepped over the bodies and kept doggedly forward, bringing down their muskets for the assault. The grim, silent ranks unnerved the French, who retreated in disarray as even the cannoneers packed up and retired. The Russian left was saved. It was time to address the right flank.

Finally organized, the rest of the Austrian line was moving along. Colloredo's 1st Austrian Division had actually moved too far to the allied right, but that was fine. From his vantage point, Colloredo saw a fair amount of masking terrain, so he asked Barclay de Tolly for leave to get around Vandamme's left. Barclay was a bit sanguine about sending the entire Austrian contingent over there, leaving a gap that might be exploited by any French still hanging around Bohmisch-Neudorf. That was solved by leaving the rest of Bianchi's division to cover that position.

Vandamme, meanwhile was still hanging around Kulm, watching the Karwitz situation and was about to order an advance there when he got word around 9:00 AM that there was something going on to the left. With his old friend General Dumonceau in tow, he rode up to a higher elevation and uncased his spyglass. After a bit of searching he could see figures appearing around the side of the Strisowitz heights. It was Colloredo. His appearance suddenly made Vandamme realize that he was overstretched.

Immediately, he sent Dumonceau to collect his division from the Bohmisch-Neudorf area and pull it back to the high ground south of Kulm in an arc that ended at Unter Arbesau. Detaching guns from Baltus' artillery park, he barely got them unlimbered when he saw enemy guns poking forward from Karwitz. Dunesme's brigade was the last unit pulling back. Hoping for a safe retreat, Dunesme's men were set upon by the Empress Cuirassier Regiment, the Tartar Uhlan Regiment and the Illowaiski Cossack Regiment. Led by Major General Vladimir Knorring, who was under orders to permit the French no relief on any part of the front, they forced the French to stop and start forming squares by battalion, blazing away with muskets at the packed formations of horsemen.

Instead of trying to break the squares, Knorring's cavalry went for the nearest artillery, butchering the members of 13th Legere that were trying to protect the gunners. Then came a determined counter-charge by the 3rd Light Cavalry Brigade. This gave the Russians

It was good, but
not good enough to
stop Duvernet.

pause, and since there was no infantry support, they began to peel away, covered by Bianchi's brigade artillery. Russian guns soon came up and the high ground to the northeast of Bohmisch-Neudorf was turned into a line of flame-spouting cannon. The French wanted no parts of it and stayed put. To keep them guessing while Colloredo maneuvered, Barclay de Tolly ordered an assault along the whole line, trying to keep the French pinned. All along the line, the French were pressed, with more cavalry of the 1st and 2nd Cuirassier divisions pushed forward a bit south of Kulm.

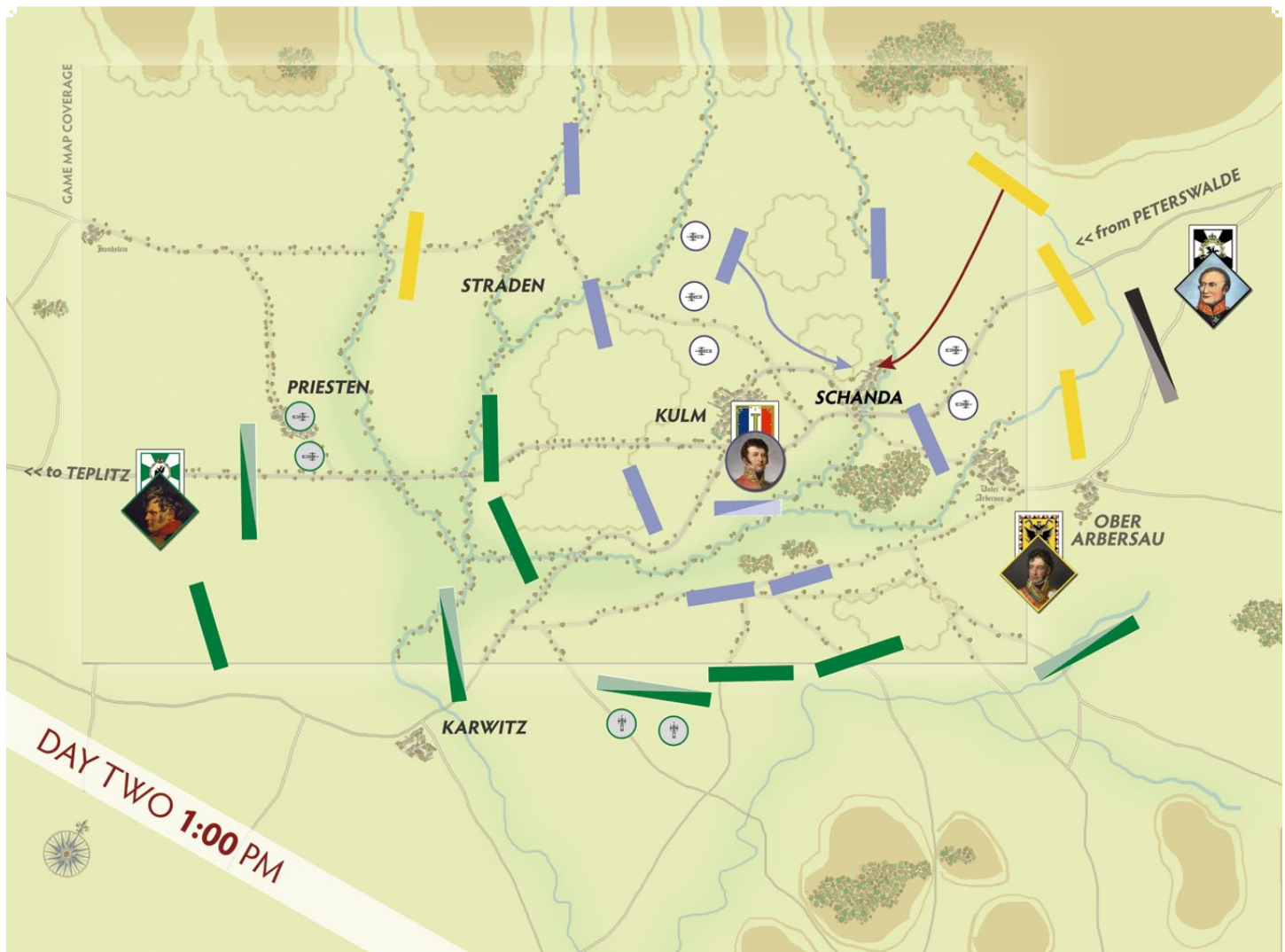
DAY TWO— THE PRUSSIANS ARE COMING



Vandamme could only try to maintain a cohesive line while being pressed on all sides. Colloredo, however, stopped his advance as he heard a cannonade over Tellniz way. Unsure of its origin, he hedged his bets. This was just before noon.

Vandamme heard it also, from an odd direction, and knew it had to be one of his fellow generals come to succor him from his increasingly dire predicament. He was chagrined to learn from an aide, who rode up to tell him that the Prussians were in their rear. Realizing that he could easily be surrounded and his entire corps destroyed, Vandamme looked at his options. He knew he could not get past the solid wall of Austrians and Russians that seemed to grow wider as time went on. He felt his only chance was to retreat back the way he came, straight through the Prussians if necessary. He got his leaders together and hastily dealt out a series of orders that entailed a fighting withdrawal and delay tactics to allow his main force to strike the Prussians while keeping Barclay de Tolly at bay until the road was clear. So, how did those Prussians end up in that position?

Kleist's men took to road to Tellniz early on the morning of August 30. A small advance guard arrived there around 11:30 AM. These were the Silesian Hussar regiment, 2 battalions of 7th Reserve Infantry Regiment and Horse Battery #7. Following on their heels were the 9th through 12th Infantry Brigades, a reserve cavalry brigade and the rest of his artillery. From his vantage point, Vandamme could see none of this. He just knew that the path behind him had to be the easiest route and planned accordingly.



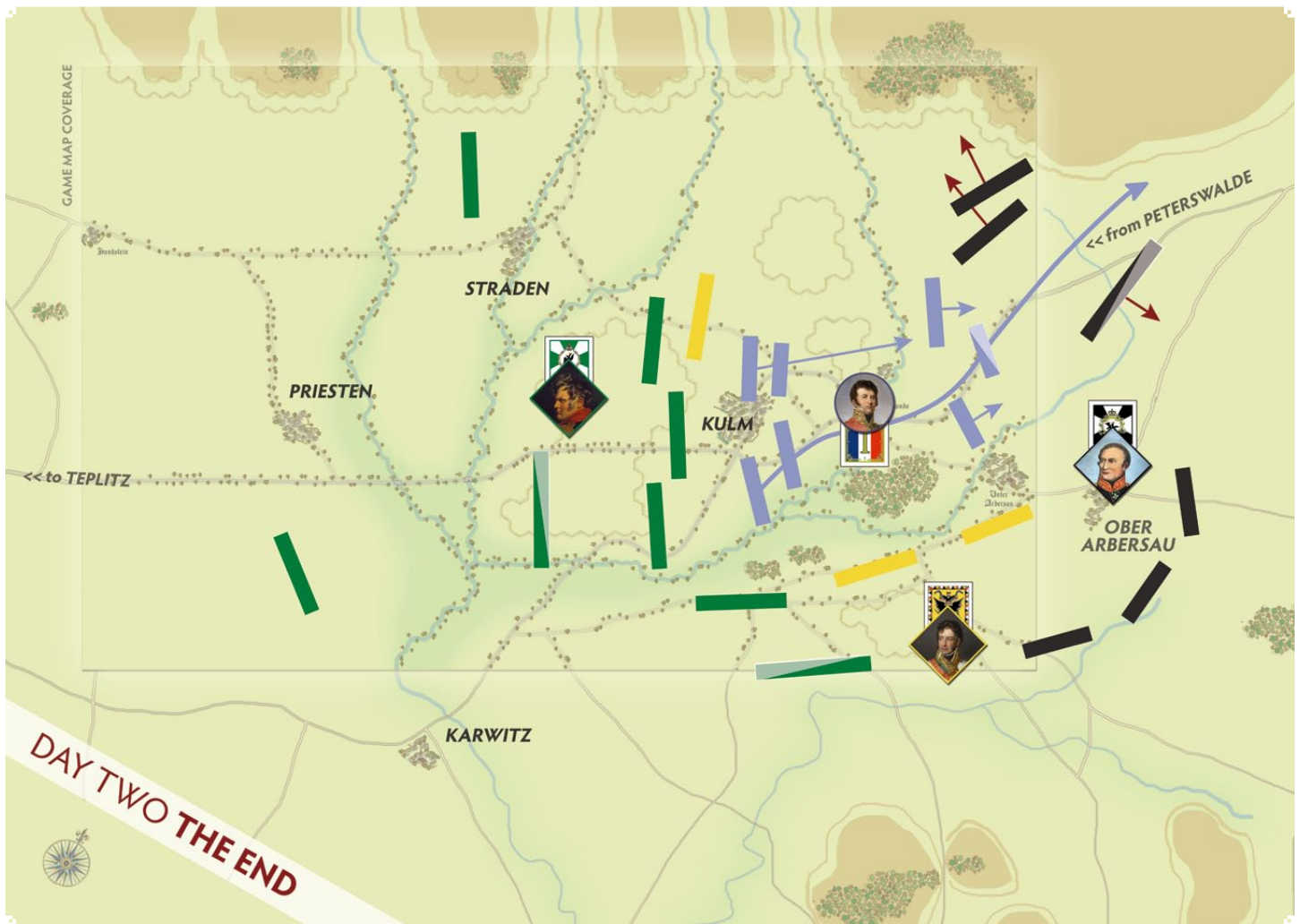
First, he sent the 1st Light Cavalry Division to keep Knorring's cavalry from getting too frisky while keeping Corbineau's brigade in reserve to counter any breakthrough. He sent Quiot to support Dunesme in the Unter-Arbesau area that Colloredo was threatening, then pushed the 2nd Brigade of Duvernet's division towards the Prussians, sending what was left of Revest right behind. Philippon was ordered to pull back slowly before executing a turning maneuver to confront the Prussians. Two hours from the arrival of the Prussians, the brigade under brigadier Charles-August Creutzer was just beginning their assault.

Vandamme was unable to immediately check on that situation as he noticed another column of Prussians heading to Ober-Arbesau on another vector to hit the French rear. This was something that had to be stopped so he called upon the already pressed Dunesme to see to it, supported by Gobrecht's cavalry. Leaving the 13th Legere to hold off Colloredo, he marched the 25th Infantry to face this new threat with Gobrecht's troopers on their left. Gobrecht saw the Silesian Hussars who were on the right flank of

the Prussians and his lancers set upon them. Lancers and Chasseurs broke up the Hussars, sending them flying past their own artillery which was unlimbered but now blocked. Too late, the French bore down upon them as well, killing a large number of them before they could flee towards approaching infantry.

This was the Prussian 10th Brigade, under Major General Georg von Pirch (better known to gamers as Pirch I, since there were two in the Prussian army and both were at Waterloo). Gobrecht sent back word that somebody was needed to stop this advance, so Vandamme took part of Creutzer's men along with three cannon to plug that gap. Gobrecht danced around in front of Pirch until Creutzer got in place. It was a cheap trade-off, at best. Vandamme wanted badly to leave Barclay de Tolly's force behind and concentrate on getting past the Prussians, but things weren't going quite right, so he rode into the fray and took charge of the rear guard; even though he was sacrificing men and material on one hand, his aim was to save much more on the other, his own safety be damned.





As the coalition forces closed in, cohesion began to fray. In some instances the advance was too much for the youth in the ranks and they bolted, throwing away anything that would slow them down and literally headed for the hills, clawing their way up and out. Others formed squares until it was no longer feasible to hold them together. Most of them managed to hold it together and retreat in good order. Pouchelon's 1st Brigade stood fast behind Baltus's cannon line until Kulm itself was clear, then they went about face and followed the rest.

Dunesme and Quiot continued to hold the coalition troops in check around Ober-Abersau, helped by Gobrecht, aided by the 2nd Brigade of Corbineau's division. They rode in and about and spying more Prussians (it was the 10th Silesian Landwehr Regiment), charged into their midst when they saw a battery of heavy guns being unlimbered. Lances couched, they smashed the Silesians aside, causing them to rout. This was the break Vandamme was looking for. He ordered an assault with Quiot and Revest to open a path through the Prussian line.

It was timely, as the Silesians ran into their brethren of the 2nd Silesian Regiment. Seeing the blue lines approaching and being disordered by the routing troops, that regiment broke and they ran for it, littering the field with dropped muskets. Prince Friedrich Wilhelm Heinrich August, the king's cousin, tried to turn them around, appealing to their patriotism: "Whoever has a true Prussian heart, follow me!" It didn't work. Some men remembered their honor and stood with him, but it wasn't enough to stop the French, who were too enraged and desperate to escape to be put off.

Vandamme had his hole, now it was time for his corps to race through it. The Prussians were trying desperately to close the gap, so once more Vandamme was forced to call upon Corbineau's division to spearhead the breakout attempt. Corbineau was up to the challenge and gathered his men for a flying wedge directly through the gap. He saw a battery of Prussian guns unlimbered before him but his men did not stop. A volley of canister tore through them and then they were among the guns with swords rising and falling among the panicked gunners. This started a chain reaction as the gunners rushed into infantry still deploying, causing them to stop and form squares.

They were slow to do so, however, and the French got in among them before the hedgehog formations could be completed and the whole mass suddenly melted away—many again, literally heading

for the hills to escape the sabers of Corbineau's troopers. He recalled them and held them ready to charge again if need be as streams of French infantry rushed past. It was the final act in Vandamme's plan and went very well.

It was around 3:30 PM that the trap closed again, this time for good, with Vandamme still inside the ring of coalition forces. It is estimated that some 10,000 were able to make good their escape, while another 8,000 would not rise again. That left some 7,000 as prisoners of war. Coalition casualties were equally severe, over 9,000 dead, mostly Russians. Dunesme was one of those 8,000, killed during the retreat from Ober-Arbesau. Quiot was captured and Vandamme was surrounded while still trying to get men out of the encirclement. Some accounts have him captured by Cossacks and nearly killed, but he was spared and brought before Tsar Alexander and his brother.



While this account may also be apocryphal, it seems most in keeping with Vandamme's truculent nature.

Tsar Alexander was not in a good mood, considering his men had taken most of the casualties, and the fact that he was still angry over the 1812 campaign and the burning of Moscow, so it is no surprise that he took his vitriol out on Vandamme, stripping him of his sword, calling him a brigand. That was the wrong thing to say to a man who had no problem confronting Napoleon, and a man who had fought the Russians in 1805 and 1807. He looked at the Tsar of all the Russias and said with equal ardor: "Nobody has ever reproached me with having assassinated my own father." You see, Tsar Paul I, the son of Catherine the Great, who was best known for undoing most of his mother's policies and making nice with the French after his alliance with England fell apart, had been assassinated by conspirators who apparently thought they had Alexander's blessing, except his blessing didn't include killing his father, just unseating him.

So ended Vandamme's role in the 1813 campaigns, which continued to go downhill, culminating in the battle of Leipzig that forced Napoleon to retreat back to France, where he would fight a losing battle to keep his throne the following year. Vandamme was released on the restoration of the monarchy in France, but did not get along with the Bourbons and stuck to his home in Cassel until Napoleon's return, when he returned to command, being at Wavre during the battle of Waterloo. This time the Bourbons considered him persona non grata and kicked him out of France. He lived for a while in Belgium, then visited the United States, finally being allowed to return to Cassel in 1819. He wrote his memoirs and died in 1830. One wonders if he argued with St. Peter at the Pearly Gates.

Andy Nunez played his first wargame in 1975 (Avalon Hill's Kriegspiel). A graduate of the University of Maryland, Andy recently retired from the state of Maryland after 30 years and now works part time at the local senior center, splitting his time between writing books and editing Against the Odds. He has had numerous articles published along with seven books about life and lore on the Eastern Shore.

