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An account of the battle fought near Asfiern, on the Marshfield, on the 21st and 22d of May, 1809, between the Archduke Charles of Austria, Generalissimo of the imperial Austrian armies, and the Emperor Napoleon, Commander in Chief of the French and allied armies.

The Emperor Napoleon having, after some sanguinary engagements near Abensburg, Hassen, and Dinzlinzen, in which the fortune of war favored the Austrians, so as to force the French garrison at Ratisbon to surrender, succeeded in cutting off the left wing of the Austrian army, and driving it back to Landshut, & then advancing by Eckmuhl with a superior corps of cavalry, taking the road of Eglofsheim, and forcing to retreat those Austrian corps that were posted on the heights of Leikepoint and Talmassing, the Archduke on the 23d of April crossed the Danube, near Ratisbon, and joined the corps of Bellegrade, who had opened the campaign by several successful affairs in the Upper Palatinate, had reached Amberg, Neamark, Hemian, & had by this time approached Stadt-am Hof, in order to execute his immediate junction with the archduke.

The Austrian army had taken a position near Cham, behind the river Regen, which was watched by some of the enemy's divisions, while the emperor Napoleon called all the disposable forces, in forced marches, from the North of Germany to the Danube, and considerably reinforced his army with the troops of Wirtemberg, Hessia, Baden, and some time after with those of Saxony.

Near Kien and Nittenau some affairs had happened between the out posts, which, however, had no influence upon the armies.

However easy it would have been for the archduke to continue his offensive operations on the left bank of the Danube, without any material resistance, and however gratifying it might have been to relieve provinces which were groaning beneath the pressure of foreign dominion, the preservation of his native land did not permit him to suffer the enemy to riot with impunity in the entrails of the monarchy, to give up the rich sources of its dependence, and expose the welfare of the subject to the devastations of foreign conquerors.

These motives induced the archduke to conduct his army to Bohemia, by way of Klentach and Neuwarkt, to occupy the Bohemian Forest with light troops and part of the militia, and to direct his march towards Budwets, where he arrived on the 3d of May, hoping to join, near Lintz, his left wing, which had been separated from him, and which had been under the command of lieutenant general baron Hiller.

But the latter had been so closely pressed by the united force of the French armies, that, after several spirited engagements, and even after a brilliant affair, in which the troops achieved all that was possible against the disproportionate superiority of the enemy, he indeed was able to reach Lintz, but was incapable of crossing the Danube, and obliged to content himself with destroying the communication with the left bank, and taking up a position behind the Traun, near Ebersberg. This was the occasion of an extremely murderous engagement, during which the enemy, in storming the bridge, lost near 4000 men.—Ebersberg was set on fire, and lieutenant general Hiller continued his retreat, till he got so much the start, as to pass the Danube near Stain, without being disturbed by the enemy, and to wait the approach of the archduke, who, after having in vain attempted the junction of the army near Lintz, had marched from Budweis to Zwettel, still hoping by a quick passage of the Danube to arrest the enemy's progress towards the metropolis.

Meanwhile a corps of Wirtembergheis had advanced from Passau along both the shores of the Danube, and occupied Lintz and the bank opposite to it; had restored the bridge, and signalised itself by destroying the defenceless villages and castles which could not be protected by the small advanced guard proceeding by the side of the main army.

The enemy, by marching through the valley of the Danube, in the straitest line, had got so much a-head that all hopes of coming up with him in front of Vienna vanished; still, however, if that city had been able to hold out for five days, it might have been relieved, and the archduke resolved on venturing the utmost to rescue that good city, which, by the excellent dispositions of its citizens, the faithful attachment to its sovereign, and its noble devotion, has raised to itself an eternal monument in the annals of Austria. All his plans were now directed towards gaining the bridges across the Danube, near Vienna, and endeavoring to save the imperial residence, by a combat under its walls.

Vienna, formerly an important fortress, was in vain besieged by the Turks, and would even now, from the solidity of its ramparts, the strong profiles of its works, and the extensive system of its mines, be capable of making a protracted resistance, had not, for upwards of a century back, the luxury of a large metropolis, the wants of ease, the conflux of all the magnates in the empire, and the pomp of a splendid court, totally effaced every consideration of military defence. Palaces adorn the ramparts, the casements and ditches were converted into workshops of tradesmen, plantations mark the counterscarps of the fortress, and avenues of trees traverse the glacis, uniting the most beautiful suburbs in the world to the Corps de la Place.

Although under such circumstances, no obstinate resistance of the capital was expected, yet from the unexampled loyalty of the inhabitants, it was confidently hoped that Vienna might, for a few days, serve as a tete de-pont to cover the passage of the river, whence all preparations amounted to no more than to secure the place against a coup-de-main; and for this reason the archduke had some time before directed field marshal Hiller to send part of his troops along the right bank towards the capital, in the event of his (the archduke's) passage to the left shore.

Field marshal Hiller now received orders to burn the bridge near Stain in his rear, to leave a small corps of observation near Krems, to hasten by forced marches with the bulk of his army to the environs of Vienna, and, as circumstances would permit, by occupying the small islands, to keep up the communication with the city, and the debouche across the bridges.

The army of the archduke now advanced, without interruption, by Neupolla, Horn and Weikendorf, upon Stockeran; and, in order to overawe such enterprizes as the enemy might project from the environs of Lintz, part of the corps of the general of artillery, count Kollowrath, which, till then, had remained near Pilsen, with a view to secure the north and west frontier of Bohemia, was ordered to march to Budweis.

Napoleon had used so much expedition on his march to Vienna, that on the 9th of May his advanced troops appeared on the glacis of the fortress, whence they were driven by some cannon shot. From three to four thousand regular troops, as many armed citizens, and some battalions of country militia defended the city: ordnance of various calibre was placed upon the ramparts; the suburbs were abandoned on account of their great extent, and the numerous islands and low bushy ground behind the town were occupied by some light troops of the corps of Hiller, as well as by the militia.

The corps itself was posted on what is termed the Point, on the left shore of the river, waiting the arrival of the army, which was advancing in haste.

The occupation of Vienna formed too essential a part in the extensive plans of the French emperor; its conquest had been announced by him with too much confidence, and was of too great importance towards confirming the prejudice of his irresistable power, for him not to employ every method of taking it before the assistance which was so near could arrive.

For the space of 24 hours the howitzers played upon the town; and though several houses were set on fire, the courage of the inhabitants remained unshaken. But a general devastation threatened their valuable property, and when at length, the enemy availing himself of the numerous craft which he found there, crossed the smaller branches of the Danube, dislodged the troops from the nearer islands, and menaced their communication with the left bank, the city was justified in capitulating, while the troops retreated by the great bridge of Tabor, which they afterwards set on fire.

The archduke received this intelligence in his head quarters, between Heirn and Meissau, and though it was scarcely to be expected that the city, surrounded as it was, could continue its resistance, the archduke proceeded on his march without interruption, flattering himself that he might be able to executive his favourite project by a bold attempt to pass the Danube near Vienna.

This city capitulated on the 13th May, so that there was no further occasion to expose the army to hazard, by crossing the Danube, for which no sufficient preparation had been made, and which must have been effected in the face of the enemy, and under local circumstances of the greatesst disadvantage. By the surrender of Vienna the army had also lost a point of support on which to rest its military operations.

In this situation of affairs the archduke resolved to collect his army at the foot of the hill Bisamberg, and allow it a few days of rest, which, after so many forced marches, it urgently wanted. The cavalry, for the convenience of water, was posted along the Russ, a rivulet, which is concealed by ground covered with bushes, and the advanced guard pushed forward to the Danube, in order to observe the movements of the enemy, and prevent his passing the river, which he had already attempted to do from Nussdorf, to what is called the Black Lake, but with so little success, that a battalion of his advanced guard was taken. The chain of the outposts extended on the left side as far as the March, and on the right to Krems; this place and Presburg were occupied by some battalions; and the head quarters of the archduke were, on the 16th May, at Edersdorf, near the high road leading to Brunn.

On the 19th the outposts reported that the enemy had taken possession of the great island of Lobau, within about six English miles of Vienna; that his numbers increased there every hour, and that he seemed to be employed in throwing a bridge across the great arm of the Danube behind the island. From the top of the Bisamberge, the whole of the opposite country appeared to be enveloped in a cloud of dust, and the glitter of arms evinced a general movement of troops beyond Summering, towards Kaiser-Edersdorf, whither, according to later accounts, the emperor Napoleon had removed his head quarters, & was, by his presence, hastening and promoting the preparations for crossing the river.

On the following morning, at day break, the archduke resolved to reconnoitre the island, and employed for this purpose part of the advanced guard, under the command of field marshal lt. col. count Klenau, supported by some regiments of cavalry.

The isle of Lobau forms a convenient place of arms, which is about six English miles long, and four and a half broad, and being separated by a large arm of the Danube from the right bank, nothing prevents the building of a bridge, which is concealed by ground covered with bushes; and the great extent of the island affords the advantage of sending troops and ordnance from so many points of it, that the passage across the smaller arm to the large plain of Marchfield may be made good by force of arms.

It was soon perceived by the strength of the enemy's columns which advanced upon the the island and placed their cannon so as to support the second passage, that he meditated a serious attack. The advanced guard sustained a tolerably warm engagement, and the cavalry routed the first division of the enemy, which debouched from the low grounds on the edge of the river, late in the evening; upon which the archduke, whose intention was not to prevent the passage of the enemy, but to attack him the following day, retreated with his cavalry to Aoklaa, and ordered the advanced troops to fall back to Maas, according as the enemy should extend.

On the 21st at day break, the archduke ordered his army under arms, and formed it in two lines on the rising ground behind Geresdorf, and between the Bisam hill and the rivulet Russ. The corps of lieut. gen. Hiller formed the right wing near Stamersdorf; on its left was the corps of the general of cavalry count Bellegrade, and the next to that the corps of lieut. gen. Prince Hohenzollern, in the allignment of Deutsch Wagram. The corps of Prince Rosenberg was posted by battalions in column on the Russback on the rivulet Russ, kept Deutsch Wagram strongly occupied, having, for the security of the left wing, placed on the heights beyond that place a division on reserve. The whole cavalry, which the day before had advanced under the command of prince Lichenstien by Anderklaa, was called back into the line, filling, in two lines, the space intervening between the left wing of prince Hohenzollern and the right of prince Rosenberg.

The vast plain of Marchfield spread like a carpet before the front of the line, and appeared by the absence of every obstruction, to be destined to form the theatre of this great event. The grenadiers remained in reserve near Sciering, and the corps of the general of artillery, prince Russ, kept the Bisam hill, and the low bushy ground along the Danube strongly occupied. Part of it was still left near Krems, the corps being almost broke up by having so many of its divisions detached to so considerable a distance.

At 9 o'clock, the archduke ordered the arms to be piled, and the troops to dine. The piquet of observation on the Bisam hill, reported that the bridge across the Danube behind the isle of Lobau, being now quite finished, was plainly perceivable, and that troops were without intermission seen filing off over it, as well as passing in boats to the isle. The out-posts likewise gave information, of the gradual augmentation of the enemy in the town of Enzerdorf, and in the villages of Essling and Aspern, and of his advancing towards Hirschstetten.

The archduke Charles now thought that the moment for giving battle had arrived, hastened to Gerarsdorf, where the chief, his quarter-master general's staff, gen. Baron Wimpsen sketched out the following plan.

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Plan of an attack upon the hostile army on its march between Essling and Aspern, and towards Hirschstetten.

The attack to be made in five columns. The first column of the right wing, formed by the corps of lieut. gen. Hillier. It will advance from its present position in the direction between the point and Leopoldau along the nearest arms of the Danube, pass along the left bank towards Stedeleau and Aspern, keep constantly near the Danube and the meadows bordering upon it; and is vigorously to repulse the enemy, who most likely will meet it on the same road, and to drive it from the left bank. This column must not suffer its progress to be impeded by the batteries which the enemy perhaps may have erected on the islands, but must endeavor to silence them by its cannon, and spiritedly continue to advance.

The second column consists of the corps of the gen. of cavalry, count Bellegrade; having Gerarsdorf to the left, it will march towards Leopoldau, endeavor to join the first column on the right, advance upon Kagran, and there, conjointly with the third column upon the left, push forward towards Hirschstetten.

The third column is composed of the corps of lieut. gen. prince Hohenzollern. It will march by Sussenbrum to Brietenlee, and from thence towards Aspern, and will endeavor to join on its right the 2d column, and on its left the fourth.

The fourth column under the command of lt. gen. prince Rosenberg, is made up of that part of his corps which is posted on the right bank of the rivulet Russ; it is to advance, by Anderklaa and Raschdorf, towards Essling.

The fifth column is formed by that part of the prince of Rosenberg's corps which stand between Deutsch-Wagram and Beaumersdorf. It will cross Russ near Beaumersdorf, leave Raschdorf and Bleschdorf to the right, endeavor to pass to the left round the town of Enzersdorf, and secure its left flank by the archduke Ferdinand's regiment of hussars.

The cavalry reserve under the command of gen. prince Lichtenstein, to march by the way of Anderklaa, without coming in contact with the 4th col. between Raschdorf and Brientenlee, and strait on to the New Inn, keeping continually at such a distance between the heads of the third and fourth columns as, in case of necessity, to be near at hand for the purpose of repelling the main body of the enemy's cavalry.

"The grenadiers corps of reserve to march from Sciering into the position which the corps of Bellegrade has taken up behind Gerarsdorf.

All the columns and corps will march at 12 o'clock at noon. The second line to follow them at a suitable distance. Every column to form its own advanced guard. The order of march, and the distribution of the field pieces, to be left to the judgment of the commanders of their respective corps.—— The whole will march by half divisions. Lieut. gen. Klenau to form the advanced guard of the 4th and 5th columns, and, before he advances, to suffer the heads of these columns to come quite up to him, in order that he may have at hand a sufficient support of infantry.

The principal object in view is to drive back the enemy entirely over the first arms of the Danube, destroy the bridges he has thrown over them, and occupying the bank of the Lobau with a numerous artillery, especially howitzers.

The infantry will form on the plain, in battalions, with half divisions from the centre.

His imperial highness, the general in chief, recommends order, closeness during the advance, and a proper use of every species of arms. His station will be with the 2d column.

Gerarsdorf, May 21, 1809.

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The 1st col. consisted of	19 bat.	22 sq.
2d	20	15
3d	22	8
4th	13	8
5th	13	16
The corps of cavalry	—	78
The corps of grenadiers	16	
Total	103 bt.	148 sq.

which amounted to 75,000 effective troops.

Of artillery, there were 18 batteries of brigade, 13 of position and eleven [illegible] artillery; in the aggregate 288 peices of different calibres.

The enemy had availed himself extremely well of the advantage of the ground to cover his passage. The extensive villages of Essling and Aspern, mostly composed of brick houses and encircled all round with heaps of earth, resembled two bastions, between which a double lane of natural trenches, intended to draw off the water, served as the curtain, and afforded every possible security to the columns passing from the isle of Lobau—Essling had a granary furnished with loop holes, and whose three stories afforded rooms for several hundred men, while Aspern was provided with a strong Church yard. The left side of the latter village borders on the arm of the Danube. Both villages had a safe communication with the bushy ground near the Danube, from which the enemy had it constantly in his power to dispatch, unseen, fresh reinforcements.

The isle of Lobau served at once as a place of arms and a tete de pont, a bridge head for the bridge, in the rear across the main arm of the river.

The enemy with the divisions of Gens. Molitor, Boudet, Nansouty, Legrand, Espagne, Lasalle, and Ferrand, under the Marshals Massena and Lasnes, as well as Marshals Bessieres, together with the guards of the Wurtemberg, Hesse Darmstadt and Baden auxiliaries, had already left this position, and was directing the march towards Hirchstetten, when the first Austrian advanced guards met them.

If it be at all permitted in war, to indulge favorable presentiments, it was certainly excusable so to do at that great moment, when on the 21st of May, exactly at 12 o'clock they began to put themselves in motion for the attack—A general enthusiasm had taken possession of the troops—joyful war songs, accompanied by Turkish music, resounded through the air, and were interrupted by shouts of "long live our emperor! long live the archduke Charles!" wherever the imperial guards appeared, who had placed himself at the head of the second column. Every breast panted with anxious desire and high confidence after the decisive moment, and the finest weather favored the awful scene.

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BATTLE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST MAY.

First Column.

The advanced guard under General Nordman consisting of two battalions of Gyulay and Lichtenstein [illegible]