

= Battle of Stockach ( 1799 ) =

The [ First ] Battle of Stockach occurred on 25 March 1799 , when French and Austrian armies fought for control of the geographically strategic Hegau region in present @-@ day Baden @-@ Württemberg . In the broader military context , this battle constitutes a keystone in the first campaign in southwestern Germany during the Wars of the Second Coalition , part of the French Revolutionary Wars .

It was the second battle between the French Army of the Danube , commanded by Jean @-@ Baptiste Jourdan , and the Habsburg Army under Archduke Charles ; the armies had met a few days earlier , 20 ? 22 March , on the marshy fields southeast of Ostrach and the Pfullendorf heights . The Austrian Army 's superior strength , almost three @-@ to @-@ one , forced the French to withdraw .

At Stockach , the French concentrated their forces into shorter lines , creating intense fighting conditions ; initially , Charles 's line was more extended , but he quickly pulled additional troops from his reserves to strengthen his front . When a small French force commanded by Dominique Vandamme nearly flanked the Austrian Army , Charles 's personal intervention was crucial for the Austrians , buying time for reinforcements to arrive . General Jourdan , while trying to rally his men , was nearly trampled to death . Ultimately , the French were driven back upon the Rhine River .

= = Background = =

Although the First Coalition forces achieved several initial victories at Verdun , Kaiserslautern , Neerwinden , Mainz , Amberg and Würzburg , the efforts of Napoleon Bonaparte in northern Italy pushed Austrian forces back and resulted in the negotiation of the Peace of Leoben ( 17 April 1797 ) and the subsequent Treaty of Campo Formio ( October 1797 ) . This treaty proved difficult to administer . Austria was slow to give up some of the Venetian territories . A Congress convened at Rastatt for the purposes of deciding which southwestern German states would be mediatised to compensate the dynastic houses for territorial losses , but was unable to make any progress . Supported by French republican forces , Swiss insurgents staged several uprisings , ultimately causing the overthrow of the Swiss Confederation after 18 months of civil war .

By early 1799 , the French Directory had become impatient with stalling tactics employed by Austria . The uprising in Naples raised further alarms , and recent gains in Switzerland suggested the timing was fortuitous to venture on another campaign in northern Italy and southwestern Germany .

= = Prelude to battle = =

As winter broke in 1799 , on 1 March , General Jean Baptiste Jourdan and his army of 25 @,@ 000 , the so @-@ called Army of Observation , crossed the Rhine between Basel and Kehl . This crossing officially violated the Treaty of Campo Formio . On 2 March , the Army was renamed Army of the Danube , upon orders of the French Directory .

The Army met little resistance as it advanced through the Black Forest in four columns , through the Höllental ( Hölle valley ) , via Oberkirch , and Freudenstadt , and at the southern end of the forest , along the Rhine bank . Although prudent counsel might have advised Jourdan to establish a position on the eastern slope of the mountains , he did not ; instead he pushed across the Danube plain , taking position between Rottweil and Tuttlingen .

The Austrian Army and Archduke Charles , its commander @-@ in @-@ chief , had wintered with his army in the Bavarian , Austrian , and Salzburg territories on the eastern side of the Lech ; his force alone numbered close to 80 @,@ 000 troops , and outnumbered the French force by three to one . An additional 26 @,@ 000 , commanded by Friedrich Freiherr von Hotze , guarded the Vorarlberg , and further south , another 46 @,@ 000 , under command of Count Heinrich von Bellegarde , formed the defense of the Tyrol . The Austrians had already reached an agreement with Tsar Paul of Russia by which the legendary Alexander Suvorov would leave retirement to assist Austria in Italy with another 60 @,@ 000 troops .

### = = = Engagement at Ostrach = = =

The Army of the Danube advanced on Pfullendorf and Ostrach , the former an imperial city in Upper ( southern ) Swabia , and the latter a nearby village of 300 belonging to the Imperial Abbey of Salem , an influential and wealthy ecclesiastical territory on Lake Constance . Jourdan 's objective was simple and direct : cut the Austrian line at the border of the southwestern German states and Switzerland , preventing the Coalition 's use of Switzerland as an overland route between central and southern Europe . Isolation of the two theaters would prevent the Austrians from assisting one another ; furthermore , if the French held the interior passes in Switzerland , they could use these routes to move their own forces between the two theaters .

Stretching between the Pfullendorf heights and the village lies a flat , wide plain , marshy in places , ringed with low @-@ lying hills , and creased with a small tributary stream from which the village takes its name . Ostrach itself lies almost at the northern end of this plain , but slightly south of the Danube itself . By 7 March , the first French forces arrived there , and the Austrians arrived a day or so later . Over the following week , additional forces for both sides arrived , and the two armies faced each other across this valley .

The French army extended in a long line from the Danube to Lake Constance . The Third Division , commanded by Laurent de Gouvion Saint @-@ Cyr , positioned itself at the far left flank , and Dominique Vandamme 's detached force , returning from reconnaissance near Stuttgart , roamed on the north shore of the river . François Joseph Lefebvre commanded the Advance Guard , positioned on the slope below Pfullendorf , and Joseph Souham , with the Second Division , took position behind him . Pierre Marie Barthélemy Ferino 's First Division held the southern @-@ most flank , to defend against any encirclement by Charles ' force . Jourdan set up command at Pfullendorf , and the Cavalry Reserve , commanded by Jean @-@ Joseph Ange d 'Hautpoul , stood slightly to the north and west of Souham .

By late on the 19th , Austrian and French soldiers had been skirmishing at outposts for more than 30 hours , with the action growing increasingly intense . In the early hours of the 21st , General Lefebvre informed Jourdan that the Austrians were attacking all his positions , and that the general engagement would begin shortly . After 24 hours of fighting , Austrian forces pushed Lefebvre and Saint Cyr 's troops back to the Pfullendorf heights . Although sappers blew up the primary bridge over the Ostrach river , the Austrians managed to ford the stream anyway . They nearly outflanked General Saint Cyr 's forces on the right flank , did outflank Lefebvre 's forces in the center , and cut off a portion of the southern flank from the main body . Saint Cyr 's troops barely managed to pull back before being fully cut off . Finally , General Friedrich Freiherr von Hotze , marching north with 10 @,@ 000 men , from Feldkirch , threatened Ferino 's First Division from the south .

### = = = Retreat from Ostrach = = =

On 21 March , at 2200 , Jourdan ordered the wounded to be transported to Schaffhausen in Switzerland , via Stockach . The main army then began its own retreat in the early morning of the 22nd . The reserve division of d 'Hautpoul left first , and pulled back via Stockach to Emmingen ob Eck . The first division pulled back to Bodman , on the northern tip of the Überlingen @-@ finger of Lake Constance ; in the retreat , a portion of the force was encircled and cut off by the 2nd Lancers of Karl Philipp , Prince Schwarzenberg 's brigade , and more than 500 were taken prisoner .

### = = Battle at Stockach and Engen = =

Fought at the junction of the east @-@ west and north @-@ south roads on the eastern side of the Black Forest , the day @-@ long battle at Stockach and Engen pitted the two armies against each other for the second time in seven days . The Austrians still had the numerical superiority , but this time it was closer to two @-@ to @-@ one , instead of almost three @-@ to @-@ one . Jourdan had consolidated his force over a shorter line , and had the full Army of the Danube under his direct

command . Charles , likewise , had shortened his line ; although Hotze had not yet caught up with the archduke , he and his 10 @, @ 000 men were approaching from the Austrians ' left rear .

= = = Dispositions = = =

By 23 March , Jourdan had his headquarters in the vicinity of Stockach . He had recalled Barthélemy Ferino from the far right flank ; Ferino had retreated along the coast of the Überlingen Lake , the northwestern finger of Lake Constance , to be in position at the close right flank , adjacent to Souham 's division . Lefebvre , wounded at Ostrach , was unable to take the field himself , and Laurent Saint Cyr commanded the left flank . When Jourdan considered his position , he felt it too extended , so he drew back further behind Stockach , toward Engen , where he could concentrate his force . The first division camped near the Hohentwiel , the 11th @-@ century fortress overlooking the marshes at the westernmost point of the Lake Constance . The second division , the advanced guard , and a cavalry division were camped on the heights above Engen . The third division was camped by Leibtengen ( Liptingen , the French called it ) , and Neuhausen . Vandamme and his small corps worked themselves discreetly into a position behind the Austrian right flank . Jourdan established his headquarters at Engen .

The plan was straightforward : Vandamme and Saint Cyr would make a simultaneous attack on the Austrian right , and Soult 's and Jourdan 's main force would attack the Austrian center and left . Jourdan 's plan , to attack four points of the opposition simultaneously , seemed to him to be the only reasonable action against a force with such numerical superiority .

The Habsburg center columns included 17 @, @ 000 men under the command of field marshal Friedrich Joseph , Count of Nauendorf , formed into three columns and approaching from the north east . The main force , under the command of the Archduke Charles , included 53 @, @ 000 men , also in three columns ; in the main force , Charles had under his command the princes of Anhalt and Fürstenberg plus six battalions in a fourth column , north of the main column , but south of Nauendorf 's command . An additional force of 13 @, @ 000 troops under the command of Lieutenant Field Marshal Anton Count Sztáray formed the southern flank .

= = = General engagement = = =

The general engagement on 25 March was brutal and bloody . Before daybreak , at close to 0500 , Saint Cyr opened by sending his forces in a headlong attack on the Austrian right , coordinated with Souham and Ferino 's assault on the Austrian left . The ferocious attack forced the Austrians out of the woods in which they had been positioned overnight , and down the road to the village of Schwandorf . Fearing that his forces would be flanked , Charles directed some reinforcements to back up General Mervelt 's force on the Austrian right , six squadrons of lancers of the First Regiment . At this point , Vandamme 's small corps , which had moved into position in the night of 24 March , attacked from the rear . Saint Cyr 's forces had taken hold of the woods outside Stockach , named by the Austrians as the gruesome wood , with the conflict there described as " obstinate and bloody . " The Archduke himself arrived with six battalions of Hungarian grenadiers and twelve squadrons of cuirassiers and led them into the fight . His grenadiers , experienced and battle @-@ hardened , objected to his exposure and one actually grabbed the bridle of Charles ' horse , to stop him . As the archduke prepared to dismount and lead his men on foot , Karl Aloys zu Fürstenberg stepped forward to volunteer , reportedly stating that he would die first , before allowing the archduke to put himself in such danger . As Karl Aloys Fürstenberg led the hussars and grenadiers into a counter @-@ attack , he was hit by French case shot and killed . Archduke Charles eventually did lead his grenadiers , and the French momentum was not only arrested , but reversed . The Prince of Anhalt was also killed in the battle . Saint Cyr made no progress until Vandamme 's assault , but both withered under the Archduke 's response . In the melee , Claude Juste Alexandre Legrand , a general of brigade of Saint Cyr 's III . Division , lost both his brother at his side , and his aide @-@ de @-@ camp , and Jourdan himself had barely escaped being trampled to death or captured , as he tried to rally his own troops . The superior number of Austrians stalled the main

French assault on the Habsburg center .

At the French right flank , General Ferino attempted to push the Austrians back , first with a cannonade , followed by an attack through the woods on both sides of the road between Asch and Stockach . Two columns made two attacks , both of which were repulsed ; finally , Ferino added his third column to the assault , which resulted in the Austrian reformation of the line , cannons at the center firing a heavy cannonade . Ferino could not respond because he had run out of artillery ammunition . The French fixed bayonets and charged the village of Wahlwies , successfully taking it , but they were unable to hold it in the night , and subsequently fell back .

= = = Withdrawal = = =

On the evening of 26 March , Jourdan arranged for the abandonment of the positions in Engen and Stockach . Saint Cyr had already withdrawn along the Danube , after his and Vandamme 's assaults on the Austrian right failed , and was working his way west toward the Black Forest . Inexplicably , at least at the time , the Austrians failed to pursue the retreating French ; instead of pursuing the French , Charles ordered his army into cantonments at Stockach and Engen , as far south as Wahlweiss . The Aulic Council , in establishing a plan of battle , had forbidden his approach to the Rhine until Switzerland was also cleared of the French army ; Charles simply held his ground .

By 31 March , the Army of the Danube established itself in Neustadt , Freiburg im Breisgau , Freudenstadt and Schiltach . Jourdan set up his command headquarters at Hornberg . The cavalry could not find enough forage in the mountains , and were sent to Offenburg .

= = Aftermath = =

= = = Interpretation = = =

Jourdan later claimed that the Austrians had lost 7 @,@ 000 killed or wounded , plus another 4 @,@ 000 prisoners , and several cannons . For the whole day of the general engagement , the French had remained on the field of battle without meat , bread or brandy , and their animals had been without forage : " it is impossible to deny , " Jourdan wrote later , " without the most glaring injustice or falsehood , that we gained a victory . " Both sides claimed a victory , but most 19th- and 20th @-@ century historians granted it to the Austrian force .

The French Directory did as well . In mid April , suffering from an nephritic complaint , Jourdan handed over command to his chief of staff , general of division Jean Augustin Ernouf , and returned to Paris to complain about the lack of men , the inexperience of the men he had , their supplies , and the size , experience , and supply of the army he had to face . He found little sympathy there , and when he told the Directory that he was ill , tendering his resignation , it was accepted .

From exile on Elba fifteen years later , Napoleon analyzed the Battle of Stockach and the French defeat : its cause , he concluded , lay in Jourdan 's division of force . Although Jourdan had increased concentration from his dispositions at Ostrach , the French force was still over @-@ extended . Against a more concentrated force , the Austrians could not have moved troops from the left to reinforce the right flank when Saint Cyr and Vandamme attacked from front and rear . Furthermore , Napoleon averred , Ferino 's force on the French right had not been concentrated sufficiently and d 'Hautpoul 's cavalry assault had taken too long to materialize , giving the Austrians the upper hand . The Austrian left had halted his assault , freeing men from the southern flank to reinforce the northern one . Importantly , the Austrian line was short enough that troops could move quickly from the southern flank to the northern one . Furthermore , Napoleon argued , Jourdan had retreated north @-@ northwest , to the Black Forest to protect Alsace . He should have retreated south , to join with André Masséna 's well @-@ positioned Army of Helvetia , where in combination the Army of Helvetia and the Army of the Danube could have combined forces to defeat the Habsburg army . With Jourdan 's misguided overall strategy , Napoleon asserted , the French snatched defeat from the jaws of victory .

