

= Battle of Vauchamps =

The Battle of Vauchamps (14 February 1814) was the final major engagement of the Six Days Campaign of the War of the Sixth Coalition . It resulted in a part of the Grande Armée under Napoleon I defeating a superior Prussian and Russian force of the Army of Silesia under Field @-@ marshal Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher .

At the beginning of 1814 , the armies of the French Empire , under the direct command of Emperor Napoleon I , were scrambling to defend Eastern France against the invading Coalition Armies . Despite fighting against vastly superior forces , Napoleon managed to score a few significant victories and , between 10 and 13 February repeatedly beat Blücher 's Army of Silesia . On 13 February , reeling from his successive defeats , Blücher looked to disengage from Napoleon and instead manoeuvre with a part of his forces to fall upon the isolated VI Corps of Marshal Auguste de Marmont , who was defending Napoleon 's rear . The Prussian commander attacked and pushed back Marmont late on 13 February . Nevertheless , the Emperor had read into his enemy 's intentions and directed powerful forces to support Marmont .

On the morning of 14 February , Blücher , commanding a Prussian Corps and elements of two Russian Corps , resumed his attack against Marmont . The latter continued to fall back until he was reinforced . Napoleon arrived on the battlefield with strong combined @-@ arms forces , which allowed the French to launch a determined counterattack and drive back the leading elements of the Army of Silesia . Blücher realized that he was facing the Emperor in person and decided to pull back and avoid another battle against Napoleon . In practice , Blücher 's attempt to disengage proved extremely difficult to execute , as the Coalition force was by now in an advanced position , had virtually no cavalry present to cover its retreat and was facing an enemy who was ready to commit its numerous cavalry .

While the actual pitched battle was short , the French infantry , under Marshal Marmont , and most of all the cavalry , under General Emmanuel de Grouchy , launched a relentless pursuit that rode down the enemy . Retreating in slow @-@ moving square formations in broad daylight and along some excellent cavalry terrain , the Coalition forces suffered very heavy losses , with several squares broken by the French cavalry . At nightfall , combat ceased and Blücher opted for an exhausting night march in order to take his remaining forces to safety .

= = Context = =

On 13 February , having fought three successful actions in three days against the Prussian and Russian army at Champaubert , Montmirail and Château @-@ Thierry , Napoleon was pursuing the defeated enemy . After his consecutive defeats , Field @-@ marshal Blücher decided to disengage from Napoleon and move a significant force against the isolated French Army Corps of Marshal Marmont , at Étoges . Blücher knew that Marmont 's Corps was weak and his plan was to destroy it and thus fall upon the rear of Napoleon 's main force .

Still in pursuit of the debris of the enemy force , late on 13 February , Napoleon received reports that Marmont 's Corps had been attacked and pushed out of his position at Étoges . The Emperor deduced that the enemy force before him would have to be a much reduced one and promptly decided to go to Marmont 's aid . The Emperor left Château @-@ Thierry on 14 February , towards 3 o 'clock in the morning , leaving a small portion of his forces with Marshal Édouard Mortier , duc de Trévise , with orders to continue the pursuit of the enemy . Taking with him the cavalry of the Guard and Grouchy 's Cavalry Reserve , Napoleon headed for the village of Vauchamps .

Meanwhile , late on 13 February , having successfully regrouped what forces he could muster at Bergères @-@ lès @-@ Vertus , Blücher had launched an attack against Marmont 's single division , pushing him out of Étoges and advancing as planned towards Champaubert and Fromentières , in the rear of Napoleon 's force . However , having read Blücher 's intentions , Napoleon had given orders for a concentration of French forces in that very sector .

= = Opposing forces = =

== = Army of Silesia == =

During the battle of Vauchamps on 14 February , Prussian Field Marshal Blücher , commander of combined Prussian and Russian Army of Silesia could count on 20 000 to 21 000 men , from three Army Corps :

IInd (Prussian) Corps , commanded by General Friedrich Graf Kleist von Nollendorf :

10th brigade under George Dubislaw Ludwig von Pirch

11th brigade under Hans Ernst Karl , Graf von Zieten

12th brigade under Prince Augustus of Prussia

Cavalry brigade under von Hacke

Cavalry brigade under von Röder

Reserve artillery under Braun .

IXth (Russian) Corps :

9th division under Udom II .

Xth (Russian) Corps under General Peter Mikhailovich Kaptzevich :

8th division under Prince Urusov (or Orosov) ,

22nd division under Turchaninov .

Kleist 's II Corps numbered 13 000 men while Kaptzevich 's X Corps counted 6 000 soldiers . There were also the 1 000 troops from IX Corps who survived the Battle of Champaubert . These were grouped into three or four temporary battalions and an artillery battery . The rump of IX Corps lost 600 men and all of its guns on the evening of 14 February . The II Corps had eight 6 pound batteries and two 12 pound batteries . Each battery had eight guns or a total of 80 cannons . There was also a howitzer battery of unknown strength . The X Corps had three batteries attached .

== = Grande Armée == =

Napoleon had sent orders for a major concentration of forces , which resulted in a force of some 25 000 men being assembled in this sector . However , of these men , only 19 000 soldiers got to the battlefield in time , with no more than 10 000 men engaged in the actual fighting :

VI Corps , commanded by Marshal of the Empire Auguste de Marmont :

3rd Division under Joseph Lagrange

8th Division under Étienne Pierre Sylvestre Ricard

Reinforcements temporarily attached : 7th division under Jean François Leval

Cavalry , commanded by General Emmanuel de Grouchy :

Division Antoine Louis Decrest de Saint Germain

Division Jean Pierre Doumerc

Division Étienne Tardif de Pommeroux de Bordesoulle

Guard cavalry , commanded by General Étienne de Nansouty :

2nd Division under Charles , comte Lefebvre Desnouettes ,

3rd Division under Louis Marie Levesque de Laferrière .

Guard artillery under Antoine Drouot .

Guard infantry , under Marshal , Prince of the Moskowa Michel Ney (Reinforcements not engaged)

:

1st (Old Guard) division under Louis Friant ,

2nd (Young Guard) division under Philibert Jean Baptiste Curial .

Grouchy 's I Cavalry Corps and II Cavalry Corps , each of two divisions , numbered a combined 3 600 horsemen . The two Guard cavalry divisions together counted 3 300 troopers . The 1st Old Guard Division had 4 000 men and the 2nd Old Guard Division had 3 000 . The 1st Young Guard Division was made up of 4 000 soldiers while the 2nd Young Guard Division had 2 500 troops . Marmont 's two divisions could muster only 3 000 men . Jean

François Leval 's 7th Division comprised 4 @, @ 500 soldiers . Of these forces , only the cavalry , Marmont 's infantry and one battalion of the Old Guard were actually engaged in the fighting . The others were marching along behind .

= = Battle = =

Having begun to push back the feeble French forces from Marmont 's VI 's Corps the day before , Blücher occupied Champaubert early on 14 February , sending his vanguard forward , as far as the village of Fromentières and then Vauchamps . Marmont , commanding only the Lagrange division and 800 men from the Ricard division , had cautiously pulled his men back towards Montmirail , where he began to receive reinforcements . Towards 9 o 'clock in the morning , Blücher set Zieten 's brigade and some cavalry in motion from Vauchamps towards Montmirail . To their surprise , Marmont 's men didn 't give ground this time and vigorously counterattacked , pushing Zieten 's advance guard back into the village of Vauchamps . The accompanying Prussian cavalry was dispersed by a violent French cannonade . With now both brigades of Ricard 's division available , Marmont launched these men against the Prussian position at Vauchamps , with the 1st brigade on his right , advancing under the cover of the Beaumont forest , south of the Montmirail @-@ Vauchamps road and the 2nd brigade on his left , north of the road , advancing frontally towards the position . Marmont also had with him his own escort cavalry squadron and four élite Imperial Guard duty squadrons from the Emperor 's own escort , under general Lion . Marmont 's leftmost brigade entered Vauchamps , but , with the village heavily invested with Zieten 's Prussian defenders , the Frenchmen were soon repulsed , with the Prussians in pursuit . Marshal Marmont then launched his five squadrons to the rescue and the cavalry promptly forced the Prussians back to the village , with one of their battalions taken prisoner , after taking refuge in an isolated farm .

Zieten then decided to pull back his forces towards the village of Fromentières . There , Zieten was joined by Generals Kleist and Kapsevitch , who , having heard the sound of the guns , had begun to move their respective Army Corps in that direction , coming from Champaubert . The French also moved forward , with Marmont 's two divisions (Lagrange and Ricard) in pursuit of Zieten , along the road to Fromentières . Marmont was now supported on his left by General Grouchy , who had just arrived on the field of battle with the divisions of Saint @-@ Germain and Doumerc , moving past the village of Janvilliers , in order to cut off Zieten 's retreat . Further French reinforcements were now available , this time on Marmont 's right : the division of Leval , who had been steadily moving up the valley of the Petit Morin river , in a bid to outflank the Prussians . With the French Imperial Guard artillery now also deployed and firing at them , Zieten 's Prussians drew back in good order , and formed in squares to fend off Grouchy 's cavalry . Towards 2 o 'clock in the afternoon , after assessing the situation , Blücher realised that he was facing Napoleon himself and thus decided to immediately withdraw . He ordered all of his forces to retreat through Champaubert and directed a part of his artillery to safety , towards Étoges .

= = Pursuit = =

With the Coalition forces now in full retreat , Marmont received orders to aggressively pursue the enemy , knowing that he could count on his two infantry divisions , plus that of Leval , as well as on the support of General Drouot 's Guard artillery , on Nansouty 's Guard cavalry on his right and on Grouchy 's two cavalry divisions on his left . Following Marmont at a short distance were further reinforcements , two Guard infantry divisions (Friant and Curial) under the command of Marshal Ney and with them was Napoleon himself . Napoleon was followed by an additional " Young Guard " division , under General Meunier , which the Emperor had taken with him when he left Château @-@ Thierry early that morning .

The French cavalry had been hindered in its movements by the broken terrain and thus far unable to really bother Zieten 's infantry squares . Consequently , Blücher was able to lead an exemplary retreat up to Fromentières and Janvilliers . However , once past these villages , the terrain became flat and even , proper for cavalry action , and now , with the increasingly aggressive action of the

enemy cavalry against his flank and rear , Zieten and his brigade became increasingly isolated . Grouchy , with the divisions of Doumerc and Saint @-@ Germain was now boldly menacing Zieten 's right , while on his left , the Prussian general saw Nansouty 's Guard cavalry (Laferrière @-@ Levesque 's division , plus the four service squadrons , under Lefebvre @-@ Desnouettes) . Zieten 's brigade was finally cut off from the rest of the army and charged violently by Grouchy 's cuirassiers , who broke the infantry squares and took no less than 2 @,@ 000 prisoners , with the rest of the brigade routed .

Abandoning his position at Fromentières , where Marmont 's infantry had just begun to irrupt , Blücher ordered the continuation of the retreat towards Champaubert and Étoges , with Kleist 's Corps on the left , south of the road and Kaptzevitch 's Corps on the right , north of the road . Again taking advantage from the flat terrain , Grouchy was able to advance rapidly and fall onto the rear of the Coalition infantry squares , which were now slowly withdrawing in echelon and efficiently using the terrain to take shelter from the artillery bombardment . With night approaching and their retreat towards Étoges now barred by enemy cavalry , the Prussian squares began to lose cohesion . Spotting this weakness , Grouchy , who had been reinforced by Bordesoulle 's division , energetically launched his three divisions against the Coalition squares , dispersing a number of them , with these men fleeing in disorder to take refuge in the Étoges forest . The old Blücher , who had been bravely exposing himself to great danger in order to boost the morale his men , was almost taken prisoner , together with his Chief of Staff , Gneisenau , Generals Kleist , Kapsevitch and Prince Augustus of Prussia .

Only just escaping capture , Blücher crossed the forest of Vertus and took up positions at Étoges with Prince Urusov 's division , which had been left there in reserve . Russian General Udom , with 1 @,@ 800 men and 15 cannon , was instructed to cover the position , by occupying the park at Étoges . Udom 's men were exhausted after the long retreat and fighting and , seeing that night had fallen , thought themselves in safety . However , Doumerc 's cuirassiers , formed unseen in the night , surprised these men and a single charge was enough to send the panicked men fleeing . Prince Urusov , 600 men and eight artillery pieces were captured during this action , with the French sailors ' regiment from Lagrange 's division subsequently entering the village of Étoges . Blücher abandoned this position too and made a hasty retreat towards Vertus and Bergères . He then opted for a speedy night march and the next day he managed to bring his remaining men to Châlons , where he was joined by Yorck 's and Sacken 's corps .

= = Result = =

The battle was actually no more than a very long cavalry pursuit and was a very costly defeat for Blücher 's " Army of Silesia " , which lost as much as 10 @,@ 000 men , during this day . French author Jean @-@ Pierre Mir states that the Prussian Corps of Kleist had 3 @,@ 500 men out of action (killed , wounded and missing) , as well as 2 @,@ 000 prisoners . According to this author , the Russian Corps had around 3 @,@ 500 men , killed , wounded or missing and also lost 15 cannons and 10 flags . Historian Alain Pigeard places overall losses of the Army of Silesia throughout this day between 9 @,@ 000 and 10 @,@ 000 men but the detail of these losses seems to suggest lighter casualties . Pigeard speaks of only 1 @,@ 250 men killed , wounded or missing and 2 @,@ 000 prisoners for the Prussians , and of 2 @,@ 000 men lost for the Russians . Since Pigeard asserts that these casualties occurred during the pursuit , it is possible that these figures do not take into account the casualties incurred during the initial actions of this battle (one battalion of Zieten 's brigade captured , plus the 2 @,@ 000 prisoners taken during Grouchy 's and Nansouty 's joint action against Zieten) . According to Pigeard , the French registered very light casualties of around 600 men .

Military Historian Jacques Garnier , analysing the battle in Jean Tulard 's Dictionnaire Napoléon , notes that only the muddy , sodden ground , hampering an efficient deployment of the French artillery and infantry , prevented a much more emphatic victory . He also notes that after Vauchamps , Napoleon was able to safely turn south and fall upon the " Army of Bohemia " , commanded by Prince of Schwarzenberg .

