

= Second Battle of Kehl ( 1796 ) =

The Second Battle of Kehl occurred on 18 September 1796 , when General Franz Petrasch 's Austrian and Imperial troops stormed the French @-@ held bridgehead over the Rhine river . The village of Kehl , which is now in the German state of Baden @-@ Württemberg , was then part of Baden @-@ Durlach . Across the river , Strasbourg , an Alsatian city , was a French Revolutionary stronghold . This battle was part of the Rhine Campaign of 1796 , in the French Revolutionary War of the First Coalition .

In the 1790s , the Rhine was wild , unpredictable , and difficult to cross . Its channels and tributaries created islands of trees and vegetation that were alternately submerged by floods or exposed during the dry seasons . A complex of bridges , gates , fortifications and barrage dams linked Kehl with Strasbourg . These had been constructed by the fortress architect Sébastien le Prêtre de Vauban in the seventeenth century . The crossings had been contested before : in 1678 during the French @-@ Dutch war , in 1703 during the War of the Spanish Succession , in 1733 during the War of the Polish Succession , and earlier in Battle of Kehl , when the French crossed into the German states on 23 ? 24 June . Critical to French success would be the army 's ability to cross the Rhine at will . The crossings at Hüningen , near the Swiss city of Basel , and at Kehl , offered access to most of southwestern Germany ; from there , French armies could sweep north , south , or east , depending on their military goal .

In late summer of 1796 , the Austrian force reacquired most of the territory lost to the French earlier in the summer . On 18 September 1796 , the Austrians temporarily acquired control of the tête @-@ du @-@ ponts ( bridgeheads ) joining Kehl and Strasbourg until a strong French counter @-@ attack forced them to retreat , leaving the French in control of the bridges but the Austrians in control of the territory surrounding them . The situation remained in status quo until late October . Control of the surrounding territory there prevented the French from crossing to safety in Strasbourg , and required the French commander , Jean Victor Marie Moreau , to withdraw toward Basel . Immediately after the Battle of Schliengen ( 24 October 1796 ) , while most of Moreau 's army retreated south to cross the Rhine at Hüningen , Count Baillet Latour moved his Austrian force to Kehl to begin a 100 @-@ day siege .

= = Background : general campaign of 1796 = =

The campaign of 1796 was part of the larger , broader French Revolutionary Wars in which republican France pitted itself against a fluid coalition of Prussians and Austrians and several other states of the Holy Roman Empire , the British , Sardinians , Dutch , and royalist French emigres . Although initially the republican French experienced several victories , the campaigns of 1793 through 1795 had been less successful . However , the Coalition partners had difficulty coordinating their war aims , and their own efforts also faltered . In 1794 and 1795 , French victories in northern Italy salvaged French enthusiasm for the war , and forced the Coalition to withdraw further into Central Europe . At the end of the Rhine Campaign of 1795 , the Habsburg Austrian Coalition and the French Republican called a truce between their forces that had been fighting in Germany . This agreement lasted until 20 May 1796 , when the Austrians announced that the truce would end on 31 May .

The Austrian Coalition 's Army of the Lower Rhine included 90 @,@ 000 troops . The 20 @,@ 000 @-@ man right wing , first under Duke Ferdinand Frederick Augustus of Württemberg , then Wilhelm von Wartensleben , stood on the east bank of the Rhine behind the Sieg River , observing the French bridgehead at Düsseldorf . The garrisons of Mainz Fortress and Ehrenbreitstein Fortress included 10 @,@ 000 more . The remainder of the Imperial and Coalition army , the 80 @,@ 000 @-@ strong Army of the Upper Rhine , secured the west bank behind the Nahe River . Commanded by Dagobert Sigmund von Wurmser , this force anchored its right wing in Kaiserslautern on the west bank while the left wing under Anton Sztáray , Michael von Fröhlich and Louis Joseph , Prince of Condé guarded the Rhine from Mannheim to Switzerland . The original Austrian strategy was to capture Trier and to use their position on the west bank to strike at each of the French armies in turn

. After news arrived in Vienna of Napoleon Bonaparte 's successes , however , Wurmser was sent to Italy with 25 @, @ 000 reinforcements , and the Aulic Council gave Archduke Charles command over both Austrian armies and ordered him to hold his ground .

On the French side , the 80 @, @ 000 @-@ man Army of Sambre @-@ et @-@ Meuse held the west bank of the Rhine down to the Nahe and then southwest to Sankt Wendel . On the army 's left flank , Jean Baptiste Kléber had 22 @, @ 000 troops in an entrenched camp at Düsseldorf . The right wing of the Army of the Rhine and Moselle was positioned behind the Rhine from Hüningen northward , centered along the Queich River near Landau , and its left wing extended west toward Saarbrücken . Pierre Marie Barthélemy Ferino led Moreau 's right wing at Hüningen , Louis Desaix commanded the center and Laurent Gouvion Saint @-@ Cyr directed the left wing . Ferino 's wing consisted of three infantry and cavalry divisions under François Antoine Louis Bourcier and Henri François Delaborde . Desaix 's command included three divisions led by Michel de Beaupuy , Antoine Guillaume Delmas and Charles Antoine Xaintrailles . Saint @-@ Cyr 's wing had two divisions commanded by Guillaume Philibert Duhesme and Alexandre Camille Taponier .

The French plan called for a springtime ( April @-@ May @-@ June ) offensive during which the two armies would press against the flanks of the northern Coalition armies in the German states while a third army approached Vienna through Italy . Specifically , Jean @-@ Baptiste Jourdan 's army would push south from Düsseldorf , hopefully drawing troops and attention toward themselves , while Moreau 's army massed on the east side of the Rhine by Mannheim . According to plan , Jourdan 's army feinted toward Mannheim , and Charles repositioned his troops . Once this occurred , Moreau 's army endured a forced march south and attacked the bridgehead at Kehl , which was guarded by 7 @, @ 000 imperial troops ? troops recruited that spring from the Swabian Circle polities , inexperienced and untrained ? which held the bridgehead for several hours , but then retreated toward Rastatt . Moreau reinforced the bridgehead with his forward guard , and his troops poured into Baden unhindered . In the south , by Basel , Ferino 's column moved quickly across the river and advanced up the Rhine along the Swiss and German shoreline toward Lake Constance , spreading into the southern end of the Black Forest . Worried that his supply lines would be overextended or his army would be flanked , Charles began a retreat to the east .

At this point , in July , the jealousies and competition between the French generals came into play . Moreau could have joined up with Jourdan 's army in the north , but did not ; he proceeded eastward , pushing Charles into Bavaria , while Jourdan pushed eastward , pushing Wartensleben 's autonomous corps into the Ernestine duchies . On either side , the union of two armies ? Wartensleben 's with Charles ' or Jourdan 's with Moreau 's ? could have crushed their opposition .

In August , Wartensleben 's autonomous corps united with Charles ' imperial troops and turned the tide against the French . The defeat of Jourdan 's army at the battles of Amberg ( 24 August ) , Würzburg ( 3 September ) and 2nd Altenkirchen ( 16 ? 19 September ) allowed Charles to move more troops to the south , and effectively removed Jourdan from the remainder of the campaign .

= = = Preliminary action at Bruchsal : September 1796 = = =

While Charles and Moreau jockeyed for position on the eastern slope of the Black Forest , Franz Petrasch engaged the French at Bruchsal . The troops there , commanded by Marc Amand Élisée Scherb , included the 68th Demi @-@ brigade and two squadrons of the 19th Dragoons ; they had remained behind after the Battle of Ettlingen to observe the garrisons of Mannheim and Philippsburg . Realizing that his command was too small to withstand a concerted attack by the stronger Austrians , Scherb withdrew toward Kehl to secure the Rhine crossing to Strasburg , since Moreau , now well into a retreat across the mountains , would need the crossing for a safe passage to France .

An initial Austrian attack on the French position at Bruchsal favored the French , who charged the Austrians with bayonets . Again , on 5 and 6 September , the Austrians spent most of the day skirmishing with the French at their advanced posts , masking their intention of circling around Bruchsal and marching south to secure the crossing to Strasbourg . General Scherb received intelligence of a contingent of infantry and cavalry marching against him and retired south . Scherb

found the Austrians already in possession of Untergrombach , a village south of Bruchsal . After he tried to force his way through , the Austrians fell back to Weingarten at 49 ° 3 ' 5 " N 8 ° 31 ' 50 " E. Scherb found himself caught between detachments of Austrians by the Kinzig river and behind him . General Moreau deployed a demi @-@ brigade of infantry and a regiment of cavalry from his army in the Black Forest , with instructions to proceed by forced marches to Kehl , but General Petrasch , acting on his own intelligence , sent Konstantin d 'Aspré with two battalions to occupy Renchen , about 10 miles ( 16 km ) from Kehl . This effectively prevented Moreau 's reinforcements from reaching Kehl and locked Scherb in place . The undermanned garrison at Kehl was on its own .

= = = Kehl garrison status 16 ? 17 September = = =

The Kehl garrison consisted of one battalion of the 24th Demi @-@ brigade and some detachments of the 104th under command of Balthazar Alexis Henri Schauenburg . This was too weak a force to defend a position of such importance , or to develop additional extensive works . Moreau reported that some of Scherb 's troops had arrived , but it is unclear which ones . Furthermore , the lack of cooperation from local peasant workers and the exhaustion of troops prevented the enhancements of the fortifications from proceeding with any speed . On the evening of 16 September , Petrasch and most of his column had arrived at Bischofsheim , immediately by Kehl , with three battalions and two squadrons ; more troops were not far behind . By 17 September , a small corps of Austrians approached the outskirts of Kehl and vigorously attacked the French sentries there ; this was merely a prelude to the more significant action the following day .

= = Action of 18 September = =

Before the break of dawn on 18 September ( 03 : 45 ) , three Austrian columns attacked Kehl , while another kept Scherb pinned down by the Kinzig . The Austrian principal column , comprising the 38th Regiment , crossed the Kinzig river above the French position and proceeded toward the dykes of the Rhine above ( south of ) Kehl . This placed them between Scherb 's force and Kehl . Using the dykes as protection , and conducted by some peasants familiar with the fortifications , they advanced as far as the horn work on the Upper Rhine and entered a gorge which led them to the outskirts of Kehl . The second column of the 38th Regiment , under command of Major Busch , proceeded via the hamlet of Sundheim toward Kehl , and obtained possession of the village itself , although not the bridge leading to Strasbourg . The third column , which included three companies of Serbians and a division of Hussars , executed a feint on the left bank of the river . One column of reserve , under the command of Franz Pongratz , approached as far as the French earthworks on the banks of the Rhine to support the columns ahead of him ; another , which included a battalion of the 12th Regiment ( Manfredini ) , moved past the hamlet by Neumuhl at 48 ° 34 ' 12 " N 7 ° 50 ' 38 " E toward Kehl .

Quickly , the Austrians acquired control of all the earthworks of the town , the village itself , and the fortress ; their skirmishers reached one side of the abutment of an old bridge of palisades , and advanced to the other side , across the islands formed by branches of the Kinzig and the Rhine . There , almost within eye @-@ shot of the French sentinels , they halted ; there is some confusion about why they stopped . Possibly they mistook the abutment for the bridge itself , as Moreau seemed to think . Regardless , the troops there did not burn the bridge , but started plundering and drinking . The French cavalry tried to retire into Kehl via the Kinzig bridge , but the heavy Austrians fire destroyed most of them .

The French executed several attempts to retake the bridges . The 68th , under command of general Jean @-@ Baptiste de Sisce , was repulsed three times by the superior numbers of Austrians and the fearsome fire of case shot from four cannons that lined the principal road . Not until 19 : 00 did fortune favor the French , when Colonel d 'Aspré and two hundred men of the Regiment Ferdinand were captured within the fort itself . The next in command , a Major Delas , was badly wounded , leaving no one in overall command of the 38th Regiment . The French general Schauenburg , who

had gone to Strasbourg for troops , returned with some reinforcements , including part of the Strasbourg national guard , and led these troops over the pontoon bridges . They met at once an impetuous Austrian attack , but were sufficiently strong to recover . At 22 : 00 , the Austrians still held the redoubt and the houses at the edge of the village ; the arrival of a fresh battalion of the 12th Regiment led to a new attack , but it was repulsed . Ultimately , though , the Austrians had insufficient reserves to meet the fresh troops from Strasbourg . By 23 : 00 , the French had recovered all of the Strasbourg suburbs , the village of Kehl and all of the French earthen works .

According to Digby Smith and his sources , the Austrians lost 2 @, @ 000 men killed , missing and wounded , and the French : 1 @, @ 200 missing and captured . German sources report , though , that the Austrians lost 1 @, @ 500 men and 300 prisoners , and the French had 300 dead and 800 wounded .

= = Impact of September action = =

Despite the limited success of Petrasch 's action , the action had a broad impact on the movements of the main armies of Moreau and Archduke Charles , which still maneuvered to the east . Moreau 's army would debouch through the Black Forest mountains , which lay to the east . By controlling the eastern access to the Kehl / Strasbourg crossing , Petrasch forced Moreau to march south ; any retreat into France would have to occur via the bridges at Hüningen , a longer march , not at Kehl and Strasbourg . The next contact between the main armies occurred on 19 October at Emmendingen in the Elz valley , which winds through the Black Forest . The section of the valley involved in the battle runs south @-@ west through the mountains from Elzach , through Bleibach and Waldkirch . Just to the south @-@ west of Waldkirch , the river emerges from the mountains and flows north @-@ west towards the Rhine , with the Black Forest to its right . This section of the river passes through Emmendingen before it reaches Riegel . Riegel sits in a narrow gap between the Black Forest and an isolated outcropping of volcanic hills known as the Kaiserstuhl .

The Austrian and French armies met again at Schliengen on 24 October . Moreau had arrayed his force in a semi @-@ circle on the heights , offering him a tactically superior position . Charles threw his army against both flanks ; the French left flank fought stubbornly , but gave way under the pressure of Condé 's emigre corps ; the right flank withstood a day @-@ long battering by Latour and Nauendorf , but eventually had to withdraw . The loss of access to the crossing at Kehl forced Moreau to withdraw south to Hüningen .

With a strong rear guard provided by Generals Abbatucci and Lariboisière , he abandoned his position the same night and retreated part of the 9 @. @ 7 miles ( 16 km ) to Hüningen . The right and left wings followed . By 3 November , he had reached Haltingen , where he organized his force to cross over the bridges into France . The Archduke then sent most of his army north to besiege Kehl .

= = Orders of battle = =

The following troops participated in the action at Kehl .

= = = French = = =

24th Demi @-@ brigade de Ligne ( one battalion )  
68th Demi @-@ brigade de Ligne ( three battalions )  
104th Demi @-@ brigade de Ligne ( remnants )  
19th Dragoon Regiment ( two squadrons )

= = = Austrian = = =

Infantry Regiment Nr. 12 ( three battalions )  
Infantry Regiment Nr. 15 ( three battalions )

Infantry Regiment Nr. 38 ( elements )