

= Army of the Rhine and Moselle =

The Army of the Rhine and Moselle ( French : Armée de Rhin @-@ et @-@ Moselle ) was one of the field units of the French Revolutionary Army . It was formed on 20 April 1795 by merging the Army of the Rhine and the Army of the Moselle .

The army figured in two principal campaigns in the War of the First Coalition , although the unsuccessful 1795 campaign concluded with the removal of Jean @-@ Charles Pichegru from command . In 1796 , the army , under command of Jean Victor Marie Moreau , proved itself more successful . By this time , many of the changes inaugurated by the French military reform of 1794 had taken hold .

On 29 September 1797 the Army of the Rhine and Moselle merged with the Army of Sambre @-@ et @-@ Meuse to form the Army of Germany .

= = Purpose and formation = =

Military planners in Paris understood that the upper Rhine Valley , the south @-@ western German territories , and Danube river basin were strategically important for the defense of the Republic . The Rhine was a formidable barrier to what the French perceived as Austrian aggression , and the state that controlled its crossings controlled the river itself . Finally , ready access across the Rhine and along the Rhine bank between the German states and Switzerland , or through the Black Forest , gave access to the upper Danube river valley . For the French , control of the Upper Danube or any point in between , offered an immense strategic value and would give the French a reliable approach to Vienna .

Undoubtedly by 1793 the armies of the French Republic were in a state of disruption ; experienced soldiers of the Ancien Régime fought side by side with raw volunteers , urged on by revolutionary fervor from the special representatives , agents of the legislature sent to insure cooperation among the military . Many of the old officer class had emigrated , and the cavalry in particular suffered from their departure . The artillery arm , considered by the old nobility to be an inferior assignment , was less affected by emigration , and survived intact . The problems would become even more acute following the introduction of mass conscription , the levée en masse , in 1793 . French commanders walked a fine line between the security of the frontier and clamor for victory ( which would protect the regime in Paris ) on the one hand , and the desperate condition of the army on the other , while they themselves were constantly under suspicion from the representatives of the new regime . The price of failure or disloyalty was the guillotine .

= = = Evolution = = =

After successes , particularly in 1792 and 1794 , in the northern theater of war ( Flanders Campaign ) , the right flank of the armies of the Center ( later the army of the Moselle ) , the army of the North and the army of the Ardennes were combined to form the Army of Sambre & Meuse . The remaining center and left flank of the Army of the Moselle and the Army of the Rhine were united , initially on 29 November 1794 , and formally on 20 April 1795 , under command of Pichegru .

= = Order of Battle = =

At its formation , the Army included 66 battalions and 79 squadrons , for a total of 65 @,@ 103 men ( 56 @,@ 756 infantry , 6 @,@ 536 cavalry and 1 @,@ 811 artillery ) . This was its standing on 1 June 1796 :

Commander in Chief ( 1796 ) Jean Victor Marie Moreau

Chief of Staff : Jean Louis Ebénézer Reynier

Commander of Artillery : Jean @-@ Baptiste Eblé

Commander of Engineers : Dominique @-@ André de Chambarlhac

= = Campaign of 1795 = =

The Rhine Campaign of 1795 ( April 1795 to January 1796 ) saw two Habsburg Austrian armies under the overall command of François Sébastien Charles Joseph de Croix , Count of Clerfayt defeat an attempt by two Republican French armies to cross the Rhine River and capture the Fortress of Mainz . At the start of the campaign the French Army of Sambre @-@ et @-@ Meuse led by Jean @-@ Baptiste Jourdan confronted Clerfayt 's Army of the Lower Rhine in the north , while the French Army of Rhin @-@ et @-@ Moselle under Jean @-@ Charles Pichegru lay opposite Dagobert Sigmund von Wurmser 's Army of the Upper Rhine in the south . In August Jourdan crossed and quickly seized Düsseldorf . The Army of Sambre @-@ et @-@ Meuse advanced south to the Main River , completely isolating Mainz . Pichegru 's army made a surprise capture of Mannheim so that both French armies held significant footholds on the east bank of the Rhine . The French fumbled away the promising start to their offensive . Pichegru bungled at least one opportunity to seize Clerfayt 's supply base in the Battle of Handschuhsheim . With Pichegru strangely inert , Clerfayt massed against Jourdan , beat him at Höchst in October and forced most of the Army of Sambre @-@ et @-@ Meuse to retreat to the west bank of the Rhine . About the same time , Wurmser sealed off the French bridgehead at Mannheim . With Jourdan temporarily out of the picture , the Austrians defeated the left wing of the Army of Rhin @-@ et @-@ Moselle at the Battle of Mainz and moved down the west bank . In November , Clerfayt gave Pichegru a drubbing at Pfeddersheim and successfully wrapped up the Siege of Mannheim . In January 1794 , Clerfayt concluded an armistice with the French , allowing the Austrians to retain large portions of the west bank . During the campaign Pichegru entered into traitorous contact with French Royalists . It is debatable whether Pichegru 's treason or his bad generalship was the actual cause of the French failure .

= = Campaign in 1796 = =

The armies of the First Coalition included the imperial contingents and the infantry and cavalry of the various states , amounting to about 125 @,@ 000 ( including the three autonomous corps ) , a sizable force by eighteenth century standards but a moderate force by the standards of the Revolutionary wars . In total , though , Charles ? troops stretched in a line from Switzerland to the North Sea and Wurmser ? s troops stretched from the Swiss @-@ Italian border to the Adriatic ; furthermore , a portion of the troops in Fürstenberg ? s corps were pulled in July to support Wurmser ? s activities in Italy . Habsburg troops comprised the bulk of the army but the thin white line of Habsburg infantry could not cover the territory from Basel to Frankfurt with sufficient depth to resist the pressure of the opposition . In spring 1796 , drafts from the free imperial cities , and other imperial estates , augmented the Habsburg force with perhaps 20 @,@ 000 men at the most . It was largely guesswork where they would be placed , and Charles did not like to use the militias , which were untrained and unseasoned . Compared to French coverage , Charles had half the number of troops covering a 211 @-@ mile front , stretching from Renchen near Basel to Bingen . Furthermore , he had concentrated the bulk of his force , commanded by Count Baillet Latour , between Karlsruhe and Darmstadt , where the confluence of the Rhine and the Main river made an attack most likely , as it offered a gateway into eastern German states and ultimately to Vienna , with good bridges crossing the relatively well @-@ defined river bank . To the north , Wilhelm von Wartensleben ? s autonomous corps stretched in a thin line between Mainz and Giessen .

The French citizen ? s army , created by mass conscription of young men and systematically divested of old men who might have tempered the rash impulses of teenagers and young adults , had already made itself onerous , by reputation and rumor at least , throughout France . Furthermore , it was an army entirely dependent for support upon the countryside . After April 1796 , pay was made in metallic value , but pay was still in arrears . Throughout the spring and early summer , the unpaid French army was in almost constant mutiny : in May 1796 , in the border town of Zweibrücken , the 74th revolted . In June , the 17th was insubordinate ( frequently ) and in the 84th , two companies rebelled . An assault into the German states was essential , as far as French

commanders understood , not only in terms of war aims , but also in practical terms : the French Directory believed that war should pay for itself , and did not budget for the payment or feeding of its troops .

At the battles of Altenkirchen ( 4 June 1796 ) and at Wetzlar saw two Republican French divisions commanded by Jean Baptiste Kléber attack a wing of the Habsburg army led by Duke Ferdinand Frederick Augustus of Württemberg . A frontal attack combined with a flanking maneuver forced the Austrians to retreat . Three future Marshals of France played significant roles in the engagement at Altenkirchen : François Joseph Lefebvre as a division commander , Jean - Baptiste de Soult as a brigadier and Michel Ney as leader of a flanking column . The battle occurred during the War of the First Coalition , part of a larger conflict called the Wars of the French Revolution . Altenkirchen is located in the state of Rhineland - Palatinate in Germany about 50 kilometers ( 31 mi ) east of Bonn . Wetzlar is located in the Landgraviate of Hesse - Kassel , a distance of 66 kilometers ( 41 mi ) north of Frankfurt .

The opening of the Rhine Campaign of 1796 began with Kléber 's attack south out of his bridgehead at Düsseldorf . After Kléber won sufficient maneuver room on the east bank of the Rhine River , Jean Baptiste Jourdan was supposed to join him with the remainder of the Army of Sambre - Meuse . But this was only a distraction . When the Austrians under Archduke Charles , Duke of Teschen moved north to oppose Jourdan , Jean Victor Marie Moreau would cross the Rhine far to the south with the Army of Rhin - Moselle . Kléber carried out his part of the scheme to perfection , allowing Jourdan to cross the Rhine at Neuwied on 10 June . This was part of a plan to lure Archduke Charles to the north so that the Army of Rhin - Moselle under Jean Victor Marie Moreau could breach the Rhine defenses in the south . The strategy worked as designed . When Charles came north with heavy forces to drive back Jourdan , Moreau successfully mounted an assault crossing of the Rhine at Kehl near Strasbourg .

On 22 June , the French executed simultaneous crossings at Kehl and Hüningen . At Kehl , Moreau 's advance guard , 10,000 , preceded the main force of 27,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry directed at the several hundred Swabian pickets on the bridge . The Swabian force consisted of recruits provided by the members of the Swabian Circle and most of them were literally raw recruits , field hands and day laborers drafted for service in the spring of that year . The Swabians were hopelessly outnumbered and could not be reinforced . Most of the Imperial Army of the Rhine was stationed further north , by Mannheim , where the river was easier to cross , but too far away to support the smaller force at Kehl . Neither the Condé 's troops in Freiburg nor Karl Aloys zu Fürstenberg 's force in Rastatt could reach Kehl in time to relieve the Swabian troops . Within a day , Moreau had four divisions across the river . Unceremoniously thrust out of Kehl , the Swabian contingent reformed at Rastatt by 5 July . There they managed to hold the city until reinforcements arrived , although Charles could not move much of his army away from Mannheim or Karlsruhe , where the French had also formed across the river .

At Hüningen , near Basel , Ferino executed a full crossing , and advanced east along the German shore of the Rhine with the 16th and 50th Demi - brigades , the 68th , 50th and 68th line infantry , and six squadrons of cavalry that included the 3rd and 7th Hussars and the 10th Dragoons . The Habsburg and Imperial armies were in danger of encirclement : the French pressed hard at Rastatt and Ferino moved quickly east along the shore of the Rhine via which they could encircle the Coalition army from the east .

To prevent this , Charles executed an orderly withdrawal in four columns through the Black Forest , across the Upper Danube valley , and toward Bavaria , trying to maintain consistent contact with all flanks as each column withdrew through the Black Forest and the Upper Danube . By mid - July , the column encamped near Stuttgart . The third column , which included the Condé 's Corps , retreated through Waldsee to Stockach , and eventually Ravensburg . The fourth Austrian column , the smallest ( three battalions and four squadrons ) , under General Wolff , marched the length of the Bodensee 's northern shore , via Überlingen , Meersburg , Buchhorn , and the Austrian city of Bregenz .

Given the size of the attacking force , Charles had to withdraw far enough into Bavaria to align his northern flank in a perpendicular line with Wartensleben 's autonomous corps . His own front would

prevent Moreau from flanking Wartensleben from the south and together they could resist the French onslaught . In the course of this withdrawal , most of the Swabian Circle was abandoned to the French . At the end of July , eight thousand of Charles ' men executed a dawn attack on the camp of the remaining three thousand Swabian and French immigrant troops , disarmed them , and impounded their weapons . As Charles withdrew further east , the neutral zone expanded , eventually encompassing most of southern German states and the Ernestine Duchies .

= = = Summer of 1796 = = =

The summer and fall included various conflicts throughout the southern territories of the German states as the armies of the Coalition and the armies of the Directory sought to flank each other. By mid @-@ summer , the situation looked grim for the Coalition : Wartensleben continued to withdraw to the east @-@ northeast despite Charles ' orders to unite with him . It appeared probable that Jourdan or Moreau would succeed in flanking Charles or driving a wedge between his force and that of Wartensleben . At Neresheim on 11 August , Moreau crushed Charles ' force , forcing him to withdraw further east . At last , however , Wartensleben recognized the danger and changed direction , moving his corps to join at Charles ' northern flank . At Amberg on 24 August , Charles inflicted a defeat on the French ; that same day , his commanders lost a battle to the French at Friedberg . Regardless , the tide had turned in the Coalition 's favor . Both Jourdan and Moreau had overstretched their lines , moving far into the German states , and were separated too far from each other for one to offer the other aid or security . The Coalition 's concentration of troops forced a wider wedge between the two armies of Jourdan and Moreau , similar to what the French had tried to do to Charles and Wartensleben . As the French withdrew toward the Rhine , Charles and Wartensleben pressed forward . On 3 September at Würzburg , Jourdan attempted to halt the retreat . Once Moreau received word of this defeat , he had to withdraw from southern Germany . He pulled his troops back through the Black Forest , with Ferino supervising the rear guard . The Austrian corps commanded by Latour drew too close to Moreau at Biberach and lost 4000 prisoners , some standards and artillery , and Latour followed at a more sensible distance . The two armies clashed again at Emmendingen , where Wartensleben was mortally wounded in the Coalition victory . After Emmendingen , the French withdrew to the south and west , and formed for battle by Schliengen .

= = = Principal actions of Summer ? Fall 1796 = = =

= = Organizational and command problems = =

The Army of the Rhine and Moselle experienced excruciating command problems in its early operations . The campaign of 1795 was entirely a French failure and the difficulties the army faced , especially in 1795 , had much to do with Pichegru 's own situation : his competition with both Moreau and Jourdan and his disaffection with the direction in which the revolution was headed . Originally a dedicated Jacobin , by 1794 , his own intrigues had placed him in command after he had undermined Lazare Hoche the previous year , insuring his own appointment as commander of this army . As the revolution waxed and waned in its ardency , so did Pichegru : by late 1794 , he was leaning heavily toward the royalist cause . The Directory replaced him with Desaix , and later Moreau . Pichegru 's actions sometimes seemed inexplicable : although an associate , even a friend , of the recently executed Saint @-@ Just , Pichegru offered his services to the Thermidorian Reaction , and , after having received the title of Sauveur de la Patrie ( " Saviour of the Motherland " ) from the National Convention , subdued the sans @-@ culottes of Paris , when they rose in insurrection against the Convention on the bread riots of 1 April 1795 .

Undeniably a capable , possibly brilliant , and popular commander , Pichegru began his second campaign by crossing the Meuse on 18 October , and , after taking Nijmegen , drove the Austrians back across the Rhine . Then , instead of going into winter quarters , he prepared his army for a

winter campaign , always a difficult proposition in the eighteenth century . On 27 December , three brigades crossed the Meuse on the ice , and stormed the Bommelerwaard . On 10 January the army crossed the Waal near Zaltbommel , entered Utrecht on 13 January , which surrendered on the 16th . The Prussian and the British armies withdrew behind the IJssel and then fled to the safety of Hanover and Bremen . Pichegru , who succeeded in avoiding the frozen Dutch Water Line arrived in Amsterdam on 20 January , after its revolution . The French occupied the rest of the Dutch Republic in the next month . This major victory , the expulsion of the Coalition from the Low Countries and the successful occupation and alliance with the new Batavian Republic , was marked by unique episodes , such as the capture of the Dutch fleet , which was frozen in Den Helder , by French hussars , and exceptional discipline of the French battalions in Amsterdam , who , although faced with the opportunity of plundering the richest city in Europe , showed remarkable self @-@ restraint . Consequently , when Pichegru then took united command of the armies of the North , the Sambre @-@ and @-@ Meuse , and the Rhine , and crossed the Rhine in force in May 1795 , he held the enviable position as hero of the Revolution . He took Mannheim in May 1795 , but inexplicably he allowed his colleague Jourdan to be defeated ; by 1797 it was well @-@ understood in Paris that he betrayed all his plans to the enemy , and , over the following eighteen months , participated in a conspiracy for the return and coronation of Louis XVIII as King of France .

= = = School for marshals = = =

The campaigns in which the Army of the Rhine and Moselle participated also provided exception experience for a cadre of extraordinary young officers . In his five volume analysis of the Revolutionary Armies , Ramsey Weston Phipps emphasized the importance of experience under these conditions . His object was to show how the training received in the early years of the war varied not only with the theater in which they served but also with the character of the army to which they belonged . The experience of young officers under the tutelage of such experienced men as Pichegru , Moreau , Lazar Hoche , Lefebvre , Jourdan , and even the unfortunate Nicolas Luckner , Adam Philippe , comte de Custine , and Jean Nicolas Houchard ( all had been arrested and guillotined in 1794 ) . Participation in this army , particularly in the contrasting campaigns of 1795 , which was a disaster , and 1796 , which had mixed success , provided young officers ? some , like Ney , only captains at the time ? with valuable experience . Furthermore , they had been tested against first class enemy commanders : Wurmser , Clerfayt , Archduke Charles , Wartensleben , for example .

Phipps ' analysis is not singular , although his lengthy volumes address in detail the value of this " school for marshals . " In 1895 , Richard Phillipson Dunn @-@ Pattison had also singled out the French Revolutionary army as " the finest school the world has yet seen for an apprenticeship in the trade of arms . " The resurrection of the marchalate , the ancien regime civil dignity allowed Emperor Napoleon I to strengthen his newly created power by rewarding the most valuable of the generals who had served under his command during his campaigns in Italy and Egypt or soldiers who had held significant commands during the French Revolutionary Wars . Subsequently , other senior generals were promoted on six different occasions , mainly following major battlefield victories .

Of the members of the Army of the Rhine and Moselle , and its subsequent incarnations , Jourdan , de Soult , and Massena were among the first to be named as Marshals in Napoleon 's regime in 1804 . The army included five future Marshals of France : Jean @-@ Baptiste Jourdan , its commander @-@ in @-@ chief , Jean @-@ Baptiste Drouet , Laurent de Gouvion Saint @-@ Cyr , and Édouard Adolphe Casimir Joseph Mortier . François Joseph Lefebvre , by 1804 an old man , was named an honorary marshal , but not awarded a field position . Michel Ney , in the 1795 ? 1799 campaigns an intrepid cavalry commander , came into his own command under the tutelage of Moreau and Massena in the south German and Swiss campaigns . Jean de Dieu Soult had served under Moreau and Massena , becoming the latter 's right @-@ hand man during the Swiss campaign of 1799 ? 1800 . Jean Baptiste Bessieres , like Ney , had been a competent and sometimes inspired regimental commander in 1796 . MacDonald , Oudinot and Gouvion Saint @-@ Cyr , participants in the 1796 campaign , all received honors in the third , fourth and fifth promotions

( 1809 , 1811 , 1812 ) .

= = Commanders = =