

= Battle of Neerwinden (1793) =

The Battle of Neerwinden (18 March 1793) saw a Republican French army led by Charles François Dumouriez attack a Coalition army commanded by Prince Josias of Saxe @-@ Coburg @-@ Saalfeld . The Coalition army 's Habsburg Austrians together with a small contingent of allied Dutch Republic troops repulsed all French assaults after bitter fighting and Dumouriez conceded defeat , withdrawing from the field . The French position in the Austrian Netherlands swiftly collapsed , ending the threat to the Dutch Republic and allowing Austria to regain control of her lost province . The War of the First Coalition engagement was fought at Neerwinden , located 57 kilometres (35 mi) east of Brussels in present @-@ day Belgium .

After Dumouriez 's victory at Jemappes in November 1792 , the French armies rapidly overran most of the Austrian Netherlands . Rather than driving the Austrians to the west bank of the Rhine River , Dumouriez and the French government became preoccupied with a war with the Dutch Republic . During the breathing space offered by her enemy , Austria assembled an army under the Prince of Coburg and struck back . After a French covering force was routed by Coburg at Aldenhoven , Dumouriez began gathering his army for a counterstroke .

Coburg took up a defensive position at Neerwinden and awaited the confident Dumouriez 's attack . The Coalition army was outnumbered in infantry but possessed a two @-@ to @-@ one superiority in cavalry . After intense fighting , Coburg 's troops repulsed the attacks of the French center and right wing . When Dumouriez found that his left wing was driven off the battlefield , he began retreating . The defeat led to mass desertions from the discouraged French volunteers . In the face of the military collapse , Dumouriez negotiated a free withdrawal of French troops in return for the surrender of Belgium and Dutch territory . Soon , Dumouriez was plotting against his own government and when his plans failed , he defected to the Austrians , leaving the French army in chaos .

= = Background = =

= = = French conquer Belgium = = =

On 6 November 1792 , a French army under Charles François Dumouriez defeated the Austrian army of Duke Albert of Saxe @-@ Teschen at the Battle of Jemappes . The French enjoyed an enormous numerical superiority with 40 @,@ 000 infantry , 3 @,@ 000 cavalry and 100 guns against an Austrian army counting 11 @,@ 628 foot soldiers , 2 @,@ 168 horsemen and 56 guns . Within one month the French armies overran most of the Austrian Netherlands , a territory known today as the nation of Belgium . On the right flank , the Army of the Ardennes led by Jean @-@ Baptiste Cyrus de Valence advanced down the Meuse River toward Huy . On the way , Valence dropped off a force under Louis @-@ Auguste Juvénal des Ursins d 'Harville to besiege Namur . Dumouriez himself with the Army of Belgium captured Liège . The Army of the North commanded by Francisco de Miranda laid siege to Antwerp . It was joined by a column under Benôit Guérin de Berneron that marched first from Ath northeast to Leuven (Louvain) .

Mechelen (Malines) capitulated to Henri Christian Michel de Stengel and 6 @,@ 000 Frenchmen on 16 November 1792 and its garrison of one battalion of the Austrian Württemberg Infantry Regiment Nr. 38 was allowed to go free . On the 27th Stengel with 8 @,@ 000 soldiers from the Army of Belgium won a minor action at Voroux @-@ lez @-@ Liers near Liège over Anton Sztáray and four battalions of Austrians . Antwerp fell on 29 November to Miranda 's 17 @,@ 600 infantry and 1 @,@ 245 cavalry . The Austrian garrison of the 1st Battalion of the Hohenlohe Nr. 17 , two companies of the Vierset Nr. 59 and four companies of the Würzburg Infantry Regiments , plus 140 gunners surrendered after losing two dead and four wounded . The French captured 57 cannons , 50 additional 3 @-@ pound regimental cannons , 3 @,@ 150 muskets and 1 @,@ 523 hundredweight of gunpowder . The 2 @,@ 599 @-@ man garrison of Namur under Johann Dominik von Moitelle surrendered on 2 December to Valence and Harville after a four @-@ week siege . The

Austrian defenders included two battalions of the Kinsky Infantry Regiment Nr. 36 , one battalion of the Vierset , two companies of the Le Loup Jäger Battalion , a half @-@ squadron of the Esterhazy Hussar Regiment Nr. 32 and 90 gunners . Harville 's division counted 13 @,@ 256 infantry , 1 @,@ 425 cavalry and 266 artillerymen .

= = = Invasion of Dutch Republic and Austrian counterattack = = =

Dumouriez had an opportunity to drive the Austrians from the west bank of the Rhine in conjunction with the Army of the Center . Instead he pursued a pet project of his , the invasion of the Dutch Republic . He hoped to go to war with the Dutch while keeping the Kingdom of Great Britain neutral . But the French government forced his hand , declaring war on Great Britain on 1 February 1793 and ordering him to overrun the Dutch Republic . Dumouriez undertook the invasion with 15 @,@ 000 infantry and 1 @,@ 000 cavalry , soon reinforced . Leaving Miranda to besiege Maastricht , covered by Valence 's army and Harville 's corps , Dumouriez pushed north . At this time the Army of the North counted 18 @,@ 322 men , the Army of Belgium numbered 30 @,@ 197 , the Army of the Ardennes consisted of 23 @,@ 479 soldiers , Harville 's corps was 12 @,@ 051 strong , the Army of Holland had 23 @,@ 244 troops and there were 15 @,@ 000 men in Belgian garrisons . All told , the strength of the French army in the Low Countries was 122 @,@ 293 men . The French army became overconfident , believing itself invincible . Meanwhile , the National Convention was riven by bitter political struggles between the moderate Girondists and the extreme Jacobins . During this period the army supply system fell apart through neglect .

Dumouriez crossed the Dutch frontier on 16 February 1793 . The fortress of Breda fell after a quick siege from 21 to 24 February 1793 . The 3 @,@ 000 Dutch defenders , which included 2 @,@ 500 infantry and a dragoon regiment , surrendered the city with its 250 cannon and were allowed to go free . Also on the 21st , Maastricht was invested by 10 @,@ 000 troops of Miranda 's army . There were 8 @,@ 000 Austrian and Dutch defenders under Prince Karl Wilhelm Georg of Hesse @-@ Darmstadt , an Austrian General @-@ major . The siege work at Maastricht in winter weather was too much for the French volunteers and many deserted their units and went home . The fortress of Geertruidenberg with 150 guns capitulated after a siege from 1 to 4 March . The Dutch garrison of two battalions and two squadrons were allowed to go free . Both Breda and Geertruidenberg had been bluffed into giving up by the military engineer Jean Claude le Michaud d 'Arcon , who had designed the floating batteries at the Great Siege of Gibraltar . A small fort at Klundert was captured on 4 March by 4 @,@ 000 men under Berneron . The tiny garrison put up a stiff fight and lost 60 killed before the 73 survivors gave up .

Poised at the edge of Hollands Diep , Dumouriez planned to cross and march through Rotterdam , Delft , The Hague and Leiden to seize Amsterdam . After capturing Maastricht , Miranda would join him by advancing through Nijmegen and Utrecht . Preoccupied with the Dutch Republic , the French commander had given the Austrians too much time to recover . Prince Josias of Saxe @-@ Coburg @-@ Saalfeld massed an Austrian army on the west bank of the Rhine . He was assisted by a promising staff officer named Karl Mack von Leiberich . On 1 March , Coburg swept aside René Joseph de Lanoue 's covering army at the Battle of Aldenhoven . The French abandoned the siege of Maastricht on 3 March . Coburg pursued slowly and the French forces regrouped at Leuven on the 9th . Dumouriez was slow to give up his Dutch project but the French government insisted that he take charge in Belgium . Leaving Louis @-@ Charles de Flers in command of the Army of Holland , Dumouriez arrived at Leuven on 11 March .

Dumouriez thought his soldiers ' morale was too shaky for a retreat so he advanced on Coburg 's army , seeking battle . In his haste , the French commander failed to call up Harville 's corps or the Army of Holland as reinforcements . Earlier , François Joseph Drouot de Lamarche had been driven out of Tienen (Tirlemont) , but on 16 March the French recaptured it after a vigorous combat . The French attacked Tienen with 10 @,@ 000 troops while Archduke Charles , Duke of Teschen defended the town with 6 @,@ 000 soldiers , six guns and two mortars . French casualties numbered 500 while their opponents sustained losses of 800 killed , wounded and missing . Coburg pulled his army back behind the Little Gete River . Believing that he outnumbered his enemies ,

Dumouriez was very confident of success . A century before , the French had won the Battle of Landen on the same ground .

= = Battle = =

= = = Forces = = =

The strengths given for the two armies vary somewhat . Historian Digby Smith credited the French with between 40 @,@ 000 and 45 @,@ 000 men while stating Austro @-@ Dutch numbers as 43 @,@ 000 . Ramsay Weston Phipps asserted that the French had 40 @,@ 000 foot and 4 @,@ 500 horse while the Coalition counted 30 @,@ 000 infantry and 9 @,@ 000 cavalry . Theodore Ayrault Dodge wrote that Dumouriez put 42 @,@ 000 infantry and 5 @,@ 000 cavalry into battle against Coburg 's 30 @,@ 000 foot and 10 @,@ 000 horse . According to Gunther E. Rothenberg Dumouriez was outnumbered 43 @,@ 000 to 41 @,@ 000 .

Lamarche 's Advance Guard counted 4 @,@ 000 infantry and 1 @,@ 000 cavalry . Auguste Marie Henri Picot de Dampierre led the Flankers of the Right , 2 @,@ 000 infantry and 1 @,@ 000 cavalry . Valence 's Right Wing numbered 7 @,@ 000 in 18 battalions and was divided into the divisions of Joachim Joseph Neuilly , Alexis Paul Michel Le Veneur and Valence . Duke Louis of Chartres led the Center which included 7 @,@ 000 foot soldiers in 18 battalions and 1 @,@ 000 horsemen . The subordinate generals of the Center were Jacques Thouvenot and Dominique Dietmann . Miranda 's Left Wing was made up of Jean Alexandre Ihler 's 7 @,@ 000 men and Felix Marie Pierre Chesnon de Champmorin 's 5 @,@ 000 infantry and 1 @,@ 000 cavalry . Joseph Miaczinski led the Flankers of the Left , 2 @,@ 000 foot and 1 @,@ 000 horse . Jean Nestor de Chancel commanded the eight battalion Reserve in the strength of 4 @,@ 000 men . These figures total 38 @,@ 000 infantry and 5 @,@ 000 cavalry .

The Advance Guard of Archduke Charles with 11 battalions and 11 squadrons was divided into a number of brigades under the command of colonels . Joseph von Gruber commanded two battalions of the Sztáray Infantry Regiment Nr. 33 . Stephan von Mihaljevich led three battalions of the Mahony Jägers , one battalion of the O 'Donnell Freikorps , 1 / 3 battalion of the Branovaczky Freikorps and one squadron of the Esterhazy Hussar Regiment Nr. 32 . Anton Ulrich Joseph von Mylius directed one battalion of the Grün @-@ Laudon Freikorps , 1 / 3 battalion of Tyrolean Sharpshooters and one squadron of the Esterhazy Hussars . Karl Philipp , Prince of Schwarzenberg directed one and 1 / 3 battalion of Tyrolean Sharpshooters , one battalion of the O 'Donnell Freikorps , 1 / 3 battalion of the Branovaczky Freikorps and three squadrons of the Uhlan Regiment . Paul Devay (Vay de Vaya) led the Barthodeisky , Briey and Pückler Grenadier battalions and six squadrons of the Esterhazy Hussars .

Joseph de Ferraris led the eight battalions and 16 squadrons of the 1st Rank with Duke Ferdinand Frederick Augustus of Württemberg as his division commander . There were two battalions each of Infantry Regiments Kheul Nr. 10 , Wartensleben Nr. 28 and Brentano Nr. 35 , one battalion each of the Archduke Charles Nr. 3 and Jordis Nr. 59 , six squadrons each of the Kavanagh Nr. 12 and Nassau Nr. 14 Cuirassier Regiments and two squadrons each of the Kaiser Nr. 1 and Duke Albert Nr. 5 Carabinier Regiments . Wenzel Graf Colloredo @-@ Waldsee directed the six battalions and 10 squadrons of the 2nd Rank , seconded by division commander Johann Andreas Benjowski and brigadier Franz Vincenz Ferrer von Hoditz und Wolfranitz . The units included two battalions each of Infantry Regiments Brechainville Nr. 25 and Callenberg Nr. 54 , one battalion each of the Alton Nr. 15 and Joseph Colloredo Nr. 57 , six squadrons of the Zeschwitz Nr. 10 Cuirassiers and two squadrons each of the Karaczay Nr. 18 Cheveau @-@ léger and Coburg Nr. 37 Dragoon Regiments .

François Sébastien Charles Joseph de Croix , Count of Clerfayt led 11 battalions and 14 squadrons of the Reserve , with József Alvinczi as his division commander and Johann Nepomuk Gottfried von Lützwow as his brigadier . The units were two battalions each of Infantry Regiments Ligne Nr. 30 , Esterhazy Nr. 34 and Württemberg Nr. 38 , one battalion each of the Murray Nr. 55 and Vierset Nr.

58 , the Leuven , Morzin and Rousseau Grenadier battalions , eight squadrons of the Latour Cheveau @-@ légers Nr. 31 and six squadrons of the Blankenstein Hussars Nr. 16 . The Dutch Republic contributed six battalions , consisting of two battalions each of the Stokkar and Waldeck and one battalion each of the May and Welderen Infantry Regiments .

= = = Combat = = =

Coburg 's Advance Guard under Archduke Charles was drawn up on the right flank , Graf Colloredo and the Duke of Württemberg stood in the center and the Count of Clerfayt with the Reserve defended the left flank . The village of Halle was at the far right of the line while Neerwinden village was in the left @-@ center . A screen of Coalition light troops was posted in all the hamlets along the Little Gete . Dumouriez organized eight columns of attack . Valence on the right led three attack columns against Racour and Oberwinden , the Duke of Chartres directed two columns in the center via Laer and Miranda commanded three columns on the left along the main road to Halle . The French reserve formed a final column on the far left where it was to first capture Zoutleeuw (Leau) and then swing south against Halle . Lamarche 's Advance Guard operated with the Right Wing .

Dumouriez believed that Coburg would put his main strength on the right wing to protect the Austrian line of communications . Therefore , he planned to throw his heaviest blow against Coburg 's left wing . Clerfayt 's line stretched from Neerwinden , across Mittelwinden hill to Oberwinden village on the left . Dumouriez directed Valence to outflank Oberwinden with one column , attack Oberwinden frontally with the second and seize the Mittelwinden hill with the third . On Valence 's left , Chartres was ordered to attack Neerwinden with his columns . At 7 : 00 AM , the French swarmed across the Little Gete but Valence was unable to capture the Mittelwinden hill until noon . The French seized Racour , Oberwinden and finally Neerwinden .

The Coalition forces launched attack after attack on the villages which were stubbornly defended by the French . Meanwhile , Austrian cavalry charges were highly effective in the open ground between the settlements . After bitter fighting in which Oberwinden and Racour changed hands repeatedly , the two villages and Neerwinden were recaptured by Clerfayt 's troops . An Austrian cavalry charge pressed back the French even farther . Dumouriez attempted one more all @-@ out attack with his right but it failed . The French cavalry covered the retreat of the infantry , with Chartres and Valence maintaining a position along the Little Gete .

When Miranda attacked that morning , Coburg 's first reaction was to draw substantial troops from his center to reinforce his right flank . Initially , Archduke Charles ' men were driven back to Dorsmael but then they held on to the village . The French Reserve captured Leau and threatened Halle but was soon thrown back . The main fighting occurred between 3 : 00 and 6 : 00 PM when Miaczinski 's column seized Dorsmael but counterattacks drove his soldiers out . Other attacks withered in the face of the strong Coalition defenses . Charles saw an opportunity and hurled his cavalry on the tired French soldiers . The Left Wing became so demoralized that its troops were driven back to Tienen before Miranda could rally them . When Dumouriez heard of the defeat of Miranda 's wing on the morning of the 19th he was forced to order a retreat .

= = Results = =

On the Coalition side , Mack was given much of the credit for Coburg 's triumph . Blamed for the defeat , Miranda traveled to Paris to intrigue against Dumouriez . The Austro @-@ Dutch reported losses of 97 officers , 2 @, @ 762 rank and file and 779 horses . The French lost 4 @, @ 000 killed and wounded , plus 1 @, @ 000 men and 30 artillery pieces captured . General of Brigade Georges Guiscard de Bar was killed and four generals were wounded . Another source estimated Austrian losses as 2 @, @ 600 killed and wounded and 400 missing while French casualties were 3 @, @ 000 killed and wounded plus 1 @, @ 000 missing or prisoners . Immediately after the battle , about 6 @, @ 000 French volunteers deserted the colors and went home . Three days later , Dumouriez 's army only numbered about 20 @, @ 000 troops as the men deserted in hundreds . On 23 March there was a clash at Pellenberg where Coburg with 38 @, @ 000 soldiers defeated Dumouriez with

22 @, @ 000 . The Austrians sustained 900 casualties while inflicting 2 @, @ 000 on the French .

On 24 March the French army retreated through Brussels . Dumouriez began calling in his detachments such as Harville 's corps . At this point Dumouriez opened negotiations with the Austrians . He offered to evacuate Belgium if his armies were allowed an unmolested retreat . The terms were accepted and the French armies withdrew to camps behind the border . The Army of Holland was allowed to march through enemy lines and took position near Lille . The Army of the Ardennes was posted at Maulde , the Army of the North at Bruille @-@ Saint @-@ Amand , and the Army of Belgium at Condé @-@ sur @-@ l 'Escaut and Valenciennes . Geertruidenberg was evacuated on 2 April and Breda on 3 April .

Dumouriez was a monarchist at heart and he despaired when King Louis XVI went to the guillotine on 21 January 1793 . He found the political situation in Paris to be chaotic . He was appalled at the tendency of radicals to interfere with army commanders . Having already negotiated with the enemy , Dumouriez offered to treat and the Austrians sent Mack on 25 March . The French commander proposed to take the army and march on Paris . He would overthrow the National Convention , crush the Jacobins and restore the Constitution of 1791 . For their part , the Austrians pledged to halt their advance while he carried out his coup . But Dumouriez moved too slowly . On 1 April , four commissioners and the War Minister Pierre de Ruel , marquis de Beurnonville arrived at his headquarters to demand that the commander explain himself in Paris . They were seized and handed over to the Austrians .

Dumouriez tried to put the frontier fortresses in the hands of his adherents but failed . Miaczinski botched the attempted seizure of Lille and was later executed . Dumouriez believed that he could control the regular infantry and cavalry regiments . On the other hand , the volunteers and the artillery remained devoted to the National Convention . In one incident , Dumouriez was fired on and nearly arrested by Louis @-@ Nicolas Davout 's volunteer battalion . He then made the mistake of being seen with an Austrian escort and the gunners took the lead in refusing to obey him . Seeing that his plot had fallen apart , Dumouriez defected to the Austrians on 5 April 1793 . He was accompanied by the Duke of Chartres , Valence , several more generals and some cavalry . No longer bound by the previous agreement , Coburg prepared to invade France .

Hitherto the armies had been ruled and directed by officers . Now begins the Revolutionary nightmare .

Ironically , the treason and defection of Dumouriez gave the Jacobins full scope to take control of the armies . Before Neerwinden , the army obeyed its commanders . Afterward , the representatives on mission were given extraordinary powers over army commanders . The generals might pay with their lives for defeat , but the real authority lay with the political operatives . Meanwhile , the new War Minister sent his agents to spy on the generals . These men were quick to report any complaint against officers , which could result in disgrace or execution . Elements of this system stayed in force even after Maximilien Robespierre was overthrown and guillotined .