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THE AUSTRIAN ARMY

LEE EYSTURLID

During the long, on-again-off-again wars generated by the events of the French Revolution, the Habsburg monarchy would contribute the largest single contingent of troops to the fight.¹ For the Austrians, the wars fought over this nine-year period were a long-term disaster. Entering the war with a small, professional army, the monarchy would constantly be at loose ends to find the financing and manpower to carry out the demands of a European-wide war. Worse yet, and critical to remember, was that the disparate Habsburg lands were incapable of the political revolution that had allowed a homogenous France to mobilize so many men and such vast resources. There could be no real appeal to nationalism, like in France, in a state that had over a dozen national and linguistic groups. Not only was Austria poor by French or English standards, but it was a thoroughly early modern state, incapable of internal, liberal political reform. The history of Austria's army and its leaders in these wars is, then, one of reaction and, when it occurred, temporary, superficial change. This said, and while the monarchy often saw defeat on the battlefield, its army's ability to outlast its opponent allowed for its survival and eventual recovery.

When the Revolution first broke out in France, there was only modest concern in Vienna. Of far greater concern at the time were relations with Prussia and Russia over the so-called Second Partition of Poland. The Habsburg emperor Leopold II warned France of its belligerence in threatening Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in 1791, but showed little inclination to war. But the Austrians misjudged the French, or at least the Directory's, inclination for war, as events would show. The January 1792 demands for compliance with the old 1756 Franco-Austrian alliance simply pushed the monarchy cooperation treaty with its old nemesis, Prussia. Then, rather unexpectedly, Leopold II, a lover of peace and an enlightened monarch, died. He was replaced by his oldest son, Francis II (later Francis I, emperor

of Austria). Young, inexperienced, and lacking his father's prudence, Francis would be unable to stem the slide to war.² Furious over the new, potential Prussian alliance and looking to discourage the other German states from participation, the Directory decided on war. On 21 April 1792, it declared war on the king of Hungary and Bohemia.

To gain an understanding of the Habsburg army, it is necessary to try and first come to grips with the rather diverse, if not confusing, nature of the monarchy itself. The empire sprawled across central Europe from what is today Belgium to southern Poland (Galicia) and from the Czech Republic (Bohemia) to the northern states of Italy. The pillar of the monarchy's holdings were the hereditary lands, the *Erblande*, which centered on what is now modern Austria.³ Added to this, though indirectly, was the large, powerful, but organizationally medieval state of Hungary, whose nobles jealously guarded their privileges. The title of Holy Roman emperor also gave, at least in theory, the Habsburg ruler access to the resources and armies of the numerous German states. However, while often evoked during the wars, the imperial title proved of little real use, as states like Bavaria, Saxony, and Brunswick, to name only three, would prove more than willing to seek political accommodation with the French when threatened. The Habsburg ruler therefore had to try and tie together the loyalties of Germans, Magyars, Czechs, Flemings and Walloons, Poles, Croatians, Serbs, Romanians, and numerous other small groups including Roma.⁴ Such a state existed due to the combination of some early modern reforms, combined with numerous concessions to medieval and noble preferences. This outdated system inherently undermined the monarchy's ability to raise troops and taxes. For this reason, despite its great physical size and relative wealth, Austria could never compete alone with its French opponent.

Government functioned during the period in question exactly as it had in the preceding century, with only the most minor of changes. The only real reforms had occurred, as mentioned above, as a result of numerous setbacks suffered during the Seven Years' War. The Habsburg ruler for all but the very beginning of the wars of revolution, Francis II, was not just a conservative, but in the end a reactionary. The violence of the French social change, when measured against the polyglot nature of his kingdom, made it clear to him that such reforms were impossible, and therefore none were attempted. Historians, often looking to find some level of real reform among

the Habsburg government or army, too often are willing to mistake improvement for real change. During the period between 1792 and 1801, nothing of magnitude changed for the Habsburg army. So command of the state, and therefore the army, remained firmly in the hands of the monarch, who was absolute. In Vienna day-to-day affairs were run by a state council, the *Staatsrat*, while foreign affairs belonged to the *Haus-Hof und Staatskanzlei*. Finance was handled indirectly by the council, under the direction of a chief financial officer. Finances were always tenuous, and the long wars required the running of a sizable debt combined with the need to get foreign loans (these coming mostly from Great Britain) and the issuance of paper money. With the renewal of fighting in 1792, Austria would face its reoccurring problem, as laid out by its then chief financier, Count Chotek. War brought inflation and rising prices, which made an increase in taxes problematic, but a burgeoning deficit made internal or external loans difficult to acquire. In reaction, Chotek appealed for greater voluntary contributions from the great families and the provinces in combination with another effort to secure foreign, read English, loans or grants.⁵

The leadership of the Habsburg military, the *kaiserlich-königliche Armee* (the imperial and royal army title for the armed forces as a concession to the Hungarians, as the Habsburg emperor was actually their king) of course rested with the monarch, but in the field, and Francis only once visited the army, command was held by the generals. Francis was not ignorant of military affairs and had seen some exposure to field operations during a visit to the field in the Austro-Turkish War in 1788. He was not a military man, was intelligent enough to realize that he would never be one, and he meddled only with overall strategy. This said, he often did not appoint the best men but rather seems to have shown a preference for mediocrities to command. Likely, this came out of the fear that all Habsburg rulers since the Thirty Year's War suffered—the fear of being overshadowed by a charismatic and successful field commander. Such had been the case with Wallenstein, whose success so frightened the Habsburg ruler of the time, Ferdinand II, that he had him assassinated.⁶ Francis also had a clear preference for the advice of his civilian advisors, chancellors like Johann Franz Baron Thugut, Johann Ludwig Count Cobenzl, and Franz Count Colloredo. While generally competent, these advisors were willing to get directly involved in questioning military strategy and even operations. Their authority

was increased in 1792 and would overlap with the uniquely Austrian organization known as the Hofkriegsrat. Dating to 1566 and made of a mixed body of military and civilian officials, the Hofkriegsrat acted as a planning staff and controlled the routine administration of the army, directing ordinance, engineering, and logistics, while issuing day-to-day orders. The organization was inherently bureaucratic and became notorious for its Byzantine abuses, where requests seemed to disappear into it, never to return. With a relatively small staff, some thirty officers and perhaps one hundred clerks, the Hofkriegsrat still looked to maintain control through streams of required reports that served to bog down the administration of the army at all levels.⁷ It was only in the initial reform efforts of the Archduke Charles in 1801 that any real streamlining of the agencies was attempted, and then only without resulting in any real change.⁸

Habsburg generals' ranks are numerous and often confusing, but should be seen as secondary in relation to the individual commanders' aristocratic titles and actual appointments as commanders of field forces or administrative organizations. This reality meant that the Habsburg military establishment carried a ridiculous number of senior generals on its rolls, far more than could be of use, although they went without pay during peacetime. Since there was no permanent military organizational structure above the level of the regiment, all commands were created on an as-needed basis. Subdivisions like brigade, division, or corps, which the French would bring into being, would only first really appear in 1809. An army was assembled as a force, given a commander, and then divided, as needed, into wings, or *abteilungen*, each again then assigned a respective commander. Field forces were often, in following the strategic practice of the time, divided between several armies, the commanders of which answered not to each other but to the emperor. This potential problem of having an unknown commander running a force of unknown regiments was solved, ideally, by the presence of a professional staff corps. Once war had been decided on and the regiments called together, the quartermaster general staff, whose director held the rank of lieutenant field marshal, would assign officers to each army. While the staff officers were intended to assist in making decisions, their primary responsibility often devolved into securing topographical intelligence.⁹ Since good maps were scarce, if nonexistent, it became a vital task for these officers to gain some notion of the lay of the land.

Another issue of concern for the Habsburg army was its logistical system. Along with the notion of the Hofkriegsrat as a bureaucratic nightmare, the General-Kriegs-Commissariat also moved imperceptibly slowly, if at all. This agency was also a mix of civilian-military personnel, although in time of war command was given to an active-duty officer. The agency's primary task during a conflict was to secure both food for the men and fodder for the horses and draft animals. This project was done through civilian commissioners, who then maintained offices in each of the provinces to act as go-betweens with the local governors. The system for collection and distribution of these supplies and resources was organized around the existence of several large-scale supply depots or magazines, *Hauptmagazine*. Supply from there was moved to depots with immediate contact with the army, or *Fassungsmagazine*. From here, the army maintained substantial supply trains, wagons, and draft animals that then filled the roads between the main force and these intermediate depots. While a permanent, and therefore ideally professional, field service existed for logistics, it remained picayune for the needs of the army at war and required an increase of nearly tenfold in personnel to even begin to meet needs.¹⁰ Added to this was the need to contract civilian drivers and teams to move the heavy artillery, field bakeries, staff facilities, and bridging equipment. As can be imagined, the Austrians' army became notorious for its long and ponderous supply lines, which choked the roads behind an army and kept troop movement, on average, well below ten miles a day.

The manpower that filled the ranks of the Habsburg army came from a combination of voluntary enlistment and conscription. Only the Military Border districts, which will be mentioned below, saw universal service. Conscription was based on a systematic census that had been ordered in 1771 to list all inhabitants of Crown lands. From this list of men available for military service, numerous exemptions were permitted, by individuals, towns, and even entire provinces. Direct application of conscription was seen in the hereditary states, although the Tyrol remained exempt with its unique form of universal militia service. Critical in raising troops, Hungary and Austria's Italian holdings also remained outside the system. Further, individual nobles, government officers, and artisans or well-to-do farmers were exempted.

While desperate for manpower, the state realized as well the necessity not to undermine the tax- and wealth-producing elements

among the town artisans and productive peasants. Therefore, the bulk of any conscription call fell upon the humblest classes, so that the army's rank and file was largely made up of the poorest peasants and day laborers. Accustomed to hardship and back-breaking labor, the average recruit was physically tough and resolute, but lacking of any personal initiative. Once conscripted, these men were to serve for life, although that was shortened during the war to twenty years, or until they could no longer serve due to sickness or wounds. Despite the long term of service, it was generally assumed that during any lengthy time of peace many of the men under arms would be discharged or given a long-term furlough. Due to the lengthy nature of the wars of the Revolution, the notion of being discharged for anything but incapacity was rare. As a result, conscription was unpopular throughout the empire, and recruiters made use of compulsion and tricks to fill their quotas. For the other branches, rules were often different, but numbers were smaller. The cavalry was supposed to only accept trained men from the infantry but often disregarded this for men with actual riding abilities. The artillery and engineers remained the most selective, and smallest, and would only take men who were Habsburg subjects, unmarried, and literate in German.¹¹

The officer corps, about which historians are always better informed, was one of the great pillars of the monarchy's stability. Its multinational makeup, and the fact that it possessed members of unclear social origin, reflected the state itself. Most often higher ranks were given to noblemen coming from the Habsburg heartlands, with some representation from the great families (e.g., Esterházy, Colloredo, Kinsky, and Liechtenstein). However, the great nobility, who saw military life as arduous and lacking substantial reward, generally did not pursue the profession. Once having entered the service, most of the officers received their training by being assigned as a cadet. They were taught the ropes, in general, by one of the regiment's senior sergeants and, if all went well, received the official rank of sublieutenant in a year. Rapidity of acceptance as a cadet and the rate of promotion varied of course with the level of noble rank the applicant brought with him. Princes of the blood, like the Archduke Charles, would expect near immediate promotion into the general ranks, while minor nobles would linger for years in lesser ranks. For the minor nobles, war was the avenue for potential, speedy promotion. While relatively rare, it

was certainly possible under the demands of wartime for commoners to be commissioned. Up to the equivalent rank of major, promotion was handled by the regimental commander-proprietor, while the rank of colonel and above required a nod from the emperor. While not recognized as ideal, ranks below major could be "purchased," albeit with approval from the regiment's colonel. Widely condemned in the nineteenth century, purchasing was intended as a means to create a form of pension system for older officers, and a means to get them out of the army.¹²

During the mid-eighteenth century, efforts by Maria Theresa had made the societal position, and therefore the attractiveness, of being an officer much greater. In order to secure their loyalty, always a Habsburg anxiety, uniformed officers had been allowed access to the imperial court. Further, and predating the Revolution's use of awards, she had created the Order of Maria Theresa, given for service and bravery and open to officers of all social ranks and religions. These and other innovations, which would create families that became generational servants in the monarchy's army and administration, did little to raise the level of military education of innovation. Rather, the Habsburg officer corps was well-known for its lack of interest in intellectual development, and most remained poorly educated.¹³ Instead, the average Austrian officer, although there were occasional exceptions, went through the revolutionary wars wed to the methods used during the Seven Year's War, and the wars against the Turks. Rarely, if ever, were the monarchy's officers encouraged to think for themselves, and it was even rarer that they should take risks.¹⁴

The army's infantry regiments were famously separated by being considered either "German" or "Hungarian." These were nominal misnomers, as they related primarily to the place and style of recruitment and to the fact that the Hungarians insisted that the language of drill and command in "their" regiments remain Magyar. In fact, the German regiments included Italians, Czechs, Poles, Belgians, and other non-Germans while their Hungarian counterparts also included Romanians and Ruthenians. The actual language of command was driven more by the language of the troops than by official designation. As mentioned above, the Military Borders of Croatia, Hungary, Slavonia, and Transylvania had a distinct status. Created as a buffer zone against the Ottomans, the regions were populated with military colonists, known as *Grenzers* (Border troops).

The notion had been to create a permanent garrison line and to cut costs. During the Seven Years' War, Maria Theresa had ordered these excellent light troops reorganized as line infantry in order to increase the size of the field armies. Understandably, their overall abilities were decreased, and the seventeen regiments fielded would not fare very well during the revolutionary wars.¹⁵

The overall kaiserlich-königliche Armee was composed of some fifty-seven regiments of line—or regular—infantry, seventeen of Grenzers, thirty-five of cavalry, and three of field artillery. Attached to this list were fortress artillery districts, a central logistical office, and various engineers and technical troops. The infantry made up three-quarters of the troops available, the cavalry a quarter, with the artillery numbering a few thousand. Due to cutbacks and lack of funds, the army had only 230,000 men ready when the wars started in 1792. There was no uniformity to the composition of troops as concerned unit size or equipment types. As an example, the average German regiment, when at full-strength, possessed two service battalions of six fusilier companies each and a stationary garrison battalion with only four companies. Each deployed battalion had three 6-pounder cannon, including artillerists and assisting troops. A regiment, whether German or Hungarian, possessed a so-called grenadier division of two companies. These men were considered the elite of the regiment and wore a traditional grenadier bearskin. During field service, these companies were taken to make ad hoc grenadier battalions, which usually served as part of formal reserve or third line. In sum, a regiment would have nearly 4,500 men under arms. More likely, as in 1792, the average fusilier company, instead of having 4 officers and 230 men, reported 3 officers and only 120 men. Because many regiments carried more men, especially the invalided or sick, on their roles than were present, it is often very difficult to determine actual army strengths at a given time by simply counting regiments.¹⁶

As the wars began in 1792, the average foot soldier, or fusilier, was armed with either the Model 1774 or Model 1784 smoothbore musket. Although considered reliable, these were heavy weapons, even for the time. As was standard at the time, both musket types allowed for the addition of a socket-mounted, triangular bayonet, measuring over a foot in length. In reaction to the setbacks of the War of the First Coalition, a reform commission would introduce a new musket, the Model 1798, which was much superior to its

predecessors. The caliber was reduced to 17.6 mm (.69), and lighter brass fittings as well as an improved firing lock were added. These changes reduced the weapon's weight by over a pound, a considerable sum. Because soldiers were able to use captured enemy ammunition, and the French fired .69 rounds as well, the weapon was seen, even by foreigners, as a real step forward.¹⁷ Along with the musket and bayonet, each man carried a short saber for close-in fighting. Each man also carried some sixty rounds of prepared ammunition on his person, with another thirty-six rounds allocated to the battalions' pack animals. Although each enlisted man was allowed little personal effects, there was a copper kettle and a tent assigned for every five men. This equipment remained with the approximately thirty packhorses and four wagons that each battalion was supposed to possess.

The army's cavalry, which numbered on paper some 40,000 strong, was often considered some of the best—horse for horse—in Europe. Unlike the infantry, whose units were often reduced to cadre strength during peace, the cavalry's need for trained men required that regiments be kept at full strength all the time. In 1792, there were thirty-five regiments, broken down roughly between one-third heavy (carabiniers and cuirassiers), one third medium (dragoons and *chevaulegers*), and one third light (hussars and uhlans). Near standard organization for all types of cavalry was the basic unit of the squadron, about 150 troopers, then organized into divisions, usually three, although heavy units often had four. Habsburg cavalry was standard for the time, mixing the use of lighter firearms with the sword or lance. The heavy cavalry, especially the cuirassiers, were generally held in reserve during a battle as the intended "shock arm." For this purpose, they possessed the heavier horse mounts and wore a front breastplate and metal helmet (unlike their French counterparts under Napoleon who wore armor on front and back). Although cuirassiers possessed pistols for sundry duties, their main weapon was a heavy, single-edged sword to be used in the charge. Light cavalry, the hussars, on the other hand, possessed a distinctive curved sword and carried a short-barreled musket.¹⁸

The third key branch, the artillery, had undergone a series of impressive and long-term reforms under the civic-minded Prince Lichtenstein in the middle of the eighteenth century but had failed to keep pace of French reforms in the 1780s. During peacetime, the monarchy's artillery possessed no real tactical formations as such

and did not have permanent unit assignments as there were no permanent units above the regiments. Three so-called field regiments were mostly administrative organizations, keeping track of the branches' nearly 10,000 officers and men. When the army moved to a war footing, these men and guns were then assigned to serve the battalion fieldpieces as well as the line batteries. Further personnel were drawn together from the *Bombardeur* corps and fortress artillery to make up the reserve batteries assigned on the newly organized army level. These reserve guns were generally employed as so-called position batteries with a given place in the battle line.

All the guns and equipment relied for transportation in the field on the *Fuhrwesencorps*, which at its best often proved unreliable and slow. While the Austrians possessed guns in weight from 3- to even 24-pounders (this giving the weight of the shot), the most commonly deployed during the revolutionary wars were the 3-, 6-, and 12-pounders. The 3-pounders were generally assigned to individual battalions, meant to bolster immediate firepower, with the 6-pounders and 12-pounders held in reserve or position batteries. Actual range of the guns varied by size, with the heavy guns roughly reaching about 3,000 feet and smaller guns maxing at 2,400 feet with solid shot.¹⁹

Acting in adjunct to the three main branches were the staffs, the engineers, and the medical services. Once put on a war footing, the army immediately began looking for men to make up the great general staff, and the several, field-army level smaller staffs. Since there were always more officers than billets, finding men was not a problem, but finding competent men often was. Contrary to these logistical and planning staffs, there always existed a standing engineering staff with corresponding units. The *kaiserlich-königliche Ingenieurs Corps*, under the command of a general field marshal and comprising nearly two hundred officers of various ranks, included two battalion-sized technical-engineering units. There were the sappers, who specialized in building fortifications while the *Minuer Corps* covered both the attack and defense of fortified positions. A third group, the pioneers, served as labor for the first two organizations, and were only activated in times of war.

Medical services were inadequate at best, and in 1792 the outdated techniques and lack of personnel would be unable to keep up with the new level of losses that the French wars would create. During a battle, dressing stations were established behind the

wings of the army, each with two staff surgeons and their immediate assistants. Often done in haste, operations necessarily revolved around the amputation of limbs. Regulations required that officers be treated first, with the rank and file to follow. Battalion and company surgeons, as they were titled, were not actual doctors. Most possessed a degree of some form, while assistant surgeons, normally enlisted men, got their training on the job. Complicating matters further was the fact that medical personnel were often not given officer rank and were held at the absolute bottom of the pay scale.²⁰ As a result, the average Austrian soldier had little hope of decent care if he became wounded on the field or fell sick on campaign.

During the wars of the Revolution, the Habsburg monarchy's "way of war" would remain in the tradition of the previous century. In strategy the dominant notion was to minimize the risks taken by the individual army commanders while protecting a baseline of supply. Maneuver, especially against an enemy's line of supply, was emphasized. The extreme importance placed on the maintenance of supply lines and access to depots explains much of the apparent timidity shown by Austrian forces throughout the Wars of the First and Second Coalition. In creating any strategy, Habsburg leaders, both civilian and military, were at pains to reconcile the potential for success with the willingness to risk the army in a battle. The ultimate achievement for any army commander would have been to maneuver one's opponents off their line of supply, forcing them to retreat (or surrender!). Such success would allow for detached corps to blockade and reduce enemy fortresses, which could then be converted to friendly depots and would open a new, secure, baseline.²¹ In the field then, the Austrians would employ, on what was essentially an operational level, the cordon system. The intention was for the army, or armies, to cover an entire region, with a series of detachments strung between fortress strongpoints. Such a line would force the enemy to move against the fortresses, to blockade or besiege them, allowing the Austrians time to gather forces for a countermove. While this system had a clear mathematical appeal, and seemed to minimize the ability of incompetent commanders to err, it was brittle and outdated. Worse for the monarchy, the French quickly bested the system with hard-marching troops, limited logistical needs, and dynamic leadership.²²

In tactics there was mirroring of the strategic and operational. Throughout the wars, the Austrian army would retain the essential

battlefield that had been standard in the Seven Years' War. Basically, doctrine called for the deployment of the infantry into two lines, preferably anchored on a physical barrier such as a river or woods, with a third, smaller line behind that in reserve. The line was then separated into a center with left and right flanks. Senior regiments and the senior subordinate general commanded on the right. Along the line was then placed the artillery, the position batteries being essentially immobile, which together with the infantry was intended to create a wall of fire. On the wings, the army's cavalry played out the role of blunting any moves by enemy cavalry or any attempt to turn the flank. Since this formation assumed a long, rigid front (this meant up to eight infantry regiments and three cavalry regiments per flank), it was best suited to the defense. Deployment in rough or hilly terrain, or anything more than a modest advance through the lines into disorder, made the force impossible for a single commander to control. Specific infantry regulations called for firing within the battalions by platoon, which was intended to give a near-constant effect. It also meant that no battalion was without a reserve of shot if it came under an unexpected cavalry charge. While all the infantry went into battle with their bayonets fixed, the real emphasis was, and remained, a controlled fire. Because of their experience in the Turkish wars, where they had been badly outnumbered in cavalry, the Austrians still made use of condensed battalion-sized formations called "close-columns." The formation was generally applied in the presence of French cavalry, or when moving to the pursuit, but it required time to form and reduced fire and speed substantially. The formation made clear that many Habsburg commanders had little faith in their troops' ability to maneuver, as the closed column gave the commander much greater tactical control over the army.²³

The monarchy's cavalry also suffered from outdated notions of training and deployment. Operating during the wars under the regulations of 1784, which assigned complicated procedures for fire, the cavalry continued to prefer, both heavy and light, the shock of the charge. For the charge, squadrons were formed up three ranks deep, the men boot to boot. The squadrons would advance at a controlled trot to maintain order, and then at a few hundred feet from the enemy receive the order to charge, which was done at a gallop. Despite the quality of many of its regiments, both heavy and light cavalry were poorly used by the Austrians. Rather than massing the

heavy cavalry, it was often used in limited numbers and with poor coordination. The army's hussars were also not used effectively for scouting, their ideal task, but rather were given out by squadron to screen or accompany smaller forces of detached infantry. Finally, the artillery had no specific rules for tactical engagement other than to add their fire to the line. Sometimes the heavier guns were combined into line of fire, rather than just the 3-pounders, often to great effect, but this was not a set tactic. Since the Austrian guns and projectile weights were inferior to their French counterparts, and since they were deployed in small groupings, their impact was always limited or inconsistent.

The Austrian armies that took the field, with their numerous allies, against the French in the War of the First (1792–97) and Second (1798–1802) Coalitions were, as has been made apparent above, a solid if somewhat obsolescent force. In the examination of the army through these long years of conflict, it is never clear that an overall grand strategy emerges. What, in the end, was the enunciated state policy of the monarchy concerning revolutionary France? With only the most minimal exceptions, the Austrians under first Leopold, and then Francis, never seem to have called for a full-scale war to remove the republic and restore the Bourbons to the throne. Perhaps the monumental nature of the task of restoration, especially after 1794, and the backing of questionable allies like Russia and Prussia, made this a non-reality. Instead, it appears, by way of the plans and cordon system employed, as a series of wars meant to restore the status quo prior to 1792. If that is the case, then the overall management of these two wars by the monarchy can be seen as an effective implementation of statecraft through a necessarily limited military tool. For it is impossible to suppose, as has been stated already, that Austrian leaders such as Francis or his reform-minded brother the Archduke Charles, had any notion that French style change was anything but impossible and also undesirable.²⁴ Therefore, by the end of 1801 the monarchy, although at the cost of men, money, and some territories had maintained itself intact in the face of revolutionary fervor.

The War of the First Coalition was in a sense a defensive war for the monarchy. Clearly uncertain how to react in the face of the radical changes then under way in France, the Austrian emperor would sign a defensively oriented convention with Prussia at the Declaration of Pillnitz on 27 August 1791. An incensed Directory,

reacting for self-serving reasons, would then declare war in April of the next year on Leopold, not Austria the state, in an effort to reflect France's new calls to liberty.²⁵ The first year of the war, which pitted the novice and disorganized armies of the French against the combined forces of Austria and Prussia saw little real fighting. Rather, neither Austria nor Prussia trusted each other, nor did it appear that either was willing to chance the loss of Polish territory in order to "save" France. It is also clear that the Austrian army was ill-prepared for war. It lacked all the needed resources, the victim of tightfisted policies and severe spending reductions under Leopold II. Further, the promised forces of the Holy Roman Empire, which were called into service by Emperor Francis, failed to materialize.

By late 1792, the French, recovering from the withdrawal of the Austro-Prussian force, went over to the offensive, attacking Austrian Belgium. In an attempt to recover their position, the allies also moved to the offensive in early 1793, forming a wide cordon line running through Belgium and Rhenish Germany under the Prince of Coburg. Again, Austrian plans were upset by a grinding lack of supplies, the slow movement of the troops, and the indecisive nature of its leadership. Despite some hard-fought victories and the failure of the French commander Charles Dumouriez, Coburg achieved little. This success was about to be shattered, however, as the French, under the leadership of Lazare Carnot, would produce larger and now veteran armies. By the end of 1793, the French had stabilized their situation in Holland and Belgium. Further complicating matters for Austria would be reduction and soon the withdrawal of the Prussians from the anti-French alliance. French offensives planned for 1794 would therefore strike against an Austrian army that was increasingly suffering from overuse, undersupply, and defeatism. Concentric attacks by French armies in the spring served to drive most of Austria's remaining allies out of the picture while also driving Coburg from Belgium itself. By October, Holland had fallen.²⁶

The start of 1795 saw Austria's Prussian, Russian, and Portuguese allies gone and the British field forces evacuated from the Continent. Still, confident of possible success, mostly the result of internal French political upheavals, Austria allied again with Russia. This hope ignored the fact that the army was exhausted and incapable of major field operations. Happily for the Habsburgs, this was also the case for the French. By September, the Austrians resumed their cordon strategy, deploying two armies of nearly 200,000 men

along a four-hundred-mile front. Modest French efforts at an offensive failed, and by the start of 1796 the monarchy's prospects looked somewhat renewed.

The campaigns of 1796–97, which ended the War of the First Coalition, saw Austria's greatest victories of the entire period dashed by the rising Napoleon. Treating Germany as the main area of operations, the Austrians found a successful commander in the Archduke Charles. Having retreated in the face of the advance of two independent French armies for several weeks, the archduke then turned and gained the position between them through a pair of battles at Amberg and Würzburg in August and September. He then pressed his advance, driving the French all the way back over the Rhine, and was preparing to move farther when disaster in Italy called him away.²⁷ While successful in Germany, the old Austrian tactic of holding lines played into the hands of the energetic and recklessly bold General Bonaparte. He quickly destroyed the Austrians' Piedmontese ally and then defeated a series of Austrian armies, capturing the last nearly intact. When Charles arrived in early 1797 to fix things, he quickly found that the army was in a shambles and pressed for peace. Furious, but with little choice, Francis accepted an armistice and then a peace treaty dictated by Napoleon. The 1796 campaign in Germany had shown that, with proper leadership and some good luck, the monarchy's army could still be successful. It was, however, to be the last real success until 1809.

The War of the Second Coalition was an even greater disappointment than the first, and did little but further damage the army. It was, unfortunately for Austria, unavoidable in the face of further French offensives taken by the Directory. Trying to stem the French tide, Austria looked for allies in Russia and Great Britain, but would provide the bulk of the troops itself. Some military reforms had been attempted in the brief respite of 1798–99.²⁸ As Archduke Charles had correctly asserted, it would be impossible to bring reform without a sustained period of peace. Changes that did occur were essentially superficial, dealing more with organization and increase in the number of regiments, a new musket, and some uniform simplifications. The argument between emphasizing skirmish warfare and maintaining unit discipline and ranks remained, but the traditionalists carried the day.²⁹

The initial campaigns of 1799 saw an effort of the Austrians and the Russians to coordinate military efforts against the French

in what is today modern Switzerland. Due to mutual distrust, these efforts came to naught. Neither the Archduke Charles, commanding in Southern Germany, nor Marshal Alexander Suvorov in Switzerland, could clearly defeat the French. Instead, the two men came to despise each other, both blaming the other for their failures. Of importance was the fact that the Russian army was so lacking in logistical support that the entire force had to be maintained by Austrian officers. By December of 1799, the coalition had disintegrated, and the Russians withdrew.³⁰ Further, the archduke was relieved for reasons of health. The campaign season of 1800 opened with a critical change: France was now under the singular direction of Napoleon, now dictator. He intended to focus his effort in Germany with General Jean Moreau's army of 100,000 while a reserve force of 60,000 assembled to support it. In Italy, he left a covering force under General André Masséna.³¹ The Austrian plans were ambitious, with a main army, some 90,000 under Baron Michael Melas, advancing from the Maritime Alps on Lyon in France. Successful at first, Melas was forced to turn and fight a separate French army under Napoleon that was threatening his line of supply. Napoleon defeated Melas in the close-run battle at Marengo and forced the Austrian to sign an armistice. The dispersed Austrian forces in Germany, faced with a reinforced Moreau, and deployed in a cordon line, also accepted an armistice that ran to 13 November 1800.

Emperor Francis, with the advice of Baron Thugut and the promises of British funding, decided to renew the war.³² New recruits were found, but the army remained demoralized. When the Archduke Charles turned down command of the army, Francis decided in favor of his amiable—albeit only eighteen-year-old—brother, the Archduke John, to take command. When the armistice came to an official end on 27 November 1800, both sides took the offensive. Moreau's plan was simple; he would advance his army to the Inn River and then attack whatever Austrians he could find. It is not clear what broader plans he may have made, except to press east along the left bank of the Danube in the general direction of Vienna. Moreau probably assumed that such a move would force the Austrians to battle, and they obliged him. The Austrian plan, the product of the ambitious and optimistic Colonel Franz Weyrother, was complicated and called for maneuvering against the French line of communications. Having concentrated the army on the Inn River, John's forces would move west and reach the Isar River in just

three days. They would then cross the river at the town of Landshut, wheel south, crushing Moreau's left flank and thereby cutting his line of communications. The French then would be forced to yield their hold on the left bank of the Danube, potentially allowing the Austrians to regain their losses of the summer. Weyrother's plan, unrealistic in the face of the French plan, made less sense considering the cold, rainy weather and the forest roads the troops would be forced to cross.³³

The battle occurred in the area surrounding the small Bavarian village of Hohenlinden, which sits fifty miles west of Munich and just north of the Inn River valley. The battle is memorable for the fact that this decisive Austrian defeat ended the War of the Second Coalition and was the last real victory for an army of the French Republic. Despite its importance, Hohenlinden was overshadowed by Napoleon's somewhat less spectacular, but soon enshrined, victory at Marengo, Italy, in June of that same year.

The town of Hohenlinden would figure prominently in both armies' plans. It was the hub for the roads that ran through the area and was therefore a key to operations. The town was all the more critical as the area between the Isar and Inn Rivers was heavily wooded and hilly, meaning that armies could only move effectively by road, especially with their artillery and baggage. It also meant that the Austrians and her German allies, trained to fight in traditional, eighteenth-century fashion, were ill suited for the terrain. However, the revolutionary French troops were now famous for their abilities to fight dispersed in any and all terrains, and to act independently at all levels.

Despite all these factors, the initial Austrian advance caught the French by surprise. Moreau, who was notoriously slow in initiating operations, now found himself temporarily on the defensive. Unfortunately, the Austrians had little idea of the actual French position. Worse still, the poor weather and the troops' inability to perform hard marches immediately slowed the Austrian advance to a crawl. It rained incessantly each day, and the dirt roads quickly turned into a quagmire, with regiments suffering from excessive straggling. As a result, both Weyrother and Franz Baron Lauer now advised the archduke to abandon his sweep around the French left for a more economic and direct move against Munich. This made sense in that Munich had a number of good roads running to it, which would shorten the marching needed. It also meant that the Austrian

army would pass through Hohenlinden, some eighteen miles from its present position, which is also where the French were now headed. It was, for the Austrians, the worst possible battlefield in the worst possible weather.³⁴

The armies made first contact on 1 December, at the village of Ampfing, which sits immediately to the east of Hohenlinden. Under the command of General Michel Ney, the French advance guard fought a pitched battle against superior Austrian numbers but was compelled to retire after six hours. In a precursor of what was to come, the French troops inflicted heavy losses on the Austrians, showing markedly superior abilities to maneuver. John was buoyed by this initial success, despite the losses, and believed that the French were retreating. To capitalize on this, he ordered a general advance in columns to make the best use of the available roads. In doing so, he hoped to advance his 64,000 men across a broad front and on roads that traveled mostly east–west, which very much limited the ability for the independent columns to support each other. In his race to catch the supposedly retreating French, John further exhausted his worn and wet troops, who did not share his elation at a potential victory.

Moreau was again caught off guard by the Austrian attack but now rose to the occasion. Looking at the map, he quickly realized that, with some planning and hard marching, the chance to catch and crush the Austrian army was at hand. Seeing that the Austrians were advancing in belief of a French retreat, Moreau ordered his units to abandon the higher, wooded ground immediately before Hohenlinden, playing on John's hopes and creating a trap. The divisions that Moreau deployed, despite being on lower ground, sat at the points where the forest roads first came into the open before the town. This meant that the Austrians would be forced to try and deploy under fire from already drawn-up French troops. It also meant that the Austrian artillery would be strung out along the road and would never come into play. If the planned worked, the French divisions under Generals Claude Juste Alexandre Legrand, Emmanuel de Grouchy, Jean d'Hautpoul, and Ney, with 32,000 men, would hold the Austrian main advance in place on the anvil while the hammer swept in from the right. Marching as quickly as possible, considering the wet conditions, 20,000 troops under Generals Antoine Richepanse and Charles Decaen were moving alongside roads to get behind and into the Austrian left.³⁵

Both armies spent 2 December on the move, the Austrians slugging along the roads toward Hohenlinden and the French either drawing up behind the town or marching east, parallel to the enemy. Both armies suffered from a combination of rain, sleet, and snow, and were now cold and wet. The French were aware that a battle was in the offing; the Austrian and German troops were simply trying to keep their formations. The day of 3 December began with the front Austrian columns making contact with the French near Hohenlinden, which they assumed was a rear guard. The battle evolved slowly with the piecemeal commitment of battalions and squadrons in localized actions. Within a few hours, however, the tide of battle around the town was turning and the Austrians were wavering.

As the situation grew worse for the Austrians along their front, the struggling troops of Richepanse and Decaen struck the left, with Richepanse nearly hitting into the enemy rear. Again, the fighting was piecemeal and confused, with units moving to the "sound of the guns" and being committed as they became available. Although the Austrians showed the will to resist briefly, the entire left flank soon collapsed, followed by the front line. Retreat almost immediately devolved into route, and much of the artillery and baggage abandoned as troops fled or surrendered. The real fighting was over by the early afternoon, and the Austrian army was in full flight.³⁶

The Battle of Hohenlinden was a clear tactical and strategic success for the French. The disaster ended the Austrian army's ability to further resist a French advance, and Moreau seized several key fortresses and depots, allowing him to threaten Vienna. The situation left the monarchy with no option but to sue for peace, ending the war. The costs of the battle, fought primarily on 3 December, had been crushing for Austria and its allies. The army lost 4,485 casualties and over 7,000 prisoners of war, as well as leaving behind 50 artillery pieces. The French losses numbered approximately 3,000. After the battle, the Austrian commanders looked to transfer the blame, and the Archduke John saw the defeat in the failure of his leaders to move quickly.³⁷

The calamitous defeat at the hands of Moreau in the battle was an anticlimactic and rather predictable end for the Austrian war effort during the wars of the French Revolution. Having reluctantly entered the war in 1792, the monarchy's army soldiered through a string of tactical and strategic defeats. Yet that same army remained

intact and would enter into a reform period in 1801, the first of two, under the promising leadership of the Archduke Charles. As has been often noted in the numerous works of the late premier English-language historian of the Habsburg military, Gunther E. Rothenberg, the Austrian army was what it could be.³⁸ It was impossible for the army to reform in any fashion similar to the French army because it lacked the potential for the necessary radical social changes. To have changed in such a matter would have negated the monarchy itself. Rather, the army remained a pillar of the empire, if badly beaten, guaranteeing the House of Habsburg's rule, the reason it had been created 150 years earlier.

Notes

1. "Habsburg Monarchy" is a nominally standard term. However, works on the topic also make use of the terms "Austria," "Austrian Empire," "Habsburg Empire," and the "Dual Monarchy." All are essentially correct.
2. Walter C. Langsam, *Francis the Good: The Education of an Emperor, 1768–1792* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 143.
3. These included Upper and Lower Austria, Vorarlberg, Carinthia, Carniola, Styria, Bohemia, Moravia, and the Tyrol.
4. C. A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire, 1790–1918*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 165–78.
5. Charles W. Ingrao, "Habsburg Strategy and Geopolitics during the Eighteenth Century," in *East Central European Society and War in the Pre-Revolutionary Eighteenth Century*, ed. G. E. Rothenberg, B. K. Király, and P. F. Sugar (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 62.
6. Golo Mann, *Wallenstein* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1971), 45.
7. Oskar Regele, *Der Österreichische Hofkriegsrat, 1556–1848* (Vienna: Österreichische Staatsdruckerei, 1972), 24–32.
8. Eduard Wertheimer, "Erzherzog Carl als Präsident des Hofkriegsrathes 1801–1805," Austrian reprint (1880; Vienna: Archiv für österreichische Geschichte, 1972), 202–203.
9. Oskar Regele, *Generalstabschefs aus vier Jahrhunderten* (Vienna: Herold, 1966), 52.
10. Gunther E. Rothenberg, "The Habsburg Army in the Napoleonic Wars," *Military Affairs* 37 (February 1973): 2.
11. H. Meynert, *Geschichte des k.k. österreichischen Armees*, vol. 2 (Vienna, 1853), 161.
12. Gunther E. Rothenberg, "Nobility and Military Careers: The Habsburg Officer Corps, 1740–1914" *Military Affairs* 40, no. 4 (December 1976): 183.
13. Christopher Duffy, *The Army of Maria Theresa: The Armed Forces of Imperial Austria, 1740–1780* (Doncaster, UK: Wise, 1990), 43.

14. Manfred Rauchensteiner, "The Development of War Theories in Austria at the End of the Eighteenth Century," in Rothenberg, Király, and Sugar, *East Central European Society and War*, 49.
15. Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Military Border in Croatia, 1740–1881* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 68.
16. Gunther E. Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversaries: The Archduke Charles and the Austrian Army, 1792–1814* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 26.
17. Arthur Paget, *The Paget Papers: Diplomatic and Other Correspondence of the Right Honorable Sir Paget, GCB, 1794–1807*, ed. A. B. Paget, with notes by J. R. Green (New York: Longmans, Green, 1896), 26.
18. Mortiz von Angeli, "Die Heere des Kaisers und der Französischen Revolution in Beginn des Jahres 1792," *Mitteilungen des k.k. Kriegsarchiv*, n.s., 4 (1889): 18.
19. Anton Dolleczeck, *Geschichte der österreichischen Artillerie* (Vienna, 1887), 362–65.
20. Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversaries*, 32–33.
21. Lee W. Eysturlið, *The Formative Influences, Theories, and Campaigns of the Archduke Carl of Austria* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), chap. 3.
22. William O. Shannon, "Enlightenment and War: Austro-Prussian Military Practice, 1760–1790," in Rothenberg, Király, and Sugar, *East Central European Society and War*, 90–110.
23. Kurt Peball, "Zum Kriegsbild der Österreichische Armee und seiner geschichtlichen Bedeutung in den Kriegen gegen die Französische Revolution und Napoleon I in dem Jahren von 1792 bis 1815," in *Napoleon I. und das Militärwesen seiner Zeit* (Freiburg, Ger.: Rombach, 1975), 101.
24. J. Allmayer-Beck, "Erzherzog Carl (1771–1847)," in *Neue Österreichische Biographie ab 1815* (Vienna: Amalthea, 1956), 28.
25. T. C. Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (New York: Longman, 1986), 60–62.
26. Carl (Erzherzogs Carl von Österreich), "Über den gegen die Nuefranken durch einen österreichischen Offizier," in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. F. X. Mancher (Vienna, 1894), 5:157.
27. Eysturlið, *Formative Influences, Theories, and Campaigns*, chap. 7.
28. A. B. Rodger, *The War of the Second Coalition, 1798 to 1801: A Strategic Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), chap. 1.
29. Manfred Rauchensteiner, *Kaiser Franz und Erzherzog Carl: Dynastie und Heerwesen in Österreich 1796–1809* (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1972), 140.
30. Philip Longworth, *The Art of Victory: The Life and Achievements of Field Marshal Suvorov, 1729–1800* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 288–89.
31. Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversaries*, 62–65.
32. Karl A. Roeder, *Baron Thugut and Austria's Response to the French Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 386.

33. James A. Arnold, *Marengo and Hohenlinden: Napoleon's Rise to Power* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2005), 145.
34. Ernest Picard, *Hohenlinden* (Paris: H. Charles-Lavauzelle, 1909), 39.
35. Eduard Wertheimer, *Geschichte Österreichs und Ungarns im ersten Jahrzehnt des 19. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1890), 246–47.
36. Arnold, *Marengo and Hohenlinden*, 245.
37. Rodger, *War of the Second Coalition*, 220.
38. For any complete understanding of the Habsburg army in the wars of the French Revolution or the Napoleonic era, it is essential, at least in English, to read Gunther E. Rothenberg's *Napoleon's Great Adversaries*.