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# MARLBOROUGH AND

# THE WAR OF

# THE SPANISH SUCCESSION


**MARLBOROUGH AT THE BATTLE OF OUDENARDE**
**(from du Bosc's *The Military History of the Late Prince Eugene of Savoy and of the Late John Duke of Marlborough*, published 1736)**

# MARLBOROUGH AND THE WAR OF THE SPANISH SUCCESSION

**By**
**LT.-COL. G. W. L. NICHOLSON,**

**Maps drawn by**

**CAPTAIN C. C. J. BOND**

**DIRECTORATE OF MILITARY TRAINING**
**ARMY HEADQUARTERS**
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# The Background to the War

> As to the Duke of Marlborough . . . it was allowed by all men, nay even by France itself, that he was more than a match for all the generals of that nation. This he made appear beyond contradiction in the ten campaigns he made against them; during all which time it cannot be said that he ever slipped an opportunity of fighting when there was any probability of his coming at his enemy. And upon all occasions he concerted matters with so much judgment and forecast that he never fought a battle which he did not gain, nor laid siege to a town which he did not take.

Thus recorded in his diary[1] Captain Robert Parker, whose regiment, the 18th Foot (Royal Irish), fought under Marlborough in the War of the Spanish Succession and contributed in no small way to the high reputation with which the British Army emerged from that conflict. So enthusiastic an estimate might well be discounted as coming from one who served with the Duke and whose judgment might tend to be unduly influenced by his great personal charm and the blaze of fame which surrounded him while he lived. But other critics with no grounds for personal bias have been just as generous; indeed Marlborough's military stature has grown with the passage of time. A century later one of Napoleon's ablest officers, General Foy, could find no higher praise for the brilliant generalship displayed by the Duke of Wellington at the battle of Salamanca than to place the Iron Duke "almost on the level of Marlborough". Napoleon himself regarded Marlborough's campaigns as a model; he read and re-read them many times, and appears to have accorded the English general a higher place than the great Frederick of Prussia. Modern military historians are unanimous in placing Marlborough in the forefront of the great soldiers of all time. "If there had been no Marlborough," writes one of them,[2] "England would have sunk into a mere province of France, and the United States would have been French, not English.... Centuries hence, when historians write their account of an England which has become a mere name and of an Europe which has passed away, they will be silent about many men who are now reckoned great, but they will not pass over Marlborough."

The War of the Spanish Succession has been called "the most businesslike" of all wars in which British forces have been engaged. The investment of a comparatively small number of troops brought Britain rich returns. By the end of the war she had acquired valuable territorial assets (including her first permanent Mediterranean naval base) and had replaced France as the leading state in Europe—and hence in the world. That a limited expenditure for men and materials could achieve such results must be credited in no small degree to the masterly guidance of the Duke of Marlborough. While he is remembered chiefly for the brilliant Continental victories which demonstrated his skill as tactician (and it is primarily with these battles that this study is concerned), these could not have crushed the power of France had it not been for his genius in the field of grand strategy, in which he was so ably served by his talents as statesman and diplomat.

### The Supremacy of France in the Seventeenth Century

What were the circumstances in which England became involved in this war which was to bring her such profitable returns? Let us first look briefly at the political picture of Europe at the close of the seventeenth century. Dominating the scene was France, unified and expanded by forty years of masterful rule by "the grand monarch", Louis XIV. Pursuing his doctrine of "natural boundaries", Louis had fought two wars (the War of Devolution, 1667-8, and the Dutch War, 1672-8) in an attempt to extend French domains to the Rhine. He had managed to retain much of the fruits of this aggression by reaching a stalemate in a third conflict, the War of the League of Augsburg, 1689-97, thrust upon him by an alliance of European states who believed that the creation of a "balance of power" provided better assurance for stability in Europe than any enforced recognition of "natural boundaries".


**Historical Section, G.S.**

The lead in forming the Augsburg League in 1686 had been taken by the Emperor Leopold I, head of the Holy Roman Empire. This crumbling "survival of a great tradition and a grandiose title" was a loose alliance of some three hundred independent states covering roughly the territory of modern Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Belgium. The most important member was Austria, which had been steadily growing stronger as the ancient empire, weakened by religious quarrels and destructive civil wars, fell into decline. The election to the imperial crown of a succession of princes of the Austrian branch of the House of Hapsburg had brought them little more than "an historical title and dignified trappings", and it is not surprising that from their court at Vienna they regarded the extension and consolidation of their own Austrian dominions as a more profitable venture than the defence of the decaying Germanic Empire. Of the German states which joined the league against Louis XIV the most powerful was the Electorate of Brandenburg, which in a few years was to become the Kingdom of Prussia.

The two other major partners in the original league were Sweden and Spain. The conquests of Gustavus Adolphus had made Sweden one of the largest states in Europe; her territories east of the Baltic extended from Finland to West Pomerania. But the enormous costs of her military campaigns had seriously weakened Sweden, and at the turn of the century, three years after the fifteen-year old Charles XII had ascended the throne at Stockholm, her chief rivals, Russia, Poland, Saxony and Denmark, banded together, judging the time ripe to strip her of her trans-Baltic possessions. As for Spain, once the leading power in Europe, the process of deterioration from her former greatness was far advanced. Her participation in the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) and subsequent struggles had emptied her treasury and exhausted her military strength. Her hold on her vast territories in the New World was slipping, and in Europe, although her Mediterranean possessions (Sardinia, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and Milan) were still intact, she had been forced to cede to France part of the Spanish Netherlands (the present Belgium and Luxembourg). Nor could Spain look to the crown for strong leadership out of her troubles. Since 1665 the Spanish throne had been occupied by the sickly Charles II, who from birth had been practically an imbecile.

In 1689 the expansion of the League of Augsburg into the Grand Alliance, largely through the efforts of William III, brought Holland and England into the coalition against France. By the latter half of the seventeenth century Holland (variously called the United Provinces or the Dutch Netherlands) had become England's bitterest rival in sea power, trade and colonization (there were three Anglo-Dutch Wars between 1652 and 1674). These differences were composed, however, when in 1689, following the Revolution which drove James II into exile, his son-in-law, William of Orange, Stadtholder of Holland, was called to the English throne. William was the arch-enemy of Louis XIV, and he

lost no time in embroiling England in his feud with France. Thus began the century-long struggle between the two countries which was to be fought out not only on the historic battlegrounds of Europe, but on less familiar fields in India and North America.

From the War of the Augsburg League, which the Treaty of Ryswick terminated in 1697, William III emerged with added stature and an influence in European politics which placed him on almost equal terms with Louis XIV. Eight years of inconclusive conflict coming at the end of a century which had seen more war than peace had left both sides exhausted, and there now seemed every reason for the two monarchs to seek a prolonged respite from hostilities. For William there was little choice. He could not engage in further fighting without the help of a strong English army. Yet his English subjects had no desire to be involved again in their Dutch King's continental troubles. Immediately after Ryswick Parliament ordered a rapid demobilisation of the army,[3] relying on England's insularity and a strong navy to keep her neutral in any future conflict. The adoption of this pacific policy and the dissolution of the coalition against him gave Louis (who was no more anxious to renew hostilities than was William) the advantage over his opponent. He could now play a bold hand in the complex game of European politics, knowing that when the opportunity arose he could advance his own interests without fear of effective opposition. That opportunity was to come in the disputed question of the Spanish Succession.

## The Problem of the Spanish Succession

By 1697 it had become apparent that "Charles the Sufferer", the feeble invalid on the Spanish throne, would die childless, and probably before very long. His nearest male relatives were his two powerful cousins, the Bourbon Louis XIV, King of France, and Leopold I, Holy Roman Emperor and head of the Austrian Hapsburgs. Both had married sisters of Charles II, although Louis had solemnly renounced any French claim which might arise from his marriage. The question of who would inherit the Spanish empire could not wait for solution until the throne became vacant; for the balance of power in Europe would be seriously upset if the crown of Spain with its control of half the world became joined with either the French or the Austrian crown. With the rival houses of Bourbon and Hapsburg each ready to resist to the utmost the other's claim, partition of the Spanish empire appeared the only solution if a general war were to be averted. In September 1698 William III and Louis XIV met secretly (the former without the knowledge of the English Parliament) to frame what became known as the First Partition Treaty. There were three major claimants to be considered: the Bourbon candidate, Philip, Duke of Anjou, grandson of Louis XIV (the French renunciation was assumed to have been nullified by Spain's failure to pay their princess's dowry at the time of Louis' marriage); Leopold's nominee, his son (by his second wife), the Archduke Charles; and the Elector of Bavaria, Joseph Ferdinand, grandson of the Emperor and his former Spanish wife (see Appendix "A"). The choice of the two royal planners fell on the young Bavarian prince, who being the least powerful of the three candidates was the least likely by his acquisitions to disturb the balance of Europe. Consolation prizes would be provided by pruning the Spanish inheritance of its Italian possessions—the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (Sicily and Naples) going to the French Dauphin, and Milan to the Archduke Charles.

This settlement, whose guarantee by England, Holland and France seemed sufficient to ensure its fulfilment, was unfortunately brought to nought by the unexpected death, early in 1699, of the young Joseph Ferdinand. Again Louis and William tackled the knotty problem of succession, and in June 1699 agreed on a Second Partition Treaty. They selected as the chief heir the Archduke Charles, who was to be King of Spain and the Indies and ruler of the Spanish Netherlands, on condition that these territories should never be joined to the Empire. Naples, Sicily and Milan would go to the French Dauphin. The division seemed to favour Austria; yet Leopold, wanting all for his son, refused to accept the terms of the treaty. From this point war was inevitable.

The long-awaited death of Charles II of Spain occurred in November 1700. Barely a month earlier, however, the moribund King had signed a will leaving all his domains to Philip of Anjou. This unlooked for action came less as a result of persuasive French diplomacy than of pressure by the Spanish grandees, who were determined that their empire should not be partitioned and who preferred by this means to buy French support for their cause rather than face a hostile neighbour against whom neither England nor Austria would be able to protect them. By the terms of the fateful will Louis XIV must sanction Philip's acceptance of the whole Spanish empire, or it would pass intact to Charles of Austria. This proviso placed the Grand Monarch in an extremely awkward position. If he refused the legacy, Austria could rightfully claim the Italian territories which William and Louis had previously reserved for France. In the words of one of the French Ministers:

> The King, by rejecting the Will had no other course left than entirely to resign the Spanish Succession, or to wage war in order to conquer that part which the Treaty of Partition had assigned to France.

And Louis realized that the English, who were anxious about the safety of their Mediterranean trade with Turkey and the Levant, would not support him in any war to win Naples and Sicily to France.

Louis soon reached a decision. Since he was faced with an Austrian war whichever course he took, it was naturally to his advantage to have Spain on his side and her ports and fortresses open to his forces. He accepted the will and sent his grandson to rule in Madrid as King Philip V. And now the moderation which had heretofore characterized his attitude on the question of the Spanish Succession gave way to arrogance, and he soon antagonised England and Holland, uniting them with Austria against him. In 1701 he marched his armies into the Spanish Netherlands, occupied the Spanish fortresses there, and went on to seize the Dutch Barrier—a chain of seven fortresses[4] stretching from Luxembourg to the sea which the Dutch had been given right by treaty to maintain in Spanish territory.

France's entry into Belgium and her newly acquired influence in Italy had a damaging effect on English trade, and other blows followed. Louis forced the Spaniards to hand over to a French company the contract for supplying African slaves to Spanish America, thereby not only blighting English hopes in that direction but opening the door to French smuggling between the New World and European ports. In June 1701 Portugal allied herself with France and Spain, with the result that there was now "not a port between London and Leghorn" where British ships could find shelter in case of war. Before the end of the year the authorities in Spanish ports were compelling English and Dutch merchants to sell their goods at half price. There was a strong reaction in England, where King William found public opinion veering rapidly towards the support of his United Provinces. In May a petition had urged the House of Commons to turn its "loyal addresses" into "bills of supply" in order "that his most sacred Majesty may be enabled powerfully to assist his allies before it is too late." A treaty signed in 1677 had pledged England to aid the Netherlands with 10,000 men if attacked, and before the end of June twelve battalions reached Holland from service in Ireland. Louis XIV was taken completely unawares by this action, which his ambassador at Madrid attempted to explain on the grounds that "the English are the most unsteady people, easy to be blown to violent resolutions."

## The Rise of John Churchill

The man whom William made Commander-in-Chief of the English contingent and appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the United Provinces was John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough. Although the King was but fifty years of age, he had been for some time in indifferent health, and in selecting to succeed him, both in command and diplomacy, one who had for much of the past decade been out of the royal favour, he showed a shrewd recognition of the problems which were likely to face the next wearer of the English crown and an appreciation of Marlborough's ability to cope with them.

To these important posts John Churchill came well fitted by experience and temperament. He was born in 1650, the same year as his royal master, the son of a country squire who had been on the King's side in the Civil War. At the age of seventeen he was commissioned in what later became the Grenadier Guards, and as an ensign saw garrison service in Tangier. In the Franco-Dutch War of 1672-8, in which England supported Louis XIV, young Churchill distinguished himself as a Captain at the sieges of Nijmegen and Maastricht. His promotion was rapid. By 1674 he was commanding a British infantry regiment in the French service, during which employment he earned the commendation of the renowned Marshal Turenne, and "learned to speak and write bad French with fluency and confidence". This first active phase of his military career ended in 1675, when he returned to England to resume his place in the household of the King's brother, James, Duke of York. In 1678 he married Sarah Jennings, Maid of Honour to the Duchess of York, and in the following year, when public opinion compelled Charles II to banish James as a papist, Colonel Churchill and his wife accompanied the Duke to Brussels.

During the next four years he was employed upon a number of important missions between the royal brothers, the successful completion of which owed much to his shrewdness and tact, coupled with his great personal charm, and helped to establish his reputation as a skilled diplomat. James was able to return to the London Court in 1682, and shortly afterwards Churchill was rewarded by being raised to the Scottish peerage and made Colonel of the King's Own Royal Regiment of Dragoons (an appointment which entitled him to make what profit he could out of the annual clothing of the regiment). Three years later, on the death of Charles, his patron ascended the throne as James II. Almost immediately Churchill, in the rank of Brigadier-General, was called on to play a major part in the suppression of the

Duke of Monmouth's ill-fated rebellion (although he had no hand in the atrocities which followed). His promotion to Major-General (with no increase of pay) came just before the decisive Battle of Sedgemoor.

The year 1688 saw Lord Churchill taking the critical step which has been termed by his illustrious descendant "the most poignant and challengeable action of his life."[5] For the past three years James II, having successfully survived the Monmouth revolt, had been moving steadily in the direction of absolute government and a return of England to the Church of Rome. Firm in his Protestant upbringing and sure in his judgment of what was best for England, Churchill did not hesitate to issue the plainest of warnings to his royal master. These went unheeded, yet apparently unresented; James knew that "Churchill loathed his policy, but fondly believed he loved his person more." But early in 1688 the Princess Anne, whose childhood acquaintance with Sarah Churchill had ripened into a warm and intimate friendship, was to write of John Churchill to her elder sister, Queen Mary, "though he will always obey the King in all things that are consistent with religion—yet, rather than change that, I daresay he will lose all his places and all that he has." That summer Churchill joined in the invitation to William of Orange to come to England. For nineteen days after the landing Churchill remained with James, before slipping away to William's camp. His unexpected defection, which was copied by the other leading officers of the Army, convinced James of the hopelessness of his cause and hastened his departure to France. Years later, when giving her instructions "to the Gentlemen that are to write the Duke of Marlborough's History", the widowed Duchess was to set down: "When he left King James, [it] was with the greatest Regret imaginable, but he saw it was plain that King James could not be prevented any other way from establishing Popery and arbitrary Power to the Ruin of England." This justification of Churchill's actions might be more convincing had he remained firm in his break with James and given his unswerving loyalty to his new sovereign.

Churchill's first task under William III was to rebuild the Army, which James had disbanded in chaos when he saw that all was lost. He tackled the job energetically, bringing to it the wealth of his organizational ability and military experience. He was confirmed in the rank of Lieutenant-General, and at the coronation of William and Mary in April 1689 he was advanced to the Earldom of Marlborough. The War of the Augsburg League had broken out and during the next two years the new Earl fought with William in the Low Countries and in Ireland, adding to his military repute in both campaigns. But his attitude towards the King was becoming openly hostile. He was dissatisfied with his rewards (an expected Order of the Garter and the lucrative post of Master General of the Ordnance had been bestowed elsewhere), and he complained to William about the preferred treatment given to the King's Dutch favourites. The break came early in 1692, when William discovered that Marlborough had sought and obtained the forgiveness of the exiled James, and had allowed his name to be associated with several suspected Jacobite plots. (That Marlborough planned to recall James to the English throne seems less likely than that he hoped to depose William in favour of his niece Anne.) The King stripped Marlborough of all his civil and military offices, banished him from Court, and even confined him for a few weeks in the Tower of London. The remainder of the war was fought without the services of Marlborough, William commanding the Allied troops in the Low Countries with no conspicuous success. The process of restoration to favour began in 1698, when Marlborough was appointed Governor to the young Duke of Gloucester, Anne's only surviving son; later in the same year he was readmitted to the Privy Council and was selected as one of the nine Lord Justices to rule England during the King's absence in Holland. Although Marlborough wrote in May 1700, "The King's coldness to me still continues",[6] by the middle of 1701, as we have seen, he had risen once more to the important post of Commander-in-Chief, and was in addition enjoying extensive diplomatic powers.

## The Coalition Against Louis XIV

On reaching The Hague in July Marlborough at once entered into negotiations for a last-minute settlement with France and Spain. That having failed, he began the reconstruction of a Grand Alliance against Louis XIV. King William remained in the background, wisely leaving the Earl to treat with the ambassadors from the various courts of Europe. The experience gave Marlborough a valuable insight into European affairs from the continental point of view. What he now learned in the field of grand strategy was to keep him from ever contenting himself with the popular belief "that naval operations against Spanish colonies and treasure-ships were the chief part of all that England need do to bridle the ambition of Louis."[7] Deliberations were completed by the beginning of September, and on the 7th Marlborough signed the main treaty, by which the Empire, Holland and England agreed to unite in imposing their territorial demands upon France and Spain. According to these Philip V would rule Spain and the Indies, but the French and Spanish crowns should in no circumstances become united. In return for this recognition of Philip, Milan, the two Sicilies and the Spanish Mediterranean islands were to go to the House of Austria. The disposition of the Spanish Netherlands, in which Dutch and Austrian interests conflicted, was purposely left indefinite—they were to "serve as a dyke, rampart and

barrier to separate and keep off France from the United Provinces". A clause in the treaty guaranteed England and Holland the same commercial privileges with Philip V's territories as they had enjoyed under his predecessor, at the same time prohibiting French ships from trading with the Spanish Indies. The treaty expressly set down the number of troops that each of the principals would put into the field to enforce these objectives. The Empire agreed to furnish 66 regiments of foot and 24 of horse (82,000 men), Holland 82 foot and 20 horse (100,000) and England 33 foot and seven horse (40,000).

Subsequent agreements made individually with Prussia, Hanover and other German principalities swelled the numbers of the international army which was forming against Louis XIV—these minor powers, many of which maintained forces far larger than the size of their territories warranted, pledging their contingents in return for English and Dutch subsidies. By the exercise of skilful diplomacy and the outlay of large sums of money Marlborough secured the neutrality of the young Charles XII of Sweden, who had just won an exhilarating victory over Russia and was being assiduously wooed by Louis, with whom he was traditionally far more inclined to side than the Emperor. With Sweden thus restricted her nervous neighbour Denmark felt safe in supplying her quota of troops to the Grand Alliance.

An enthusiastic English Parliament quickly ratified the treaties which Marlborough had negotiated, and preparations went forward rapidly to put the country on a war footing. England had to raise 58,000 men—40,000 seamen for her fleet and 18,000 soldiers. The remaining 22,000 troops required to meet her commitment to the Grand Alliance would be foreign soldiers in English pay. Then on February 20, 1702 King William was thrown from his horse while taking exercise and broke his collarbone. Complications set in and in two weeks he was dead. On March 8 Anne, younger daughter of James II, ascended the throne. Her friendship with Sarah Churchill at this stage was never more sincere. During the Churchills' long service in her father's household Anne had been accustomed to turn to them for guidance in almost all she did. Now that she was queen her reliance upon Marlborough was greater than ever; for the next five years the management of not only England's military ventures on the Continent but also of the country's domestic affairs was to rest largely in the Duke's hands.

## CHAPTER II

# The Campaigns of 1702-3

### The Art of War in Marlborough's Day

Before turning to Marlborough's campaigns on the Continent it may be useful to examine briefly the state of military science at the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession. Two types of operation, both generally carried out in accordance with certain set rules of procedure, dominated the military scene—the siege, and the large-scale pitched battle. The wasting struggles of the Thirty Years' War had encouraged a tendency to favour defensive methods of warfare. During the latter half of the seventeenth century the principle of offensive action as accepted today received little recognition; to be considered a successful commander it was less important to win victories than to guard against defeat. The numerous fortresses and fortified towns of Flanders furnished ample scope for the exercise of such non-aggressive tactics; securely garrisoned, they would serve as strong points about which a defending army might manœuvre almost indefinitely while holding off a superior force.

In attempting to reduce one of these fortresses the attacker must employ two armies—one to perform the actual investment, the other to cover the siege by warding off counter-blows from the defending field force. As one war after another flowed across this cockpit of Europe and these strongholds changed hands time and again, the procedure became so stereotyped that it was possible to predict with a high degree of accuracy the cost, in time and lives, of taking a particular fortress. Thus was Louis XIV able on occasion to move his Court in holiday mood to the scene of action in order to enjoy the operations from a safe distance and then participate in the capitulation ceremonies.

Custom had established just as definite a pattern for the conduct of the pitched battle. It was an operation to be entered upon only after careful deliberation. An army was a great political and moral asset which had been acquired at great expense; it might not be lightly risked in decisive action. In those days there were no well organized lines of communication moving a steady stream of reinforcements up to the front; a beaten army usually meant no more campaigning until an intervening winter had allowed its commander to go home and rebuild his forces. Thus the stakes were uncomfortably high. In a single battle two opposing armies with a combined strength of upwards of 200,000 men, fighting on a front restricted to three or four miles, might in a few short hours decide the issue of a year's campaign—if not of the whole war. Topographical conditions had to be just right. As we shall see, the manoeuvrability of an army in line of battle was very low; a hedge, a ditch, or any other comparatively minor irregularity might be enough to throw the advancing ranks into confusion. Accordingly battle was rarely joined unless the combat ground conformed closely to accepted standards of space and flatness; and, of greater importance, a considerable numerical advantage seemed to lie with the attacker. It was far less risky to wage war by the slower method of attrition and piecemeal absorption of territory (and there was then always the possibility of coming to terms with the opponent).

Campaigns had to be fought in the summer months, when forage was plentiful and the few roads had sufficiently recovered from the winter rains to allow the passage of troops. In this respect the Spanish Netherlands were particularly suited to conduct of war because of their rich plains furnishing abundant crops for the feeding of armies, and their navigable waterways which could be used for moving siege trains and other heavy material. Always the approach of winter ended hostilities for the year and the opposing armies would retire into winter quarters until the following spring. Many of the officers would return to their homes to spend the next six months recruiting replacements and preparing for the summer's campaign. For the commander-in-chief dependent upon foreign contingents to fill his army it was a time for making the rounds of his clients to ensure that each was going to live up to his commitment in the spring.

The composition of Marlborough's armies during his campaigns was never more than one-third British. This component was raised in the main by voluntary enlistment, each colonel being responsible for bringing his regiment up to strength. The officers whom he sent recruiting, when they had combed the countryside for likely yokels, could usually find in the jails and the debtors' prisons many willing candidates for the Queen's bounty; and they were further assisted by a series of Recruiting Acts passed from 1703 onward, which authorized certain limited forms of conscription (such as impressing able-bodied unemployed persons with no visible means of support).

The presence of the foreign contingents alongside his English force precluded any homogeneity in the structure of

Marlborough's army. Nor was there anything approaching the systematic organization of modern times. Corps and divisional formations were unknown, and indeed were not to come into existence until the wars of the French Revolution. Not only did each national contingent retain its identity as a fighting force, but within each the troops of the various arms were kept segregated both for purposes of administration and for tactical employment. The absence of any established chain of command through which the commander-in-chief might delegate his authority meant that he had to exert personal control over the operations of all parts of his army. From a point of vantage overlooking the battlefield he would direct the progress of the action, keeping the position and role of every unit registered in his mind, and transmitting to each his verbal orders by means of specially trained liaison officers. It was a prodigious task, and one which required a rare combination of almost superhuman intellectual and physical qualities.

The seventeenth century had seen an important development in the tactics of battle—the change from fighting in column to fighting in line. During the Thirty Years' War it had been the custom for cavalry to charge in close column of six or more in depth, directing their attack against infantry drawn up in dense columns, with the pikemen in the centre flanked on either side by the musketeers in mutual support. One of the great contributions of Gustavus Adolphus to tactics had been to reduce the depth of both horse and foot formations; as a result, by the end of the century the cavalry charge was usually delivered in line three deep, and opposed by infantry formed in ranks not more than six deep. The cavalry continued to be the dominant arm in battle as long as the pike remained the chief infantry weapon. The principal weakness of the infantry lay in this necessity of having to employ pikemen to protect with their ten- or twelve-foot weapons the musketeer laboriously engaged with his slow-loading matchlock. The end of this cumbersome interdependence (not unlike that of the intermingled archers and dismounted men-at-arms of an earlier day) was foreshadowed by the introduction of the ring, or socket, bayonet in the 1680s. Its great advantage over the earlier plug bayonet, which blocked the muzzle of the musket, was in allowing the musketeer to fire his weapon right up to the instant of engaging the enemy with cold steel. By the turn of the century the ratio of pike to musket in English regiments had fallen as low as one to five. Before the battle of Blenheim the last pikes in Marlborough's armies had been replaced by firearms, although French infantry were still being trained in "*le combat à la pique et au mousquet*."

Musketry had further developed with the replacement of the matchlock by the much faster flintlock; by 1700 a man thus armed could fire at the previously unheard of rate of one shot a minute. The new musket[8] had the added advantage of requiring only about half as much space for loading and firing as the clumsier matchlock. The closing up of files which this made possible, the substitution of musketeers for pikemen, and the improved capabilities of the new weapon all contributed to the production of a greatly increased volume of fire on any given front. Marlborough made the most of these advances, believing that infantry "was not a thing that stood, but a thing that fired." He insisted on constant exercise in fire discipline and marksmanship, schooling his troops to fire by platoons, two or three men deep—a technique which permitted close control and achieved a more devastating volley than the system, which the French continued to use, of firing rank by rank.

As the War of the Spanish Succession opened, the ability to deliver the maximum volume of fire was being recognized as the most important factor in determining the order in which an army would be drawn up for battle. To secure the widest possible front for firing, the normal arrangement was to form up the infantry three deep in two long lines reaching across the centre. Deploying the troops into position from order of march was a complicated procedure, and in spite of lengthy parade ground training every winter took a considerable time, all wheeling having to be carried out at the halt. To maintain these ranks in perfect order throughout the battle, either when halted or when moving forward, was the aim to which much exacting drill and the exercise of rigid discipline were directed. A line once broken could rarely be repaired; any gap in that row of fire or in the array of advancing bayonets might afford the opposing cavalry squadrons a point of penetration to throw all into confusion.

The cavalry were posted on both flanks, also in two lines, and in the rear there might be a small reserve of horse and foot. In the seventeenth century it was the general practice on the continent for squadrons when charging to attack with carbine or pistol fire before drawing their swords. It was a manoeuvre of very dubious worth, for either the speedy motion of the horse made accurate shooting impossible, or should the rider draw rein in order to take proper aim the whole benefit of the momentum gained in the charge was lost. The great Gustavus however taught his Swedish horse to charge straight in, sword in hand, reserving their firearms for the ensuing mêlée; and this tactic had been copied by both Rupert and Cromwell in the English Civil Wars. Following this practice Marlborough's troopers charged with the sword as their only weapon, reaching their maximum rate of speed—a full trot—just before the moment of impact. As will be seen, this shock action gave the English cavalry a decided advantage over their French opponents, whose squadrons at Blenheim still halted to discharge their firearms.

Field artillery up to this time had played a relative minor role, partly because of the limited accuracy and range of the crude field-pieces then in use, and also from the fact that the work of moving these in and out of position was done not by soldiers[9] but by hired civilians with a natural disinclination to take any risk which might cause them to become casualties. It was customary for the guns, generally three-pounders weighing about eight hundredweight and firing round shot at long range and grapeshot at close quarters (although heavier pieces up to 24-pounders were in use), to be placed out in front of the infantry in order to cover the deployment into line of battle. Because of their lack of mobility their usefulness generally ended once the opposing forces had come to grips. As we shall see, the Duke of Marlborough attached great importance to artillery and made the most of the superiority in gun strength enjoyed by the English over the French (one estimate gives a ratio of 1.16 guns per 1000 men for the Allies against .91 for the French). Before a battle he would personally site each of his batteries, carefully co-ordinating his artillery fire with that of his infantry to thin the enemy's ranks and break up their counter-attack; and he did not hesitate to shift his guns to a more advantageous position as the operation developed. But although artillery was acquiring some mobility the heavy guns required for siege operations still remained. It is recorded that a siege train in Marlborough's day consisted of 100 guns and 60 mortars of all calibres up to 15 inches (only mortars and howitzers fired explosive bombs or shells), and more than 3000 wagons. It took 15,000 horses to move this cumbersome train, and its passage occupied more than fifteen miles of road space.[10]

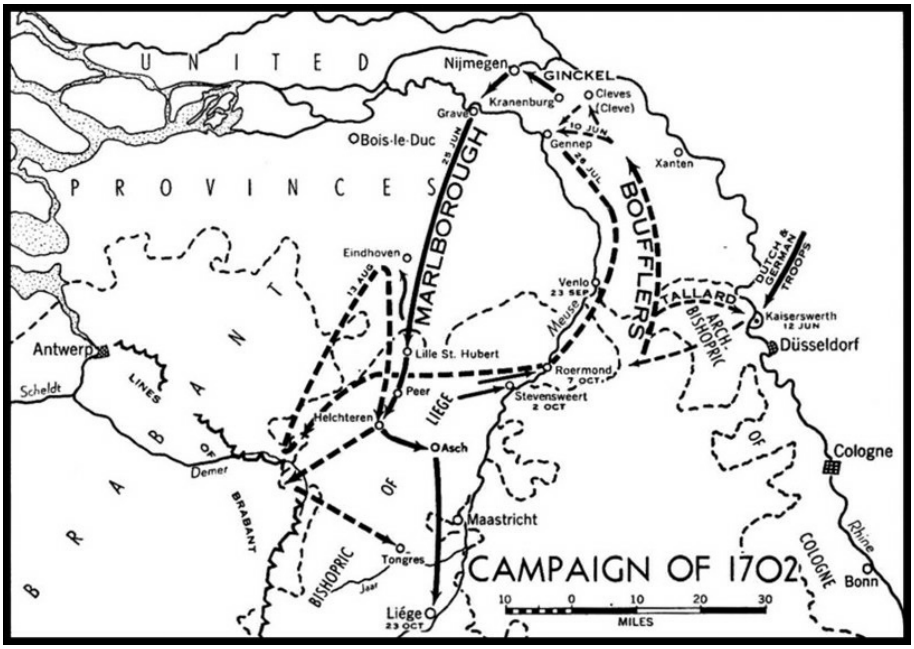
It must not be imagined however that because battles of Queen Anne's day were generally fought by set formulas and with weapons inferior to those of modern times they were the less violent or sanguinary. Let a master of description paint the scene:

> We do not think that the warriors of our time,[11] unsurpassed in contempt of death or endurance of strain, would have regarded these old battles as a light ordeal. Instead of creeping forward from one crater to another or crouching low in their trenches under the blind hail of death and amid its shocking explosions, Marlborough's men and their brave, well-trained opponents marched up to each other shoulder to shoulder, three, four, or six ranks deep, and then slowly and mechanically fired volley after volley into each other at duelling distance until the weaker wavered and broke. This was the moment when the falcon cavalry darted in and hacked and slashed the flying men without mercy. Keeping an exact, rigid formation under the utmost trial, filling promptly all the gaps which at every discharge opened in the ranks, repeating at command, platoon by platoon, or rank by rank, the numerous unhurried motions of loading and firing—these were the tests to which our forebears were not unequal. In prolonged severe fighting the survivors of a regiment often stood for hours knee-deep amid the bodies of comrades writhing or for ever still. In their ears rang the hideous chorus of the screams and groans of a pain which no anaesthetic would ever soothe.

## The Clearing of the Lower Meuse, 1702

On May 4, 1702 England, the United Provinces and the Empire simultaneously declared war on France. Marlborough went at once to The Hague as Queen Anne's ambassador. It took a month or more to dispose of the claims of various rival candidates for the chief command of the allied armies, and at the end of June the Dutch named Marlborough Deputy Captain General of the Republic. The appointment placed him in charge of the British, Dutch and German armies, a command which he was to exercise continuously for the next ten years. Although nominally he held no authority over the forces of the Austrian Empire, he was recognized (by his enemies, if not always by his allies) as the leading general of all the forces opposing Louis XIV, and we shall refer to him hereafter as Commander-in-Chief.

But the ten thousand pounds a year which the Dutch paid Marlborough carried with it very definite restrictions on his freedom to wage war as he chose. Following constitutional practice they attached to his staff two parliamentary deputies, whose instructions were to see that the new Captain General exercised extreme caution in all that he undertook and did not allow himself to be drawn into any battle that could possibly be avoided. The Government at The Hague was suffering from the defensive complex which had characterized so much of the campaigning of the latter seventeenth century, and it was quite content to prevent the French from occupying Dutch territory without making any attempt to drive them out of the Spanish Netherlands.




**Historical Section, G.S.**

To Marlborough the situation in the Low Countries at the beginning of the campaigning season of 1702 seemed one that called for vigorous offensive Allied action. The Grand Monarch held an extremely advantageous position as a result of his seizure of the Spanish Netherlands and the Dutch Barrier and his occupation of the Archbishopric of Cologne and the Bishopric of Liége, whose rulers had both made common cause with Louis. The French controlled the important waterways of the Scheldt, the Meuse (except for the fortress of Maastricht, still in Dutch hands), and the Lower Rhine from Bonn down almost to Nijmegen. During the summer of 1701 Louis had caused to be constructed, under the direction of his skilled engineer Sébastien Vauban, a seventy-mile defence system stretching from Namur on the Meuse to Antwerp on the Scheldt. These "Lines of Brabant", consisting of extensive field works based on a number of small rivers and supplemented by low-lying areas which had been deliberately flooded, were strongly garrisoned and were designed to bar the way to any opposing army seeking to reach French territory by an advance west of the Meuse.

In disposing his forces for the summer's campaigns, Louis placed in the Netherlands an army of 60,000 men led by one of his most competent generals, Marshal Boufflers. He sent another 60,000 under Marshals Villars and Vendôme to Italy to carry on the fight against Prince Eugene of Savoy, the brilliant commander of the Imperial Army of Austria. A third French army of 20,000 men under Marshal Catinat was put on guard in the region of Alsace, as a check to an Allied army of equal size commanded by Prince Louis of Baden, which was blocking any French move eastward across the Upper Rhine. The Prince was holding the strong "Lines of Stollhofen", an elaborate system of fortifications which he had constructed to close the nine-mile gap between the Rhine at Stollhofen (fifteen miles below Strasbourg) and the heavily timbered slopes of the Black Forest Mountains.

When on July 2 Marlborough, accompanied by his two Dutch Field Deputies, went to Nijmegen, there to assume command of an army of 60,000, fighting had been in progress for ten weeks. In mid-April a combined Dutch-German force of 25,000 had besieged Kaiserswerth, a French-held fortress on the right bank of the Rhine, half a dozen miles below Düsseldorf. Its capture would free the river from the Dutch border up to Cologne. The main French army had pushed up between the Meuse and the Rhine to within twenty miles of Nijmegen, the Dutch stronghold which guarded the Rhine delta and barred entry to Holland. From his headquarters at Xanten Boufflers had sent an army under Marshal Tallard to raise, or at least hamper, the siege of Kaiserswerth, but his efforts from the Rhine's left bank had been unavailing. On June 10 Boufflers suddenly made a two-pronged advance through Gennep and Cleves in an attempt to nip off the Dutch General Ginckel, who was at Kranenburg concentrating the main Allied army and at the same time covering the siege of Kaiserswerth. Ginckel narrowly escaped to the protection of the guns of Nijmegen, and Boufflers took up position at Gennep, with his left flank protected by the River Meuse. Kaiserswerth fell in mid-June, setting free 8000 of the besiegers to join the main Allied force, the others moving up the Rhine to rid the Archbishopric of Cologne of its remaining French garrisons.

Marlborough soon found that any plan to march southward and seek a decisive battle with the French was stubbornly opposed by the authorities at The Hague as well as by the Dutch generals in his army, who in their anxiety to guard Holland closely showed little concern that the initiative in the campaign should remain with the French. "If the fear of

Nimeguen and the Rhine had not hindered us from marching into Brabant", he wrote to the Earl of Godolphin, the English Lord Treasurer, on July 13, "they [the French] must then have had the disadvantage of governing themselves by our motions, whereas we are now obliged to mind them."[12] Marlborough won the support however of one of the Dutch Deputies, who urged the Grand Pensionary of Holland, Anton Heinsius, "to be so good as to work unceasingly for a resolve to do something effective; for without action all is lost."[13] Marlborough realized that he must contrive to get the French out of the area between the Lower Rhine and the Meuse before the Dutch would agree to operations against the Spanish Netherlands—and he had to accomplish this without committing his forces to a pitched battle.

On July 15 he moved his army to Grave, on the Meuse eight miles south-west of Nijmegen, and ten days later, having secretly bridged the river in three places, crossed to the left bank. His intention was to advance towards Dutch-held Maastricht, in the hope that this threat to the French communications would force Boufflers to beat a retreat. Before he could start his march, however, to placate the Dutch he was compelled to divide his army and leave a substantial force entrenched in front of Nijmegen. Having covered forty miles in five days Marlborough halted at Lille St. Hubert within the territory of the Bishopric of Liége to see what Boufflers would do. The French commander reacted as expected. Finding his enemy between him and the Lines of Brabant, he recalled Tallard from the Rhine and fell back to the south-west by way of the fortresses of Venlo and Roermond, leaving both strongly garrisoned. On August 1 his path of retreat lay over a wide moorland between Lille St. Hubert and the village of Peer. Although this would take his army right across the Allied front, Boufflers decided to make the attempt under cover of darkness. This was what Marlborough was waiting for, and he ordered his troops to stand to their arms all night. But at the crucial moment the Dutch Deputies prevailed on him to abandon the attack. Next morning at the Commander-in-Chief's insistence they rode out with their generals to watch the passage of the French across the heath and, writes Parker in his *Memoirs*, "saw them hurrying over it in the greatest confusion and disorder imaginable; upon this they all acknowledged that they had lost a fair opportunity of giving the enemy a fatal blow."

A second opportunity came next day when the tired French army was still ten miles from its destination, encamped in an ill-chosen position that made it particularly vulnerable to attack. But again Marlborough's hands were tied by Dutch timidity, and Boufflers escaped safely behind his defence lines, where he was shortly joined by Tallard. On August 5 the Allied army moved forward to Peer, a score of miles from the River Demer, which formed part of the Brabant position.

Furious at the loss of the whole of the lower Meuse (below Maastricht only the isolated fortresses of Stevensweert, Roermond and Venlo were still in French hands) Louis XIV spurred Boufflers to vigorous action. A profitable course seemed to lie in interrupting Marlborough's supply lines, which because passage up the Meuse was still blocked by the French forts, ran overland from Nijmegen and Bois-le-Duc.[14] Marlborough, who was just as anxious for action as the Grand Monarch, set the stage by arranging that a large convoy of bread wagons from the north should pass within reach of Boufflers. Thus enticed the French left the safety of their lines on August 9, intending to intercept the supply train near Eindhoven. Marlborough's move to cut in behind them was made prematurely, however, and Boufflers escaped the trap. The Duke now moved his main army southward, keeping General Opdam's convoy escort of 6000 men well to the rear as a decoy. With the King's exhortations in mind, Boufflers went in pursuit, and after three days came up with Opdam near Helchteren, where to his consternation he found not only the small force of the Dutch general, but the whole of Marlborough's army drawn up for battle on the open plain. Yet once more Marlborough's skilful manoeuvring was to go for naught. His advantage over the tired and unprepared French was so obvious that the Dutch Deputies assented to an attack. The battle opened with a brisk artillery exchange which caused several hundred casualties to each army, but when Opdam was ordered to make a key assault on the French left, which was badly disarrayed because of marshy ground, he refused to advance because the footing was not firm. The remaining hours of daylight were wasted without an attack being made, and during the night Boufflers was able to complete his deployment. Next day the Deputies, finding the balance between the two sides more even, although still in Marlborough's favour, prohibited further offensive action. That night Boufflers slipped back behind the River Demer. In bitter disappointment Marlborough wrote from Helchteren:[15]

> I have but too much reason to complain that the ten thousand men upon our right did not march as soon as I sent the orders, which if they had, I believe we should have had a very easy victory, for their whole left was in disorder ... I am in so ill humour that I will not trouble you, nor dare I trust myself to write more ...

The dispiritedness of the Dutch Deputies or the Dutch generals had now prevented Marlborough on at least four occasions from forcing a decisive action on the French. For the remainder of the campaigning season of 1702 he turned to the reduction of the three Meuse fortresses below Maastricht. Siege warfare being a conventional form of operation to

which they were well accustomed the Dutch raised no objections to these undertakings, particularly against Venlo, which besides being the strongest of the three was the closest to Holland. It was invested on August 29, but although preparations had been ordered well in advance there were long delays in bringing the heavy siege batteries up the river and securing the civilian labour to carry out the required entrenchings and mining. To cover the siege Marlborough placed himself with an army of 45,000 at Asch between Helchteren and the Meuse, where he could intercept not only any French attempt to relieve Venlo but also any move against the Dutch garrison in Maastricht, about ten miles to his south. Venlo fell on September 23 after a brilliant assault upon an outlying fort by a British force (which included Captain Parker's Royal Irish Regiment), and Stevensweert and Roermond were taken in quick succession. By October 7 the whole of the Meuse was cleared as far as Maastricht.

It was late in the season for further campaigning, but Marlborough sought once more for a chance to smash the French army. Less than twenty miles up the Meuse from Maastricht was the city of Liége, whose retention by the French was of great importance to their communications with Bonn and their other fortresses on the Rhine. To check a possible Allied move in this direction Boufflers, who was under orders from Louis XIV to save Liége at all costs, moved to Tongres and took up a stand on the Jaar, a small tributary which entered the Meuse above Maastricht. The threat did not deter Marlborough from marching south. On the night of October 13-14 he crossed the Jaar between the French position and the Meuse. As was to be expected his proposal to attack Boufflers was vetoed and he turned to the reduction of Liége. The town opened its gates immediately but there was stern opposition from the citadel, which only fell to a general assault on October 23, and an outlying fort which capitulated six days later. The capture of Liége was Marlborough's crowning success of the 1702 campaign, and a bitter blow to the French, who besides sustaining 10,000 casualties in the siege now found themselves cut off from their positions in the Archbishopric of Cologne.

Early in November Marlborough moved his men into winter quarters and headed for England, narrowly avoiding capture when the boat in which he was descending the Meuse was waylaid by a marauding band of French irregulars. He escaped by using a French passport which had been made out for his brother, General Charles Churchill (for the custom still persisted from the days of chivalry for generals to give their opposite numbers safe-conduct passes). Marlborough was enthusiastically welcomed by the English people and the Parliament; the Queen conferred a dukedom upon him, and he was granted a pension of five thousand pounds a year for life.

The year 1702 had not gone as well for the Allies on other fronts. In Italy Prince Eugene, who by his masterly campaigning in 1701 had established himself in Lombardy, had failed in his efforts to extend his control south of the Po. On the Upper Rhine Prince Louis of Baden's capture of the fortress of Landau had been more than offset by the treacherous defection to the French of Prince Max Emmanuel, who had succeeded the young Joseph Ferdinand (page 6 above) as Elector of Bavaria. While negotiating with the Allies he suddenly seized the city of Ulm on the Danube, thereby threatening the communications of Prince Louis and the other Allied German Princes of the Rhine with Vienna. Fortunately for the Allies the barrier of the Black Forest Mountains separated the Bavarian Elector at Ulm from the French forces west of the Rhine, and although Marshal Villars, replacing Catinat, routed Prince Louis' army at Friedlingen in mid-October, it was too late in the season for a junction. Before campaigning ceased Marshal Tallard's capture of the fortresses of Trèves and Trarbach in the Moselle valley had opened to the French a new passage from the Netherlands to the Upper Rhine.

An Allied amphibious undertaking against Spain, designed as the first step in Marlborough's strategy to gain control of the Mediterranean, had miscarried. At the end of July a British fleet under Admiral Sir George Rooke carrying a force of 8000 soldiers commanded by the Duke of Ormonde sailed for Cadiz, the key port for trade with Spanish America, with orders to seize that important harbour as a base for subsequent operations against Minorca in the Balearic Islands. There was even a hope, if all went well, that help by sea might be brought to Prince Eugene's operations in Northern Italy. The assault on Cadiz failed through the Admiral's apathy and the General's weak leadership, and through lack of co-operation by both; and the fiasco was only partly redeemed on the way home by a well executed raid on a treasure fleet in Vigo Harbour in North-Western Spain, which enriched the British treasury by one million pounds sterling.

Marlborough spent the remaining winter months in preparation for the campaign of 1703, receiving from Parliament a vote of 10,000 additional foreign troops and five new British battalions. He returned to The Hague in mid-March in order to make an early start with operations. The probability of what the French would do played an important part in determining the Allied plans. Louis XIV was anxious to join forces with his new ally, the Elector of Bavaria, to which end he proposed to send Marshal Villars eastward through the Black Forest and bring the French army in Italy back across the Alps into Bavaria. He was content to stay mainly on the defensive in the Netherlands, where Villeroi had 60,000 men behind the Lines of Brabant, covering the area from Namur to Bruges. However, he wanted Liége retaken at

the opening of the year's campaign, before the Allies, who were expected to be delayed by the customary tardiness of the Dutch, were ready to begin operations.

## 1703—A Frustrating Year

Marlborough recommended to the Allied planners a vigorous offensive in Flanders that would compel the French to reinforce their army there, and so curtail their activities along the Upper Rhine. As usual the Dutch, clinging to the idea that "to reduce fortresses was the whole art of war", would agree only to besieging Bonn, the capture of which would free the whole Lower Rhine (the fortress of Rheinberg having been taken early in February in a winter siege).

The investment of Bonn began on 27 April, much earlier than the French had expected Allied campaigning to start. Marlborough took personal charge of the operation, placing a covering army of 15,000 men under the Dutch Marshal Overkirk between Liége and Maastricht. This relatively small force was soon attacked by Villeroi, who, surprised and angered by Marlborough's sudden move, thought to recapture Liége while the Allies were occupied with the siege of Bonn. A heroic stand at Tongres by two Allied battalions delayed a French army of 40,000 men more than a day, and the timely arrival of 10,000 British reinforcements, coupled with the support of the fortress guns of Maastricht, provided Overkirk with a sufficiently powerful argument to compel a French retirement. This check of the enemy at the Meuse gave Marlborough the time he needed at Bonn. By pressing the siege with the utmost vigour (the general bombardment employed the unprecedented fire-power of ninety large mortars of up to 8 inches in calibre, 500 smaller mortars and more than 500 guns) he forced a capitulation on May 15—less than forty-eight hours after Villeroi had shamefacedly withdrawn from before Maastricht.

The Duke hastened back to the Meuse, and immediately set afoot his next project. He called it "the great design", and aptly so, for it was a bold plan to capture Antwerp by mounting four widely separated attacks against the French. The thrust on the big port itself was to be made by General Opdam advancing southward from Bergen-op-Zoom, to which base twenty battalions from the Bonn operation were transported in troop barges down the swiftly flowing Rhine. At the same time a diversionary attack would be made sixty miles to the west against Ostend by another force under the noted Dutch engineer, Baron Cohorn, a master of siege warfare and inventor of the small grenade-throwing mortar to which he gave his name. Marlborough himself would pin down Villeroi by moving his main army south-westward from Maastricht to threaten the fortress of Huy, which commanded the Meuse between Liége and Namur. A final diversion was assigned to the fleet, which was to simulate an assault against Dieppe on the French coast.

But "the great design" failed, less from any weakness in the plan or strength of enemy opposition, than from the failure of Marlborough's subordinates to carry out their allotted tasks. The Commander-in-Chief himself succeeded in drawing Villeroi well down towards Huy, but in the north Cohorn, whose merit as a tactician seems to have fallen short of his skill as an engineer, instead of attacking Ostend obtained permission from The Hague to go on a plundering raid into the region between Antwerp and Bruges. For nearly three weeks the armies of Marlborough and Villeroi faced each other north of Huy while the Duke waited in vain for the States-General to make Cohorn carry out his original assignment, and so force a detachment from the garrison at Antwerp. At the end of June, Opdam, without co-ordinating his actions with the other Allied forces, advanced with 10,000 troops to within four miles of Antwerp. He was met and defeated by Marshal Boufflers' army of nearly 40,000, which Villeroi had rushed northward behind the Brabant Lines.

The main armies on both sides had been drawn towards Antwerp by Opdam's ill-timed move, but Marlborough's proposal to force an engagement a few miles south of the city was rejected. Throughout the summer the Dutch refused to sanction any attack on the French lines, and he had to be content with the siege of two not very important fortresses—Huy, which fell on August 25, and Limbourg, ten miles east of Liége, which was taken on September 27.

The obstruction of the Dutch parliament and its generals was intolerable to Marlborough (indeed, he made up his mind to resign his command), for a victory in Flanders was particularly desirable in view of Allied setbacks elsewhere. Marshal Villars, after capturing the fortress of Kehl on the east bank of the Rhine opposite Strasbourg, had crossed the Black Forest and joined the Elector Max Emmanuel, so that now the French had a clear path from Lorraine to Bavaria. On September 20 Villars and the Elector soundly defeated an Imperial army at Hochstadt on the Danube, and the Elector's capture of Augsburg shortly afterwards still further opened a way to Vienna. Only a spirited uprising by the peasantry of Tyrol against the Elector's attempt to overrun their country prevented his Bavarian army from linking up with Marshal Vendôme, who was ready to come through the Brenner Pass from Italy. Finally, Marshal Tallard's recapture of Landau in November deprived the Grand Alliance of a useful outpost in the valley of the Upper Rhine.

This gloomy balance sheet reflected two minor Allied gains, although neither of them achieved by force of arms. In September Victor Amadeus, whose Duchy of Savoy-Piedmont guarded the Alpine passes between Italy and France, had quarrelled with Louis XIV and declared for the Allies. There had been no major activity at sea; but an alliance with Portugal had given the English and Dutch fleets the use of Lisbon and Lagos.

The Allied reverses do not seem to have greatly worried the Dutch. Far from sharing Marlborough's disappointment they regarded the campaign of 1703 as quite successful, and in celebration struck a medal showing the Duke receiving the keys of the three fortresses he had captured and inscribed with what he must surely have regarded as a most dubious tribute—"Victorious without slaughter, by the taking of Bonn, Huy, and Limburg". While this motto epitomizes the Dutch concept of warfare, it is hard to think of a less appropriate allusion to Marlborough's aspirations and achievements in the campaign just completed. For him it had been a year wasted in passively safeguarding the Dutch frontier; as in 1702, recurring opportunities of smashing the armies of the French king had been thrown away.

But although for two years Marlborough had not been allowed to demonstrate conclusively his tactical skill in battle, he had during that time given ample evidence of the military genius that was to win him the great victories of the next six years. If we may apply to the years 1702-3 the Principles of War generally recognized by modern students of military science[16] we shall see the measure of Marlborough's superiority over his Dutch Allies. The two campaigns demonstrate above everything else his firm belief in the necessity for *Offensive Action*—a conviction which sets him far apart from most of his contemporaries. Just as apparent was the Allied failure to agree on the *Selection and Maintenance of the Aim*—the non-observance of this primary principle, as demonstrated in the diverging views on strategy held by Marlborough and the Dutch, was more than anything else responsible for the Allied lack of success. The Dutch insistence on tying down large forces along their borders in a passive role of defence violated the principle of *Economy of Effort*; fortunately for the Allied cause this was to some extent offset by Marlborough's *Flexibility*—notably in his manoeuvres between Eindhoven and Helchteren in August 1702, and the speed with which he redisposed his forces after the capture of Bonn in the following May. The mobility with which the Duke executed these tactics enabled him to achieve effective *Surprise*, although circumstances did not permit him to reap its benefits. We shall see more of this use of mobility, however, in subsequent campaigns, when the genius which employed it will at last be allowed to reap its just rewards.

## CHAPTER III

# The March to the Danube, 1704

### The Expedition is Planned

The year 1704 opened with exceedingly gloomy prospects for the Grand Alliance, for it seemed impossible that the Empire could be saved from French domination, in which event European resistance to the Grand Monarch must inevitably collapse. Vienna was seriously threatened from east, south and west. In Hungary Magyar hostility against the House of Austria, which had first shown itself in guerrilla risings in 1702, had developed into open warfare waged by powerful armies under the fiery leadership of the outlawed Prince Rakoczy. In mid-February the English ambassador wrote from Vienna: "We live at the discretion of the Hungarians as to the suburbs, where they may arrive with little opposition in twelve hours' time."[17] In the south Marshal Vendôme, burning to punish the defection of Victor Amadeus, was preparing a major offensive against Savoy and its allied Austrian army in Northern Italy.

Austria's western neighbour, Bavaria, as we have already noted, blocked the Emperor's communications with his Maritime allies, and the Elector now controlled the Danube from its source to the Austrian frontier. With Marshal Marsin, who had succeeded Villars in command of the French Army of Bavaria, he had assembled 40,000 men at Ulm, ready to descend the Danube as soon as reinforcements should arrive from France. Marsin's force was one of eight French armies placed in the field by Louis XIV, who was confidently determined that 1704 would be the decisive year of the war. The primary objective was Vienna. Once French and Bavarian troops had joined hands there with the Hungarian rebels (who had not wanted for French support in money and men) Louis would be able to dictate separate terms of peace to the Emperor Leopold, leaving Holland and England to face the armies of France alone.

Good strategist as he was, the Duke of Marlborough could not have failed to appreciate these unfavourable prospects for the coming year; but if there remained any possible doubt concerning the serious danger to Vienna it was removed by the insistent representations of the Emperor's ambassador to England, Count Wratislaw. As the Empire's plight became increasingly desperate during 1703 the Austrian envoy not only vigorously pressed his case in London but travelled from court to court of the Grand Alliance soliciting aid for Leopold, and urging in the strongest possible terms that in 1704 the Allies must turn their attention eastward from the Netherlands. The proposal to carry the war into a new theatre was in line with the thinking of Marlborough, who was resolved never again to exercise command in Flanders under the restrictions of the last two years. It also found favour with the English parliament, where a strong anti-Dutch attitude had arisen, particularly on the part of the Tory opposition.

During the winter of 1703-4 Marlborough gave careful consideration to the various courses advocated by Count Wratislaw, the boldest of which was to strike at the main threat to Vienna by leading an army against the enemy forces in Bavaria.[18] It was probably April before he finally included in his plans a march to the Danube, but in the meantime he produced a design that was to win the enforced support of the defence-minded Dutch and at the same time serve as an effective cover plan for the major operation, should that be undertaken. Marlborough had long entertained the idea that once the Dutch frontier was cleared he would invade France by advancing up the valley of the Moselle from its junction with the Rhine, and thereby outflanking the strong fortress zone which stretched across southern Flanders. Dutch timidity had kept him from carrying this out during 1702 and 1703, but at the end of January we find him crossing to The Hague firmly resolved "to induce the States-General to decide upon a siege of Landau, or a diversion on the Moselle."

At first the Dutch Government vigorously opposed his proposal to transfer all British and some foreign troops to the Moselle region, even though Dutch forces and the remaining auxiliaries would remain under General Overkirk on the defensive in the Netherlands. But with the influential Grand Pensionary, Heinsius, on his side, Marlborough finally won a grudging acquiescence in the Moselle plan, and even secured a vote of subsidies to maintain the Margrave of Baden and other German princes in the field. Before he returned to London the Duke arranged for the Prussian and Hanoverian contingents that were watching the northern frontiers of Bavaria to move westward to Coblenz, where they would ostensibly be available for operations on the Moselle, but at the same time be in readiness to join in a march up the Rhine.

After a brief period in England, during which he matured his plans and arranged for the dispatch of 10,000

reinforcements to his army on the continent, Marlborough landed again in Holland on April 21 accompanied by Count Wratislaw, who was to back him in his arguments with the Dutch. He was the bearer of the Queen's written instructions authorizing him

> to take the most effectual methods with the States-General of the United Provinces, Her good Allies and Confederates, to send a speedy Succour to His Imperial Majesty and the Empire, and to press the States to take the necessary measures to rescue Germany from the imminent Danger it was now exposed to.[19]

The Duke needed the support which this fortifying and conveniently vague directive gave him. He found that the obstinate States-General, although already committed by agreement to some form of campaign on the Moselle, were resolved to spare only 15,000 troops for that purpose, and had moreover ordered the recall to Holland of Dutch regiments serving with Prince Louis of Baden east of the Rhine.

After more than a week's debate in which little was accomplished, Marlborough abruptly announced his intention of proceeding to Coblenz with all troops in English pay, regardless of what the Dutch might do. The threat worked. The States-General agreed to supply the required troops for a Moselle campaign, and indeed from that time onward showed a reasonable and even magnanimous attitude towards Marlborough and the Allied cause. They were still in the dark as to the Duke's real intentions, which were set down in two letters to the Earl of Godolphin. On 29 April he wrote:[20]

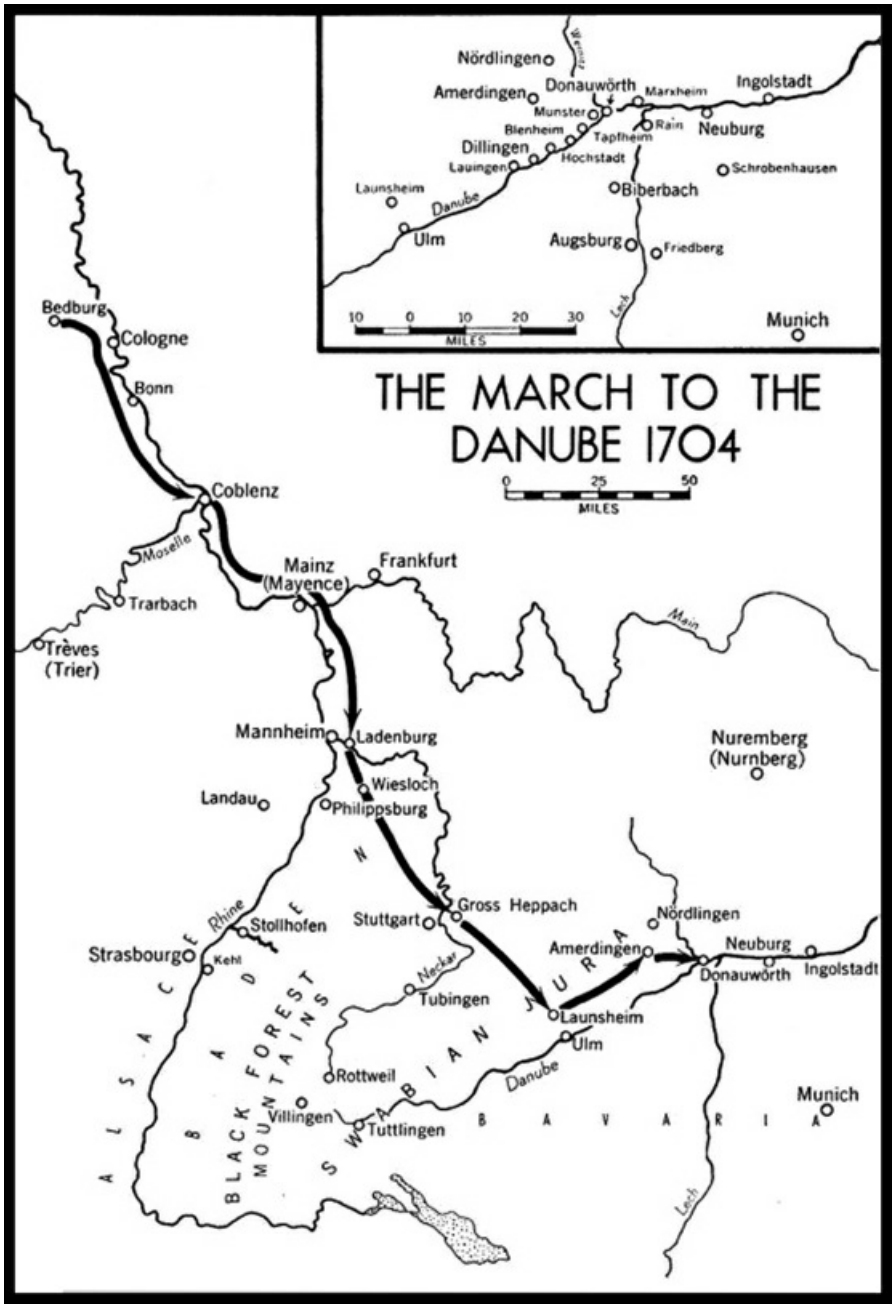
> By the next post I shall be able to let you know what resolutions I shall bring these people to; for I have told them I will leave this place on Saturday. My intentions are to march all the English to Coblentz, and to declare here that I intend to command on the Moselle. But when I come there to write to the States that I think it absolutely necessary, for the saving of the Empire, to march with the troops under my command and to join those in Germany that are in Her Majesty's and the Dutch pay, in order to take measures with Prince Lewis for the speedy reducing of the Elector of Bavaria . . . What I now write I beg may be known to nobody but Her Majesty and the Prince [Consort].

Three days later he wrote announcing his ultimatum to the Dutch and confirming his subsequent intentions:[21]

> By the advice of my friends that I advise with here, I have this afternoon declared to the deputies of the States my resolution of going to the Moselle . . . I am very sensible that I take a great deal upon me. But should I act otherwise, the empire would be undone, and consequently the confederacy . . . If the French shall have joined any more troops to the Elector of Bavaria, I shall make no difficulty of marching to the Danube.

The condition expressed here is significant. Until news of such a reinforcement reached Marlborough (which was not until May 23, when he had not progressed beyond Bonn), he had a choice of three courses—either to carry out the operation on the Moselle expected by his army, to proceed farther up the Rhine for an attack on Alsace, or to do what he ultimately did, swing south-eastward to the Danube.

The cloak of secrecy under which preparations for the great project were carried to completion was not designed merely to keep the Dutch in blissful ignorance of an enterprise so contrary to their limited ideas of strategy that they could never have been persuaded to agree to it. There was a greater need of concealing the undertaking from the French. The move from the Netherlands to Bavaria would take Marlborough's army across the long curve of the enemy front. His route lay within striking distance of French forces on the Moselle (based in Trèves and Trarbach) and in Alsace (about Landau); given sufficient warning these would be able to intercept the Allied march.




**Historical Section, G.S.**

The prospect of Allied operations in the Moselle valley did not greatly disturb the French. There seemed little probability that an invasion of France by that route could present a serious threat to Paris before Vienna had fallen and the Grand Alliance had been smashed. To Louis XIV the decisive theatre of action was on his right flank, and to his satisfaction he saw his Anglo-Dutch opponents apparently tied down on his left. It is ironical that probably one of the most powerful factors in concealing from the French the proposed Allied move was the assurance, arising from thirty years' experience of Dutch military methods, that the government at The Hague would never consent to weakening its defences for a concentration in Bavaria. Thus the French, secure in the belief that the initiative was all theirs, developed their plans to reinforce Marsin and the Elector Max Emmanuel. From his position on the Upper Rhine above Strasbourg Marshal Tallard was given the responsibility of passing drafts of 10,000 men eastward through the Black Forest to Ulm. Then, while Villeroi stood guard in Flanders, Louis would strike a double blow at Germany—Tallard attacking down the Upper Rhine, and Marsin and the Elector down the Danube.

## From Bedburg to Donauwörth

Early in May British and Dutch forces and foreign auxiliaries began assembling at Bedburg, between Roermond and Cologne, about seventy miles from Coblenz. Concentration was carried out under General Charles Churchill, and on May 18 Marlborough reviewed an army nearly 50,000 strong, composed of 90 squadrons of horse and 51 infantry

battalions (of which 19 squadrons and 14 battalions, numbering some 16,000 troops, were British)[22]. Two days later the march began. The next six weeks were to see a gigantic "scarlet caterpillar" crawling for three hundred miles across the map of Europe, "dragging the whole war along with it."

Among the Principles of War it is laid down that for any operation "the administrative arrangements must be designed to give the Commander the maximum freedom of action in carrying out any plan." It would be hard to find a better instance of adherence to this principle than the efficient manner in which everything necessary to the progress of the expedition was provided for by Marlborough, assisted by a handful of carefully picked officers (a staff which seems extraordinarily inadequate when contrasted with the extensive headquarters of an army today).

To ensure the speed essential to his project, Marlborough sent the bulk of his artillery and heavy baggage and his hospital stores up the Rhine by barge as far as Mannheim. Although the Dutch would not permit their siege train to leave Flanders, they furnished the gunpowder to be used in siege cannon obtained from the German Princes. The convenient cover of the Moselle plan had made it possible, long before the army left the Meuse, for provision to be made in German cities along the Middle Rhine for the supply of the army and the payment of the troops. Thus a complete issue of new shoes had been contracted for in Frankfurt, and adequate credits had been arranged with local bankers. We find Marlborough writing to the Lord Treasurer on May 29:[23]

> I send tomorrow to Frankfort to see if I can take up a month's pay for the English, and shall draw the bills on Mr. Sweet; for notwithstanding the continual marching, the men are extremely pleased with this expedition, so that I am sure you will take all the care possible that they may not want.

What better evidence could be given of the importance which the Duke attached to maintaining his army's morale?

To the inhabitants of the towns and villages on the line of march it was a novel experience to witness the passage of an army that instead of pillaging along the route paid its way in cash. They responded with an enthusiastic welcome and a willingness to aid which considerably expedited the march. They admired the costly British equipment (later they were to give the name "Malbrouck" to a wagon of the highest standard of construction); and on one occasion the neat and cleanly appearance of the English officers drew the observation, "these gentlemen seem to be all dressed for the ball."

Unlike the French Marshal Tallard, who hustled the reinforcements for Marsin through the Black Forest at such a rate that half of them became incapacitated along the way, Marlborough enforced a wise march discipline which produced a satisfactory rate of speed with no injurious effect on his men. Each morning the troops were on the move by three o'clock and had completed their march by nine in the forenoon before it was really hot, "so that the remaining part of the day's rest was as good as a day's halt." The cavalry rode on similarly well-planned schedules. There were ample supplies of forage for the horses, and we are told that Prince Eugene was amazed at their splendid condition at the end of their journey. Captain Parker sums up the excellence of the administrative arrangements:[24]

> As we marched through the countries of our allies commissaries were appointed to furnish us with all manner of necessaries for man and horse: these were brought to the ground before we arrived and the soldiers had nothing to do but pitch their tents, boil their kettles, and lie down to rest. Surely never was such a march carried on with more order and regularity and with less fatigue.

Six days after leaving Bedburg Marlborough and his cavalry reached Coblenz, followed two days later by his infantry under General Churchill. Instead of turning along the Moselle, "to our surprise", writes Parker, "we passed that river over a stone bridge and the Rhine over two bridges of boats."[25] As the long columns continued up the right bank of the Rhine they were joined by Hanoverian and Prussian forces. On the last day of the month the mounted troops crossed the River Main opposite Mainz, where Marlborough arranged for siege artillery to ascend the Rhine to Mannheim and for a bridge of boats to be thrown over the river at Philippsburg—a suitable crossing place for an attack on Landau.

To Louis XIV and his marshals, whose plans of campaign had been thrown into confusion by Marlborough's sudden seizure of the initiative, these latest developments seemed a sure sign of an impending attack on Alsace. From the first intelligence of the Allied march they had been forced to suspend the intended movements of their own armies and undertake temporary expedients until Marlborough's objectives should become apparent. Within a day of the departure from Bedburg Villeroi, after a demonstration against Huy (which brought from General Overkirk a frantic but fruitless appeal to the Duke to return at once), had hastened southward to cover the Moselle. Tallard had successfully delivered the drafts to Max Emmanuel on May 19 (the Margrave of Baden by staying too long in the Lines of Stollhofen having

missed a good chance to intercept him in the Black Forest) and had returned to Alsace. By the time French agents brought word that Marlborough had reached the Main, Tallard was ready with 22,000 men to meet an attack on Landau, and Villeroi with an army of equal size was rapidly approaching through Lorraine. Characteristically the Dutch had made no attempt to hold the latter by a diversionary attack. The French marshal, however, had some cause for apprehension that the whole operation might be a ruse to draw him away from the Low Countries; for it was uncomfortably apparent that if Marlborough suddenly doubled back to Holland his Rhine boats could transport his forces downstream at upwards of 80 miles in a day—eight times as fast as the French army could travel overland.

Meanwhile Marlborough crossed the River Neckar at Ladenburg, and after a three days' halt to allow his brother to reduce the distance between cavalry and infantry he reached Wiesloch on June 6, where he was a day's march east of Philippsburg and less than 30 miles from Landau. The suspense with which Tallard and Villeroi were watching his movements ended next day, when Marlborough turned abruptly eastward and headed for the Danube.

The significance of this sudden change in direction was only too clear to the French marshals. By his skilful manoeuvring, and without a shot being fired on either side, their enemy had achieved a major strategical victory. A junction of the armies of Marlborough and Prince Louis of Baden was imminent. When that happened a combined force of close to 100,000 Allied troops would stand between the Franco-Bavarian force at Ulm and the two French armies west of the Rhine. Louis XIV immediately directed Villeroi and Tallard to submit a plan for bringing aid to the Elector; but after two weeks of consultation they had to report to their royal master, "In view of the superiority of the enemy forces between the Rhine and the Danube, assistance to Bavaria is so difficult as to appear almost an impossibility."[26]

On June 10 Prince Eugene of Savoy arrived in Marlborough's camp. The Duke had stipulated in his preliminary talks with Wratislaw that Eugene should join him for the forthcoming campaign, and to this the Emperor had agreed, even though the Prince was now at the War Office in Vienna serving as President of the Imperial Council of War. This first meeting of two most distinguished soldiers marked the beginning of a close personal friendship and a harmonious collaboration rarely to be equalled in the annals of war. Three days later they were joined by Prince Louis, the Margrave of Baden. At Gross Heppach, 40 miles north-west of Ulm, the trio formed their plans. Although the three generals addressed each other in the most cordial and complimentary terms, both Marlborough and Eugene distrusted the Margrave, whom they suspected of deliberately delaying operations in order to give the Elector of Bavaria a chance to avoid defeat. (Indeed, before the month was out Wratislaw was to suggest to the Emperor the advisability of having the Margrave arrested.) Prince Eugene was assigned the important task of taking a force of 30,000 troops back to the Rhine to oppose the armies of the two French marshals at either Philippsburg or Stollhofen. Marlborough's army was to join the Margrave's forces at the Danube as quickly as possible. On the question of the command of the combined armies, Prince Louis' claim of precedence as the senior Imperial general had to give recognition to Marlborough's status as Commander-in-Chief of the forces of the Queen of England and of the States-General of Holland. Long before the two met, the Englishman had taken the precaution of having the Supreme Council of War at Vienna arrange that the command should be shared between them, both working together "as commanders of independent forces of equal status". The watchword of the day, which was issued by the Emperor, and the day's orders previously agreed upon, would be given by each general "to his army or to his wing if the armies were together or alternatively could be given out by each of them on alternate days".[27]

The final stage of Marlborough's march was made over the barrier of the Swabian Jura, which forms the watershed between the Neckar and the Danube. The steepness of the rough mountain roads hampered the progress of the artillery, and ten days of heavy rain added to the difficulties of the infantry. On June 22, however, the two Allied armies joined hands at Launsheim, ten miles north-west of Ulm. And now the excellent administrative arrangements made by Marlborough for the journey brought their reward in the fine physical condition and high morale of the troops, who had just completed a march of some 300 miles—the cavalry in 35 days, the infantry (who arrived on the 27th) in 42 days. Further evidence of the Duke's foresight was soon forthcoming. Having passed the limit of his extended lines of communication backward along the valley of the Neckar and down the Rhine, he now brought into use new lines of supply which he had set up stretching north-eastward to Nuremberg and the fertile regions of the upper Main.

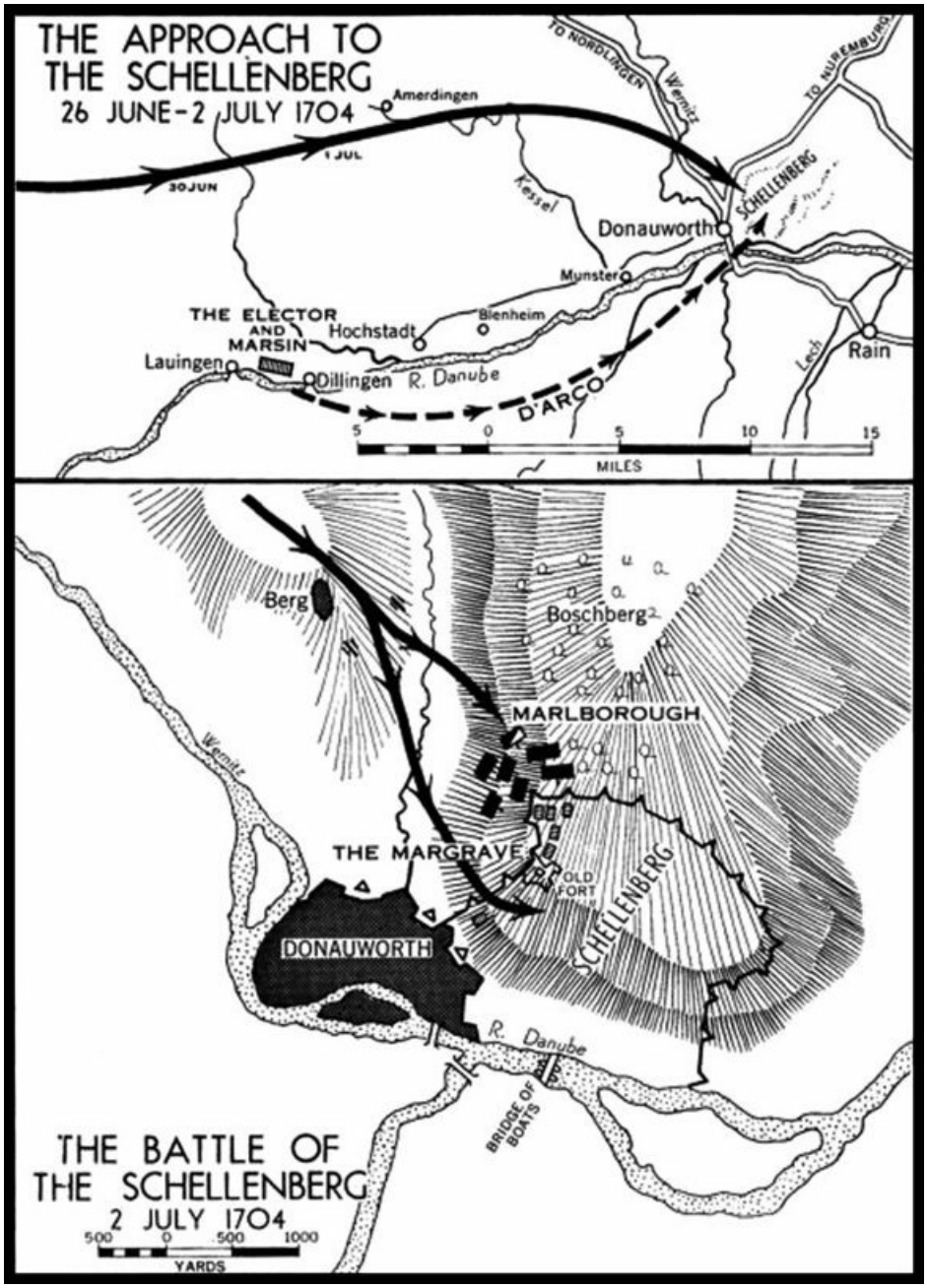
After the necessary detachments had been made to Eugene's force at the Rhine, the combined Allied armies at the Danube outnumbered those of Marsin and the Elector of Bavaria by some 70,000 to 45,000 men. Yet in spite of this superiority Marlborough did not hold any great hope of bringing the enemy to an immediate contest; for although the Franco-Bavarian troops were on the north side of the Danube, having fallen back to an entrenched camp near Dillingen (30 miles downstream from Ulm), they could if threatened refuse battle and, crossing to the right bank, put the river barrier between them and the Allies. The Duke already had a plan in mind. Another 30 miles below Dillingen was the old town

of Donauwörth, the capture of which would not only provide the Allies with a strong base of operations, but would give them a bridgehead through which they could cross into Bavaria and so carry the war into the Elector's own country. For even though Max Emmanuel could not be brought to battle, he might well be prevailed upon to break off his alliance with France if he saw his territory being ravaged by a hostile army. On June 8 Marlborough had written to Godolphin, "I shall in two days after the junction march directly to Donauwörth. If I can take this place I shall there settle a magazine for the army." Without delay he now pushed eastward, following a course about eight miles back from the river. On June 30 he passed the enemy's camp at Dillingen; whereupon the Elector hastily dispatched a force of 14,000 men under his leading Bavarian general, Count d'Arco, to occupy Donauwörth and strengthen its defences.

The town itself was no strong fortress. Its mediaeval walls were long obsolete and would present little difficulty to an attacker. To the south and west the Danube and its unfordable tributary, the Wernitz, afforded natural protection. The real key to the defences was a steep, flat-topped hill to the north-east, named from its bell-like shape, the Schellenberg. On the broad plateau, 500 feet above the town, there was room for an army of 20,000 men. The northern slopes were covered by a dense wood (in those days an effective barrier to attacking troops), but to the east, where the incline was less steep than on the west, a stretch of open ground extended down to the Danube. In spite of French warnings Max Emmanuel had delayed starting work on defences until late in June, so that while a line of newly-constructed trenches ran from the Danube along the eastern and northern sides of the plateau, it stopped short of an old earthwork fort (built by Gustavus Adolphus in the Thirty Years' War) on the west side of the hill, about 500 yards north of the town walls. The southern part of the unfinished sector could be covered by the fortress guns in Donauwörth; to fortify the rest of this gap became the urgent task of Count d'Arco's men.

## The Assault of the Schellenberg

On July 1 the Allied armies camped at Amerdingen; 15 miles west of Donauwörth. Wet weather had made marching conditions deplorable, and it seemed obvious to d'Arco, busy with his preparations on the Schellenberg, that his enemy could not be in position to launch an attack before the morning of the 3rd at the earliest. Another day's digging would put the defences in a satisfactory state of readiness. This Marlborough realized, and he also appreciated that every hour that passed brought the probability of strong reinforcements reaching Donauwörth from the Franco-Bavarian main body. He was convinced that if the Schellenberg was to be taken, it must be taken on July 2, and on the afternoon of the 1st he began preparing for an attack next day.




**Historical Section, G.S.**

It has been the custom of historians to emphasize that July 2 was the Duke's turn to command the combined Allied force, and that the urgency with which he pushed the operation against the Schellenberg was dictated by his fear of the Margrave's inability to mount a successful attack when his turn came on the 3rd. As we have seen (footnote to page 38, above), one modern writer has questioned the existence of this daily alternation of command. In fact he produces evidence to show that the schedule by which each commander alternately issued the Emperor's password gave the odd-numbered days in June and July to Marlborough and the even numbers to the Margrave.[28] The significant thing is that on the 1st when he was issuing his preliminary order, on the 2nd when he was conducting the attack, and on the 3rd when he was reporting success to Queen Anne, Marlborough undoubtedly acted as if he were sole Commander-in-Chief—though all the while being careful to secure the full co-operation of his fellow general.

Ever conscious of the value of good intelligence, Marlborough sent forward a large reconnaissance group of horsemen to the Wernitz to report on the enemy's defences, and supplemented this information with examination of local inhabitants and deserters. Having decided to attack he methodically went about his preparations. He drew 130 men from each infantry battalion in his army to form an assault force of nearly 6000. To this were added three battalions of the Margrave's Imperial Grenadiers, and 35 squadrons of cavalry. In completing his administrative arrangements the Duke did not forget to send notification to the town of Nördlingen (fifteen miles north-west of Donauwörth on the new communications) to prepare its surgeons to receive many wounded.

At three o'clock on the morning of July 2 Marlborough's picked band set off along the road to Donauwörth, followed two hours later by the main army under Prince Louis. During the seventeen hours before darkness fell the advanced force was faced with the desperate task of marching fifteen miles through the mud, crossing the river Wernitz, deploying for battle, and finally storming the Schellenberg. Pioneer parties had gone forward in the early darkness, and by the time the assault troops reached the Wernitz, having taken nine hours to cover twelve miles along the vile roads, these pioneers had repaired a broken stone bridge and thrown three pontoon bridges over the river. Crossing to the east bank and approaching so close to the enemy's position that the Donauwörth cannon opened fire, Marlborough and his generals made their reconnaissance. They could see d'Arco's troops frantically digging their entrenchments on the west side of the Schellenberg, while south of the Danube were signs of a new camp being set out to receive heavy reinforcements, probably that night. Time was with the enemy; but the advantage of surprise lay with the Duke. If any further incitement to action was needed, it came in a dispatch from Prince Eugene warning that Villeroi and Tallard were at Strasbourg, preparing to reinforce the Elector through the Black Forest. Marlborough took his final decision, to which the Margrave agreed, that

> . . . Notwithstanding that the infantry was very tired from the long march, that the enemy's entrenchment was found perfected and that the evening was beginning to fall . . . the advantageous enemy entrenchment should be attacked that evening with the utmost vigour . . .[29]

Behind his incomplete defences Marshal d'Arco, realizing at last that contrary to all the rules an army which had marched all day was going to attack with darkness only a few hours away, had his own decision to make. He discarded the alternative of saving his force by a withdrawal across the Danube, and ordering his infantry to lay aside their shovels and resume their arms set himself to resist the impending assault. To cover the vital sector north of the old fort which the fortress guns could not reach he posted half of his sixteen field cannon at the edge of the wood, concentrating the bulk of his infantry in this vulnerable area. He ordered the Governor of the town to man the "covered way"[30] outside his walls with French musketeers; another French battalion was spread thinly along the line of trenches adjoining the town, where the enfilading cannon fire was expected to keep off any serious assault.

By five o'clock Marlborough's storming column, having formed up for battle east of the Wernitz, had advanced up the lower slopes of the Schellenberg until the leading troops were within 250 yards of the entrenchments. The Duke had decided to launch a massed attack on a narrow frontage immediately adjacent to the wood, where the line of fortifications jutted outward to form a sharp salient angle about 300 yards along each arm. He was fully aware that this obviously vital sector would be defended in great strength, but his plan gave him two chances of winning. If he could bludgeon his way through the enemy concentration victory was assured; on the other hand should this thrust fail, it ought to draw in sufficient enemy forces from other parts of the defences to ensure the success of a subsidiary attack elsewhere. He drew up his 6000 storm troops in three dense lines on a front of about 300 yards, supporting them by 16 battalions of the Margrave's army; and behind these he placed in a fifth and sixth line 35 squadrons of cavalry. In command of the assault force he put Lieut.-General von Goor, a Dutchman "of courage and capacity" on whose leadership he placed great reliance. Each foot-soldier carried in his left hand a short fascine of brushwood which the early arriving cavalry had cut. These were for filling the trench in front of the enemy breastworks.

The word to advance was given at about six o'clock. For nearly an hour an English battery of ten guns beside the Nuremberg road had been hurling round shot with telling effect at a battalion of French Grenadiers posted high up the Schellenberg to guard against any attack from the northern flank. As the assault force stepped briskly up the slopes led by a "forlorn hope" of 80 volunteers, it was met by the deadly fire of the eight guns stationed beside the wood. Soon these switched to grapeshot and the defending infantry poured a heavy volume of musketry fire into the dense ranks of the assailants. Men fell by hundreds, among them General Goor and many of his officers. Yet with cheers and cries of "God save the Queen!" the attackers pressed forward, their shouts so threatening the enemy morale that within the ramparts orders were given to drown out the noise by beating the "Charge" on the drums. By ill chance the leading attackers mistook a dry gully for the enemy's ditch and threw in their fascines, and thus had no means of crossing the actual works fifty yards beyond.

Here a fierce hand-to-hand struggle ensued as the French and Bavarian infantry on the parapet fought tooth and nail to throw back the assailants. "I verily believe", wrote the commander of the French Grenadiers, who had descended the hill and were now closely committed in the struggle, "that it would have been quite impossible to find a more terrible representation of hell itself than was shown in the savagery of both sides on that occasion."[31] The attackers were forced back down the slope, and were rallied only by the steadfastness of a battalion of English Guards who, with most of their

officers killed or wounded, stood their ground against the enemy's counter-attack, driving them once more within their lines.

Now the Allies dropped back to re-form at a point where the steepness of the hillside concealed them from the defending muskets, although they still suffered casualties from the round shot fired by the Bavarian artillery. Generals and other mounted officers left their horses to lead the second assault on foot. Again the assailants reached the trenches and engaged the defenders with cold steel, and again the attack was beaten off with tremendous loss. This time it was the English cavalry squadrons that, moving forward to within musket range, rallied the retreating infantry and checked the enemy's sally. Disregarding the heavy fire which took its toll of charger and trooper, the lines of horsemen stood steadfast, their confidence inspiring the shaken infantry. Methodically these began re-ordering their ranks for a third attempt on what one writer has aptly called the "death-angle".[32] But before this was launched the defenders had come under threat from a new quarter.

The main Allied army had begun to arrive on the scene about the time that the first assault was launched, and by seven o'clock it had completed deployment on Marlborough's right flank. Boldly led by Prince Louis it advanced against the centre of the line of trenches joining the town and the old fort. As we have noted, these positions had been but thinly held at the start of the battle, and the demands for reinforcements in the "death-angle" had further denuded them of troops. But of greater significance was the unexplained failure of the Governor of Donauwörth to man the covered way outside the fortress walls as instructed. As the Margrave's close columns passed in front of the town they were assailed by the cannon on the ramparts, but no deadly enfilading musketry fire struck them. Pressing forward they overcame without difficulty the ineffective resistance in the trenches, and quickly re-formed ranks within the defences, in time to break with their disciplined fire a desperate downhill charge by nine squadrons of d'Arco's cavalry. Then they pushed forward against the Bavarian flank as Marlborough launched his third and final attack. Caught between the converging thrusts the defenders of the Schellenberg broke and fled for the river. As they raced southward across the front of the Imperial army volleys of musket fire mowed them down in droves. Then Marlborough's cavalry squadrons were upon them and cutting them down with the cry, "Kill, kill and destroy!"[33] No quarter was given. Some escaped by swimming the Danube; many were drowned when a bridge of boats collapsed under the crowding fugitives. From the rout of d'Arco's army fewer than 5000 (some authorities say not more than 3000) made their way back to rejoin the forces of the Elector.

On the following night the Governor abandoned Donauwörth, failing to carry out his instructions to set the town on fire and completely destroy the bridge over the Danube. As a result a quantity of valuable stores fell intact into Allied hands. Thus the battle had given Marlborough his Danube bridgehead for operations into Bavaria and the terminus he needed for his new communications. For the British Army the result was especially significant (although strangely enough the name Schellenberg appears on no regimental colours). British forces on the continent had won their first victory of the war—a victory that did much to atone for the bitter defeats suffered under William III at Steenkirk (1692) and Landen (1693).

In a note to the Queen Marlborough attributed the success of our first attack of the enemy . . . in great measure . . . to the particular blessing of God, and the unparalleled bravery of your troops".[34] To his wife the Duchess he wrote: "It has pleased God, after a very obstinate defence, to have given us the victory, by which we have ruined the best of the elector's foot, for there was very little horse."[35] But well might the Duke admit (in a letter to Overkirk) that the victory "a coûté un peu cher".[36] The total Allied casualties numbered nearly 6000, including 1500 killed. Of the 4000 English troops engaged more than one third had been killed or wounded. Particularly great was the proportion of loss among the senior officers—eight generals were killed and nine others, including the Margrave, suffered wounds. Not only were the surgeons of Nördlingen to have their hands full, but in all the surrounding villages arrangements were made for the wounded to receive whatever crude care was available. These heavy casualties were seized upon by Marlborough's political enemies in England to launch new attacks on his generalship. The Dutch struck another medal, which gave all the credit for the Schellenberg victory to Prince Louis. And from Hanover the Electress Sophia, deploring a thousand Hanoverian casualties, was to write:[37]

> The Elector is saddened at the loss of so many brave subjects in consequence of the mistakes made by the great general Marlborough. He says that the Margrave of Baden did very much better, and that without him there would have been complete failure, as on the other wing proper measures had not been taken.

But these critics are not supported by the verdict of history. The dramatic victory at the Schellenberg was a fitting climax to the great march of Marlborough's army from the North Sea to the Danube. Both the march itself and the battle which

followed carry important lessons for the student of military history. The former has been called "one of the most striking examples in history of the indirect approach."[38] By threatening the enemy at successive stages with blows at alternative objectives, each of them completely convincing, the Allied commander kept his foes ignorant of his ultimate design until it was too late for them to prevent its accomplishment. By the time Marlborough revealed his true goal by turning eastward from the Middle Rhine he had gained the advantage of interior lines, along which he was able to outpace any reinforcements moving from Alsace to the aid of the isolated Franco-Bavarian force. As we have shown, the speed with which the whole journey was completed was not exceptional; a century later Napoleon's Grand Army was to march from the Straits of Dover to Ulm in three weeks, covering from thirteen to fifteen miles a day. But, as Captain Liddell Hart has pointed out, this lack of rapidity was partly compensated for by "the mask of strategic ambiguity" which covered the march. Indeed, until the final stages of Marlborough's march there was no particular need of haste; it was far more important to him to have his troops arrive at the end of their journey (over roads which were considerably worse than in Napoleon's day) in high morale and physically fit for battle.

If Marlborough's long-range move from the area in which all his military tasks seemed to lie marked a bold departure from the cautious strategy of his day, his unexpected attack on the Schellenberg was equally an innovation in tactics. By contemporary standards the normal procedure on this occasion would have been for the Allied commander to postpone action until he had assembled his total strength outside Donauwörth, and then assault the hill on a wide front. But realizing that such a delay would have allowed the enemy to complete his defences and bring in reinforcements Marlborough took a calculated risk. He knew the quality of his troops. He accepted the inevitably heavy price in casualties, and reaped the great advantage of surprise.

Many of the Principles of War are strikingly demonstrated in the events described in this chapter. We have already shown how Marlborough in preparing and executing the march to the Danube recognized the value of sound *Administration*, and by the practical application of this principle was able to maintain the high *Morale* of his army—the evidence of which was to appear so splendidly on the bloody slopes of the Schellenberg. We have also referred to the way in which the long march and the final assault made use of *Surprise*. The elements of surprise are secrecy, concealment, deception, originality, audacity and rapidity—a list from which the reader should have little difficulty in selecting characteristics which these operations demonstrated. Few better examples of *Flexibility* can be found than the manner in which the Duke laid his plans and selected his route for the ascent of the Rhine so as to have a choice of objectives and thus retain the initiative. The final rapid march to Donauwörth exemplified the mobility which is an important factor of this principle. Lastly the battle of the Schellenberg demonstrated once again Marlborough's belief in *Offensive Action*; while the tactics he employed of the massed attack on a narrow front proclaimed him as a redoubtable exponent of the principle of *Concentration of Force*.

## CHAPTER IV

# Blenheim, 1704

A letter from Prince Eugene to Victor Amadeus, Duke of Savoy, undated, but apparently penned about the middle of July 1704, expressed concern over the way in which his fellow generals Marlborough and the Margrave of Baden were conducting their part of the campaign. "Up to now everything has gone well enough between them", wrote the Prince, "but I greatly fear that this will not last. And to tell the truth since the Donauwörth action I cannot admire their performances."[39] This observation, coming from such a brilliant soldier is the more significant because Eugene, while serving under Marlborough in the field, was also responsible, as President of the Imperial War Council, for the direction of the Empire's total military effort in all theatres. How far was the criticism justified in the case of Marlborough?

The immediate result of the battle of the Schellenberg was to lay the Electorate of Bavaria open to the Allies, unless Max Emmanuel could put his forces to his country's defence—and in so doing run the risk of being cut off from French support. Right after d'Arco's crushing defeat the Elector and Marshal Marsin had abandoned Dillingen and withdrawn to Augsburg, a fortress on the west bank of the River Lech, which flows north into the Danube about ten miles below Donauwörth. The Bavarian prince decided that his best plan was to wait here for Tallard's army to join him, in the meantime protecting his threatened territory as best he might by dispersing the majority of his infantry and half his cavalry to garrison unwalled towns and guard valuable properties (not forgetting his own private estates). He abandoned the fortified town of Neuburg on the Danube and moved its garrison down to Ingolstadt, hoping to retain this as the last of his river fortresses on the 200-mile stretch from Ulm to the Austrian frontier.

### The Devastation of Bavaria

On July 8 Marlborough, having crossed the Lech five miles above its junction with the Danube, occupied Neuburg (thereby gaining another supply route from Nuremberg) and laid siege to the walled town of Rain. The defences were by no means formidable, but the attackers were hampered by the lack of a siege train, which the Margrave had failed to provide as arranged; and it was not until the 16th, after some heavy cannon arrived from Nuremberg, that the place fell. Possession of the Donauwörth-Rain-Neuburg triangle gave Marlborough a secure base on the Danube at the head of his new lines of communication from Central Germany. From this position he could either strike south-eastward into Bavaria or move westward for a reunion with Eugene, for which eventuality he took the precaution of destroying the abandoned Franco-Bavarian entrenchments at Dillingen, and posting a small watching garrison there and at Hochstadt, ten miles down the river. While Rain was still under siege the Allied armies had begun laying waste the countryside. Seizing as much grain and other food stocks as they required for their own needs, they ruthlessly destroyed the rest, burning whole towns and villages in their path. This devastation continued for three weeks, and when it ended upwards of 400 communities had been put to the torch.

Marlborough has been assailed by German and English historians alike for imposing this rigorous treatment on the Bavarians, and the fact that the bulk of the destruction was carried out by Imperialist rather than British troops has not lessened the censure. Yet there were sound reasons, both political and military for his action.

As a political measure this dreadful visitation upon Max Emmanuel's subjects was aimed at bringing him to terms. "We shall to-morrow have all the army in the elector's country", Marlborough wrote to Godolphin on July 9, "so that if he will ever think of terms it must be now, for we shall do our utmost to ruin his country."[40] However on the 14th the Elector himself broke off the negotiations to win him from his French partnership when word arrived that Tallard was on the march to join him and already in the Black Forest. The attempt to coerce him through his people's sufferings had apparently failed, and Marlborough probably had strictly military considerations in mind when two days later he wrote to Heinsius: "We are now advancing into the heart of Bavaria to destroy the country and oblige the Elector one way or the other to a compliance."[41] His object now, as set down in one of his dispatches, was two-fold—"to deprive the enemy as well of present subsistence as future support on this side". By cutting off supplies into the Augsburg fortress he hoped to starve Marsin and the Elector out into the open where they might be brought to battle; and once the "scorched earth" policy had been carried out Bavaria would be incapable of sustaining the combined forces of the Elector and

Marshals Marsin and Tallard. As we already mentioned, the burnings were to have the effect of dispersing Max Emmanuel's troops throughout his entire territory, an action which caused Tallard to reproach him "for having all his troops, except five battalions and about 23 squadrons, spread about the country to cover his salt-works, a gentleman's private estate in fact, instead of what they should have guarded—his frontiers."[42]

Meanwhile the Allied armies, advancing southward, had on July 22 occupied Friedberg, a town on the right bank of the Lech, opposite Augsburg. The inaction which Eugene had criticized was to continue for two more weeks as they remained facing the enemy forces only four miles away on the far bank. For Marlborough it must have been a period of frustration reminiscent of his worst days in Holland. He could not provoke his opponents into leaving their fortified camp at Augsburg, yet he lacked the strength to launch an assault. Nor could he cross the Lech to intercept the approaching French reinforcements, for such a move would have placed in jeopardy his own communications with the north and with Eugene. He considered laying siege to Munich, the Bavarian capital, but was forced to abandon the scheme for want of the necessary artillery. To his difficulties were added the "perpetual annoyance of a joint command". His relations with Prince Louis had steadily deteriorated since the Schellenberg battle, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for the two to reach agreement. But these unfavourable circumstances were not fully known to Eugene, or he might have shown more forbearance before he wrote to his compatriot, "To put things plainly, your Royal Highness, I don't like this slowness on our side".

## Eugene Rejoins Marlborough

At the western end of the theatre of operations Eugene had been playing his exacting role with considerable skill. He kept in close touch with Marlborough by means of frequent dispatches and a continuous exchange of liaison officers of senior rank. The two generals thus had up-to-date intelligence of the enemy's activities on both fronts and were able to co-ordinate their own moves with a precision that was to contribute in large measure to victory in mid-August.

From his position behind the Lines of Stollhofen Eugene had shown the two French marshals in Alsace so bold a front during June that when Tallard began his march towards Bavaria Louis XIV had forbidden Villeroi either to become involved in the Black Forest or to send further reinforcements after his fellow marshal. By mid-July Tallard, having set out from Strasbourg with an army of 35,000 men, had crossed the mountains and was besieging the fortress of Villingen on the headwaters of the Danube, deeming its reduction necessary to secure his supply lines. The German garrison resisted staunchly, so that in four days of bombardment the French made little progress.

Meanwhile Prince Eugene, leaving the greater part of his strength at Stollhofen to watch Villeroi, had cut through the Black Forest to the upper valley of the Neckar, appearing on July 18 with 18,000 men at Rottweil, less than a dozen miles from Villingen. Fear of Eugene's intervention may have been the main reason for Tallard's decision to raise the unprofitable siege; at any rate on the 22nd he left Villingen untaken, and crossing to the right bank of the Danube arrived in the neighbourhood of Ulm a week later. The considerable detail in which Marlborough's spies reported the Marshal's moves is disclosed in a dispatch of the Duke from Friedberg:

> M. Tallard, after lying six days before Villingen, with four twenty-four pounders and eight sixteen-pounders, had been obliged that day [July 22], upon the approach of Prince Eugene, to retire;... and was to march the same day to Dutlingen [Tuttlingen] on the Danube, where he had sent before to bake bread for his troops, resolving to march with all expedition to join the Elector.[43]

And now Eugene's brilliance as a tactician is revealed in his successful manoeuvres to hold Villeroi at the Rhine and at the same time cover Tallard's eastward advance. A quick descent of the Neckar valley to Tübingen, thirty miles north-east of Rottweil (where he had been reinforced by 40 squadrons from Marlborough's army), made it appear to the French that he was abandoning the pursuit of one army in order to return and face the other. As a consequence Villeroi, who had been preparing to follow Tallard to Bavaria, decided that he must remain about Strasbourg in order to guard Alsace. But from Tübingen Eugene doubled back south-eastward, roughly paralleling the movements of Tallard, although along a shorter route. Thus all was proceeding as foreseen by the Allies: the impending reinforcement of the Elector by Tallard would be balanced by a junction between Eugene and Marlborough. On July 27 the Duke reported to the Secretary of State:[44]

> M. Tallard... is now marching this way with all the expedition possible, so that he may probably join the Elector about the 2nd of next month. Prince Eugene is likewise advancing this way, and I hope will be within reach of us

about the same time.

Tallard, taking three days longer than expected, joined the Elector on August 5 at Biberbach, roughly midway between Augsburg and Donauwörth. Marlborough at once withdrew twenty miles north-eastward to Schrobenhausen, where on the afternoon of the 6th he welcomed Prince Eugene, whose army had arrived that day at Hochstadt.

On August 7 the three Allied commanders conferred together for the first time since their discussions at Gross Heppach. They examined the courses of offensive action open to Tallard (who must now be regarded as the Commander-in-Chief of the 60,000 Franco-Bavarian troops at Biberbach). The Allied fortifications at Rain and Donauwörth would frustrate any attempt to cut Marlborough's communications north of the Danube. The only practicable course open to the enemy seemed to be to attack Eugene's force of 18,000 before a junction with Marlborough's "grand army" of 53,000 gave the Allies the superiority in concentrated strength. To encourage such a move and so provoke the battle they sought, Marlborough and Eugene would keep their forces separated, on opposite sides of the Danube, although we may be sure that the marching time between them was carefully measured against the enemy's capabilities.

Yet the Allies had no intention of remaining inactive until such time as Tallard should make a move. Before Eugene arrived plans had been laid for the capture of Ingolstadt, and on August 9 the Margrave crossed the Danube at Neuburg with a force of 15,000 men and marched along the north bank to invest the fortress. Marlborough's role was to cover the siege. With his army now reduced to 38,000 he moved closer to Eugene, halting for the night near Rain, where he was only a short march of seven miles from Donauwörth.

While this move was still in progress word reached the Duke that the whole Franco-Bavarian force had left Biberbach and was heading for the Danube, apparently with the intention of crossing at Lauingen, five miles above Dillingen. The news brought Eugene hurrying back for consultation, and in a critical two-hour conference the two generals made their final plans for the clash that now seemed imminent. The most surprising result of their deliberations was the decision not to recall the Margrave, even though without his force the enemy would outnumber them by about six to five. That Marlborough was willing to accept this disadvantage in numbers rather than be hampered by the Margrave's presence during the forthcoming battle is a striking commentary on the hostility that existed between them. Yet more than that it illustrates the supreme confidence that both Eugene and the Duke placed in the fighting quality of their troops and in their own ability to outgeneral the enemy. Indeed, to allay any fears that Prince Louis might have about the security of his rear, Marlborough still further depleted his forces by sending him ten of Eugene's Imperial squadrons.

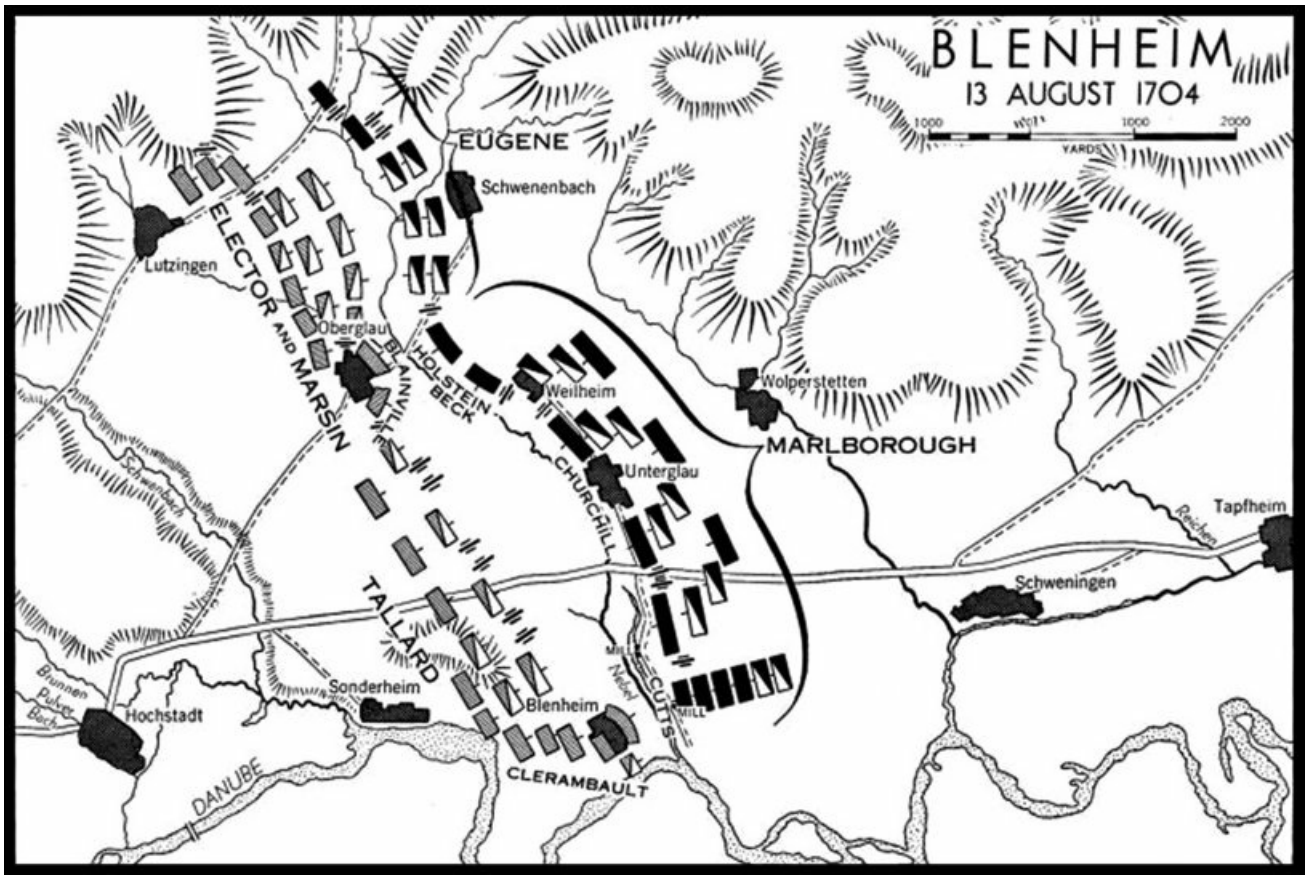
## The Approach to Battle

It seems certain that at this conference at Rain the two commanders reached the momentous decision to stake everything on a pitched battle, and even picked a place for the struggle. Eugene's army had fallen back from Hochstadt to Münster, on the right bank of the Kessel, a small tributary entering the Danube four miles west of Donauwörth. Here the range of wooded hills which extend westward from the Schellenberg along the left bank of the Danube recede from the river to leave a narrow plain varying from one to three miles in width. Eugene did not want to retire farther east than Münster; for, as he wrote to Marlborough on the 10th, "it is above all important not to be shut in between these mountains and the Danube."[45] The battle would be fought in the open, somewhere west of the Kessel.

The nicety of judgement which had determined the Allied moves and dispositions up to this moment now showed its fruits in the rapidity and precision with which the final concentration was carried out. Marlborough used two routes. At two o'clock on the morning of the 10th he dispatched the bulk of his cavalry (28 squadrons under the Duke of Württemberg) northward to cross the Danube at Marxheim and then move west through Donauwörth. General Charles Churchill followed with 20 battalions of foot. At three the main army began to march westward from Rain, taking a short cut across the River Lech. Late that evening the cavalry reached Münster, where they joined 22 squadrons of Eugene's horse on guard along the banks of the Kessel. Eugene had prudently withdrawn his infantry into Donauwörth for the night; next morning he brought them forward again to Münster, where they were soon joined by Churchill's infantry. Throughout the rest of the day the single road from Donauwörth was crowded with the long columns of Marlborough's main force, and by ten that night both armies were concentrated at the Kessel. Marlborough's army had marched less than twelve miles, but the journey had been made over roads damaged by heavy rain, and had involved crossing three rivers—the Lech, the Danube and the Wernitz. While the Allied troops rested in their camp all day on the 12th, the two commanders rode forward to reconnoitre, escorted by 28 squadrons of cavalry. From the church-tower at Tapfheim, a hamlet two miles west of Münster, they were able to watch the approach of the Franco-Bavarian army. About two miles east of

Hochstadt the Nebel, a companion watercourse to the Kessel, entered the Danube from the north, and on the grassy flats behind this stream Marlborough and Eugene observed the enemy's quartermasters marking out a new camp.

In contrast to the air of immediacy that had characterized the Allied activities of the past few days, the enemy's movements seem strangely leisurely. After crossing the Danube at Lauingen on the morning of August 10 the Elector and the two French marshals had failed to attack Eugene when they had the advantage of numbers, probably because of poor intelligence and divided counsel. Max Emmanuel seems to have favoured a quick advance, but Tallard decided it was wiser to await reinforcement by the troops which he had urged the Elector to call in from guard duties. He had opposed their employment on such tasks, and now that Marlborough was withdrawing from south of the Danube (a conclusion he based on the Duke's retirement from Friedberg even before he learned of the probable junction with Eugene) there were no longer any grounds for their retention in Bavaria. Since Marlborough's action in levelling the Dillingen fortifications had deprived him of a protected camp there, he moved on to occupy Hochstadt on the 11th and selected the open area east of that town as a good spot to halt his armies until the Bavarians arrived. With frontal protection afforded by the swampy Nebel and three defended villages, and flanked by low hills on the one side and on the other the River Danube, the site appeared to offer all necessary security.




**Historical Section, G.S.**

That the Allies would venture to attack does not seem to have entered the minds of Tallard or his fellow commanders. It would be contrary to all accepted doctrines of war that they should be assailed in their present defensible position, unless perhaps by a force of far greater numerical superiority than could be mustered by the three Allied armies (carefully briefed "deserters" had told the French that the Margrave and his troops had joined Marlborough and Eugene). The Allies knew the rules, and any such offensive action by them in the present circumstances would be (to borrow Churchill's simile) "as unlikely as that a chess-player should knock over the board and seize his opponent by the throat." Tallard now conceived his role to be that of pursuing the Allies as they fell back along their communications. So convinced was he of the correctness of his appreciation that on the morning of the 13th, when he awoke to see the Allied armies approaching on the far side of the Nebel, he decided that they were on their way northward, and to a letter written the previous day to King Louis he added an optimistic postscript:

> They are now drawn up at the head of their camp, and it looks as if they will march this day. Rumour in the countryside expects them at Nördlingen. If that be true, they will leave us between the Danube and themselves and in consequence they will have difficulty in sustaining the posts and depots which they have taken in Bavaria.[46]

While the Franco-Bavarian camp slept, the Allied armies had been on the move since three o'clock. On the previous day pioneers had bridged the Kessel in several places and thrown fascine causeways across the Reichen, a small watercourse west of Tapfheim. There was thus no undue delay at these obstacles as the mighty company of 56,000 men advanced steadily, Marlborough's army in four columns on the flank nearest the Danube, and Eugene's with the same number on the right. On the far bank of the Reichen a ninth column was formed from 20 battalions and 15 squadrons of British and German troops, and this powerful force fell in on the extreme left under Lord Cutts (a commander who had won distinction at the siege of Venlo). By six o'clock the heads of the columns had drawn level with the village of Schweningen, only two miles from the Nebel; here they halted briefly while Marlborough and Eugene rode forward with 40 squadrons of horse to reconnoitre the French positions and confirm their plan of battle. Through the clearing morning mists they could see the opposing camp spread out on the rising ground beyond the Nebel. They had no detailed maps on which to project formation boundaries, but the three villages which punctuated the four-mile gap between the Danube and the hills gave them definite landmarks. It was decided that Oberglau, roughly 1000 yards to the right of centre, should mark the inter-army boundary. Marlborough, with 34,000 men, would attack on a front from Blindheim (or Blenheim), at the river, to Oberglau; Eugene with the lesser force, would take on the right-hand sector, from the northern outskirts of Oberglau to the village of Lutzingen on the hill slopes. Their reconnaissance completed, the two leaders rejoined their respective armies, which now moved forward to deploy for action.

It was then that realization came to the Franco-Bavarians that they were going to be attacked. Their camp sprang into motion, "their Generals and their Aid de Camps galloping to and fro to put all things in order". Signal guns recalled scattered foragers, and outposts fell back hurriedly from a number of small hamlets east of the Nebel, first setting these on fire. There was still ample time to complete defensive dispositions while the Allies were engaged in the long drawn-out process of deploying over the difficult ground, so that the surprise gained by Marlborough must be considered moral rather than tactical. Nevertheless the shock of his appearance was bound to have an adverse psychological effect upon the Franco-Bavarian commanders and troops alike, who suddenly saw their fancied security rudely disturbed and the initiative wrested from their grasp.

Although taken unawares, Marshals Tallard and Marsin and the Elector were too experienced campaigners not to have planned their dispositions to meet such an emergency. Their three armies formed up in the order in which they had encamped—Tallard's nearest the Danube, Marsin's in the centre about Oberglau and the Elector's on the northern flank. They made their strongest infantry concentrations in the sectors most likely to be attacked by fordings of the Nebel—on the left from Lutzingen to Oberglau, and on the right immediately about Blenheim. The remaining sector, facing the area between Unterglau (which stood on the Allied bank below Oberglau) and some water mills 500 yards above Blenheim, where the marshy ground about the stream seemed to preclude any danger of a serious attack, was held mainly by cavalry. Of the three villages on which the defences were based, Blenheim with its 300 stone houses was by far the strongest held. Into it Tallard packed 16 infantry battalions, ranging 11 more in reserve a few hundred yards to the rear. The 200-yard gap between Blenheim and the Danube he blocked with a barricade of wagons guarded by 12 squadrons of dismounted dragoons whose horses had died of a disease caught in Alsace. On the two-mile stretch of open ground overlooking the Nebel between Blenheim and Oberglau were drawn up in two lines 68 squadrons of cavalry (36 of Tallard's and 32 of Marsin's) supported by only nine battalions of foot. Marsin guarded Oberglau with 14 battalions, and the rest of the line was held by 67 French and Bavarian squadrons flanked by 17 battalions outside Oberglau and 12 defending Lutzingen.[47] The cannon were posted in a chain of batteries across the entire front, outnumbering the Allied guns 90 to 66.

Various military writers have criticized this order of battle, particularly the unusual disposition which placed the French cavalry in the centre instead of on the flanks. The arrangement arose from the fact that since his arrival in Bavaria Tallard, instead of integrating his forces arm by arm with those of the Elector and Marsin, had kept his army separate, principally in order to prevent the spread of the ailment afflicting his horses to the rest of the Franco-Bavarian cavalry. Thus when they hurriedly deployed from their respective camps on the morning of August 13 Tallard's flanking squadrons found themselves next to those on Marsin's right flank. Those who give this reason for the unusual formation have suggested that had the enemy commanders not been taken by surprise they might have rearranged their line to give their centre the solidarity of defense that only infantry could provide. It seems evident, however, that Tallard, overruling the objections of his colleagues, who favoured repelling the attackers at the stream's edge, was planning a deliberate trap for the Allies in the improbable event of a crossing in force in this swampy sector of the Nebel. He therefore kept his squadrons well up on the crest, 1000 yards from the water, so as to leave a "killing ground" on which a frontal charge by his cavalry could be reinforced by heavy flanking blows from the infantry in Blenheim and Oberglau.

## The Battle is Joined

On the Allied side of the Nebel Eugene's assignment to the right flank meant that because of the oblique course of the stream from north-west to south-east his troops had to make a long and troublesome deployment to reach their positions opposite Lutzingen. Their progress was slow across the rough fields intersected with numerous ditches, and all the while they were under fire from the enemy's guns, which their own, still on the move, could not answer. Meanwhile pioneers were busy repairing a stone bridge over the Nebel and constructing five additional crossing-places between Oberglau and Blenheim. Shortly before 10 o'clock the leading brigade of Lord Cutts' column occupied the mills on the left bank, and pushing across the stream went to ground about 150 yards in front of Blenheim. Seated or lying rank on rank on the slopes leading down to the Nebel Marlborough's remaining units were now ready for action; but they had to wait for nearly three hours for Eugene's troops to reach their allotted positions. Under continuous fire from the enemy's cannon they held divine service and ate their midday meal. The Duke himself, ignoring the flying cannon balls, cantered slowly up and down the lines conferring with his officers, checking the position of every gun, and inspecting his squadrons and battalions. His composed bearing instilled confidence in all who saw him, and only the frequency with which he dispatched messengers to inquire of Eugene's progress revealed his impatience to begin the action. Finally at half-past twelve a message came that the Prince was ready. Immediately the Duke sent word to Cutts to attack Blenheim and ordered a general advance down to the Nebel.

The nature of the task before him had caused Marlborough to dispose his main columns in four lines (each three or four men deep)—a line of infantry in front and rear (of 17 and 11 battalions respectively), with two of cavalry (36 and 35 squadrons) in between. The purpose of this unconventional arrangement is explained by Dr. Hare, the Duke's personal chaplain, who was present at the battle, and whose journal of the events was read by Marlborough himself.

> The reason for drawing up the first line of foot in front of the horse was because it was to pass the rivulet first, and to march as far in advance on the other side as could be conveniently done, and then to form and cover the passage of the horse, leaving intervals in the line of infantry large enough for the horse to pass through and take their post in front.[48]

In employing this close co-operation between horse and foot (forerunner of "infantry-cum-tank" tactics of the Second World War), Marlborough was exploiting to the full the advantage held by his musketeers in their possession of the ring bayonet (see p. 15 above).

The battle of Blenheim was fought long before the day of written operation orders, and Marlborough does not appear to have gone on record afterwards as to his actual intentions for the attack. But we can reconstruct his plan from his direction of the successive phases of the Allied effort and his prompt reaction to the enemy's counter strokes. When he observed the unorthodox arrangement of the enemy's armies the Duke could not have failed to appreciate the significance of the long lines of cavalry that linked none too strongly the powerful defences on either flank. He must have noted that although Blenheim and Oberglau were held in strength (he could no doubt recognize the colours of the finest regiments of the French Army), the distance between these villages was too great for their cannon fire to cover the intervening ground effectively. And the fact that instead of defending the edge of the Nebel Tallard had left an inviting open space in front of his line suggested that the French Marshal either deemed the rivulet too difficult to cross or was preparing a trap for the Allies.

The decision of Marlborough and Eugene therefore appears to have been to keep the enemy in a sense of false security by striking first in those sections where the nature of the ground was least unfavourable to the Allies and thus most likely to encourage an attack. Eugene would assault vigorously on the right in the hope of turning the Lutzingen flank or at least keeping the enemy fully occupied in that sector. The decisive blow, on the success of which would be risked all the fruits of the long march to the Danube, would be delivered by Marlborough's army opposite Unterglau. But first the defended villages of Oberglau and Blenheim would be engaged by forces strong enough to carry these places if possible, but at all events to keep the infantry garrisons from assisting the French cavalry squadrons in the centre.

The frontal assault on Blenheim by the five British battalions was first halted by the withering fire that burst from the village palisades and then broken by a flanking charge of three squadrons of the famous French Gendarmerie. Casualties were heavy. A second attack in which Cutts put in two more of his infantry brigades managed to break into the outskirts, but could get no farther. The French commander in Blenheim, Lieut.-General the Marquis de Clérambault, whose morale seems to have been badly shaken by the Allied decision to give battle, had called in the infantry reserve which Tallard

had stationed in the rear, and the village was now jammed with 27 French battalions, besides the 12 squadrons of dismounted dragoons who had swarmed in from the river flank. Thus the tactics of the Schellenberg assault were again succeeding. The Allied attack might not penetrate the defences, but it was drawing in forces which the enemy should have kept elsewhere. In vain one of Tallard's cavalry commanders urged the excited Clérambault to release 12 battalions to line the banks of the Nebel above Blenheim; while the Marshal himself, the one man who could and should have corrected his subordinate's error, had ridden across to the less critical left flank to exercise an uncalled-for supervision over Marsin and the Elector in their handling of Eugene's attack.

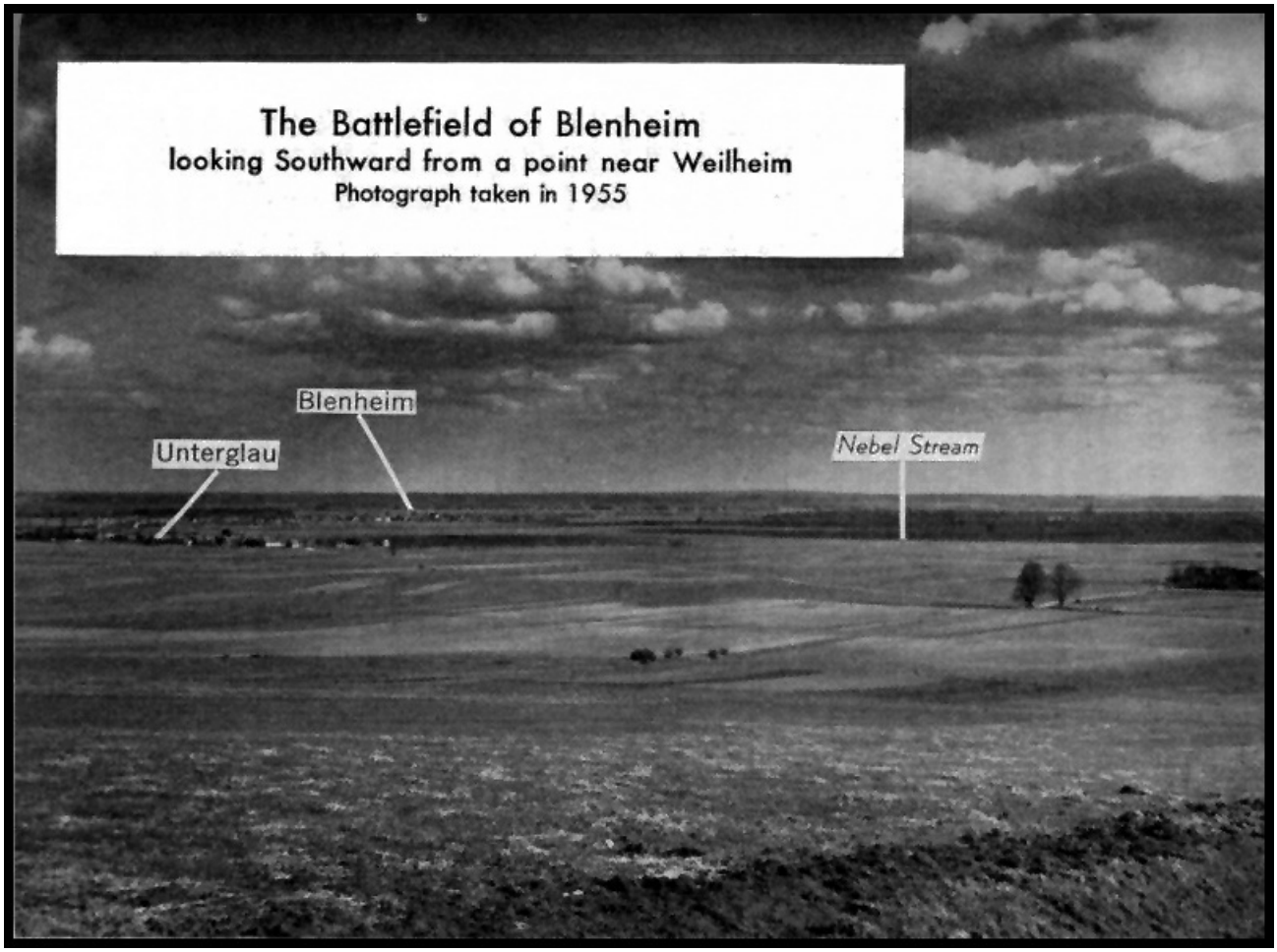
That Prince's role, as we have seen, was diversionary, to contain the enemy's left wing even though there was little hope of overcoming the Franco-Bavarian forces, who had the advantage of ground and superior numbers. Having formed all his infantry on his right he crossed the numerous streamlets which comprised the Nebel in that sector and launched an attack on Lutzingen, about the time that Cutts was making the first assault on Blenheim. Seven Danish and eleven Prussian battalions of foot pushed back the enemy's front line and captured a six-gun battery, and in the open ground to the left the Imperialist cavalry broke the Elector's first line of horse. But a counter-charge of Bavarian Life Guards turned the tables and drove the whole attacking force back to the woods behind the Nebel. A second cavalry effort was broken up by heavy converging cannon fire from Lutzingen and Oberglau.

Oberglau itself, opposite Marlborough's extreme right flank, was becoming the scene of some of the bitterest fighting of the day. The Duke had kept the village under vigorous cannonading, and as soon as the first of Churchill's infantry had crossed the Nebel he assigned to the assault ten German battalions, led by the Prince of Holstein-Beck. But the French general in Oberglau, the Marquis de Blainville, displayed better tactics than his fellow commander in Blenheim. As Holstein-Beck's two leading battalions advanced to storm the village, Blainville suddenly unleashed on them nine of his best battalions, including the indomitable Irish Brigade of the French service. Holstein-Beck was mortally wounded, one of his battalions was annihilated, and the rest of the attacking force was thrown back in disorder across the Nebel. At this critical point, when Marlborough's right flank was exposed to a cavalry attack that might have cut the whole Allied line in two, the Duke himself galloped up and took charge. He sent an urgent call to Eugene for cavalry assistance, and throwing in three fresh Hanoverian battalions he halted the Irish counter-attack. Hard pressed though the Prince of Savoy was, he was soldier enough to recognize Marlborough's greater need, and he instantly sent him a strong force of Imperial Cuirassiers. They arrived in time to take Marsin's charging squadrons in the left flank (on their vulnerable bridle hand) and save the day. The Allied infantry now pressed forward again and drove Blainville's troops back into Oberglau, where with the help of a battery brought forward by Marlborough's artillery commander, Colonel Holcroft Blood,[49] they kept them pinned down from further sortie. It was the first time that an English army had used artillery as a mobile weapon.

Meanwhile Tallard had returned to his own flank in time to absorb a painful lesson in cavalry tactics. Fearing a further Gendarmerie charge upon his infantry outside Blenheim, Cutts had urgently requested cavalry protection. In response five squadrons of horse from the left of Marlborough's line forded the Nebel in the vicinity of the mills and formed up on the left bank a few hundred yards north-east of the village. They were immediately charged by eight squadrons of Gendarmerie, who, in accordance with their training, halted before reaching their target to discharge their carbines from the saddle. It was a fatal mistake, which cost them all their advantage of impetus and superior numbers. Before they could regain momentum the five English squadrons were upon them with drawn swords, swerving outwards to shear off their wings and then converging inwards to demolish their centre and put all to rout. The episode shocked Tallard, who later accounted for his defeat at Blenheim "first, because the Gendarmerie were not able to break the five English squadrons".

About half-past two Lord Cutts, calling up his fourth and last infantry brigade, prepared to assault Blenheim for the third time. But Marlborough, who in contrast to Tallard had kept full control of the actions of his commanders and who now judged that the threat to the French right flank had fulfilled its purpose, called off the attack, and ordered that the enemy be kept pinned down in the village. This Cutts achieved by covering all the village outlets with his fire and having his infantry advance successively by platoons from just outside musket range to pour their volleys into the congested streets. In this manner 15 or 16 Allied battalions held 27 French in Blenheim throughout the afternoon.

While the opposing forces on either flank had been fighting the violent and protracted actions which we have described, Marlborough's main body had been steadily crossing the Nebel, the infantry filing over the bridges and causeways below the burning village of Unterglau, the cavalry columns following at various fording places.




> There was very great difficulty and danger [writes Hare] in defiling over the rivulet in the face of an enemy already formed and supported by several batteries of cannon, yet by the brave examples given and great diligence used by the commanding officers, and by the eagerness of the men, all passed over by degrees and kept their ground.[50]

But the French did not rely on artillery fire alone to halt the passage of the opposing army. No sooner had the front line of foot redeployed on the western bank with the first line of cavalry behind it than a sudden charge of Tallard's squadrons struck the left flank, and was only beaten off by the steady fire of the infantry and the timely arrival of fresh Danish and Hanoverian horse. Thus another crucial threat was overcome, as was Blainville's violent counter-attack on the Oberglau flank. In spite of these obstructions, by four o'clock the entire army had passed the stream and had formed up at the foot of the slope, with the two lines of cavalry now in front and a double row of infantry in the rear with intervals through which the horse could retire if pressed.

At last Marlborough's tactics had gained him the advantage he sought: by inducing his adversary to dissipate his superior infantry strength, he had achieved an overwhelming preponderance of his own. With 41 of the best French battalions penned in Blenheim and Oberglau by 25 Allied battalions, Tallard could put only nine battalions of young recruits with the cavalry in the two-mile space between the villages. Concealed behind his lines of horse Marlborough had 23 battalions. The 60 French squadrons, several of which had been engaged earlier, he confronted with 80 fresh, well-conditioned squadrons of his own.

## The Decisive Stroke

Although his troops were now in position to deliver the long-planned decisive blow, almost another hour was to pass before Marlborough put his men in motion. He wanted the final offensive to be launched on the whole front; and on the far right Eugene was not yet ready. After the failure of his second cavalry attack the Prince had personally led another unsuccessful infantry advance against Lutzingen, and he was now preparing a three-pronged effort in which Danish battalions would circle through the woods to outflank the Elector's left, Prussian foot would attack Lutzingen frontally, and his rallied cavalry squadrons would deliver their third charge across the Nebel between Lutzingen and Oberglau. Shortly before five o'clock, writes Hare, "the Duke of Marlborough, having ridden along the front, gave orders to sound

the charge, when all at once our two lines of horse moved on, sword in hand, to the attack." The "leisured and majestic" advance of the squadrons up the long slope was made at a walk so that the infantry in the rear could keep pace and even bring forward supporting cannon with them.

In the French lines Tallard (whose defective eyesight is said to have misled him as to the numbers which had crossed the Nebel) was soon to realize that his cavalry squadrons, whose earlier engagements that day could have brought them no great cause for exhilaration, were confronted by a vastly superior force. He ordered forward the nine battalions which formed his only infantry reserve and interspersed them between the rear squadrons of his cavalry over towards Oberglau. It was too late to withdraw some of the surplus troops in Blenheim by the rear of the village, and his orders for a breakout on the flank were futile as long as Cutts' platoons commanded the forward outlets with their fire.

Accounts vary concerning the initial clash, but most agree that the enemy did not wait for the Allies to strike first. A French narrative describes a brisk charge ordered by Tallard which

> made all the Squadrons they attacked give way; but these Squadrons being sustained by several lines of horse and foot, our men were forced to shrink back, and throw themselves on our second line . . .[51]

Whatever the French horse may have done, far more effective in temporarily halting the Allied advance was the steady shooting of the determined young musketeers with whom Tallard had reinforced his left, and the volume of fire with which the Blenheim garrison continued to aid his right flank. Marlborough's front line of cavalry was driven back some sixty yards, and for one hopeful moment the French commander, as he wrote later, "saw an instant in which the battle was gained".[52] But volley after volley from General Churchill's well-disciplined platoons checked any forward movement of the French cavalry, and Colonel Blood's artillery poured a deadly volume of grapeshot into the ranks of the nine French battalions, which were formed up in hollow squares. These recruits held their ground like veterans, falling where they stood, so that after the battle their corpses clearly revealed the order of their positions.

And now Marlborough ordered his cavalry to charge. As the trumpets sounded, the double lines broke forward in a brisk trot. The French squadrons, thoroughly demoralized at the spectacle of this approaching power, hurriedly discharged their carbines in an ineffectual fusillade and then turned in flight, leaving the surviving infantry to be cut down or captured. The routed enemy ran in two directions. Those on Tallard's left headed for Hochstadt and the rear of Marsin's army; those of his right swung down towards the Danube behind Blenheim. Marlborough sent 30 Allied squadrons under his Prussian cavalry leader, Lieut.-General Hompesch, after the former; he himself led a similar force in pursuit towards the river. The French were given no time to rally. Many that escaped the Allied sabres were swept over the high river bank to be crushed under their falling horses in the marshes below or to perish in the swift current. Tallard himself was captured when trying to make his way into Blenheim. He was taken to Marlborough, who with courtly ceremony offered him his own coach.[53]

Elsewhere on the four-mile front the issue was no longer in doubt. Eugene's cavalry attack, like the earlier ones, had been repulsed by a counter-charge of Marsin's horse; but his infantry, battling heroically against murderous fire, had reached the outskirts of Lutzingen and once more captured the great battery there. They hung on grimly to the ground they had gained, and in time their resoluteness was rewarded. Marsin and the Elector, seeing the débâcle of Tallard's forces and the resultant exposure of their own right flank, began an orderly withdrawal, first setting on fire the two villages for which so much blood had been shed. Their hasty but disciplined retreat, which was in marked contrast to the headlong flight of the French right, was aided by the failing light. Hompesch, with a good chance to intercept them, mistook Eugene's pursuing force for part of the Elector's army and halted to make sure; while Eugene, taking Hompesch's cavalry for French reinforcements from Tallard, also hesitated. By the time each had recognized the other the Franco-Bavarians had reached the marshes behind Hochstadt, where it was too dark for the Allied cavalry to hunt them down.

Meanwhile only Blenheim remained in the possession of its original defenders, and its fate was sealed. As soon as Marlborough's cavalry rode off in pursuit of Tallard's shattered squadrons Churchill had wheeled to his left and with his battalions had extended almost to the Danube Cutts' containing line around the village. But the harassed Clérambault had not waited to see Blenheim invested. He realized that the day was lost and blamed it on his own misjudgement. Without handing over his command to anyone he rode down into the Danube, seeking either safety or suicide. The groom who accompanied him reached the far bank, but Clérambault was drowned. For nearly an hour the leaderless garrison in Blenheim bore the weight of repeated assaults from three sides, and all the time the casualties mounted as Allied artillery fire raked the crowded streets. There were renewed but fruitless efforts to break out when a new leader, the Marquis de Blansac, assumed command. Demands for capitulation made by the British generals were at first indignantly

rejected but later hotly debated. Finally, about nine o'clock Blansac surrendered; yet there were many dissenters among the unconquered battalions. Shocked officers sadly surmised, "Que dira le Roi?"; and the proud regiment of Navarre buried[54] its colours.

## "It Was a Famous Victory"

"Thus was concluded and completed the victory of this great day", wrote Hare in his journal, and went on to rejoice at the acquisition of "about one hundred fat oxen ready-skinned, which were to have been delivered out this day to the French troops, but which proved a welcome booty to the soldiers of the Allied army after such long and hard service."[55] Marlborough had already dispatched to the Duchess his famous message, pencilled on the back of a tavern bill:

> I have not time to say more but to beg you will give my duty to the Queen, and let her know her army has had a glorious victory. Monsieur Tallard and two other Generals are in my coach and I am following the rest. The bearer, my Aide-de-Camp Colonel Parke, will give Her an account of what has passed. I shall do it in a day or two by another more at large.

Measured by casualties alone the French suffered a crushing defeat.

> They say it was a shocking sight
> After the field was won;
> For many thousand bodies here
> Lay rotting in the sun;
> But things like that, you know, must be,
> After a famous victory.[56]

The Allies had lost some 6000 killed and probably a slightly larger number wounded (a contemporary[57] computed the total loss at 12,758, or about 23% of all the forces engaged). But against this it is estimated that at least 14,000 of the enemy were killed, wounded or drowned, and upwards of 15,000 fell unwounded into Allied hands. These numbers were increased by desertions and the cutting off of stragglers during the subsequent retreat to the Rhine; indeed, two weeks after the battle intercepted letters to the French Court admitted losses of 40,000 men, or no less than two-thirds of their original strength.[58] The vast quantity of equipment captured by the Allies included "100 pieces of cannon, great and small, 24 mortars, 129 colours, 171 standards, 17 pair of kettle-drums, 3600 tents, 34 coaches, 300 laden mules, 2 bridges of boats, 15 pontoons, 24 barrels, and 8 casks of silver."[59]

Yet the significance of Blenheim does not lie in the balance sheet of losses of men and material. The defeat had suddenly brought to naught the Grand Monarch's aspirations in Central Europe. Vienna was saved, there would now be no French-sponsored Bavarian Prince on the Imperial throne, and German principalities between the Rhine and the Danube need no longer fear the march of Louis XIV's armies. Above all Blenheim ended the delusion of the invincibility of French arms. For two generations the prestige enjoyed by French soldiers had dominated the European military scene. It had created in the opponent a sense of inferiority which facilitated the very conquests on which it thrived. That reputation had now been struck a shattering blow from which it was not to recover for nearly a century. For the remainder of the War of the Spanish Succession the moral advantage was to be very definitely with the armies of the Grand Alliance.

In England the news of the victory was received with the greatest rejoicing. The entire population of the capital thronged the streets, and the tavern cellars were quickly emptied as loyal citizens drank bumpers to the Queen's and the Duke's health. "Never were such illuminations, ringing of bells, such demonstrations of joy since the laying of London stone."[60] The Queen proclaimed a solemn thanksgiving and rode in stately procession to St. Paul's with the Duchess of Marlborough by her side. The nation's attitude towards the war underwent a marked change; active opposition was replaced by a glowing enthusiasm for the struggle to continue until France was beaten to her knees.

As for the Duke himself, the people of England were not to have a chance to welcome him until Christmas Day, for, as we shall see in our next chapter, he was to press four more months of campaigning into the year 1704. On December 26, in reply to a highly laudatory address delivered in the House of Lords, he begged "to do right to all the officers and soldiers I had the honour of having under my command; next to the blessing of God, the good success of the campaign is owing to their extraordinary courage."[61] This tribute to the British soldier (who heretofore had been all too "commonly

regarded as a blackguard") was not only to raise him in his countrymen's esteem but was to win from him a gratitude which for seven years he registered "in deeds, the like of which are only done for generals who possess the key to the self-respect and pride of simple hearts."

It remains to sum up briefly the lessons of the battle. This was Marlborough's most decisive victory, and probably the one which he gained at the heaviest risk. Here was displayed in striking fashion the "touch of the gambler" which Lord Wavell lists as one of the requirements of true generalship. It is a measure of the Duke's greatness that having gained by successful strategy an opportunity favourable for attack, he fully realized the odds against him, yet had sufficient confidence in his tactical skill to carry a sound yet simple plan through to victory. One modern historian has declared that "the scales were turned more by the stoutness of the rank and file, together with the miscalculations of the French command, than by Marlborough's skill."[62] We may subscribe to this opinion without detracting from Marlborough's reputation if we keep two things in mind. It was Marlborough's strategy of the march to the Danube, carried out successfully under his skilful organization, that had brought his forces to the scene of battle in first class physical condition and morale, while compelling the French to reinforce hurriedly with "raw troops, over-marched and ill-provisioned". And in admitting Tallard's contribution to his own defeat we must recognize Marlborough's special gift of detecting his opponent's weaknesses and capitalizing on them to the fullest extent.

While it would be an exaggeration to say that the French violated the Principles of War almost as consistently as the Allies adhered to them, the respective breach and observance of certain Principles by the opposing sides stand out clearly. We may note the *Economy of Effort* demonstrated by Marlborough in achieving in the centre "an effective concentration at the decisive time and place"; by contrast, what could have been less economical than the enemy's concentration in Blenheim of 27 battalions whose immobilization robbed Tallard of any chance to exercise much-needed *Flexibility* to counter Marlborough's deciding blow? The division of command between Tallard, Marsin and the Elector resulted in a fatal absence of *Co-operation*; in effect the French left and right fought as two separate armies, a condition which, as we have seen, placed Tallard under the imagined necessity of leaving his own front at a crucial moment to visit his colleagues on the other wing. On the Allied side, however, a similar division of command was neutralized by the complete mutual understanding that existed between the two leaders and by Marlborough's "exceptional tact in managing to retain the reality of undivided generalship under the surface of a divided one".[63] None of Tallard's errors was more serious than the neglect of Security which arose from his overestimation of the Nebel as an obstacle. This made it possible for Marlborough to deliver his decisive stroke where it was least expected. It was the Duke's third important use of *Surprise* against Tallard, who had been previously taken unawares by Marlborough's unexpected junction with Eugene, and by the subsequent Allied decision to give battle at Blenheim.

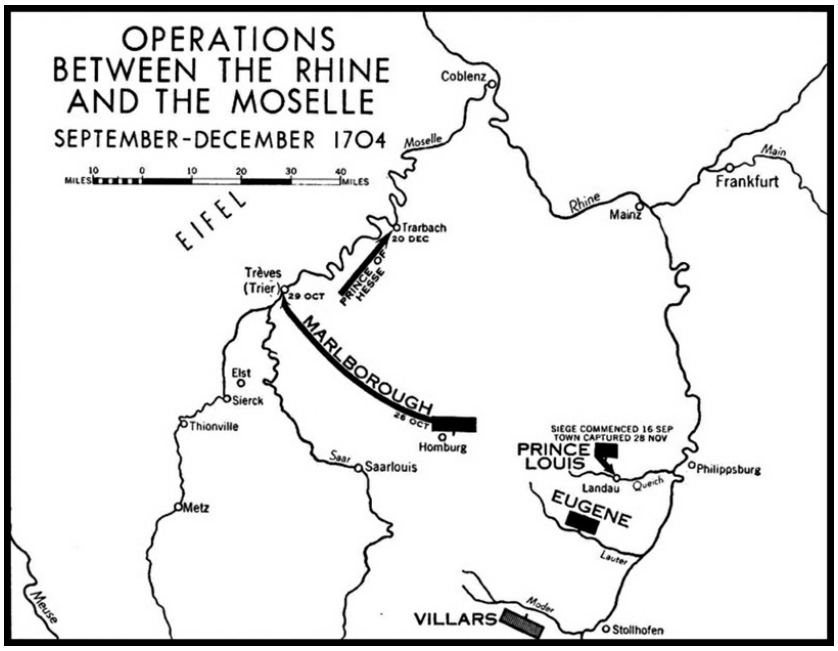
*Offensive Action*, obviously a function of the attacking force, is no less a requirement in the defence. Tallard failed to recognize this, and, as we have seen, sacrificed the mobility of his troops to a passive defence. On the Allied side no one exemplified this principle more brilliantly than Prince Eugene, whose repeated onslaught against the strongly held Franco-Bavarian positions splendidly fulfilled Marlborough's purpose of keeping the enemy's left wing fully occupied. The Prince's gallant perseverance brought a generous tribute from Marlborough: "Had the success of Prince Eugene been equal to his merit, we should in that day's action have made an end of the war."[64]

## CHAPTER V

# The Lines of Brabant, 1705

### After Blenheim

As the defeated French and Bavarian armies hurried by forced marches back to the Rhine, their route marked for later generations by churchyards which the aftermath of battle had filled, Marlborough ascended the valley of the Danube at a more restrained pace. Blenheim had been followed by no grand pursuit, for neither Allied commander had fresh troops available, and both were occupied with the care of their wounded and the task of feeding the thousands of prisoners. While a small force of Austrian hussars harried the enemy's rear, the main Allied body rested for four days near Dillingen. On the 19th the two armies moved forward towards Ulm.




**Historical Section, G.S.**

Outside Ulm Marlborough and Eugene were joined by Prince Louis of Baden, who had been recalled from the now unnecessary siege of Ingolstadt. The Margrave was smarting under the trick which had deprived him of participation in the triumph of Blenheim (although had he been present there must almost certainly have been no battle). He temporarily concealed his indignation, but his resentment against Marlborough was to persist, and with most adverse effects upon the Allied cause. All three commanders agreed that they must exploit success by following the French back to the Rhine, and beyond it. The Margrave's proposal to besiege Landau was acceptable to Marlborough, for its recapture would enable Allied forces to be stationed on the French side of the Rhine. But the Duke had greater things in mind. He realized that the demoralized state of the enemy invited an incursion into the Moselle valley. The season was late, but if the Allies could secure the Moselle as far up as Trèves before winter set in, they would be excellently situated to undertake in the spring his long-cherished project of an advance up the river towards Paris. Leaving 15,000 men with the siege train to reduce Ulm, the Allies resumed their march. For ease of supply the armies moved in four columns by as many separate routes, that of the English infantry and artillery taking them in triumph through the same towns and villages that had welcomed them two months before. There was a rendezvous at Philippsburg during the first week of September (Eugene bringing in from the Stollhofen Lines the troops no longer needed there), and by the 8th the whole force had crossed the Rhine and was concentrated on the left bank.

Meanwhile Marshal Marsin and the Elector, herding with them the remnants of Tallard's army, had been met near Villingen by Villeroi, who had hastened eastward from the Rhine to cover their withdrawal through the Black Forest. They reached the Rhine on August 31, to find refuge under the fortress guns of Kehl. By the time Marlborough arrived Villeroi had gathered together a force of 85 battalions and 112 squadrons to oppose operations against Landau, and was

holding the line of the River Queich, which ran past the fortress to enter the Rhine about three miles above Philippsburg. With all crossing places defended by hastily constructed palisades and entrenchments, the position was one that seemed reasonably defensible, even against an Allied force of 92 battalions and 181 squadrons.

But the French troops, their morale shattered from the disaster of Blenheim and the horrors of the retreat, were in no mood to face their former opponents. Villeroi recognized this, and when on September 9 the Allies marched south towards the Queich, he ordered successive retreats to the Lauter and the Moder, two more tributaries of the Rhine respectively 20 and 40 miles south of Landau. "If they had not been the most frightened people in the world", Marlborough wrote to Godolphin on the 12th, "they would never have quitted these two posts."[65]

Ulm had fallen on the 11th, releasing the siege train to be moved to Landau, where Prince Louis opened his trenches on the 16th. The operation against the Alsatian fortress went slowly, for the garrison was alert and vigorous, and the Margrave was short of engineers and equipment. As one English cavalry officer wrote, "The Imperialists undertake sieges without cannon, ammunition, and engineers with as much assurance as they did a war without money, credit, or troops."[66] Marlborough and Eugene had the role of covering the siege, but after five weeks of relative inactivity the former, impatient to lay the foundations for a spring campaign on the Moselle, began putting his plans into effect.

Leaving the Prince of Savoy on the Lauter with 25,000 men to watch Villeroi's 40,000 at the Moder, the Duke quietly concentrated a force of 12,000 at Homburg, some 40 miles north-west of Landau. On October 25 he struck out across the mountains which enclose the Moselle valley from the south. Marlborough was well aware of the risks attending the expedition. On the 26th, when he had covered a score of miles and had the same distance still to go, he wrote to Sarah:

> I am got this far in my way to the Moselle, after having marched through very terrible mountains. Had we any rain it would have been impossible to have got forward the cannon, and it is certain if the enemy are able to hinder us from taking winter quarters in this country, we must throw our cannon into some river, for to carry them back is impossible.[67]

Too late Villeroi awoke to the danger to Trèves, which was defended by only 300 French soldiers. He dispatched 5000 reinforcements, who came within sight of the fortress on the 29th. But they were a few hours too late; earlier that day Marlborough had marched in, the garrison fleeing at his approach.

This success isolated the companion fortress of Trarbach, down the river towards Coblenz. Having billeted his infantry in and about Trèves and put 6000 peasants to work repairing the fortifications, Marlborough entrusted the siege of Trarbach to the Prince of Hesse-Cassel, giving him twelve Dutch battalions newly arrived from Holland and arranging for a siege train to come up by water from Coblenz. He himself returned to Landau, where that siege was still dragging on, deliberately prolonged by the Margrave, in the opinion of many, as a revenge for his treatment at Blenheim. The English cavalry covering the operations had scoured the countryside bare of fodder and their horses were wasted with disease. The same officer reported: "He has spun out the siege till the left wing of the horse, to which that action [Blenheim] was chiefly owing, is entirely ruined. We have not above twenty horses a troop left."[68]

Landau finally fell on November 28 after 70 days of siege, and the rocky fortress of Trarbach was taken on December 20. The Moselle valley from the Saar to the Rhine was now in Allied hands, and supplies could reach Trèves all the way from Utrecht by boat. The preparation of bases for the great spring design went steadily forward. Meanwhile Marlborough was busy making the rounds of the European capitals. It was no pleasure trip. The Duke was threatened with a breakdown in health as a result of his strenuous campaigning. "I am so lean", he had written to the Duchess in October, "that it is extremely uneasy to me . . . your care must nurse me this winter or I shall certainly be in a consumption".[69] Yet he now undertook a fatiguing 800-mile journey in his lumbering coach, "obliged to be every day 14 or 15 hours on the road, which has made my side very sore."[70] In Berlin he got the agreement of King Frederick I to supply 8000 Prussians to help the Duke of Savoy in Northern Italy. At Hanover his charm won the Electress Sophia from her former hostility, causing her to forget her criticism of his tactics at the Schellenberg (page 45, above). She saw him as the perfect commander. "Never have I become acquainted with a man who knows how to move so easily, so freely, and so courteously. He is as skilled as a courtier as he is a brave general".[71] The warmth of his reception by the Prussian and Hanoverian monarchs was repeated in Amsterdam and The Hague. He finally reached London on December 25, after an absence of eight months, to receive the acclaim of a grateful nation. The Queen granted him the manor of Woodstock, to build there, at her expense, stately Blenheim Palace.

In contrast to the successes gained under Marlborough the year 1704 had recorded no great Allied achievements on other

fronts. General Overkirk had accomplished nothing in the Netherlands; in Northern Italy Victor Amadeus had lost to Vendôme's army one after another of his fortresses in Piedmont, and was now hemmed in about his capital city of Turin. In south-western Europe the Portuguese Alliance had dragged England into an unprofitable and indecisive Peninsular War. The young Archduke Charles had gone to Portugal, where he had been proclaimed King Charles III of Spain. But a campaign launched along the Spanish border had failed and the end of the year found Charles still in Lisbon. Illuminating this otherwise gloomy picture, however, had been Admiral Sir George Rooke's capture of Gibraltar in the week before Blenheim. Then, on August 22, Rooke engaged in the Straits Admiral Toulouse with the main French fleet, which had been sent out from Toulon to retake Gibraltar. The battle, fought off Malaga, was the one big naval action of the whole War of the Spanish Succession. At the end of the day both sides exhausted claimed the victory, the British and Dutch with the better right; for next morning Toulouse's battered fleet was on its way back to France, and England's ownership of her new Mediterranean fortress had survived its first serious threat.

## Failure on the Moselle

After a busy winter Marlborough returned to The Hague in mid-April, in high hopes that his long-cherished project, the foundations of which he had so carefully laid the previous autumn, might now be brought to completion. But, as so frequently seemed to happen when his prospects at the beginning of a campaign looked bright, he was doomed to disappointment. Once again it was to be his allies who let him down. For it appears that Dutch and Austrians alike were incapable of sharing the Duke's penetration and breadth of vision; a limited success would satisfy them and make them forget their obligations until fresh misfortunes provided a new incentive to co-operate.

It had been Marlborough's design to invade France by two parallel thrusts, within mutual supporting distance so that neither could be separately overwhelmed. He himself would lead 60,000 troops in English and Dutch pay up the Moselle from Trèves, while the Margrave of Baden with 30,000 Austrians and Germans marched westward from Landau to the River Saar. But to his disappointment he found that the magazines on the Meuse and the Moselle which the States-General had agreed to fill with supplies were half empty, and that the longstanding fear for the safety of their own frontiers had decided the Dutch to retain in Holland half the troops which they had promised for the Moselle. Things were no better on the Austrian side of the Rhine, where the German princes, freed from the Bavarian war, were showing little concern for their obligations to the Grand Alliance. Preparations for the spring campaign were dilatory and inadequate and it became apparent that the commitment on the left would not be met. The Margrave himself was making the most of an infected foot, injured at the Schellenberg, and furnished Marlborough with many polite excuses, but no troops.

Marlborough set to work to overcome Dutch fears, and finally convinced the Deputies that a bold execution of his plan would compel the French to abandon any threat against Holland. He wrote in the strongest terms about the Imperial shortcomings to Prince Eugene, who, by threatening to abandon the service of the Empire, forced the government in Vienna into a belated effort to redeem its pledges. Yet when he reached Trèves on 26 May, having brought his British and Dutch forces forward from their concentration area at Maastricht (besides making a week-long journey to confer with the Margrave in his new palace near Strasbourg), the Duke was forced to report to the Secretary of State that the negligence of his Allies had reduced him to one army.

> According to the promise I have had all this winter from Vienna, I was in good hopes the Prince of Baden would have been enabled to have seconded me in these parts with a considerable force, so that we might have acted with two separate armies; but you will be surprised to hear that all he can bring at present does not exceed eleven or twelve battalions and twenty-eight squadrons. These troops were to begin their march about this time, and may be here in ten or twelve days.[72]

On the last day of May he recorded with bitterness, "We are losing the finest opportunity in the world for want of troops who should have been here long ago."[73]

On the enemy side there had been no half-heartedness in preparing for a renewal of hostilities. Louis XIV had entrusted the defence of his frontiers to Villeroi and the Elector in Flanders, Marsin in Alsace, and in the centre, where the danger was gravest, to his ablest commander, Marshal Villars. Early in February Villars set up his headquarters at Metz and established a chain of posts stretching from Thionville on the Moselle to Saarlouis on the Saar. By the end of May he was holding a position of great natural strength near Sierck, on the Moselle's right bank, about 25 miles above Trèves. Here, reinforced to an army of 52,000, he awaited his opponent's move.

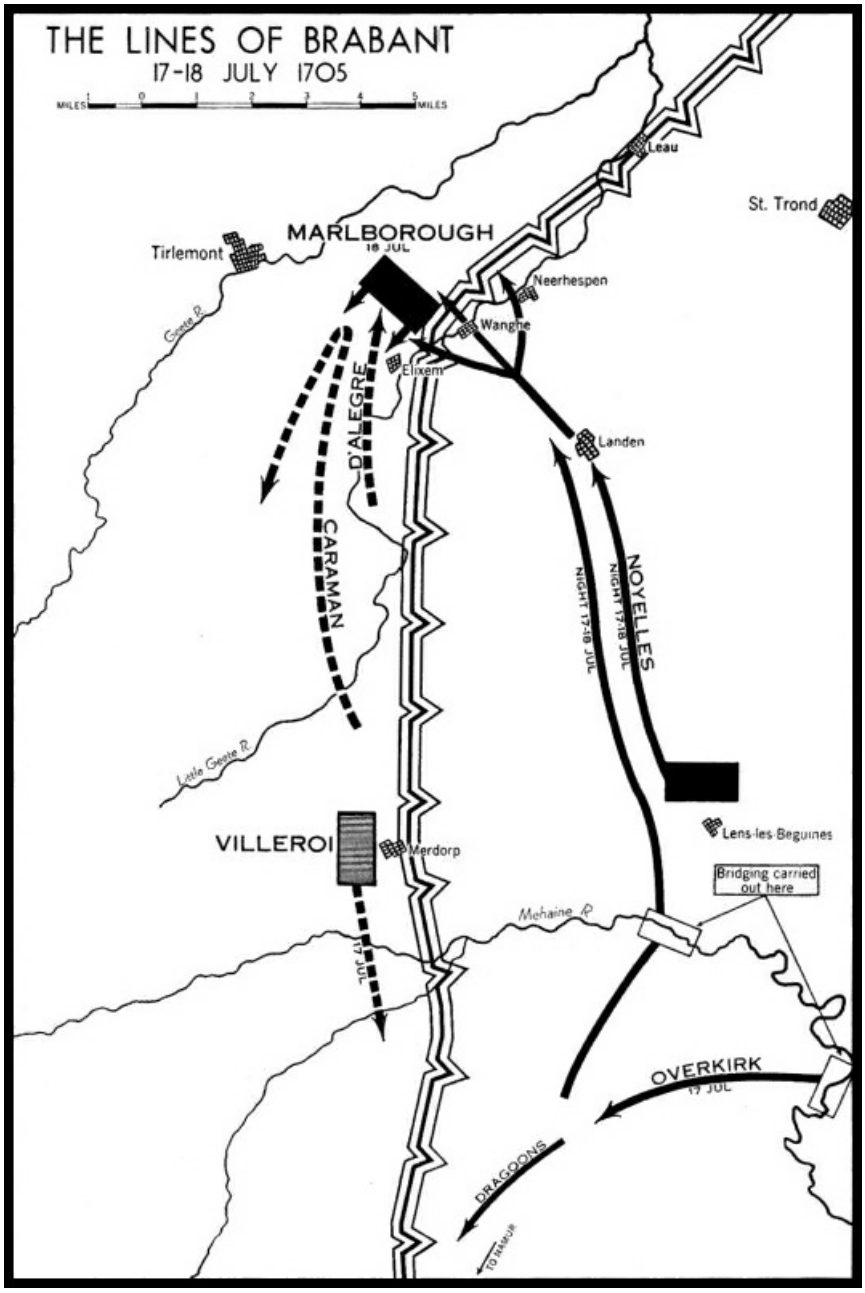
That move came suddenly, as Marlborough, without waiting longer for reinforcements, set out from Trèves at 2:00 a.m. on June 3, and advanced quickly between the rivers with 30,000 men, to halt within sight of Villars' position on the heights of Sierck. Taken by surprise the French Marshal failed to use his superior numbers to fall upon the fatigued Allied forces at the vulnerable moment when they were deploying. Marlborough took up headquarters in the castle of Elst (still called by the Lorraine peasantry the "Château de Malbrook") confronting Villars' own rocky position. From here he could intercept any French move towards the fortress of Saarlouis, which he hoped to besiege whenever the arrival of German transport would enable him to move the siege train up from Trarbach. There followed a fortnight of inactivity, for Marlborough had not the strength for a frontal attack, and the French flanks were too well protected by the Moselle on one side and by deep ravines and dense woods on the other. The Duke's correspondence during this period is taken up with problems of supply; the French had laid bare the countryside, and all food and fodder had to come forward through Trèves. He calls for "all possible grain and forage from Mainz and Coblenz". Biscuit was to be sent "as fast as it can be cooked", and fifty bakers were to be taken to Trèves under escort and set to work. Sutlers were to be encouraged to come forward to the army, "for we are in a country where we find nothing."[74]

In spite of fictitious statistics planted on "deserters" and various other attempts at deception it was impossible for Marlborough to conceal from Villars the fact that his strength was considerably less than the figure of 110,000 which he would have liked the French to accept. Lacking the Margrave's army he could not impel Villars to draw in troops from his northern flank. Soon serious news came from Flanders, where Villeroi had moved against Overkirk during the last week in May. The French had recaptured the fortress of Huy on the Meuse and besieged Liége. When the inevitable Dutch appeals for help reached Marlborough, he acted quickly. There was nothing to hold him on the Moselle now that his great design had collapsed. In the circumstances he welcomed the call from the Dutch as a way out of an untenable position; indeed it is reported that before leaving Maastricht he had provided himself with such a safeguard by dropping pointed hints that he was to be summoned should the French launch an offensive in Flanders.

## The Lines of Brabant

In the darkness of the night of June 17/18 Marlborough withdrew quickly from Elst, and leaving a German garrison of 16 battalions and 15 squadrons in Trèves (in the faint hope, not to be realized, that the Moselle project might later be re-opened) began the long march to the Meuse. The journey over the bleak, mountainous region of the Eifel was made in vile weather, and large numbers of the ill-fed horses perished. On June 27 Marlborough reached Maastricht, and on July 2 took his army across the Meuse and joined Overkirk. Villeroi, whose strength of 70,000 about equalled that of the combined English and Dutch armies, immediately raised the siege of Liége and fell back within the Lines of Brabant. The southern part of this system was based on two small rivers, the Mehaine, a tributary of the Meuse, and the Little Geete, which flowed northward into the Demer. Between these two streams there was a space of seven miles without any natural protection, and here Villeroi concentrated his main body, establishing his headquarters at Merdorp, in the centre of the gap. Marlborough encamped opposite him, about the hamlet of Lens-les-Beguines. He took immediate steps to recover Huy; by the time it capitulated on July 12 the preparations for his next move were well advanced.

It will be recalled that in 1703 the Duke had failed in every attempt to win Dutch agreement to an assault of the lines behind which Villeroi then, as now, was standing in apparent security. Since the attitude of the States-General had not changed, he determined to attempt a surprise penetration of the Lines, using only English troops and auxiliaries in English pay. The Dutch generals agreed that their forces were only "to second and follow him if he succeeded, to help him to make his retreat if he miscarried, but not to share the danger with him."[75]




**Historical Section, G.S.**

As Marlborough rested in apparent indecision outside the Brabant Lines, conflicting rumours as to his future moves began to reach the French camp. The Duke was busy weaving the web of deception which was to cloak his true actions and secure the surprise he needed. Villeroi knew well the Dutch opposition to a major attack, but when Allied "deserters" spoke of preparations being made for a three-pointed assault centred on Merdorp, he concentrated his forces more closely in that sector. He might place more weight on reports that Marlborough was preparing to take his army back to the Moselle, or (as set down in captured letters) that he was about to move a few miles northward to Saint Trond, a camping area used by the English in 1703, in search of better subsistence for his idle army.

This last conjecture seemed to be the correct one when late on July 17 Villeroi and the Elector learned that the Army of the Moselle had broken camp and was marching north. It had been a perplexing day for the French Marshal. Early that morning Overkirk's army, which had been employed in covering the siege of Huy, had crossed the Mehaine and advanced to within six miles of the lines. Extensive bridge-building behind the Dutch suggested that Marlborough's force would follow across the Mehaine that night. Villeroi hurriedly shifted to his right and concentrated 40,000 men in the threatened area, ordering all to remain on the alert all night. Just before sunset a strong body of Overkirk's dragoons marched down the Namur road to bring new alarm to the extreme French right.

But the actual point which Marlborough had selected for penetrating the Lines lay a good dozen miles north of where Villeroi was expecting trouble. The Duke rightly concluded that since the Little Geete provided the strongest natural obstacle in this sector it would be relatively lightly guarded. As darkness fell a picked force of 20 battalions and 38

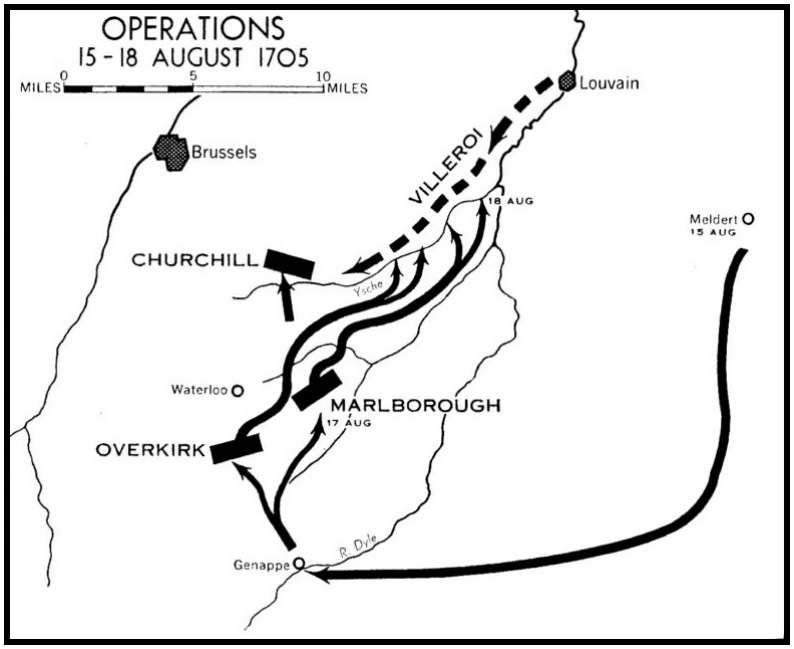
squadrons moved off from Lens, led by Count Noyelles, a general officer who knew the country well. Every precaution had been taken to insure secrecy. No unit commander knew in advance his destination nor the identity of his flanking units. The customary tell-tale fascines for crossing ditches had not been prepared; instead each trooper carried a truss of hay. An hour after the advanced guard had marched northward, Marlborough set the rest of his army in motion along the same route. It was then 10 o'clock, and within another hour Overkirk's troops had withdrawn from their positions on the extreme left and were following swiftly in the rear. The sound of their going was heard by the enemy, but by this time the northward shift of the entire Allied force had gained too big a lead for any French counter move to overtake.

In the small hours of the night French patrols, straining their ears in the darkness, reported that Marlborough's columns were following the road to Saint Trond. About three o'clock, however, as Noyelles reached the famous battlefield of Landen, he swung to the left off the Saint Trond road and headed in three separate columns for the Little Geete. There was no shortage of guides here, for many in the English regiments had fought on that bloody field twelve years before.

A thick morning mist rising off the river covered the final deployment as the three columns moved to their points of attack on a front about two miles wide—Noyelles in the centre opposite the Château of Wanghe, with the flanking columns at the villages of Elixem on the left and Neerhespen on the right. A body of cavalry seized the bridge at Wanghe about 4:00 a.m., and as the first storming parties crossed the Little Geete, they took the French guards completely by surprise. Without waiting for the pioneers to build bridges the infantry threw the trusses of hay into the stream and scrambled across on the uneven footing. On the far side they quickly overpowered the few defenders in the almost empty lines, and began forming up in battle array. The coup had been completed at the cost of not more than half a dozen casualties. The attacks on the flanks were equally successful, another bridge being secured intact at Elixem. Soon the cavalry were crossing the captured bridges and those constructed by the engineers; by half-past five, when the first enemy appeared in force, a double line of horse was drawn up from Elixem to Tirlemont, on the main Geete, with more than 6000 infantry forming behind them. The whole of Noyelles' force was within the enemy's lines, and the leading units of Marlborough's main army were now arriving. General d'Alègre, who commanded Villeroi's left wing, was three miles south of Elixem when news of the Allied penetration reached him. He at once hastened northward with 33 squadrons of French, Bavarian and Spanish cavalry. From four miles farther south he ordered up eleven Bavarian battalions under Count Pierre Caraman. He also brought forward ten new triple-barrelled cannon, a "secret weapon" of which high hopes were held.

When Marlborough reached the scene at seven o'clock he found the opposing cavalry facing each other across a deep sunken road which ran at right angles from the Little Geete toward Tirlemont, while behind the French horse Caraman's infantry were beginning to deploy from their rapid march. From between the French squadrons the new guns opened a surprisingly rapid fire at close range. Deciding to attack while the enemy's infantry and horse were still separated, Marlborough occupied the hollow way with five infantry battalions, whose volleys quickly compelled the enemy to fall back. Under cover of this fire the British squadrons managed to make their way across the obstacle. Then they charged, with Marlborough himself riding in the front rank. At the force of the impact d'Alègre's horsemen broke in disorder, and before they could rally the second Allied line was upon them. This time the rout was complete: the Bavarian squadrons, who formed the bulk of the enemy cavalry, galloped from the field, leaving the new guns in Allied hands. Only Caraman's infantry acquitted themselves with distinction. Their commander formed all eleven battalions into a great hollow square, and in this formation, firing by platoons as they retired, they held off their pursuers—Marlborough refusing to sanction a further charge until he knew the whereabouts of the main forces of Villeroi and the Elector.

Those commanders, however, had quickly grasped the situation and directed their armies to retreat westward to Louvain. There was still time for the Allies to intercept them, had Marlborough been assured Dutch support; but when Overkirk's weary columns crossed the Little Geete at ten o'clock on the 18th they had marched 27 miles in the last 31 hours. There were sound reasons for not risking a major battle with tired troops, and at the very moment that the Dutch General Slangenberg, Marlborough's personal enemy, was ostentatiously calling for an advance to Louvain, his army was quietly pitching its tents behind Tirlemont. By nightfall the French were safely at Louvain on the west side of the Dyle River. Another year was to pass before the Allies would reap the full harvest of their passage of the Little Geete. Yet the fact of a missed chance at Louvain cannot detract from the brilliance of the stroke which had suddenly deprived the French of fifty miles of defence lines and brought to an end the long period of stalemate in that northern theatre. Fatigue parties were set to work filling in trenches and levelling earthworks, and the Lines of Brabant ceased to be a factor in the strategy of the war.




**Historical Section, G.S.**

The rest of the summer of 1705 repeated the frustrations of 1703. Efforts by Marlborough to bring the enemy to battle were blocked by the Dutch generals or the civilian Deputies. On July 29 a carefully devised scheme to capture Louvain by a surprise flanking movement across the Dyle was called off by the Dutch just as the river passage had been made and there was good prospect of taking the town. Never was the need for unity of command more apparent. From his camp at Meldert (ten miles south-east of Louvain) Marlborough wrote to Heinsius after this failure:

> It is absolutely necessary that such power be lodged with the general as may enable him to act as he thinks proper, according to the best of his judgment, without being obliged even to communicate what he intends further than he thinks convenient.[76]

The only response to this was a concession permitting Marlborough to make two or three marches without summoning a council of war; but he was not to engage in any major operation without the concurrence of Overkirk and the Deputies.

The Duke determined to make the most of these three free marches. On August 15, having accumulated a ten days' supply of bread, which carried in convoy would give him considerable flexibility of movement, he marched south from Meldert and swinging right crossed the Dyle at Genappe. Here he turned northward along the Brussels road, and by the end of his third day's march was in the neighbourhood of Waterloo. To Villeroi and the Elector this unexpected threat from the south placed either Brussels or Louvain in peril—just as in a game of chequers the interposing of a king between two of the opponent's pieces seals the fate of one. They decided early on the 18th to abandon Louvain and save Brussels; but they had barely started their retirement on the latter city when they found themselves confronted by Marlborough's army ready to give battle. During the night the Duke had sent a strong corps under his brother Churchill to take the enemy in flank and rear, and had rapidly shifted his main forces to the right and deployed them along the south bank of the narrow Ysche, abreast of the French positions.

Detachment from the French army of numerous units to guard open towns which the loss of the Lines of Brabant had exposed to Allied threat had left Villeroi with 103 battalions and 127 squadrons, against which Marlborough had concentrated 100 battalions and 162 squadrons. Complying with the stipulations from The Hague, the Duke had sought and obtained General Overkirk's agreement to attack. Having thus secured a superiority of more than four to three, and with all his skilfully laid plans moving smoothly towards fulfilment, he could, at midday on the 18th, congratulate the Field Deputies "on the prospect of a glorious victory". It was a vain hope. Led by Slangenberg the Dutch generals opposed the whole enterprise, producing one specious argument after another against its practicability. The afternoon passed in fruitless appeals by Marlborough to generals and Deputies in turn. Meanwhile, and throughout the night, the French improved their means of defence, and by morning the Allied chance of victory was gone. The disappointment hurt Marlborough keenly. "I am at this moment ten years older than I was four days ago," he said on the evening of the 18th, and wrote next day to Godolphin:

> I think this will show very plainly that it is next to impossible to act offensively with this army, so governed as they are; for when their general and I agree, as we did in this, that it shall be in the power of subordinate generals to hinder its execution is against all discipline . . . If I had had the same power I had the last year I should have had a greater victory than that of Blenheim, in my opinion, for the French were so posted that if we had beat them, they could not have got to Brussels.[77]

A week later with thinly veiled sarcasm the Duke notified Heinsius of his willingness to fall in with any plans made by his Dutch subordinates, "for I have so good an opinion of this army that I think they are able to execute whatever their generals will resolve; beside we have yet two months before we ought to think of winter quarters." And again later —"The resolution I have taken of being governed by your generals the remaining part of this campaign gives me a great deal of quiet, so that I am now drinking the Spa waters."[78]

Out of these dismal frustrations and missed opportunities some good was to emerge, however. The States-General were left in no doubt concerning English reaction to the Dutch treatment of Marlborough. But any resentment at English anger was overshadowed by their fear of the offers of peace with which Louis XIV now approached them. Before the year ended an envoy from The Hague had expressed regrets to Marlborough for the past and pledged that he would not again be asked to serve under such conditions. Another factor which, unknown as yet to the Allies, was to help them next year, was the buoyant effect which their failures in the field had had upon the French. "I have a mediocre opinion of the capacity of the Duke of Marlborough", wrote the French Minister of War to Villeroi in September. Perhaps Blenheim should "be attributed to luck alone" rather than to Allied generalship. Thus with false confidence misleading the French high command, and a spirit of contrition persuading the Dutch military leaders to make amends for past obstructiveness, there was a reasonable chance that in 1706 Marlborough might realize his long-held ambition of precipitating a major battle in the Netherlands.

## CHAPTER VI

# Ramillies, 1706

### The French Seek Battle

The beginning of 1706 found Marlborough contemplating a far grander project than a renewal of inconclusive hostilities in Flanders. He proposed nothing less than a march to Northern Italy where he might campaign with Prince Eugene to drive the French back across the Alps and restore the fortunes of the Duke of Savoy. In such an operation in the Mediterranean theatre the Allies would be able to benefit by their superior sea power. Things had gone well in the Spanish Peninsula during 1705. Gibraltar had been held against French counter-attacks, and the spectacular capture of Barcelona in September by a British amphibious expedition under the Earl of Peterborough had been followed by the occupation of Catalonia and Valencia, so that the entire eastern Spanish seacoast was now in Allied hands.

But the Italian venture was not to be made. The Kings of Denmark and Prussia showed little enthusiasm for a project which would carry their troops so far afield, and Prince Louis of Baden was as dilatory as ever in contributing his forces. Early in May, just as the States-General seemed about to give their consent, a sudden offensive by Marshal Villars south of the Moselle drove the Margrave from his holdings on the Lauter and the Moder and chased him across the Rhine. On the left bank only the key fortress of Landau remained in Allied hands. The defeat alarmed the Dutch and put an end to the Italian scheme. Against his will Marlborough found himself once more committed to operations in Flanders. On May 12 he was at Maastricht, assembling his forces for what he feared would be a round of indecisive manoeuvres.

The Duke had little hope of bringing the enemy to battle in the coming season. In March he had written to Heinsius:

> In my opinion there is nothing more certain than that the French have taken their measures to be this campaign on the defensive both in Flanders and Germany, in order to be the better able to act offensively in Italy and Spain.[79]

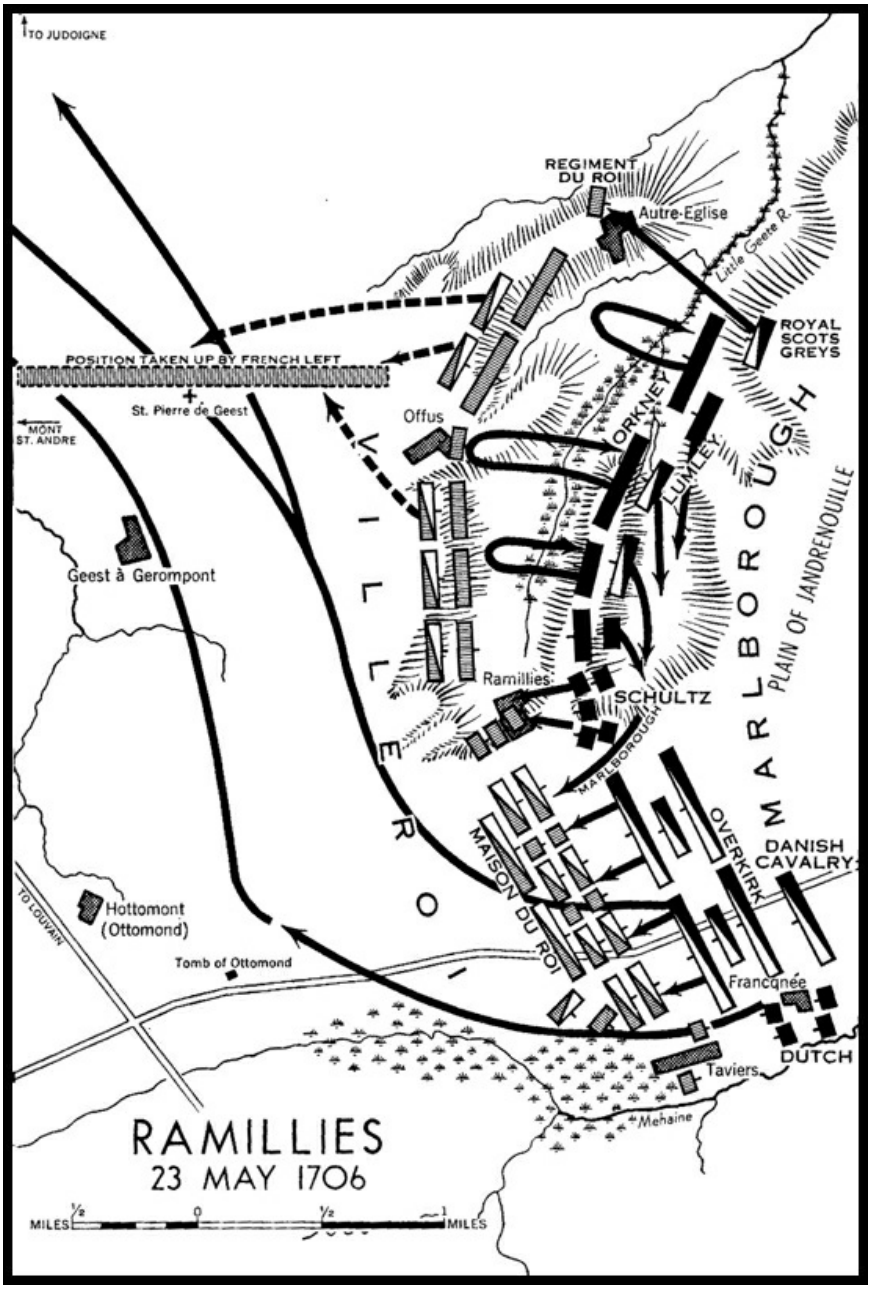
But Marlborough erred in judging the French intentions by what he himself might have done in a similar case. How was he to know that Louis XIV, inflated with some of his Minister of War's optimism, was urging Villeroi to adopt a bolder attitude and to seize any opportunity for a pitched battle? Marsin's army of 25,000 men was in Lorraine, and could reinforce his fellow marshal in Brabant. Specific instructions went out from Versailles that Villeroi should recapture Leau, a petty fortress at the junction of the Great and Little Geete which the Allies had taken the previous September when demolishing the Lines of Brabant. Perhaps this action would provoke Marlborough to battle.

On May 19 Villeroi, hurt by the implied royal doubts about his courage, and anxious to prove these harsh suspicions unjustified, without waiting for assistance from Marsin crossed the Dyle at Louvain and advanced towards Tirlemont. He had learned from his agents that Marlborough was far from being at full strength. The Prussians were still east of the Rhine and unlikely to march, and the Danish mercenaries were being held in winter quarters until the Allies should settle arrears of pay. Villeroi thus counted on having to reckon only with the English and Dutch forces, which combined would be considerably inferior in numbers to his own 60,000.

At Maastricht Marlborough had been considering a dash at Namur when he received the welcome news of Villeroi's advance. English gold flowed freely and quickly to adjust financial differences with the King of Denmark, and the fine Danish cavalry were soon hastening to join the Duke. On the evening of May 22 they camped within half a dozen miles of the combined Dutch and British armies, which had moved forward to Corswaren, about eight miles east of the battlefield of Landen. The Danish arrival raised Marlborough's total strength to about 62,000—all in first class condition. His spies reported the French moving to Judoigne, near the headwaters of the Great Geete. He determined to advance in order "to oblige them to retire, or with the blessing of God to bring them to a battle."[80] Judoigne was two days' march away. The 22nd was a Saturday, and it was the Duke's intention to camp next day, Whitsunday, at the village of Ramillies, and from there, early on the Monday, advance to battle with Villeroi. Each side, however, misjudged the rate of the other's approach. Early on the 23rd the advanced guards of the two armies almost blundered into one another in a dense morning fog. Ramillies thus became a battlefield by a strategical accident; neither Marlborough nor Villeroi

can be credited with selecting it for its tactical possibilities.

The area was familiar to both contenders, Villeroi from his occupancy of the Lines of Brabant, and Marlborough from his stay at nearby Meldert the previous autumn. It was a flat region in which high and low were only relative terms. The most elevated ground was a rise about two miles long which stretched between the source of the Little Geete and the Mehaine and formed part of the watershed between the Scheldt and the Meuse. The villages of Ramillies and Taviers marked the north and south ends of this rise, which broadened out into two "plateaux"—to the west Mont St. André (with a high mound called the Tomb of Ottomond forming a landmark in the centre), and to the east the Jandrenouille plain. In the shallow depression between them the Little Geete curved in a slight crescent towards the north-east. On its left bank lay two more villages, Offus and Autre-Eglise, respectively one and two miles north of Ramillies. The only other built-up community in the vicinity was the small hamlet of Francqnée, which was situated beside the Mehaine a few hundred yards below Taviers, and was the most easterly position to be manned by the French.

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Whether Villeroi had originally intended to fight on this site or to occupy it only temporarily with a view to later seeking a battle further east, the unexpected encounter with Marlborough's forces left him no choice. By mid-morning of the 23rd his army was arrayed along a four-mile front reaching from Autre-Eglise to Taviers. In general it was a strong position, and bore a close similarity to that taken up by the French and Bavarians along the Nebel in the previous August (page 57, above). To the south the marshes about the Mehaine replaced the Danube in protecting the right flank, and the open space for manoeuvre between Taviers and Ramillies matched that between Blenheim and Oberglau. The French left, like the

difficult Lutzingen flank which had faced Eugene, had the strongest natural protection of the whole front. An attack against Offus and Autre-Eglise would have to be made across the morass of the Little Geete and up slopes obstructed by orchards and small enclosures. Unlike the Blenheim field, however, there was no continuous water obstacle across the French right centre, which an attacking army would undoubtedly select for its main cavalry charge.

The chief disadvantage of the French position, and one that was to contribute heavily to Villeroi's defeat, was the concave front which he was forced to adopt because of the direction of the Little Geete and the location of the villages that must be held. It meant that once battle was joined the transfer of any French troops from either wing to a critical point in the centre must be made in an arc along "exterior lines". On the other hand Marlborough, conforming to the French position, would be holding a convex front, and could make his shifts to a corresponding spot along a direct chord.

On the open tract of ground between Ramillies and Taviers Villeroi (temporarily deprived of the assistance of the Elector of Bavaria, who had gone to Brussels for his Whitsunday mass) drew up in three lines some 80 squadrons of horse, including the Maison du Roi, the flower of the French cavalry. Interspersed between them were several battalions of his best infantry. He hastily entrenched Ramillies and allotted to its defence 20 battalions and 24 of his 80 guns. The remainder of his front, protected as we have seen by nature, received less attention. A brigade of infantry held Taviers, and a small delaying force of dragoons was pushed forward to Francqnée. From Ramillies a double line of infantry stretched northward to Offus, backed by 50 squadrons of cavalry. A single line of foot continued to Autre-Eglise, which was defended by the crack troops of the Régiment du Roi.

From the slopes opposite Ramillies the Duke of Marlborough made his reconnaissance about 11 o'clock and directed the deployment of his army, which was arriving from the east in four long columns. He brushed aside the naive recommendations of one of the new field Deputies, Sicco van Goslinga, who has been described as "a military-minded civilian, fascinated (without any professional knowledge) by the art of war".[81] Observing the obvious unsuitability of the northern end of the front for cavalry action Goslinga could not understand the Duke's apparent obtuseness in dividing his horse equally between his two flanks instead of concentrating them on the left where the going was good. But Marlborough's plan of action was as usual based upon a close study of the ground. He had not missed the fact that his convex front gave him the advantage in transferring troops. Yet such moves if visible to the enemy could still be copied, even with some delay. Of far greater significance, his reconnaissance had showed him a slight fold in the ground east of the Geete. Behind this lay a shallow depression which would just give sufficient cover from French view for troops opposite Autre-Eglise to be moved southward for about a mile without being seen by the enemy.[82] It seems certain that his initial dispositions were made with this in mind. In the post of honour on the right he placed his British contingent of horse and foot together with 39 squadrons of foreign cavalry; German and Dutch infantry and cavalry under the command of General Overkirk formed the centre and left; as the Danish squadrons arrived they were posted behind the left centre. His guns outnumbered the enemy's by fifty per cent, and the greater part of these, including some thirty 26-pounders, were massed opposite the French centre, between Ramillies and Offus.

## The Allies Attack

Shortly after one o'clock the artillery of both sides opened fire, and an hour later the Allies advanced to the attack. The first contact was made on the Mehaine flank, where four Dutch battalions quickly cleared Francqnée and, supported with excellent effect by two guns, pushed on to take Taviers by storm. Alarmed at this serious threat to his flank Villeroi ordered a Bavarian brigade of infantry behind Ramillies to move to Taviers, but without waiting for these reinforcements the commander of the French right dismounted fourteen squadrons of dragoons and marched them up to the village. Withering Dutch volleys halted them, and a whirlwind charge by the Danish cavalry utterly routed them, their flight throwing the late-arriving Bavarians into disorder.

This setback brought no immediate reaction from Villeroi, whose attention was taken up with affairs on his left flank, where the scarlet-coated English battalions under Lord Orkney had begun descending the eastern slope of the Geete valley opposite Offus and Autre-Eglise. Behind them moved the cavalry squadrons commanded by General Henry Lumley. The French Marshal had not expected an attack against his naturally strong left flank, but he took prompt counter-measures. Louis XIV had prescribed for just such a contingency. "It would be very important", the Grand Monarch had written two weeks earlier, "to pay particular attention to that part of the line which will endure the first shock of the English troops".[83] Accordingly Villeroi (as Marlborough had foreseen) at once began reinforcing his left at the expense of his right and centre. In spite of the uncertain footing, and in the face of a galling fire from the villages

above, the English foot-soldiers struggled across the marshy stream and mounted the opposite slope, while behind them the cavalry laboriously made their way across the sodden water meadows. With a dozen battalions, including the 1st Guards (the Grenadier Guards), across the Geete, and the first line closely engaged, there seemed to Orkney an excellent chance of turning the French left wing. He was considerably surprised, therefore, and not a little chagrined, when a succession of messengers brought orders for him to break off the attack and withdraw to the east bank. The whole undertaking on this part of the front had been designed by Marlborough as a feint to force Villeroi to weaken his right, but in order that it should appear the more convincing the Duke had let Orkney believe that it was the real thing. It reflects great credit on the discipline of the English battalions and their leaders that in such circumstances they managed to disengage safely and conduct an orderly withdrawal. On the eastern slope the rear line wheeled about and faced the French to form a potential threat which for the next hour was to hold nearly half of Villeroi's horse and foot immobile on the opposite bank. But the front line continued retiring until they reached the hidden fold in the ground, where they turned to their right, and unobserved by the enemy, marched southward to take up reserve positions to the rear of Marlborough's centre.

If the action on the two wings be regarded as constituting the first phase of the battle, the second had opened about half-past two with a massive attack by Overkirk's 48 squadrons against the main French forces drawn up south of Ramillies in the open plain. The initial charge of the Dutch troopers broke the front line of Franco-Bavarian horse, but they were checked by the interspersed bodies of infantry, which stood firm, and were counter-attacked by the famous regiments of the Maison du Roi. A desperate struggle ensued. The tide of battle ebbed and flowed as each side mounted charge and counter-charge. Even with the help of the 21 Danish squadrons brought up on his left flank Overkirk was hard put to it to hold his own. It was at this stage that Marlborough drew the first dividends from his convex position. As soon as the cavalry action started he had summoned 18 squadrons from his right flank. Moving by the concealed route already referred to, the long column of horse had arrived without the enemy being aware that any large body of troops was being shifted across their front. They formed up quickly and Marlborough himself led their charge against the French, having first ordered the immediate transfer of the remaining cavalry of his right wing, except the English, 21 squadrons in all. In the ensuing melée the Duke twice came near death—once when he was unhorsed and overridden in a ditch, and later when a French cannonball took the head off the equerry who was assisting him to remount.

The arrival of the 21 fresh squadrons decided the issue. By successive reinforcements Marlborough had increased his cavalry force from the original 69 squadrons (48 Dutch and 21 Danish) to 87, and then 108 squadrons. He now held an overwhelming advantage, for on the French side not a single troop had been added to the 68 squadrons that faced Overkirk's first charge. Among the 25,000 horsemen engaged in the struggle neither side held a monopoly of courage, but in the end sheer weight of numbers told. Even before the latest Allied arrivals could make their charge, the Danish squadrons had turned the French right flank behind Taviers, and were posting over the plain to the Tomb of Ottomond, riding down the remnants of the fourteen dismounted squadrons of dragoons. Outnumbered five to three, and assailed in front and flank and with its rear threatened, the French cavalry of the right wing collapsed and broke in disorder.

While the open plain south of Ramillies was thus being bitterly contested, a stubborn infantry action had developed for Ramillies itself. It is conceivable that Marlborough may have visualized this third phase as forming the main effort of the battle, to which the two flank attacks and the cavalry encounter in the left centre would be preliminary actions. That these had already secured unexpectedly decisive results detracts nothing from the achievement of the spirited foot-soldiers who were ordered to capture the village. Early in the afternoon the place had been vigorously bombarded by the heavy cannon, but with comparatively little effect on the defenders, who were well covered. At about three o'clock, when Overkirk was already engaged with the French cavalry, on his right a force of twelve infantry battalions, led by the Dutch General Schultz, advanced to storm the village. They immediately came under fire from the guns which had been enfilading the Allied cavalry, who from then on had no enemy interference to fear from that quarter. Two frontal assaults were repulsed, but a third, accompanied by an encircling movement on the right, met with success. Taken unawares on the flank two Swiss battalions deserted their posts and gave the attackers entrance into the northern part of Ramillies. Schultz's main force burst into the village, driving out the defenders in time for them to join in the cavalry's retreat. The Buffs and the Scots Fusiliers are said to have chased three entire French battalions into the marshy source of the Little Geete. By five o'clock Ramillies was firmly in Allied hands.

## The Pursuit

There followed a brief lull in the fighting while Marlborough's forces reorganized for the pursuit. By his orders the whole cavalry line, pivoting on Ramillies, made a great right wheel to face almost due north across the plain, in

readiness to roll up the French line of battle. Villeroi frantically attempted to form a new front facing south between Offus and the village of Mont St. André. In the centre of this, about St. Pierre de Geest, he placed his 50 squadrons of the left wing, brought over from behind Autre-Eglise, where they had not yet been committed in the battle. At right angles to this line the high ground above the Little Geete was held, more thinly now, by its original infantry; the important hinge Villeroi had to entrust to the remains of the battalions that had been given the defence of Ramillies.

The enormous task of re-forming more than 100 squadrons of Allied cavalry, "disordered by fierce action and triumphant pursuit", was skilfully accomplished, and at six o'clock the charge was sounded. The morale of the Bavarian and Spanish squadrons drawn up across the Mont St. André plain had been broken by the disaster to their comrades of the original right wing; as the long line of Allied cavalry began advancing the enemy squadrons broke and fled. Their panic spread to the flanking infantry, who themselves now came under attack from the whole of the Allied foot. Included among these were several of the British battalions that had been earlier balked of success. The redcoats met only slight resistance as they surged up the slopes, while on their extreme right the British cavalry, having struggled across the Little Geete, fell upon the French rear behind Autre-Eglise. Emboldened by the enemy's disorganization to charge at the gallop (unusual tactics in that period) the Royal Scots Greys overtook two battalions of the Régiment du Roi and cut them to pieces. All across the battlefield similar incidents were taking places as the fresh British squadrons rode down the demoralized enemy. Only here and there a disciplined body of French infantry briefly held off the charging troopers by volleys fired from the temporary protection of a ditch or hedge which the horse could not pass, and then made good their escape before the following infantry could come up with them.

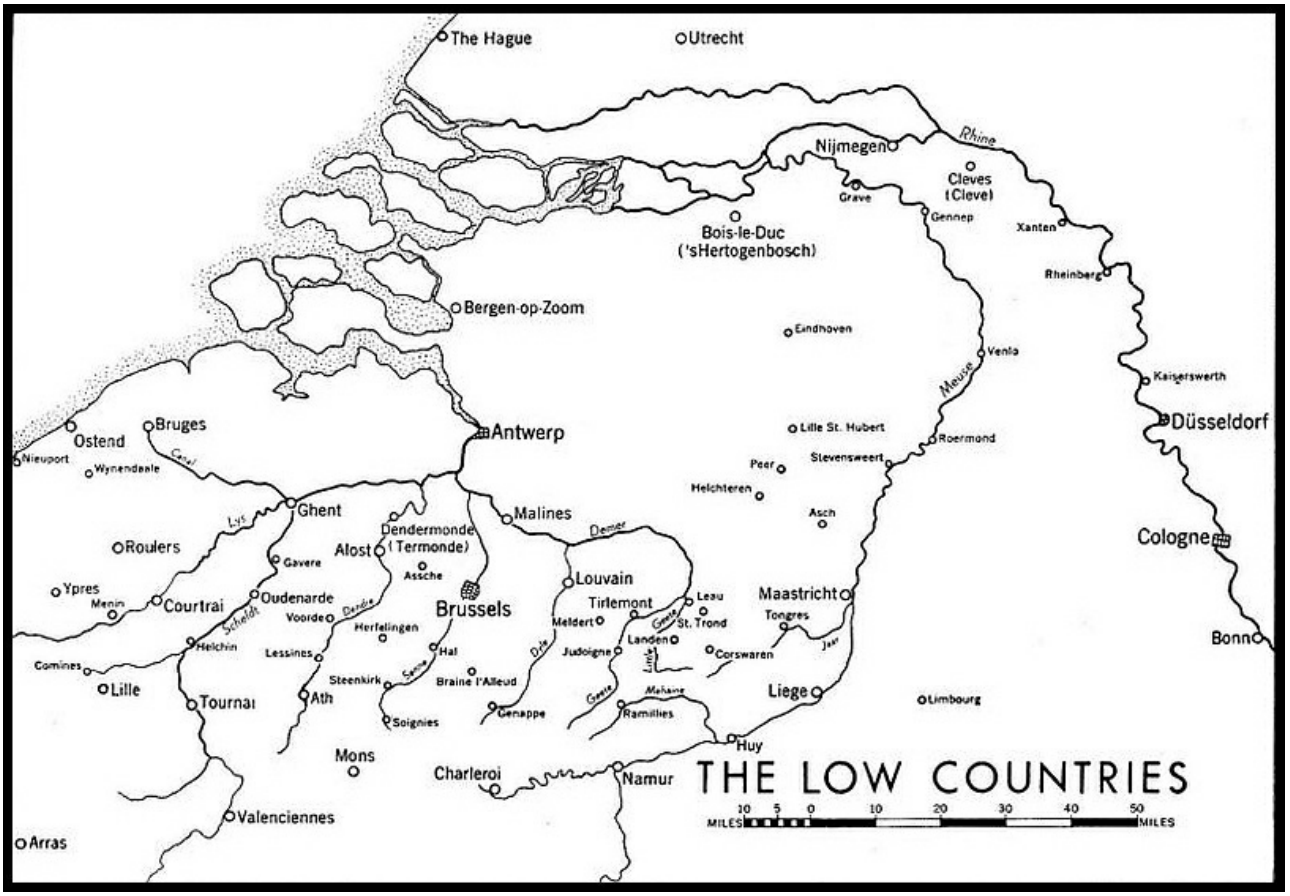
The pursuit was pressed right through the night. The general French retreat was to the north-west along the road to Judoigne and Louvain. But the fleeing columns found this route blocked by the great bulk of their own transport. Some escaped by scattering over the countryside; vast numbers were cut down or fell into Allied hands. By the time pursuing cavalry drew rein within sight of Louvain, having covered a score of miles from the battlefield, nearly 6000 of the enemy had been taken. Villeroi had lost double that number dead and wounded. There remained under his control only 15,000 men, or about a quarter of the army with which he had entered the battle. All his guns were captured. By contrast the Allies had suffered a little more than 4000 casualties.

Of all Marlborough's great battles Ramillies stands out as the one in which he successfully carried out a major pursuit. In this respect it ranks with the great victories of Jena and Waterloo. An all-night march of fifteen miles brought the infantry to Meldert on May 24, and next day they crossed the Dyle and entered Louvain unopposed. Villeroi had hoped to make a stand at the Dyle, but the rapidity of the Allied advance gave him no time to rally. For the same reason he was forced to abandon Brussels fifteen miles to the west. And now the significance of the Whitsunday victory became more fully apparent. On the 27th Marlborough, informing Godolphin of his capture of Louvain, Malines and Brussels, wrote:

> The consequence of this battle is likely to be of greater advantage than that of Blenheim; for we have now the whole summer before us, and with the blessing of God I will make the best use of it.[84]

## Exploiting the Victory

The triumphant march westward continued. At first it was a progress less of conquest than of liberation. The people of the Spanish Netherlands seized the opportunity to throw off the yoke of Louis XIV and declare for Charles III. One by one their cities opened their gates, the French garrisons usually beating a hasty retreat. By the end of the month Ghent and Bruges had been added to the Allied gains, though Dendermonde (on the Scheldt below Ghent) escaped capture when its governor inundated the approaches to the town. "So many towns have submitted since the battle," Marlborough wrote to Sarah on May 31,[85] "that it really looks more like a dream than truth . . . I hope we shall do more in this campaign than was done in the last ten years' war in this country."

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The "dream" persisted. On June 2 Oudenarde capitulated, and three days later the Allied army had crossed the Scheldt and the Lys. Marlborough had expected that the reduction of Antwerp, isolated by the French withdrawal from Ghent and Bruges, would take a month. Yet on June 7, before the siege had started, the Spanish governor surrendered the city, the French troops in the garrison being given a safe conduct, and the Walloon regiments coming over to the Allied side. Marlborough now concentrated on securing Ostend, for its possession would give him direct lines of communication from England, and would provide a continental base for a descent on the French coast. At the end of June Overkirk laid siege to the fortress with the Duke himself commanding the covering force at Roulers, 20 miles to the south-east. A squadron of English battleships and smaller craft subjected the place to a three-day bombardment, which all but reduced it "to a heap of rubbish". On July 6, two days after a Dutch battalion had gained a lodgement on the counterscarp, Ostend surrendered.

In seven weeks Marlborough had cut a clean swath across the Spanish Netherlands from the Lines of Brabant to the North Sea. North of a line joining Namur to Ostend only Dendermonde remained in French hands. He now turned his attention to the chain of key fortresses which lay above the French border and included the strong points of the old Dutch Barrier. He saw the need for haste, for he had learned that Louis XIV had recalled Marshal Vendôme from Italy to replace Villeroi, and was making arrangements to furnish him a huge army of 100,000 men. He moved against Menin, one of Vauban's great fortresses, and in a siege described by a participant as "the briskest and regularest carried on in the whole war", and one which cost the Allies 2500 casualties, secured its capitulation on August 22. Dendermonde, which Louis had boasted could only be taken by an army of ducks, was captured early in September by General Charles Churchill; and a sudden onslaught on Ath which completely surprised Vendôme, who had arrived at Valenciennes only 25 miles away, secured the town's capitulation on October 1. Marlborough would next have attacked Mons, but was deterred therefrom by the heavy autumn rains and by the opposition of the Dutch, who were more than satisfied with the results so far achieved, and were showing a willingness to lend a ready ear to French overtures for peace. The captured fortresses were strongly garrisoned and the Allied troops went into winter quarters. A council of state was set up to govern the Belgian provinces on behalf of Charles III, Marlborough having declined the Emperor's offer of the governorship (at £60,000 a year) so as not to incur the jealousy of the Dutch.

Decidedly 1706 had been a good year for Allied arms. Ramillies, and the vigorous exploitation of that victory, had set a new mark in the campaigning of those times. Never had so much territory been overrun in so short a time. The success in

Flanders had been matched in Italy. Outside the walls of Turin on September 7 Prince Eugene, after a spectacular march up the length of the Po valley, had inflicted a crushing defeat upon Louis XIV's main Italian army under Marsin. The Marshal, who had come from France convinced that he would not survive the campaign, received mortal wounds. The siege of Turin was raised, and the French began evacuating Savoy-Piedmont. By the end of the year the war in Italy was over.

Throughout the summer Marlborough, the grand strategist, had been a close observer of events in that theatre, which he saw as an extension of his own front. At the beginning of June, when reporting to Godolphin the movement to Flanders of some of Villars' forces which had been opposing the Margrave of Baden on the Rhine, he wrote:

> If Prince Louis makes use of this occasion to press the French in Alsace, as I will, with the blessing of God, in this country, the King of France will be obliged to draw some troops from Italy, by which Turin may be saved.[86]

But the Margrave was in neither physical nor mental condition to fight. Blood poisoning from his injured foot had spread through his body, and he was bitterly grieved that the Emperor, mistrusting him as a malingerer, if not a mutineer, was threatening to replace him with his second-in-command. No Allied offensive developed across the Rhine; and on January 4, 1707 the Margrave died in his still unfinished palace behind the Lines of Stollhofen. Things had gone somewhat better in Spain. Barcelona, which in April had come under French siege from land and sea, had been relieved on May 9 by the combined fleets of England and Holland. An army under the Earl of Galway had advanced from Portugal into Spain and occupied Madrid in June, but before Charles III could reach the scene the arrival of a strong French force under the Duke of Berwick (the natural son of James II and Marlborough's sister Arabella) had forced the Allies to abandon the capital and retire eastward into Valencia.

All in all, for the Grand Alliance the campaign of 1706 was the most successful of the whole war; and in that year Marlborough reached the summit of his military fame. Of all his great victories Ramillies was the only one for which there could be no question of sharing credit with his famous collaborator, Prince Eugene. The laurels were his, and his alone. The Duke's prowess was recognized not only in England, but throughout Europe, and not least in France. "Everyone here is ready to take off his hat at the mere name of Marlborough", wrote Vendôme on his arrival at Valenciennes.

Ramillies will rank for ever (Sir Winston Churchill has pointed out) "as an example of what a general can do with men". The opposing sides were almost equal in numbers, but Marlborough's gained the victory because he had taken pains to maintain in them a high level of *Morale*.[87] No other Principle of War does the battle demonstrate more clearly. Through all the ranks of his international army a strong sense of loyalty, born of confidence, inspired British soldier and foreign mercenary alike to give his best for "Corporal John". How different from the situation on the other side of the Geete, where Villeroi's hesitancy and defensive attitude communicated themselves to an entire army whose disordered ranks were to hear before nightfall the demoralizing cry, "Sauve qui peut"!

No better example of the "master" principle of *Maintenance of the Aim* is to be found than in the singleness of purpose with which Marlborough refused to allow the unexpected success on his right wing to divert him from his original objective—the break-through in the centre. As for *Surprise*, we have observed that the Duke did not hesitate even to mislead his own commanders in order the better to deceive the enemy. We must note too the contributing elements of concealment, made possible by his intimate knowledge of the ground ("time spent in reconnaissance is rarely wasted"), and the rapidity with which the all-important reinforcement from right to centre was accomplished. Not least among the surprises to which Villeroi was subjected that day was the unexpectedly strong showing of the once poorly rated Dutch cavalry squadrons, who were demonstrating the beneficial results of five years under Marlborough's leadership. The holding throughout the afternoon of the flank opposite Autre-Eglise with considerably reduced numbers admirably illustrated *Economy of Effort* (just as Villeroi's fruitless build-up on the same flank transgressed that principle), and led to the striking demonstration in the centre of the complementary principle of *Concentration of Force*. Finally, from the moment that Marlborough seized the initiative with his first flanking attacks, retaining that initiative throughout the whole battle by his indomitable resolution, until the halt of the pursuit many hours later, the Allied army exhibited convincingly that victory can only be gained by *Offensive Action*.

## CHAPTER VII

# Oudenarde, 1708

### The Stalemate of 1707

The alternation of good and bad years which we have already remarked as characterizing the Allied fortunes in the War of the Spanish Succession persisted. In making plans for 1707 Marlborough decided that there was little to be gained by campaigning in Flanders, where a recurrence of Dutch hesitancy and Vendôme's defensive tactics made a major battle improbable. Eugene's appraisal of the French marshal, sent to Marlborough in July 1706, was being confirmed: "He is ever ready to challenge an army, but unless he has a large superiority he will not attack it if he finds that it intends to stand its ground."[88] Since the Dutch would not hear of a revival of the Moselle project, the best prospects for success seemed to lie in the Mediterranean, where the Allied achievements in Italy and Spain encouraged the Duke to contemplate an amphibious assault of the great French port of Toulon, the capture of which might well end the war. It was another "great design". From Northern Italy, secured to the Allies by the victory at Turin, Prince Eugene would cross the Alps and, advancing along the Riviera coast, combine with a British fleet in a surprise attack on the French naval base. Allied affairs in Spain would benefit; for the withdrawal of French forces to meet the threat in Toulon should enable the English and Portuguese armies to reoccupy Madrid and secure Spain for Charles III.

Having set this ambitious scheme in motion, Marlborough hurried over to the Continent on a diplomatic errand for the Emperor Joseph (who had succeeded to the throne in 1705 on the death of his father, Leopold I). The tempestuous young Charles XII of Sweden, having soundly beaten one of his chief rivals, Augustus II, King of Poland and Elector of Saxony, had driven him from his Polish throne and pursued him into the heart of Saxony. This southern penetration alarmed the Allies, who feared a Franco-Swedish coalition, more especially since Charles, as self-constituted champion of the oppressed Protestants of Eastern Europe, was challenging the Emperor's ill-treatment of the Lutherans in Silesia. In September 1706 Marlborough had written to Heinsius, "I agree very much with you, that if the King of Sweed be not brought to reason very quickly, he will give us great trouble",[89] and in the following February he expressed to the Grand Pensionary his readiness to visit Charles in Saxony in order "to set him right, or at least to penetrate his designs, that we may take the justest measures we can, not to be surprised."[90]

The two met at Altrandstadt, in Saxony, and Marlborough's persuasive powers quickly won over the young King, who was not averse to such flattery as: "I wish I could serve some campaigns under so great a general as your majesty, that I might learn what I yet want to know in the art of war."[91] The negotiations were probably assisted by the clandestine payment of large sums of money to some of Charles XII's ministers; at any rate, when the Duke left the Swedish court on April 29, he was able to report that King Charles "has no manner of engagement with the French, nor is inclined to take any measures with them that may occasion the least disturbance to the Allies in the prosecution of the war."[92] Before Marlborough returned to Flanders he saw the Elector Augustus and secured the promise of 4500 Saxon soldiers. But the satisfaction that he could rightly feel at the success of his mission was offset by serious news from Spain. At Brussels he was met by word that the Earl of Galway's army had been soundly beaten on April 25 by a superior Franco-Spanish force at Almanza, on the borders of Valencia. The defeat cost the Allies the whole of Valencia, and struck a crippling blow at Marlborough's plans against Toulon. He now turned his attention to the campaign in Flanders.

Taking the field late in May he advanced with 90,000 men towards Mons, which Vendôme was holding with an army of more than 100,000. On the 26th the Allies reached Soignies, a dozen miles from the French lines, only to find that Vendôme had moved eastward to threaten Brabant. Marlborough would have followed to try and force a battle but was prevented by the Dutch Deputies. He withdrew to his old post at Meldert, to guard the approaches to Brabant between the Dyle and the Great Geete. A score of miles to the south Vendôme set up a fortified camp at Gembloux, and in these positions the opposing armies remained virtually inactive for the next ten weeks—the French because they were under restraint not to fight unless the need were urgent, and Marlborough, both because of Dutch reluctance and the necessity of covering Brussels and other open towns with his numerically inferior force.

At the end of May he had received tidings of another reverse. After the death of Louis of Baden the Imperial command on the Rhine had been given to the Margrave of Bayreuth, who turned out to be even more incompetent than his predecessor.

His forces were dissipated over South Germany in unnecessary garrison duties, a fact of which the able Marshal Villars was quick to take advantage. Striking suddenly across the Rhine, his troops overran the almost empty Lines of Stollhofen and raided far and wide through German territory, some bands reaching as far as Blenheim. It was a bitter but none the less deserved lesson to the German princes for their apathy towards the Allied cause. The loss of the long-trusted defences between the Black Forest and the Rhine caused the diversion to Southern Germany of the Saxon contingent for which Marlborough had negotiated, and added considerably to Dutch fears. At the Duke's insistence the Margrave of Bayreuth was replaced by the Elector of Hanover, afterwards George I of England. With the general situation so unfavourable, Marlborough's sole hopes for success in 1707 now rested on a favourable outcome of the Toulon venture.

But here too he was doomed to disappointment. The surprise which would have attended an expedition in the early spring was forfeited through the selfish designs of the Emperor Joseph, who saw in the Turin victory an opportunity to bring the whole of the Italian peninsula under Austrian control. He delayed Eugene's start by sending 10,000 of his men on an expedition to rid Naples of its weak Spanish garrisons, so that it was the beginning of July before the Prince and Victor Amadeus could set off into Provence with an inadequate army of 35,000 men. As they marched along the Mediterranean coast their left flank was protected by the combined English and Dutch fleets under Admiral Sir Cloudesley Shovell. They reached Toulon on July 26, to find that the French garrison had been reinforced from Spain and was in sufficient strength to make siege impracticable. Further reinforcements were on the way, including 12 battalions and 12 squadrons released by Vendôme in Flanders, and others from Villars, who had been hastily recalled across the Rhine. Fearing for the security of his lines of communication Eugene, over the protests of the Duke of Savoy and the English admiral, withdrew eastward, leaving Toulon untaken.

From the miscarriage of this venture there emerged, however, some cause for satisfaction in the destruction by the French of a large part of their fleet rather than face action, and the pulling back of Villars and Vendôme on the central and northern fronts. On learning that Vendôme had transferred some of his forces and was retiring towards Mons, Marlborough hurried west in an unsuccessful attempt to force an engagement; by the end of August both sides were in the positions they had held in May. Two weeks of heavy rain intervened, and then came a final series of rapid marches which brought no decisive result, as Vendôme continued to live up to his reputation of excessive caution. During September Marlborough crossed the Dendre (at Ath) and the Scheldt (at Oudenarde), causing his opponent to withdraw across the French border to the shelter of the guns of Lille. There the frustrating campaign ended in October, with Marlborough "much out of humour and peevish" as he sent his army into winter quarters.

He returned to England in poor health to face political storms and to find that the close friendship between Sarah and Queen Anne had cooled, and that the Queen no longer placed her full confidence in him. In Parliament, where the opposition urged the transfer of England's main efforts to the Spanish theatre, he justified the policy of remaining in Flanders, in order to tie down large French forces and to ensure continued Dutch adherence to the Alliance.

Thus ended 1707, of all the years of the war the one most lacking in Allied achievement. The disappointments of Almanza, Stollhofen and Toulon, and Marlborough's failure to accomplish anything of note in the Netherlands must be considered due in no small measure to the bitter jealousies and rivalries that were dividing the principal partners of the Grand Alliance. In December Marlborough wrote to Heinsius:

> It is very melancholy to reflect how little the Emperor and the Empire have done this war for their own preservation and how little they seem disposed to exert themselves at present when their all is in a manner at stake . . . It behooves us to be very plain with them without loss of time in letting them know . . . that we may reasonably expect they should exert themselves beyond anything they have done hitherto.[93]

## 1708—Early French Successes

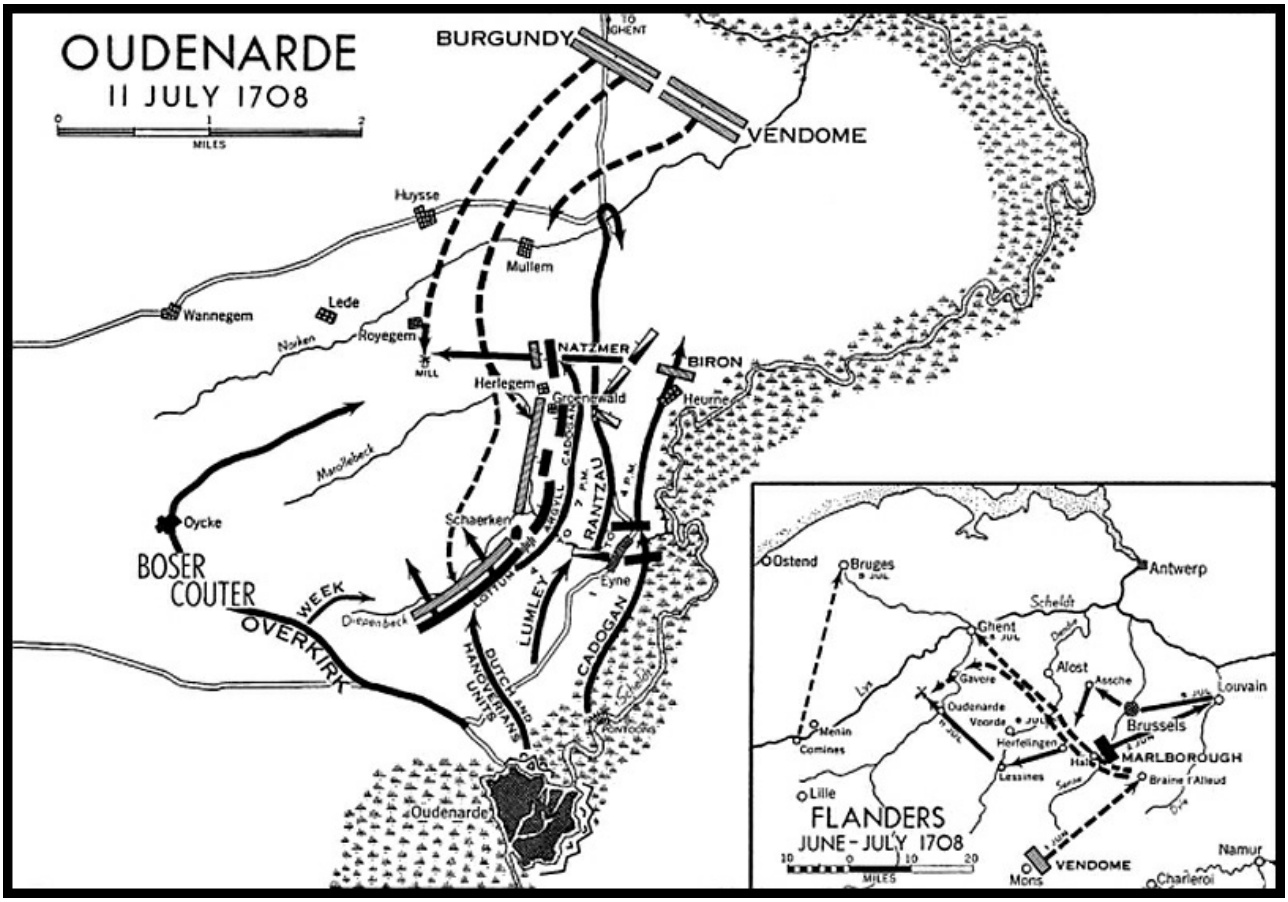
In planning for the campaign of 1708 Marlborough realized from the experience of the previous year that whatever success might be gained would have to come from his own efforts. He determined to have Prince Eugene once more at his side, and with him to force another battle in Flanders, in the hope of chasing the French back through the border fortresses and invading their homeland. On April 1 he met with Eugene and Heinsius at The Hague to work out their strategy. The Allies would line up in three separate armies: the Elector of Hanover on the Alsace border with 40,000 German troops; Eugene on the Moselle with 45,000 (including the main Imperial contingent); and Marlborough in Belgium with 90,000 men in English and Dutch pay. Subsequently Eugene's forces would secretly join Marlborough's, but these early dispositions would serve to conceal this intention from the French.

For their part the French, encouraged by the events of 1707 (which had brought them no major defeat), saw good prospects of a successful campaign in Flanders. They hoped to recover the cities which Ramillies had lost to them, counting on the co-operation of the inhabitants, who were generally discontented with two years of Dutch administration. Victory here would help to ensure the favourable peace which the depleted national treasury demanded. The nominal command in Flanders was given to the Duke of Burgundy, grandson of Louis XIV and heir to the French throne, with Marshal Vendôme attending him as a sort of adjutant. It was not a happy arrangement; the two commanders rarely saw eye to eye, and their followers formed two factions in the French camp. Max Emmanuel, the Elector of Bavaria, refused to serve under Burgundy, and was sent with the Duke of Berwick to watch the Upper Rhine.

Spring came very late in 1708, and May was half over before either side could put its forces in the field. Marlborough was at Hal, on the River Senne above Brussels, while outside Mons the French assembled the largest army that had been seen for many a war—132 battalions and 216 squadrons, numbering nearly 110,000 men. It was an anxious time for Marlborough, for Eugene's army was slow in mustering and could not arrive before the end of June, and without this reinforcement he could not take the initiative. After a week of inactivity the French, repeating their tactics of the previous year, suddenly moved eastward. Once again the Duke headed them off with a counter-march, and encamped beside the Dyle, just outside Louvain, the enemy halting at Braine l'Alleud, ten miles south of Brussels. Here both waited out the rest of June, Marlborough perforce being satisfied to protect both Brussels and Louvain from attack by much superior forces. He systematically reviewed his own army. What he saw pleased him, and he was able to report to Eugene that his troops were "in so good a condition that I am sure it would gratify your Highness to see them".[94] At last the news he had long been awaiting arrived. On July 2 he was able to break secrecy and inform the States-General that Eugene's Moselle army was to join him in Flanders, and was at that moment approaching by forced marches. He concluded,

> As soon as the cavalry shall approach we shall move directly upon the enemy, and bring on a battle, trusting in God to bless our designs.[95]

But the French acted first. Disagreement between the Duke of Burgundy and Vendôme as to objectives was temporarily settled as the former overruled his more experienced colleague, and decided on a direct march on Ghent and Bruges. On the evening of July 3 the Grand Army broke camp and headed rapidly westward. Advanced detachments crossed the Senne and the Dendre, and on the second morning were at the gates of both cities. Bruges surrendered without opposition. Ghent followed suit, although its citadel held out for two more days. By daylight on the 6th the whole French army was west of the Dendre and in position to attack the Allied fortresses of Oudenarde (on the Scheldt) and Menin (on the Lys). Thus by a timely stroke the French had regained control of the waterways of Western Flanders and were well placed to sever Marlborough's line of communication through Ostend. They encamped between the Dendre and the Scheldt, near Alost, where they could cover the reduction of the Ghent citadel and threaten Brussels while deciding on their next move.

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Marlborough, though far from well, had acted with his usual promptness and decision. He had earlier stationed a mobile brigade between Bruges and Ghent, and as soon as he learned of Burgundy's move he ordered its commander to send a regiment to reinforce Oudenarde. He was seriously handicapped by the absence of Eugene's forces, which he could not expect for several days. He put his army in motion towards Brussels in order to cover the capital from any sudden eastward thrust by the French. Late on the 5th one of his cavalry detachments caught up with the enemy's rear-guard as it was crossing the Dendre and captured a baggage column and some 200 prisoners. He established his main force at Assche, midway between Alost and Brussels, and was joined here on July 6 by Eugene, who had ridden on ahead of his cavalry now at Maastricht.

The Prince of Savoy found Marlborough "pretty consternated", but (according to the former's Austrian biographer) "succeeded in convincing the Duke that his affairs were not in anything like so bad a state as he saw them."[96] In a conference which lasted several hours the two comrades formulated plans which the Dutch council of war endorsed (the Field Deputies being under orders from The Hague not to persist in their restrictive tactics of the previous year). The northward move of the French armies against the Allied lines of communication had left their own communications with France dangerously exposed. The Allied plan was to advance across the Scheldt so as to safeguard Oudenarde and Menin, and then to continue to the coast in order to cut off the enemy from Lille and his other bases, and if possible provoke a battle. These projects were to be undertaken by Marlborough's army alone, whose commitment of protecting Brussels would be taken over by Eugene's cavalry—now expected on the 9th.

Thus the enemy's temporary inactivity played into the Allies' hands. Preparations were made to ensure the utmost mobility when the time came to strike. A supply of bread for eight days was made ready, and all baggage was cut down (writes Hare) "with a greater strictness than has been used on our side this war that we may have nothing to hinder our march."[97] At the same time Marlborough further reinforced the garrison of Oudenarde with 700 men from Ath. Of greater importance, the pause got the Duke past the crisis of his sickness. He collapsed in a fever on the evening of the 7th, and spent next day in bed, improving in the evening thanks to "something he took in the afternoon". At two o'clock on the following morning (July 9) he was on the march with his whole army. It was an advance leading directly into a battle which, unlike the carefully patterned, set-piece engagements of that period, was to foreshadow in its improvisation and flexibility the fluid operations of a much later day.

## Oudenarde—An Encounter Battle

On the other side of the Dendre the French were also on the move. The Ghent citadel had capitulated on the 7th, and a decision had then been taken to besiege Oudenarde, placing the covering force at Lessines, on the Dendre's left bank. The investment of Oudenarde was still proceeding on July 9, when word came that Marlborough had struck camp and was at Herfelingen, fifteen miles south of Assche. This could mean that the Allies were contemplating an advance south-eastward against Charleroi or Namur. The possibility of a thrust to the west does not seem to have been given much consideration; in any case such a move might be blocked at Lessines, to which Burgundy's main forces began marching during the afternoon. These rested for the night at Voorde, ten miles short of their objective.

But Marlborough had not stayed long at Herfelingen. Preceded by a strong advanced guard under the Earl of Cadogan, which crossed the Dendre and occupied Lessines before midnight, he brought his main body to the river by mid-morning of the 10th, having completed a march of thirty miles in 33 hours. The French, finding Lessines denied to them, decided to abandon the siege of Oudenarde, but to secure the line of the Scheldt and await the arrival of Berwick's army, which Eugene's departure from the Moselle had brought hastening northward from Alsace, and which was reported to have its advanced guard at Namur. They did not know that Marlborough's main army had reached the Dendre, for he had taken the precaution to leave some tents standing at a halting-place south of Herfelingen. They had thus no sense of insecurity as they turned towards the Scheldt and on the evening of the 10th halted to prepare crossings at Gavere, half a dozen miles downstream from Oudenarde. Once across the river it was their intention to advance up the left bank in order to block any Allied crossing and put themselves within a safe two days' march of Lille.

But while they slept their opponent was on the march. At one o'clock in the morning (July 11) Cadogan set off from Lessines along the road to Oudenarde fifteen miles away, taking with him 16 British and Dutch battalions and eight Hanoverian squadrons, 32 guns and strong bridging detachments. His task was to seize and hold a bridgehead for the main army. He reached the Scheldt unperceived by the French, who were still on the east bank at Gavere, and by mid-morning his pioneers were at work throwing pontoon bridges across the river below the fortress. Marlborough had started his main force from Lessines at 7:00 a.m., and when news reached him from Cadogan that the French were not yet over the Scheldt, he ordered the march to be pushed with the utmost speed.

His men responded enthusiastically, eager to get at the enemy and avenge the loss of Bruges and Ghent. The Duke himself galloped forward with Eugene and 20 squadrons of cavalry, and shortly after midday crossed the bridges which Cadogan had completed. Now for the first time the enemy became aware that the Allies were at the Scheldt and had begun to cross in force. The news was sent back to Vendôme and Burgundy by the commander of their advanced guard, Lieut.-General Biron, who had gone forward along the west bank with 20 squadrons and seven battalions to cover a foraging party and to reconnoitre. After a brush with some of Cadogan's patrols the French cavalry had taken post astride the road from Ghent while the infantry occupied two villages near the river bank—three battalions in Heurne, about three miles north of Oudenarde on the river road, and the other four in Eyne, a mile nearer the fortress, at the junction with the Ghent road. Here they were between two streams that flowed eastward into the Scheldt, the Diepenbeck, which crossed the main road just south of Eyne, and the much larger Norken, about two miles to their rear.

Vendôme received the news with incredulity. How could Marlborough's forces, which had been at Assche only two days before, have covered nearly 50 miles in so short a time? Angrily he declared, "If they are there the devil must have carried them. Such marching is impossible!"[98] He assumed that only a small advanced guard could have crossed the Scheldt, and sending Biron orders to attack at once he headed towards Oudenarde with a strong force of cavalry, leaving Burgundy to follow with the main body. Biron, however, had been informed by a fellow general who had arrived to lay out the French camp that the ground in front of him was too marshy to pass, and noting the rapidly growing strength of the Allied force south of the Diepenbeck he thought it better to remain on the defensive, a decision in which Vendôme on his arrival apparently acquiesced. Thus it was Cadogan who attacked. During the early afternoon he had formed up his 16 battalions behind the Diepenbeck and now he marched them, headed by a British brigade, against the four Swiss battalions in Eyne. His cavalry, under the Hanoverian General Rantzau, advanced on the left flank. The first volley was fired at three o'clock, and the battle of Oudenarde had begun. In their isolated position the Swiss offered little resistance. Three battalions surrendered at once, and the fourth was cut down by Rantzau's squadrons. The defenders of Heurne retreated precipitately behind the Norken, where Burgundy's infantry were coming into position on a long ridge which ran back westward from the Ghent road. Without halting, Rantzau's cavalry charged and routed Biron's twelve squadrons behind Heurne. As though this success had whetted his appetite, the fiery Hanoverian carried on against the cavalry of the French left wing, now forming up in front of the Norken. He was driven off by weight of numbers, but not before his

gallant riders (who included the young Electoral Prince of Hanover, later George II of England) had given an excellent account of themselves. The first round had been won handsomely by the Allies.

On the high ground north of the Norken stood three villages, from east to west Huysse, Lede and Wannegem, which from their elevated positions would have furnished Burgundy's army with strong defensive posts had he decided to remain on the ridge and await an Allied attack. The region south of the river formed a rough sort of amphitheatre, enclosed on the west by the Boser Couter, a prominent hill north-west of Oudenarde, and on the east by a slight ridge about 500 yards west of the Ghent road, overlooking the Marollebeck rivulet, a tributary of the Diepenbeck. These lesser heights were crowned by three small villages within a space of a mile—Schaerken, at the junction of the two streams, and farther north, Groenewald and Herlegem. It was in and around these communities, and along the banks of the Diepenbeck, in a region of closely cultivated ground broken by hedges and garden walls, that the main battle was to be fought. While the opening encounter was taking place Marlborough's main forces had been steadily deploying across the Scheldt. After the capture of Eyne and Heurne Cadogan had moved the majority of his infantry into position about Groenewald, and as fresh battalions arrived from the bridges they formed up on his left in a line reaching to Schaerken and beyond.

Up till now, in spite of Vendôme's orders to drive the Allies back across the Scheldt, the French had shown a marked hesitancy in getting into action. The conflict of wills between the Marshal and Burgundy was undoubtedly to blame for this and throughout the day was to continue to result in a complete absence of any co-ordinated plan for dealing with the rapidly changing situation. Thus it was without Vendôme's knowledge that Burgundy, stung by the daring affront of Rantzau's cavalry charge, about four o'clock, having sent forward 16 squadrons to reconnoitre, ordered the infantry of his right wing to cross the Norken in successive detachments and attack the Allied positions. The Prince crossed the stream with his staff and established himself in a windmill at Royegem, from where he could observe the progress of the battle. An initial attempt by six French battalions to capture the village of Groenewald was beaten off in a heavy fire-fight. As soon as the direction of the French thrust was established, Cadogan on Marlborough's orders brought the remainder of his 16 battalions into line, and occupied Herlegem as an advanced position on his right. Thus when the French renewed the attack, employing six additional battalions, they were caught by unexpected flanking fire from Herlegem, and were again heavily repulsed. In the thick of the fight, wielding a pike like any private of the line, was Vendôme himself. He was determined to take Groenewald at all costs, and called forward battalion after battalion across the Norken.

As the commitment of new troops on both sides gradually extended Marlborough's left flank farther to the south-west along the Diepenbeck, the Allied right singularly remained unassailed. As a precautionary measure the Duke had placed behind Cadogan—between Herlegem and Heurne—Rantzau's eight squadrons and 20 fresh Prussian squadrons under General Natzmer. Experience had shown, however, that cavalry unsupported by infantry formed no strong defence, and the open fields east of the Ghent road seemed to invite an attack by the French left wing, which was now drawn up behind Mullem, a village on the Norken about a mile below Huysse. At five o'clock Vendôme, doing what Marlborough had expected, sent orders to Burgundy to launch the whole of the left wing (some 30,000 strong) in an attack that would come in behind Herlegem and aim at rolling up the Allied right flank. But under the misapprehension that the intervening ground was too boggy to be crossed the Prince made no move. What was worse, the courier whom he sent informing Vendôme of this decision was killed before he could deliver his message. When Vendôme led his next frontal attack on Groenewald, to his surprise it was unsupported by the expected flanking thrust. Thus the Marshal paid the penalty of abandoning his responsibilities as a commander to fight in the ranks.

But while the French left remained uncommitted, the whole of the infantry of the right and centre were locked in a deadly struggle along the Marollebeck. At the Schaerken end of the line the Duke of Argyll had arrived with 20 British battalions, among them the Royal Scots and the Buffs, and these with the tiring soldiers of Cadogan's 16 units were opposed by nearly 50 French battalions. Schaerken itself changed hands twice as the enemy broke across the Diepenbeck, outflanking Argyll, but 20 Prussian and Hanoverian battalions under Count Lottum arrived in time to force the enemy back and recover the village. More and more troops were thrown in on both sides until the front extended more than two miles from Herlegem, to come within a mile of the road which ran north-west from Oudenarde over the Boser Couter.

This road was destined to play an important part in deciding the day's issue. As we have noted, the battle of Oudenarde, unlike most of the other major actions of the war, was fought "on the move", for neither side had had an opportunity to plan a complete course of action or draw up a formal line of battle before fighting started. From the time that he crossed the Scheldt Marlborough had been busily engaged in committing to various parts of the field the successive units as they arrived in the bridgehead. His right flank remained under tremendous threat from the powerful French force about Mullem, and in the hand-to-hand struggle in the centre the issue was still very much in doubt. Yet amid the full fury of the

battle, while closely occupied with what one writer has called his "radial reinforcement" of each endangered portion of his front in turn, and so weakened by fever that he could with difficulty sit his horse, the Duke had contrived to keep the whole operation in proper perspective and devised the scheme which was to carry the Allies to a decisive victory.

Marlborough had probably gained some familiarity with the ground about Oudenarde in the year of Ramillies. At any rate, he was quick to discern that the Boser Couter commanded the battle area from the west, and that the French had been too busily engaged with their struggle for the villages to post a guard on the hill. He therefore ordered General Overkirk—who with the cavalry of the left had earlier been guarding the east bank of the Scheldt against any attack on that side of the river—to cross on two permanent and two supplementary bridges inside Oudenarde and ascend the Boser Couter in an encircling movement that would outflank the French right. In order the better to control these operations on the left, shortly before six o'clock the Duke turned over to Eugene the command of the Allied right, which included the infantry of Cadogan and Argyll and the cavalry under Rantzau and Natzmer. Almost immediately the Prince was in difficulties, as Vendôme's determined third attack having reached its peak forced Cadogan's weary battalions out of Herlegem and Groenewald. Marlborough sent help to his colleague even before it was asked. He rapidly transferred to the danger area Lottum's corps of 20 battalions, replacing them along the Diepenbeck with his latest infantry arrivals, 18 Dutch and Hanoverian units. It was not the first time in his campaigning that he had deprived one section of his front to benefit another, and once again the manoeuvre was successful. Lottum's troops arrived in time to counter-attack and regain the two villages.

Meanwhile, on the extreme left, the veteran Overkirk (now 67 years old), unseen by the French was approaching the Boser Couter at the head of a force of 25,000 composed of Dutch infantry and a number of Danish cavalry squadrons. A breakdown of the temporary bridges in Oudenarde had delayed his crossing, and was to reduce the fruits of the final victory. As his leading infantry reached the source of the Diepenbeck Overkirk detached two Dutch brigades under General Week to swing right and join Marlborough's left. Their arrival coincided with Eugene's recovery of Groenewald and Herlegem, and was the signal for the whole Allied front to advance in a great converging movement. It is recorded that the musketry fire from both sides at this stage of the battle was the heaviest and most sustained that had ever been known.

Less than two hours of daylight remained, and Overkirk was still some distance from the top of the hill whence he was to turn in behind the French rear. The greatest risk to the Allies was still on their own right flank, and at seven o'clock Marlborough again reinforced Eugene, sending him General Lumley's 17 squadrons of British cavalry, which had not yet been committed. They swiftly trotted across from the left flank, and their arrival behind Herlegem released Natzmer's 20 squadrons for a very gallant charge against Burgundy's cavalry, whose presence in front of Royegem had been a deterrent to the advance of Lottum's foot. The Prussian gendarmes broke right through the French squadrons and two infantry battalions beyond, but were finally stopped and driven back with losses of 75 per cent by the deadly fire of the Maison du Roi. Forlorn though the charge may have been, it eased the pressure and gained the time needed for events to mature on the other flank.

At last Overkirk was in position, and from Oycke on the top of the Boser Couter he sent four brigades of Dutch infantry marching down the road to Royegem, supported by a dozen Danish squadrons. In command was the nineteen-year old Prince of Orange, fighting his first battle. At the same time the other claw of the pincers closed in as Cadogan pushed forward from Groenewald, the Grenadier Guards and the Coldstream leading the advance. Soon all was over. On some parts of the front the French fought bravely to escape annihilation, but eventually discipline and order vanished before the remorseless Allied pressure. As darkness fell Marlborough halted the battle to prevent the two Allied wings firing into each other's ranks. Later he was to write to the Duchess:

> If we had been so happy to have had two more hours of daylight, I believe we should have made an end of this war.[99]

The cordon was too thin to hold all within it, and large numbers of the French right and centre escaped. Burgundy's left wing, which from the safe side of the Norken had been spectators of the whole battle, retired intact to Ghent, where they were joined by other remnants of the army (excepting an estimated 10,000 stragglers who headed across the Scheldt to France). There was no large-scale pursuit (40 squadrons assigned the task were stopped by an effective French rear-guard), but within the pocket 9000 were captured, to add to the loss of 6000 killed and wounded. A French officer wrote that "at least forty of our regiments are reduced to a wretched condition, the greatest part of them being killed or taken."[100] By contrast the Allied casualties numbered just over 3000, including 800 killed. But their army was still

intact; when darkness fell on the 11th there stood at the Scheldt crossings 20,000 troops who had taken no part in the battle, and the losses were readily replaced by enemy deserters and captured mercenaries.

Marlborough's tactics at the battle of Oudenarde provide an excellent example of the principle of *Maintenance of the Aim*. Confronted with the possibility of catching the French in the open, he was determined to force a fight and inflict the maximum damage on his opponents. From the moment that, having forestalled the enemy at Lessines, he sent Cadogan's small force forward to seize a Scheldt bridgehead until the final closing of the pocket around the French right wing, his skilful tactical control of operations moved the course of events relentlessly towards victory. In marked contrast is the violation of this principle by the French commanders, who first of all could not agree whether or not to oppose the Allied passage of the Scheldt, and subsequently failed to co-ordinate their efforts, issuing conflicting orders with disastrous results. The principle of *Flexibility* is nowhere better illustrated in Marlborough's campaigns than in this battle, not only in the physical mobility which ensured the timely arrival of the Allied forces at the point of conflict and their presence at the right part of the field at the crucial moment, but more particularly in the originality of mind and rapidity of decision exercised by the commander in making these dispositions.

Whereas the French violated the principle of *Economy of Effort*, first by sending forward their unsupported detachment to Eyne while advancing with their main body in a different direction, and then by the fruitless unemployment of the whole of their left wing behind the Norken, Marlborough maintained a judicious balance in the use of his resources. Thus he opposed the French infantry along the Diepenbeck and the Marollebeck with inferior numbers, not hesitating to transfer troops from the centre to reinforce Eugene when hard pressed; and by placing his cavalry behind Herlegem, he contrived to ensure the continued immobilization of the French left. By such measures he was able to keep in hand the necessary forces for the final thrust behind the French right flank—a good example of *Concentration*, which enabled the decisive blow to be delivered at the crucial moment.

Undoubtedly the chief element in the *Surprise* which enabled Marlborough to seize the initiative in the battle was the *rapidity* with which the approach march was made (although we may note too the *deception* of the empty tents on the way and the *audacity* of Cadogan's initial crossings); while *concealment* played an important part in the successful delivery of Overkirk's unexpected thrust from the Boser Couter. Among the various ways of raising the *Morale* of soldiers, not the least effective is the incentive of avenging a wrong (real or imagined). As we have seen, eagerness to remove the sting of Bruges and Ghent inspired Marlborough's troops to prodigious efforts on the approach march and encouraged them to give their best in the continued *Offensive Action* which won the victory. And here we may note that more than any of the Duke's great battles this one belonged to the infantry; no less than fourteen famous British foot regiments proudly display on their colours the honour "Oudenarde".

## The Siege of Lille

Marlborough allowed his over-marched army two days' rest at Oudenarde and then moved westward to the Lys, to encamp at Wervicq, four miles above Menin. He had sent a strong detachment under Count Lottum to level the French fortified lines from Ypres to the Lys at Comines, and thereby open a pathway into France between the great fortresses along the border. The Duke of Berwick, hastening over from the Meuse, arrived too late to prevent these demolitions, and turned his attention to reinforcing with stragglers from the recent battle the garrisons of Ypres, Lille and Courtrai.

With the French army of Flanders safely behind the Bruges-Ghent canal, Marlborough saw that there was little hope of compelling an action in that sector. But he recognized other means of drawing Vendôme out of Ghent.

> They leave all France open to us [he wrote to Godolphin on July 16], which is what I flatter myself the King of France and his council will never suffer; so that I hope by Thursday M. de Vendôme will receive orders from Court not to continue in the camp where he is, from whence we are not able to force him but by famine.[101]

In order that Louis XIV should not lack the incentive to recall his Marshal, Marlborough now laid a heavy hand on the provinces of Artois and Picardy, sending 25,000 troopers to pillage and destroy throughout the countryside and to exact heavy levies from the towns and cities.

Eugene went off to join his army, which had arrived at Brussels, and which it was decided should remain there as long as the French held Ghent. But before he left, Marlborough had unfolded to him what was probably the most daring strategical project that the two generals had yet considered. This was no less than a plan for their combined armies to invade France and establish a new base at Abbeville, at the mouth of the Somme. The advance by land would be

accompanied by a cross-Channel assault, for which a force of 6000 men was already standing by on the Isle of Wight. With Abbeville in possession the stores and equipment in Flanders could be ferried down the coast to the new base, and the Allied communications through Ostend abandoned. The target would then be Paris. But the plan was too audacious even for Prince Eugene, who was dubious about its amphibious aspects. Furthermore he was against leaving the frontier fortresses unreduced. On July 26 Marlborough was to report to Godolphin:

> He thinks it impracticable, till we have Lille for a *place d'armes* and magazine: and then he thinks we may make a very great inroad, but not be able to winter, though we might be helped by the fleet, unless we were masters of some fortified town.[102]

With Eugene opposed to the plan there was no point in considering it further. Marlborough turned to the siege of Lille, for which task he was faced with the difficult problem of getting his artillery train over from Holland. As long as the French held Ghent, at the junction of the Lys and the Scheldt, transfer by water (the normal means of passage) was impossible. The Duke therefore determined to bring the heavy guns by road. It was a bold decision, not only because of the tremendous administrative difficulties involved, but because during the move the artillery, upon whose safe arrival so much depended, must pass within easy reach of two French armies—Vendôme's at Ghent, and Berwick's, now at Mons. The guns were assembled as secretly as possible in Brussels, whither every horse that the army could spare was dispatched. Nearly 16,000 were required to draw the 15-mile train, which included 80 heavy cannon (20 horses each), 20 great mortars (16 horses), and 3000 four-horse ammunition wagons. The huge convoy left Brussels on August 6, guarded by the greater part of Eugene's army, as well as by 25 squadrons and as many battalions supplied by Marlborough. At intervals along the 75-mile route it was joined by other strong detachments. Berwick would have attacked, but could not secure Vendôme's co-operation. It passed through Ath on the 8th, crossed the Scheldt two days later, and reached its destination at Menin on the 12th, without having lost a gun. Next day, on the fourth anniversary of the battle of Blenheim, the investment of Lille was completed, and that night Marlborough (who was keenly conscious of French attempts to minimize their July defeat) recorded:

> The siege... will be pressed with all possible vigour, and this may at last convince the enemy that they have lost the battle of Oudenarde.[103]

On August 27 the batteries were in position and bombardment of the walls began.

The siege of Lille, which Marlborough's engineers were at first hopeful of ending in ten days, lasted four months. The fortifications were the strongest in France, and the large garrison under the veteran Marshal Boufflers fought with the utmost determination. Prince Eugene was entrusted with the actual siege operations; Marlborough commanded the covering force of 137 squadrons and 83 battalions. The Duke took up a position 15 miles away on the Scheldt at Helchin, from where he could counter relief attempts by Vendôme from the north or Berwick from the east. But by September 2 the two, having joined forces on the Dendre, had crossed the Scheldt at Tournai, causing Marlborough to fall back towards Lille. In the next fortnight the combined French armies, which considerably outnumbered Marlborough's forces, made three attempts to outflank the Duke and reach Lille. But each time they were outmanoeuvred and found their path blocked by a force which Vendôme could not raise the courage to attack. On September 16 they pulled back to the Scheldt, having at no time got within six miles of the besieged city.

The process of overcoming the formidable defences of "Vauban's masterpiece" moved slowly, Marlborough blaming "the ignorance of our engineers and the want of stores."[104] A serious shortage of ammunition had developed, for by holding the line of the Scheldt the French had been able to cut off supplies coming from Holland through Brussels. Towards the end of September Vendôme sent 22,000 men to intercept a convoy bringing much-needed munitions across country from Ostend; but Marlborough successfully met the threat by dispatching two protecting forces, one of which, under General John Webb, gained an outstanding victory over much superior numbers at Wynendaale. The timely arrival of new materials for the bombardment of Lille brought results. The counterscarp was in Allied hands on October 1, and on the 22nd Boufflers surrendered the city, the citadel still holding out.

Late in November in a last desperate effort to raise the siege the French presented a counter threat by sending the Elector of Bavaria with 15,000 men to besiege Brussels. The Belgian capital was garrisoned by less than 7000 troops, whose morale the governor sought to boost by ordering "a pound of flesh, two quarts of beer, and four large glasses of brandy to be distributed to each soldier every day *gratis*."[105] Probably more stimulating than these excellent measures was the news that Marlborough was on his way to the rescue. On November 25, after feinting northwards towards Ghent, he

suddenly struck eastward to the Scheldt. The enemy, taken completely by surprise, offered little resistance. Wide-flanking columns under Cadogan and Lottum forced passages above and below Oudenarde, where Marlborough's main body crossed in time to capture 1000 of the enemy's rear-guard. In a single stroke the Scheldt fortifications were lost to the enemy, whose garrisons fled north to Ghent or south to Tournai. By the 28th the Duke was at Alost, where he learned that Max Emmanuel had abruptly abandoned the siege of Brussels and retired to Mons, in his haste leaving his guns behind him.

The citadel at Lille fell on December 10, Boufflers and 7000 survivors marching out with all the honours of war. The garrison's determined resistance had cost the Allies 15,000 casualties, many having been incurred from the enemy's "hellish inventions of throwing of bombs, boiling pitch, tar, oil and brimstone with scalding water and such like combustible from the outworks."[106] On word of this final blow King Louis called it a day and ordered his armies into winter quarters, counting on holding Ghent and Bruges as a base for operations in the spring. But Marlborough, in spite of the lateness of the season, had other ideas. A few days before Lille fell he had written to Lord Godolphin, "I think we must have Ghent and Bruges, let it cost what it will."[107] Favoured by unusually good December weather he moved his siege train north by water and laid siege to Ghent, the trenches being opened on Christmas Eve. Reversing their procedure at Lille, Marlborough directed the operations at the walls, with Eugene commanding the covering army. Although the place was strongly held by 19 squadrons and 36 battalions, it capitulated with unexpected suddenness on January 2. On the same day the Bruges magistrates arrived to surrender their city.

All conquests made by the French early in 1708 had now been recovered. There had been good news too from the Mediterranean. The British fleet had needed a winter base there from which it could watch Toulon. Two days after the battle of Oudenarde Marlborough had written to General Stanhope, the British Commander in Spain, "I am so entirely convinced that nothing can be done effectually without the fleet, that I conjure you, if possible, to take Port Mahon".[108] This harbour on the island of Minorca was considered the finest in the Mediterranean. In September an English fleet under Admiral Sir John Leake, having captured Sardinia for Charles III, rendezvoused off Minorca with a force of 2000 troops brought by Stanhope from Barcelona. Fort St. Philip, covering the harbour, was successfully invested and after a brief siege surrendered, putting Port Mahon and the whole island in British hands for the next fifty years.

Marlborough could look back upon his seventh, and in many respects his greatest, campaign of the war with considerable satisfaction. Ably assisted by his great comrade in arms, the Prince of Savoy (though at all times bearing the full responsibility himself for what was done), the Duke, despite constant ill-health and harassing by political opponents in England, had pursued his aims with a skill and ruthless determination which had completely outmanoeuvred the French and left them thoroughly demoralized. His field of operations had been the whole of Western Flanders from the Bruges Canal to the French frontier, an area in which he had convincingly demonstrated by his amazing marches the supreme importance of mobility in an army. In a little over six months he had twice saved the Belgian capital; on the banks of the Scheldt he had fought and won a "twentieth-century battle" which proved to be a major turning point in the war; he had reduced the most powerful fortress on the French border, while neutralizing every attempt by the enemy to sever his communications; and finally by the recovery of the key cities along the northern waterways he had secured for his army a quiet occupation of their winter quarters and assurance of opening "with advantage the next campaign". In no other year did he demonstrate so brilliantly the "touch of the gambler"—and yet the risks he took were based on a shrewd appreciation of his opponent's capabilities and limitations, and must appear justified by their successful results.

Well might he write to Godolphin at the beginning of January: "The campaign is now ended to my own heart's desire."[109]

## CHAPTER VIII

# Malplaquet, 1709

### Negotiations for Peace

The overtures for peace which Louis XIV had unsuccessfully made after Ramillies were renewed after Oudenarde, the first negotiations taking place secretly between the French Foreign Minister, the Marquis de Torcy, and Heinsius, the Dutch Grand Pensionary. During the autumn of 1708 Marlborough carried on personal negotiations with the French in an exchange of letters with his nephew, the Duke of Berwick, with whom he had kept in correspondence despite (or because of) the latter's presence in the enemy's camp. These exchanges ended abruptly in November, however, when the French, who had not then lost the line of the Scheldt or the Bruges Canal, professed to attribute Marlborough's approaches to concern for his own precarious situation in the field, and stipulated that the evacuation of their territory and the restoration of Lille should be a condition of any armistice.

The new year saw the commencement of formal negotiations at The Hague, with Marlborough under instruction from his Government to make the maximum demands upon the French. The successes of 1708 had encouraged the English people to believe that the enemy was in no position to fight another campaign. France was exhausted from many years of war and Louis could no longer be deaf to the clamour of the population, who were reduced to extreme wretchedness and despondency and were indeed facing famine as a result of a prolonged winter's frost "which had destroyed the fruits of the earth in the germ". But Marlborough was under no illusion regarding French capabilities. In mid-February he wrote to the Lord Treasurer:

> I am far from thinking the King of France so low as he is thought in England, and, as I am afraid, will appear very quickly; for it is hardly to be credited the reports the people make me, whom I employ on the frontier, of the vast numbers of troops they have in all their towns, and that all their villages and farm-houses between the Sambre and the Meuse are full of their horse.[110]

Progress at The Hague was slow, as the French representatives reluctantly conceded the Allied claims point by point. Besides recognizing the right of the Hapsburg Archduke (Charles III) to the Spanish inheritance, France was now ready to acknowledge Queen Anne and expel the "Old Pretender", demolish Dunkirk (for long a base for privateers preying on merchantmen in the English Channel), hand over Alsace to the Empire and Newfoundland to England, and give the Dutch a protective barrier of fortresses from Ypres to Charleroi. But the final memorandum of terms which Torcy sent back to Versailles at the end of May contained two humiliating articles which the Allies had inserted as safeguards for French compliance. These demanded that Louis should himself assist in expelling his grandson from Spain if Philip failed to leave within two months, and that should Spain not be evacuated within that time, the armistice would be void, and six fortresses which the French were required to hand over as a pledge of good faith would be forfeited to the Allies. Acceptance of these conditions would have placed Louis completely at the mercy of the Allies. He rejected them, and the war went on.

### The Siege of Tournai

Marlborough had not waited for the final breakdown in negotiations to take the field, although the late termination of the 1708 campaign and the backward spring, which delayed the growth of green fodder, prevented an early start in 1709. Enthusiasm for a continuation of operations was stronger in England than in Holland or the Empire, and the increase of 25,000 men in Marlborough's forces came mostly as a result of the English Parliament's vote of £7,000,000 for the year's campaign. At the beginning of May Marlborough wrote, "Our troops were never in better order nor the enemy's in worse."[111]

But for once the Duke was underestimating his foe. Although the French army had been reduced to a state of destitution by the national poverty and the unparalleled severity of the winter, they had found in their very adversity a stimulus to greater endeavour. Louis XIV capitalized on the harshness of the Allied terms to kindle in his people a burning

patriotism which showed itself in a determination to fight on. Above all, he gave the command of his main army to the brilliant Marshal Villars, whom all recognized as the man who had stopped Marlborough on the Moselle in 1705. The French soldiers had confidence in him as in no other leader. He vigorously set about improving conditions in his army, obtaining for it a priority in the allocation of available food. The wealthy followed the example of Marshal Boufflers in sending their plate to the mint so that soldiers might eat. Peasants flocked to the colours to avoid starvation. By the end of June, when campaigning started, Villars had nearly 90,000 men to oppose Marlborough's 120,000. With this force, inferior in numbers and equipment and badly undernourished (a regiment received full rations only on the days it marched) the French marshal had little choice about his course of action. To halt the Allied advance on Paris, and preserve his army (for undoubtedly France would not be able to raise another) he must adopt defensive tactics and exercise extreme caution. He therefore constructed the Lines of La Bassée, a strong system of field fortifications 40 miles long, stretching from a point on the Lys west of Béthune to the Scarpe at Douai. This position blocked the Allied path southward from Lille, at the same time providing Villars with a base from which he could strike suddenly if a favourable occasion arose.

When in mid-June the Allied council of war at Marlborough's headquarters between Menin and Courtrai were discussing plans for the coming campaign they had to decide between three possible courses of action. Public opinion in England clamoured for a direct march on the French capital. But an examination of the Lines of La Bassée—Cadogan is reported to have made a personal reconnaissance, disguised as a French peasant—had revealed their strength, and it was unanimously decided that a frontal assault would not be feasible. As an alternative Marlborough, hoping to revive his scheme of the previous year, advocated the capture of Ypres as a preliminary to operations down the coast to Abbeville, and thence to Paris. Eugene, looking to the inland flank, favoured an assault on Tournai, on the Scheldt, and was supported by the Dutch and German leaders in the council. On June 24 it was decided to attack Tournai.

This fortress was regarded as the strongest in Europe after Lille, though held by a garrison much reduced below normal numbers, and considerably underprovisioned. To conceal his true intention Marlborough made ostentatious preparations pointing to either an assault of the western end of Villars' lines or a siege of Ypres, and added conviction to the latter possibility by moving the siege train forward to nearby Menin. To meet this threat to his left flank Villars transferred forces from his right, including the battalions from the Tournai garrison. Then on the evening of June 26 Marlborough's whole army began advancing south-westward as though to attack La Bassée, but after marching for two hours, turned abruptly to its left and headed eastward. As so many of them had done on previous excursions, the troops marched all night, unaware of their destination. Daylight found them in sight of Tournai, and investment of the city was completed by nightfall. The siege train made the long journey down the Lys from Menin to Ghent and then up the Scheldt, arriving, despite French attempts to block the latter river, on July 10.

Marlborough himself directed the siege operations, with Eugene commanding the covering army to the south-west. The assailants suffered heavily from mining operations carried on by the depleted but none the less determined garrison, and many fierce subterranean struggles took place as Allied sappers penetrated the galleries which underlay the fortifications. On July 30 the town capitulated, and after five more weeks of bitter fighting the citadel was taken. The cost to the besiegers had been 5000 casualties.

With the main French army resting safely behind the double row of trenches of the La Bassée lines, it might have been expected that the only operations for the Allies to undertake now would be the reduction of more fortresses, in the hope of further weakening the enemy and hastening his ultimate collapse. But such was not to be the case. While Tournai was still under siege the high command on both sides adopted a very much more aggressive attitude. Louis XIV relaxed the rigid restrictions earlier imposed upon Villars, and gave him freedom to seek an encounter in the field. Marlborough was notified of the great desire of the Allied representatives at The Hague "that we should undertake something of consequence". On August 18 he hastened to reply to Heinsius that "the prince and myself . . . shall neglect no opportunity of undertaking what we can judge practicable . . . and that [if] the temper of your people are such that they will not be satisfied unless there be action, we must then take our measures agreeable to that".[112] Thus both contenders were started upon the road to the bloodiest battle of the century.

If further sieges were to be undertaken—and there was no other course unless the French moved out into the open—the Allies had to look well out to the flanks for their next objective. Béthune, Arras, Douai and Valenciennes in the centre were too well protected by the La Bassée lines; but the capture of either Ypres in the west or Condé or Mons in the east would outflank Villars' positions. Decision fell on Mons, as being the least strongly held; it was hoped too that an Allied move in that direction might provoke Villars to come out into the open and thereby bring on the battle which Marlborough sought. Several days before Tournai fell the Duke and Eugene had moved the bulk of their forces westward

to a position in front of the French lines opposite Douai, and from there they secretly dispatched Lord Orkney with a detachment of 20 squadrons and all the grenadiers in the army to seize St. Ghislain, a minor fortress six miles west of Mons which guarded the line of the Haine, one of the Scheldt's tributaries.

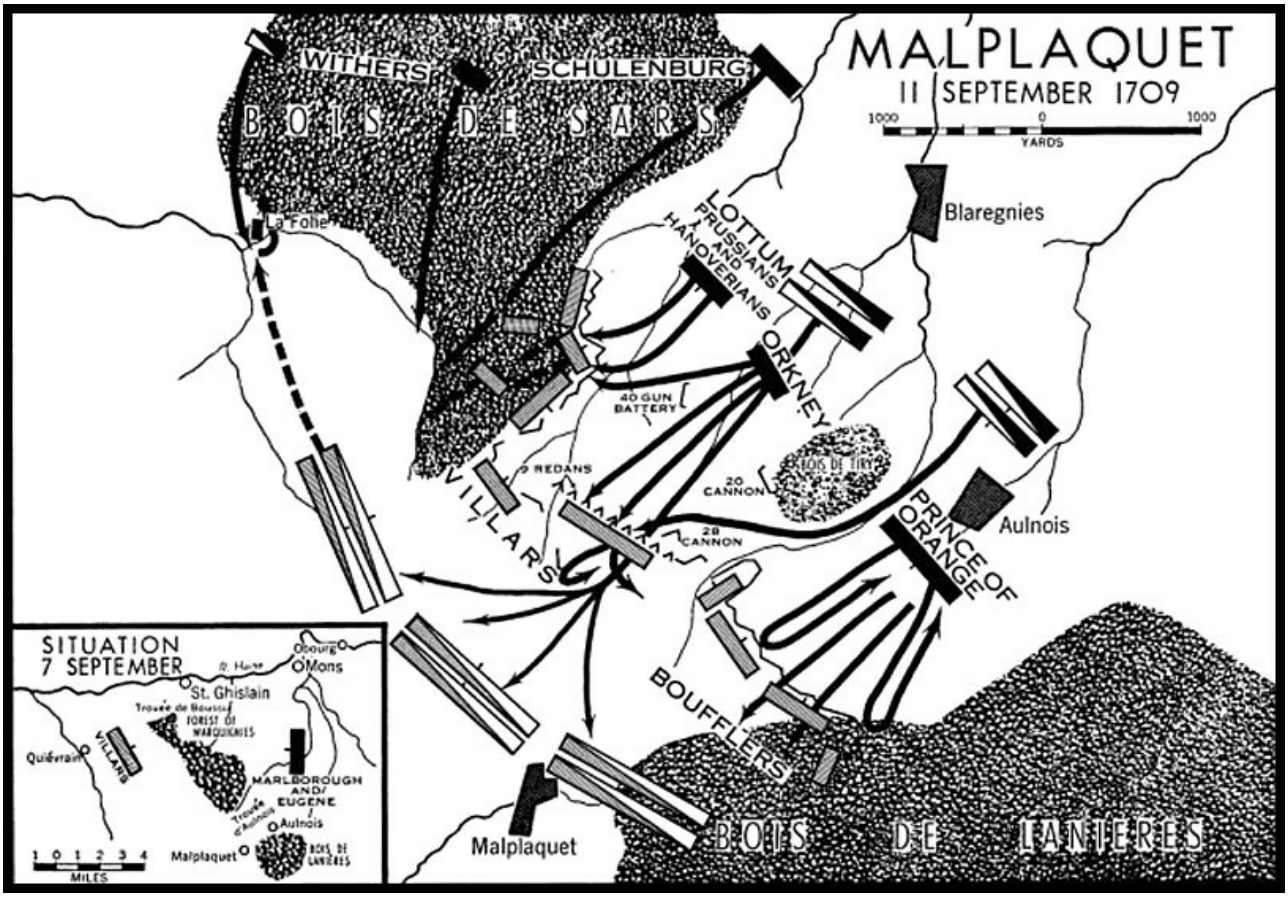
The fall of Tournai was the signal for the main forces to move. On the afternoon of the 3rd a band of 60 squadrons and 4000 foot marched eastward under the Prince of Hesse-Cassel with orders from Marlborough to help Orkney take St. Ghislain if it were not too strongly held. Behind them came Cadogan with another 40 squadrons, followed by the remainder of the Allied army. In a remarkably rapid march through pouring rain Hesse-Cassel reached St. Ghislain, and learning from Orkney that it was garrisoned in strength pushed on along the north bank of the Haine, to cross at Obourg, three miles east of Mons. In 56 hours he had covered 53 miles. Without pausing he wheeled to his right around the southern outskirts of the city, passed unopposed through some defence lines running south-east from Mons to the Sambre, and on the morning of September 6 took up a position facing west—the direction from which any move by Villars must come. Early on the 7th Marlborough's main body followed across the Haine, and by nightfall had joined Hesse-Cassel west of Mons.

The sudden coup caught Villars completely unprepared. Determined to save Mons, he rushed 30 squadrons of dragoons eastward in an attempt to stop Hesse-Cassel at the Sambre lines; but they arrived too late, the three garrison regiments having fled at the Allied approach. The dragoons fell back to Quiévrain, a dozen miles west of Mons on the Valenciennes road, to await the arrival of the main French army, which Villars was hurrying eastward by forced marches. The Marshal himself arrived on the 7th, and while waiting for his infantry to come up spent part of the day in a reconnaissance in force towards the Allied positions. In the evening he brought his army forward to a point about two miles east of Quiévrain. During the day Marshal Boufflers, who was held in a respect only surpassed by that accorded Villars, had arrived from Paris bringing "his cuirass and his weapons with him".[113] No one in the French army now doubted that a fight was at hand.

## Preparations for Battle

The morning of September 8 found the armies less than eight miles apart, each watching to see what the other might do. The whole area from the Haine to the Sambre was fairly heavily wooded, and between the opposing forces stretched a broad forest barrier which an army might pass at only two places. The northern gap, called the Trouée de Boussu, lay between the Haine at St. Ghislain and the Forest of Warquignies, which at its southern end merged into the Bois de Sars. The southern gap, the mile-wide Trouée d'Aulnois, separated the Sars wood from the Bois de Lanières, which reached southward towards the Sambre. For Villars the shortest route to Mons lay through the Boussu Gap, and the direction of his approach suggested that this was the path he had chosen to take. But the Marshal, taking a leaf out of Marlborough's book, was only feinting. Late on the 8th his cavalry seized the forward edges of both gaps, and reconnaissance of the Trouée d'Aulnois by Marlborough and Eugene early on the 9th discovered the French army moving southward down the west side of the woods. The escorting cavalry squadrons clashed vigorously with the French advanced guard, but were soon driven off, and by midday Villars had occupied the Aulnois gap in strength. He now held a decided advantage over his opponents, for though Marlborough, on learning of the French shift, had immediately brought his own army southward in a parallel move, Eugene's troops, which had been covering the Boussu gap, were still six miles to the north.

Villars had boasted that he would fight a battle to prevent the siege of Mons, yet instead of attacking on the 9th he began digging in. In acting thus he may have felt the need of more time for deployment or perhaps the boldness of Marlborough's advanced squadrons in contesting his occupancy of the gap had convinced him that Eugene's troops were close at hand. Above all was the psychological factor—the realization that his army was the last that France could muster, and the disquieting thought that no French commander had yet beaten the redoubtable Marlborough in battle. Nor did the Allies attack that day, the commanders deciding in a council of war to await the arrival of Eugene.




**Historical Section, G.S.**

By the morning of September 10 he had joined Marlborough, and their combined forces now equalled or outnumbered the enemy's. The rapidly growing system of entrenchments which the French were constructing made it clear that Villars had decided not to risk an encounter in the open, but to invite an Allied attack and oppose it from a position whose natural advantages had been reinforced by elaborate field fortifications. Yet Marlborough made no offensive move on the 10th, even though postponement of action gave Villars valuable time to extend and improve his defences. Had they wished, the Allies might have thrown up field works of their own in front of Villars and holding him thus immobile detached a force to reduce Mons. The Allied delay, however, was occasioned by no indecision as to objectives. Marlborough had determined to attack Villars, for the defeat of the French army, even at a heavy cost, would be of far greater strategical significance than the capture of Mons. But there were 19 battalions and ten squadrons under General Withers still on the march from Tournai, and it was judged that their presence would outbalance any advantage that a day's pause might give the defenders.

On the 10th Villars, having done all he could on his main line of entrenchments, began work on an alternative position about 700 yards to the rear, which would give him more space for the employment of his cavalry. However this second line was not completed in time. His formidable forward line followed the crest of a ridge which ran between the Lanières and Sars woods.[114] In order to provide the maximum field of fire it conformed closely to the contours of the ground, an arrangement which resulted in a number of salients and re-entrants decidedly advantageous to the defenders. In the open ground in the centre the line consisted of a triple row of trenches next to the southern wood, extended to the left by a series of nine redans (earthworks with high breastworks in front and on each flank but open to the rear to allow the defenders to retire if overrun and to give the enemy no cover if he occupied them). Between these redans were wide gaps for the passage of the supporting cavalry. At either extremity the advanced wooded flanks concealed rows of entrenchments behind "abatis" of felled trees, whose sharpened branches pointed directly towards the expected attack. These defences were concentrated in the greatest strength at the northern end of the line, where it jutted forward nearly a mile to form a right-angled salient about the skirts of the Bois de Sars. The whole formidable position was supported by 80 guns in numerous entrenched batteries, the largest of which was a 20' gun battery at the right centre, about 500 yards from the edge of the Bois de Lanières. "I don't believe ever army in the field was attacked in such a post", wrote Orkney. "From their right to the left I may call it a counter-scarp and traverse, in many places, three, four and five retrenchments one behind the other."[115]

To man these defences Villars assigned 45 battalions to the right flank, to hold the wood and the adjacent entrenchments; at the right centre, next to the 20-gun battery, he placed 17 battalions, which included the famous French and Swiss Guards; in the redans of the left centre over to the edge of the Bois de Sars were another 17 battalions, among them those of the Irish Brigade; and on the extreme left in the wood itself was a corps of 23 of his best regiments under the Chevalier d'Albergotti, with a further 17 battalions in reserve west of the wood. The cavalry, 260 squadrons strong, were massed in rear of the centre, just in front of the village of Malplaquet, which was to give its name to the battlefield. Villars entrusted the command of the right flank to Boufflers, taking the responsibility of the left himself. Thus when the Allies attacked on the morning of the 11th, they were to be faced by an equal force of well-entrenched soldiers, who were imbued with a new fighting spirit and commanded by Louis XIV's two most skilful generals.

Marlborough spent some time on the 10th carefully investigating the French positions and planning his attack. He completed the investment of Mons and sent a detachment of 18 battalions to storm St. Ghislain, which Villars had stripped of all but 200 men. Thus he secured an unimpeded line of retreat to Tournai should the battle go wrong, and a shortened means of approach for Withers. The Duke's design for the battle was the familiar one that he had used at Blenheim and Ramillies. He would cause the enemy to weaken his centre by assailing both flanks, and then, having pierced the centre with his infantry, send his massed cavalry through for the deciding encounter with the enemy's horse in the rear.

On the morning of the 11th divine service was read in the Allied camp at three o'clock, and the subsequent deployment was carried out under cover of a dense fog. Shortly after six all were in position, Marlborough's army (which included the forces of the States-General) on the left and centre, and Eugene's Imperial troops on the right. The main flank attack would be made on the Allied right, where the menacing salient at the edge of the Bois de Sars would come under converging attacks by two forces. General Schulenberg with 36 of Eugene's German battalions would strike from the north-east, deriving some advantage from an approach masked by the trees, while Lottum with 22 Prussian and Hanoverian battalions from Marlborough's right would advance towards the French centre and then swing to their right to assault the south-eastern face of the wood. To assist in the storming of this strong position a Grand Battery of 40 guns had been dug in during the night within range of the salient. Another 28-gun battery was placed opposite the French centre. The remaining 32 Allied cannon were assigned as "guns of accompaniment" to the infantry.

The attack on the left against the Bois de Lanières was to be secondary to that on the right, and to start half an hour later. It would be made from the vicinity of the village of Aulnois by thirty Dutch battalions under Count Tilly and the Prince of Orange (the veteran Overkirk had died outside Lille the previous autumn).[116] In the centre the Duke of Orkney, with fifteen British battalions drawn up on the right of the small Bois de Tiry, had the task of covering Lottum's left and, when the French front should have been sufficiently weakened, advancing to occupy the enemy redans. The Allied cavalry, 200 squadrons strong, were massed in the rear to await the moment for the decisive charge, but ready in the meantime to exploit any gains which the infantry might make in any part of the field. A special role was assigned to General Withers' detachment, which had arrived from Tournai late on the 10th and made camp four miles south of the Haine. Originally it had been intended that Withers' troops should support the Dutch on the left, but in view of their late arrival and the fatigue of their 35-mile march from Tournai, a last-minute change of plan kept them on the Allied right, in fact outside the main order of battle. Their new task was to advance across or around the northern part of the Sars Wood, in order to turn the French left flank.

## Malplaquet, September 11, 1709

Just before nine o'clock a salvo of fire from all the Allied artillery gave the signal to attack. On the right Schulenberg, with 20,000 Germans marching in a triple line, plunged into the wood, while on his left Lottum's battalions advanced in column towards the French centre, to turn sharply to their right after passing the great battery. A bitter struggle soon developed in the Wood of Sars. In spite of the Allied superior numbers (fully 60 battalions assaulted the vital salient, which was defended by one quarter of that strength), the first line of attackers was thrown back at the fringe of the wood. The second and third lines pressed forward and overcame the outlying entrenchments, but as they fought their way inwards they were stopped by the successive lines of Albergotti's stoutly manned fortifications. Casualties were heavy, for in the close hand-to-hand fighting quarter was neither asked nor granted. Disorganized by the difficulty of movement through the trees, the Allied troops fell back before vigorous French counter-attacks. At this point Orkney on his own initiative detached two of his own battalions, the 1st (Grenadier) Guards and the Royal Scots, and sent them under heavy covering fire from the Grand Battery to help Lottum's hard pressed infantry. With this timely assistance the crucial angle of the wood was repossessed and held.

Villars now prepared to counter-attack Orkney with a dozen battalions from his centre, but called off the charge when he saw Marlborough, who was directing the battle from an exposed rise behind Orkney's position, quickly place himself at the head of a strong force of cavalry to meet the threat. Bitterly contesting every yard the defenders of the Wood of Sars were gradually forced backward, and shortly before midday Schulenberg and Lottum gained the western edge and began forming up in the open fields. During the morning General Withers had been carrying out his allotted role. While his ten cavalry squadrons, augmented by another ten released to him by Prince Eugene, were making their way around the northern perimeter to the village of La Folie, his foot-soldiers had advanced steadily through the wood, their turning movement gradually forcing back the French left.

In the meantime things had been going badly for the Allies on the other flank. The initial advance of the Dutch infantry had halted just outside artillery range as planned. Then, after the prescribed half-hour's pause, the impetuous young Prince of Orange, without waiting for Tilly's orders, had led his force forward. The Dutch battalions (including two Scottish regiments in the Dutch service) heavily outnumbered, advanced courageously against the French right—some assaulting the positions in the Bois de Lanières and others attacking the triple fortifications in the open. They suffered heavily from deadly round shot and grape from the 20-gun battery and the volleys of musket-fire which beset them from front and flank. Yet they carried the first line of trenches in two places before being driven back with staggering losses as Boufflers began throwing in his reserves. Subsequent attempts were equally unsuccessful, the attackers undergoing "such a butchering that the oldest general alive never saw the like".[117] Five thousand fell in half an hour, among them large numbers of the famous Blue Guards, pride of the Dutch army. By the time that the Prince of Hesse-Cassel with 20 squadrons had extricated them from the battle, the Dutch had lost more than half their number. A more daring commander than Boufflers might have exploited this French advantage by a general advance of his right wing, which could have spelled disaster to the Allies; but the opportunity passed, and before long Marlborough had restored his left flank with hastily gathered reserves.

While the Allies were being repulsed at the south end of his line Villars had been fully occupied with his left, where he now planned to deliver a large-scale counter-attack. Up to this stage his centre had been assailed only by artillery fire (though this had been costly enough, particularly to his cavalry in the rear, who had suffered numerous casualties from "overs" and ricochets). Since Boufflers could spare him no reinforcement from the right, Villars felt justified in transferring northward a number of infantry units from the centre, among them the exiled Irish Brigade. This diversion of strength was what Marlborough had been waiting for. The tactics so successfully employed at Blenheim had worked again here in giving the superiority he needed at the right time. Shortly before one o'clock the 40-gun battery was moved forward, and Orkney's thirteen battalions charged the enemy centre. The few remaining defenders were quickly put to flight, the redans taken, and through the gaps between them 30 Dutch squadrons trotted forward to take their turn in the battle.

Quickly forming up behind the French line they charged the enemy horse drawn up in the rear. The ensuing struggle was fought on very even terms. Once again it was the Maison du Roi, flower of the French cavalry, led by Marshal Boufflers himself, that stopped the Dutch squadrons and drove them back. But now the British and Prussian cavalry with Marlborough at their head came pouring through the captured lines. The French, helped by being already in line of battle, launched six successive charges which hampered the deployment of the Allied horse. Each of these counter-attacks suffered heavily from the volleying of Orkney's infantry in the captured field works, and from the point-blank fire of ten cannon which had been hastily brought forward to the ridge. "I really believe", wrote Orkney later, "had not ye foot been there they would have drove our horse out of the field."[118] Thus aided, the cavalry, which included such famous British regiments as the Royal Scots Greys and the King's Dragoon Guards, formed up in order and flung themselves against the French. With the arrival of Eugene and the Imperialist squadrons there were 30,000 Allied troopers engaged, and for more than an hour a deadly cavalry struggle, the fiercest of the whole war, was waged over the heath beside the village of Malplaquet.

And now we must return to the situation west of the Bois de Sars, where along a mile of front both sides had spent more than an hour preparing for fresh encounters. They were about equal in number, for, as we have seen, Marshal Villars had reinforced the original defenders of the wood with his reserve units and the battalions drawn untimely from his centre, so that altogether some 50 battalions faced the diminished forces of Schulenberg and Lottum.

The action opened with a sudden charge by eight French squadrons upon Withers' cavalry, who were in the process of deploying north of La Folie. The Allied horse were completely routed, six squadrons being cut to pieces. Cheered by this success the French launched their counter-stroke, even as news reached Villars that Orkney's infantry were breaking into his weakened lines in the centre. From the edge of the wood the Allied foot, personally directed by Eugene, returned

volley for volley. By a queer turn of fate the French Royal Regiment of Ireland was engaged and repulsed by the 18th Foot (Royal Irish), of Withers' command. The losses on both sides were exceedingly heavy. Villars himself was wounded and carried unconscious from the field, Albergotti and the commander of the left centre becoming casualties at the same time. With the command suddenly thus disorganized a staff officer called off the counter-attack and withdrew the fifty battalions out of Allied range. As this retreat of the French left began, Eugene, disregarding a musket shot wound in the head, hurried back to the centre, where he was in time, as we have noted, to lead his cavalry in the final stages of the battle.

On the southern flank the Allies were in full control, the indomitable Prince of Orange, backed by Hesse-Cassel's cavalry, having finally overrun the French positions. With both his wings in retreat, Boufflers, on whom the whole command had now devolved, broke off the cavalry action shortly before three o'clock, realising that the day was lost. He ordered a general retirement, to be covered by rear-guard action. But the Allied infantry and cavalry had fought too hard that day to take part in any great pursuit. A few squadrons followed the French left wing as far as Quiévrain, without seriously disturbing its orderly withdrawal. The exhausted main Allied forces encamped on the battlefield to bury the dead and begin the care of 15,000 wounded. That evening Marlborough penned a short postscript to a letter he had started to the Duchess two days before.

> I am so tired that I have but strength enough to tell you that we have had this day a very bloody battle; the first part of the day we beat their foot, and afterwards their horse. God Almighty be praised, it is now in our powers to have what peace we please, and I may be pretty well assured of never being in another battle.[119]

It had indeed been "a very bloody battle". The Allied casualties numbered close to 20,000, of which the Dutch had suffered more than half; the French losses were estimated at nearly 14,000[120]—a comparison which justified Villars' observation to King Louis, "If God gives us another defeat like this, your Majesty's enemies will be destroyed."[121] Marlborough's enemies in England charged him with a heavy "butcher's bill", although British casualties were less than 600 killed and 1300 wounded, a considerably lower figure than for the battle of Blenheim. The Dutch exhibited no rancour over their heavy proportion of the total cost. "Your High Mightinesses cannot but be sensible", wrote Goslinga and his fellow Deputies to the States-General, "that the enemy could not be forced from three entrenchments well provided with cannon, without a considerable loss."[122] The expressions of gratitude which reached Marlborough from The Hague were evidence of the changed attitude of the Dutch Government, which now seemed as determined to press the war relentlessly against the French as it had once been anxious to seek a separate peace.

There was nothing now (except a prolonged period of bad weather) to hinder the siege of Mons, which was carried out as rather an anti-climax to the battle. The siege train was brought forward in three large road convoys from Brussels, and after considerable battering of its walls the fortress capitulated on October 20. Of the 2000 troops who formed the garrison the French were allowed to march to Maubeuge, and the Spaniards and Bavarians to Namur. With the surrender of Mons Marlborough wrote on the 23rd, "We are obliged to conclude our campaign, through the scarcity of forage, and in two days the troops will be moving towards their winter-quarters."[123] Thus the most tangible gains of the year 1709 were the capture of Tournai and Mons, the last French strongholds in Flanders and Brabant.

Where does Malplaquet stand among the Duke of Marlborough's great battles? If it had been fought in the opening years of the war there is little doubt that it would have been hailed by the Allied nations as a major triumph. But people had been spoiled by the successes of Blenheim, Ramillies and Oudenarde, and they could muster only limited enthusiasm for an encounter which had cost the Allies as many casualties as these three victories combined, without achieving any spectacular results. Yet tactically Malplaquet was as brilliant an action as Marlborough had ever fought. At the beginning the odds might seem to have been very much against him. His armies had enjoyed no great numerical superiority over the enemy forces, whose morale was exceedingly high, who were skilfully led by a very able commander, and, above all, who had the advantage of an exceptionally strong position.

We have noted that Marlborough had to decide between tackling this formidable situation and the alternative of containing Villars where he was and turning to the siege of Mons. But the Duke realized that the defeat of the French army was of far greater importance than the capture of Mons, and having selected this *Aim* he maintained it with the utmost vigour. The execution of his plan, simple like those of his other battles, depended perhaps more than any of them on a close *Co-operation* between the various arms. Not only was the employment of Orkney's infantry with the cavalry a first class example of combined tactics, but even more outstanding (in a period when artillery was not noted for its mobility) was the contribution of the guns in supporting the assaulting infantry, smashing the enemy's cavalry charges,

and even putting out of action sixteen of the opposing cannon.

Once again at Malplaquet, as in his former battles, Marlborough demonstrated his skill in securing the desired *Concentration of Force* by causing the enemy to denude his lines at the point he had selected for the decisive blow. And although some Dutch critics might argue that support by Withers' detachment in the role originally assigned to it would have restored the balance of the left flank and lessened the disastrous casualties there, we must credit Marlborough with foreseeing that its employment on the right would (as in fact it did) turn the scale in a very even struggle in that sector—a good example of *Economy of Effort*. Finally, the tremendous casualties suffered by both sides at Malplaquet bear testimony to the complete commitment of attacker and defender to *Offensive Action*. There is no finer tribute to the persistence with which the Allied infantry adhered to this principle than the words of the French official account of the battle:

> After four hours of a bloody and obstinate combat in which their left had failed and their right been brought to a standstill, far from renouncing the role of the attacker, in one final effort they succeeded in breaking the resistance of their opponents, affirming with no uncertain voice the immense superiority of the offensive.[124]

## CHAPTER IX

# The Lines of "Ne Plus Ultra", 1711

### The Campaign of 1710

Although after Malplaquet Marlborough had written, "it is now in our powers to have what peace we please", he was still to fight two more campaigns, after which the war was to drag on yet another year. It is not surprising that his conduct of operations in 1710 lacked some of the vigour and imagination which had characterized his leadership in other campaigns. He had to be extremely cautious, for there were not wanting powerful enemies at home ready to seize on the slightest failure in the field as an excuse for degrading him and encompassing the downfall of those ministers who supported him.

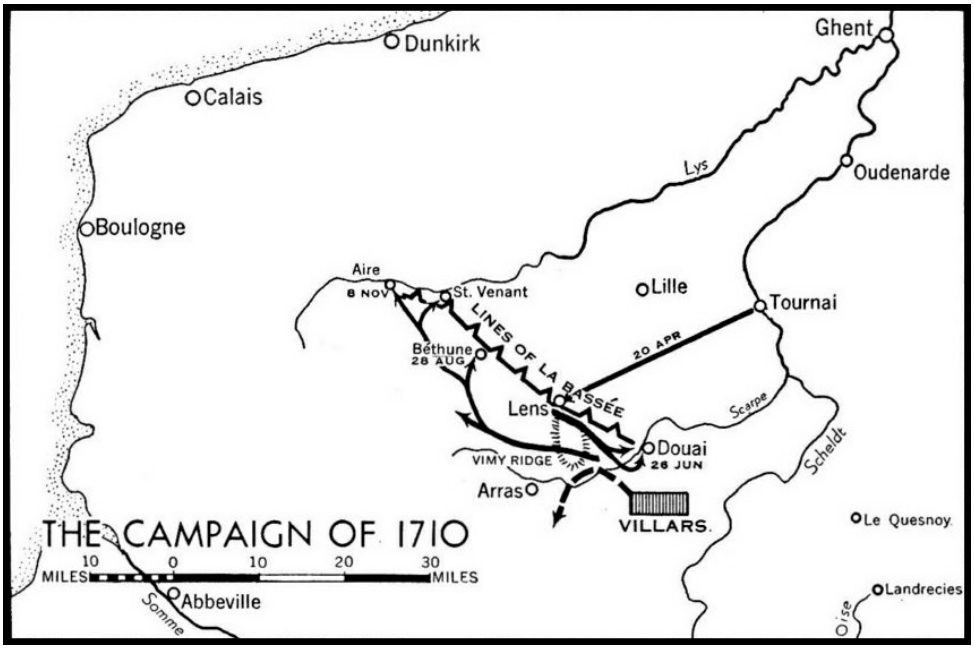
His relations with the Queen had never been worse. In the autumn of 1709, realizing that the uncertain political situation in England threatened the security of his own position, Marlborough had imprudently asked Anne to make him Commander-in-Chief for life. The Queen's refusal provoked an angry letter from the Duke, complaining of her attachment to Mrs. Abigail Masham, who had replaced the Duchess in the royal confidence. The Tory opposition made the most of the unfortunate episode, accusing Marlborough of seeking to become "Perpetual Dictator", and even his Whig colleagues were hostile. The Queen's antagonism increased when he successfully opposed her award of the command of a Dragoon regiment to Mrs. Masham's brother, Colonel John Hill, which she had proffered without first consulting him as Commander-in-Chief. In the summer of 1710 Anne compelled him against his will to promote Hill; and in the following year the new Brigadier added little to an inconspicuous military career when he commanded the force which accompanied Admiral Walker's ill-fated expedition to Canada.

Before the campaign of 1710 could start, Marlborough had other less personal problems to deal with. Two events had taken place to weaken further the ties binding together the Grand Alliance and seriously increase the Duke's difficulties in securing the necessary forces for the coming operations. In the previous October England and Holland had signed a Barrier Treaty, which secured Dutch support for a continuation of the war (particularly in order to win Spain for Charles III) by guaranteeing Holland the right to garrison a large number of cities and fortresses on the French Border and in the Spanish Netherlands. The disadvantages which this agreement imposed on the Spanish Netherlands aroused the antagonism of the Emperor, just as the proposed Dutch acquisition of Upper Guelderland (astride the Meuse below Venlo) angered Frederick of Prussia. The other main source of Marlborough's recruiting worries lay in the threatened transfer of Denmark, Prussia, Saxony and Hanover into a northern war over division of the abandoned territories of Charles XII of Sweden, who had been overthrown by Russia at the Battle of Poltava (June, 1709). Only strenuous efforts by English diplomats kept the northern allies from attacking each other over the spoils and withdrawing their 60,000 troops from their commitments against France.

With these difficulties temporarily patched up Marlborough was enabled to take the field in April with a strong force. The early start (a month in advance of normal) caught the French unawares, and gave the Duke unusual freedom in his opening moves. His plan for the campaign was to take the fortresses of Douai and Arras, co-ordinating with the siege of the latter a landing near Abbeville, in order to isolate Boulogne and Calais. The reduction of Douai was a masterly demonstration of the role of a covering army. On the evening of April 20 Marlborough left his area of concentration outside Tournai and marched rapidly south-westward into the plain of Lens, passing the La Bassée Lines without opposition, having covered thirty miles in the first 22 hours. Villars' main army, south of Douai, was unready for battle; short of dry forage, it would be immobile until new growth appeared, and its regiments were still far below strength. On the 22nd Marlborough crossed the Scarpe above Douai, and next day completed the investment of the fortress. Orders were issued for the siege train to be brought up by water from Tournai.

The 8000 defenders were to derive little assistance from outside their walls, but under General Albergotti, the stout-hearted holder of the Wood of Sars, they put up a determined resistance, checking the besiegers with repeated sorties and inflicting heavy casualties upon them. Towards the end of May Villars, at last able to field an army, moved against Marlborough. But the Duke, having placed the siege operations in Eugene's capable hands, was ready. He had used his advantage of time to secure the routes which Villars must use, and although the wily Marshal carried out a number of

rapid manoeuvres during June in attempts to break through to Douai he was thwarted each time by Marlborough's counter-moves. With Malplaquet fresh in their minds the French dared not force a battle. They abandoned Douai and fell back south of the Scarpe to cover Arras. On June 26 the fortress fell, having cost the Allies more than 8000 casualties.




**Historical Section, G.S.**

Instead of proceeding directly against Arras, Marlborough, showing an unusually cautious attitude, decided to improve his communications with Flanders and at the same time clear the path for his projected descent on Abbeville by reducing three fortified towns which lay west of Lille in the upper basin of the Lys—Béthune, St. Venant and Aire. Accordingly he marched westward over Vimy Ridge to take up a well-entrenched position on the watershed between the Scarpe and the Lys, where he could block any attempts by Villars to molest Eugene's siege. The Marshal, however, who claims that he was under orders not to attack, left Béthune to its fate, employing his army on the construction of new defence lines which were to figure prominently in the next year's campaign. Béthune surrendered on August 28 after a siege of six weeks. Without delay St. Venant and Aire, the two remaining fortresses on Marlborough's programme for the year, were invested simultaneously. The former, weakly held, fell within a fortnight, but Aire caused considerably more trouble. Besides having to deal with a resolute garrison in a position made "very strong by art and nature", the besiegers were severely hampered by heavy rains which put them knee-deep in mud and water. It was November 8 before they could force a capitulation. The victory ended a campaign which, though falling short of the aim, had nevertheless brought the Allies substantial gains. The reduction of the four fortresses had made an imposing breach in the defences of the French frontier, and had extended the Allied communications towards France by securing control of the whole of the Lys waterway and of the Scheldt and Scarpe as far as Douai. Even though Villars had not been inveigled into a decisive battle, what progress had been made would materially assist a major offensive next year.

When Marlborough met the Queen on his return to England, she told him not to expect the usual thanks of both Houses; "the reason assigned", says du Bosc, "was that nothing very remarkable had been done in the foregoing campaign."[125] The Duke could no longer count on the support of the ministry, for during the summer Anne had replaced one by one Godolphin and her leading Whig ministers in order to pave the way for a Tory return to power in the November general election. In this she had been influenced by the scheming Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, who now became Chancellor of the Exchequer. The new government would have dismissed Marlborough except for the damaging effect such an action would have had upon the Allied war effort. Although the Tories were anxious to end the war (indeed, unknown to Marlborough, Harley had reopened negotiations with Louis XIV), they saw the need of maintaining military pressure upon France in order to secure the terms they wished. Marlborough must therefore be kept on for a time, since (as the new Chancellor was reminded by a correspondent on the Continent) "his success in the field, his capacity or rather dexterity in council. . . and his personal acquaintance with the heads of the Alliance, and the faith they have in him make him still the great man with them and on whom they depend."[126] Only the representations made by Prince Eugene are said to have prevented the Duke from resigning. The new House of Commons voted £6,000,000 to carry on the war, and in March Marlborough returned to The Hague to set his last campaign in motion.

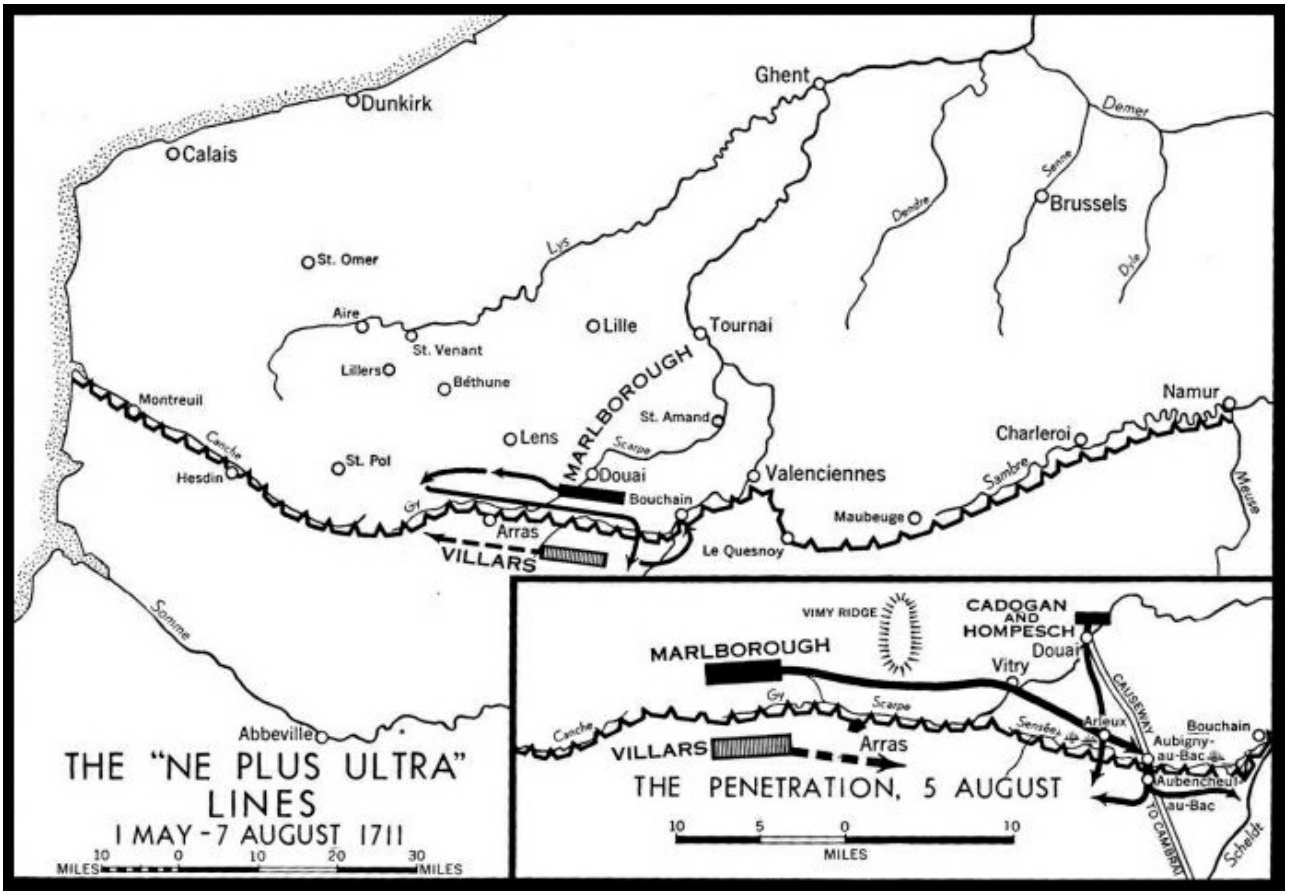
The only remaining theatre of significance was Flanders and the French border, the fighting in Spain having ended

disastrously for the Allies in 1710. In September, after defeating Philip V's Spanish forces at Almenara and Saragossa, an Allied army under Count von Starhemberg had marched on Madrid and led Charles III once more into the capital. But the people of Spain preferred the Bourbon Philip to the Hapsburg Charles, and at the beginning of winter Starhemberg was forced to begin retiring towards the east coast, moving in three columns for better foraging. Louis XIV had reacted to his grandson's two setbacks by sending Marshal Vendôme into Spain with an army gathered from the frontier garrisons. Marching swiftly in pursuit of the Allies Vendôme surprised and surrounded Lord Stanhope's column of 4000 British at Brihuega, taking all captive. The defeat proved to be the deciding blow in the Peninsular War, only Barcelona and one or two other Catalonian cities being held for Austria. For years English statesmen had whipped up flagging Dutch efforts with the pledge, "No Peace without Spain", but these words were soon to be heard no more. Instead, before the year ended, the Marquis of Torcy secretly received this significant and not too creditable message from across the Channel:

> We will no longer insist on the entire restoration of the Monarchy of Spain to the House of Austria . . . and we shall be content provided France and Spain will give us good securities for our commerce; and as soon as we have got what we need and have made our bargain with the two crowns, we will tell our Allies.[127]

## Piercing the "Ne Plus Ultra" Lines

The work begun by Villars on defence positions during the summer of 1710 had been completed during the winter, and when Marlborough took the field in the spring he was confronted by a formidable system of field fortifications stretching across Northern France from the English Channel to the Meuse. This 150-mile barrier was based on a succession of rivers (the Canche, Gy, Scarpe, Sensée, Scheldt, Sambre and Meuse), a number of these having been dammed to inundate the banks. A series of elaborate earthworks protected the only part (about 15 miles) not covered by water or marsh, and the whole was considerably strengthened by the presence of a number of fortresses either in or close to the lines. These included the strongholds of Montreuil, Arras, Bouchain, Valenciennes, Maubeuge, Charleroi and Namur, the last forming the eastern anchor of the system; at the western end the Calais-St. Omer group of fortresses projected well forward to threaten the communications of any hostile effort against the centre. To Villars it seemed impossible that an invading army, even Marlborough's, could advance beyond this position.




**Historical Section, G.S.**

From the beginning of March Marlborough was busy at The Hague getting ready for the campaign. Administrative preparations received his customary careful attention. Numerous letters in his particularly voluminous correspondence at this time reflect his concern that magazines of forage should be ready in time. On March 6 he wrote, "We are doing all that is possible to prevent the enemy's being in the field before us, as they threaten by their early preparations";[128] and a week later he dispatched the Earl of Cadogan "to assemble a body of troops in the plains of Lille, as well to observe the enemy's motions as to cover the boats and convoys going up the rivers with forage, and other provisions for forming our magazines."[129]

There were the usual troubles over manpower. A "corps of neutrality" formed to keep the peace in the Baltic had taken a number of battalions that would otherwise have been available to Marlborough; the King of Prussia held back his expected contribution pending satisfaction over the promise of Guelderland to the Dutch; without warning the English Government withdrew five battalions to accompany Brigadier Hill on his fruitless expedition to Canada (a classic violation of the principle of *Maintenance of the Aim*); and the four French towns captured in 1710 had to be garrisoned. To crown all, on April 17 the Emperor Joseph, long a firm supporter of Marlborough's, died of smallpox. His successor was his brother the Archduke (Charles III of Spain), who in due course became Emperor Charles VI; but pending the election Eugene was called away to command an Imperialist army assembled on the Rhine to block any French intervention. This was to leave Marlborough in mid-June with an army reduced to 94 battalions and 145 squadrons, against Villars' 131 battalions and 187 squadrons.

Yet with this inferiority in numbers Marlborough was to give one last demonstration of his military genius unequalled in his whole career. In nine years of war the French had fallen farther and farther back under Allied pressure, relinquishing in 1703 the fortresses of the Lower Meuse, in 1704 their positions east of the Upper Rhine, the Lines of Brabant in 1705, most of Flanders after Ramillies in 1706, the great fortress of Lille after Oudenarde in 1708, and finally, following the breathing-space which Malplaquet had given, Douai and the Lys fortresses in 1710. Now Villars had drawn a line that was intended to set a limit to further encroachment. At the end of April his army lay behind that part of his water defences formed by the Sensée marshes, with its right at Bouchain and its left eight miles to the west. On May 1 Marlborough posted his army south-east of Douai opposite Villars, and for six weeks the two forces faced each other without action, the Duke reporting that the French were "very busy in fortifying and securing all the passages of the rivers."[130] On June 14 Eugene marched off to the Rhine with all the Imperialist troops, and in order to divert attention from his departure Marlborough shifted his remaining forces a day's march westward into the plain of Lens. If Villars interpreted this as an invitation to battle, he did not accept it, for he was under definite instructions to stay behind his defences.

Three weeks passed with neither side showing any inclination for a further move. But Marlborough was devising the scheme whereby he would force the lines, and on July 6 he took the first step to implement it. He had singled out the Bouchain area as offering the greatest possibilities, for the capture of Bouchain or Cambrai would make the deepest inroad towards Paris. But the flooded Sensée marshes behind which these places lay formed a very strong point in Villars' defence system; for marsh, which can be neither rafted nor bridged, is the most effective obstacle to an army that nature can provide. Two causeways, however, reportedly left for the benefit of the local peasantry, crossed these swamps. The larger of these, nine miles west of Bouchain, carried the main Douai-Paris road between the small villages of Aubigny-au-Bac on the north bank, and Aubencheul-au-Bac on the south. The other was about three miles up the Sensée and was guarded on the north bank by the town of Arleux, which Villars had garrisoned and fortified. As long as the French held Arleux Marlborough could not use either causeway; yet he realized that to seize the place, even if he later destroyed it, would warn Villars of an intended crossing and enable him to concentrate a strong blocking force at the threatened points. The Duke therefore resolved to induce Villars to demolish the place himself.

Arleux's isolated position outside the French defences made it extremely vulnerable, and on the night of July 6 an Allied detachment under General Rantzau captured it without difficulty. Marlborough put in a garrison and strengthened the defences, placing a covering force under General Hompesch between Arleux and Douai. Villars reacted quickly. He attacked the fort on the 9th, and though repulsed caught Hompesch by surprise and inflicted nearly 1000 casualties on him. It has generally been accepted that the failure of Hompesch to take elementary precautions (he is said to have had no sentries out) was part of a deliberate plot to lead on Villars.[131] Marlborough, making no attempt to conceal his anger at his subordinate, reinforced him and strengthened the garrison in Arleux, as though emphasizing his determination to hold it. When on July 20 the Duke marched a score of miles to the north-west and camped south of Lillers, near the source of the Lys, the enemy seemed justified in believing that his main interest in retaining Arleux was as a block to a French raid towards Douai. Villars had paralleled the Allied westward move with his own army, but had left behind a detachment

large enough to deal with Arleux. On July 22 this force attacked the place, whose commander sent Marlborough a frantic call for help. The Duke immediately dispatched Cadogan with 30 squadrons and all the grenadiers in his camp; but Cadogan is reported to have taken "not such haste as the occasion seemed to require", and before he was half way to his destination he received word that Arleux had fallen.

Once again Marlborough paraded his vexation in a manner so contrary to his usual self-control that (even making allowances for his ailing health and his political worries) it must surely have been simulated. Word that Villars had razed the Arleux fortifications provoked a further peevish outburst, and he declared in public "that he would be even with Villars"—all of which was doubtlessly faithfully relayed to the French by their spies. He showed every intention of launching a full-scale assault on the French lines west of Arras, making elaborate reconnaissances of the defences in that sector. But meanwhile he did not neglect to further his true objective. Although the French believed the whole Allied army to be in the Lillers area, Marlborough actually had strong forces much nearer Arleux. At the time of his westward shift he had inconspicuously increased his garrisons in Douai, Lille and Tournai. Then the news that Villars was preparing to send a large force to make a diversion in Brabant gave the Duke an excuse to dispatch Lord Albemarle in a counter-move eastward to Béthune with 10,000 men (at the same time furnishing an opportunity to ship all the army's baggage and his heavy artillery to Douai).

Marlborough now made ostentatious preparations for a frontal assault. Successive advances on August 1 and 2 brought his army to the St. Pol-Arras road, only six miles from the line of elaborate earthworks which linked the headwaters of the Canche and the Gy. Villars no longer doubted that he was going to be attacked, but he was supremely confident that his position was invulnerable. Ever since Marlborough's manoeuvres started he had been strengthening his already formidable defences, and he had called in to the threatened area the majority of his distant garrisons, including the troops left in the vicinity of Arleux. In his assurance he wrote to the King that "at length he had brought Marlborough to his *ne plus ultra*".[132]

On August 4 the drama neared its climax. On the previous evening another strong detachment had slipped out of the Allied camp, taking with it most of the field artillery and all remaining vehicles. Shortly after daylight Marlborough with his general officers, escorted by the army's grenadiers and 80 cavalry squadrons, rode in reconnaissance along the whole front in full view of the enemy, the Duke pointing out with his cane the objectives assigned to each commander. "Every one with him", writes an eye-witness, "was surprised at the rash and dangerous undertaking, and believed it proceeded from the affront which Villars had put upon him, and the ill-treatment he had of late received from the queen and the ministry, which now made him desperate."[133] The confidence of the Allied troops in their Commander-in-Chief was strained to the utmost as they faced the awful prospect of a frontal attack delivered without artillery and with inferior numbers against a well-prepared enemy who was manning defences considerably stronger than those which he had held at Malplaquet. As the day passed the gloom in the Allied camp was in marked contrast to the optimism which pervaded the French lines. Finally tattoo sounded, and the attention of the French was attracted by a body of light cavalry which moved out on the Allied right flank and trotted westward on a course which was later to bring it in a wide sweep back to its own lines.

This was the signal for the whole Allied camp to spring to action. In the gathering darkness tents were quickly struck and by nine o'clock the army was formed up in four columns, ready to move off from the left.

With Marlborough himself leading the vanguard the long march to the east started. Earlier in the day Cadogan had galloped out of camp with forty hussars to alert the garrison at Douai. There Hompesch was waiting with a force which detachments moving in from Lille, Tournai and St. Amand swelled to 23 battalions and 17 squadrons. Before midnight some 14,000 troops stood ready at Douai, less than eight miles from the Aubigny causeway.

In the meantime Marlborough's main army was hastening eastward. The darkness which had covered the important initial movements had given way to brilliant moonlight. They marched all night, passing between Vimy Ridge and Arras over ground whose turn as field of battle was to come 200 years later. In less then eight hours they covered nineteen miles, reaching the River Scarpe at Vitry shortly after sunrise. Here the pontoon bridges were already laid, and on crossing they found their artillery waiting on the eastern bank.

And now a messenger reached Marlborough with word that Cadogan and Hompesch with 2000 horse and 20 battalions had crossed the Arleux causeway unopposed at 3:00 a.m. and were posted to block any French move eastward. But the objective of the marching army, the eastern causeway at Aubigny, was still ten miles away. Down the long columns Marlborough's staff officers carried his personal message to the weary troops: "My Lord Duke wishes the infantry to step out." Marlborough himself pushed forward with his fifty cavalry squadrons; by eight o'clock they were across at

Aubencheul and were forming up along the south bank of the Sensée. Loyally responding to their leader's order the infantry "stepped out"; although with the burden of each man's 50 pounds of equipment, the forcing of the pace with no pause for rest or food, and the fatigue of what had already been accomplished during the night, these last ten miles under the hot morning sun imposed a terrific strain.

The numbers who dropped out in sheer exhaustion ran into the hundreds, and then the thousands. Many died where they fell. Not more than half reached the objective. But in Marlborough's careful calculations these were enough for the allotted task, and they arrived with enough strength to perform it. The vanguard crossed the Sensée sometime in the forenoon, and the last of the rear-guard still in formation were over by four in the afternoon (those of the Allied right wing having covered close to forty miles in less than nineteen hours). They spread out eastward to the Scheldt and westward to the Arleux crossing, the fresher troops from Douai holding the flank nearer the enemy.

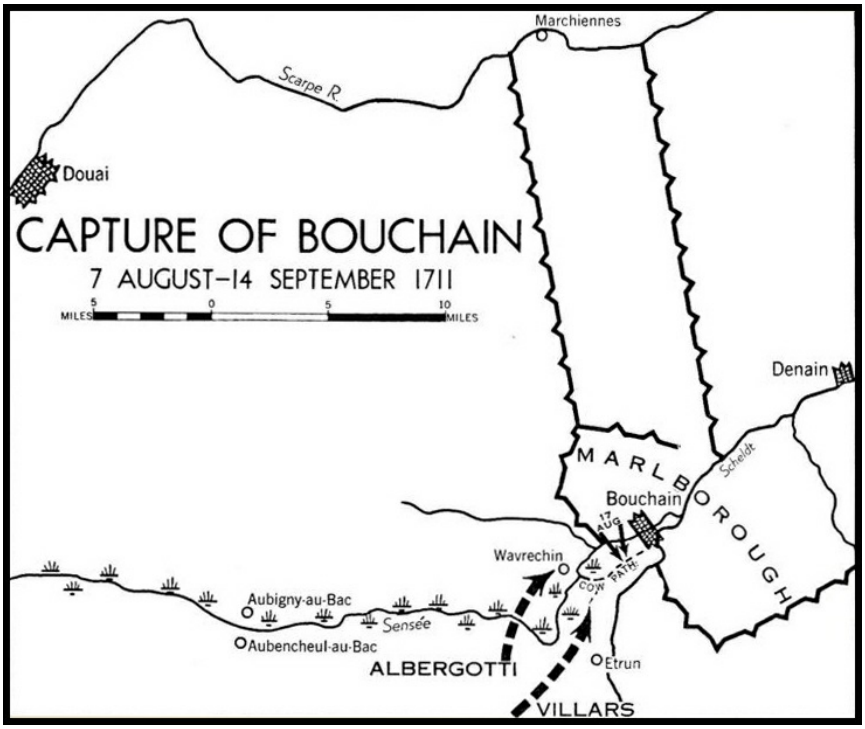
What of Villars and his proud boast of invulnerability? The Marshal had first learned of Marlborough's movements about 11:00 p.m. on the 4th, but the cavalry diversion opposite his left had misled him, and it was two in the morning before he was sure of the direction of the Allied march. He immediately set his own army in motion to the east, and hurried ahead with the Maison du Roi. But the five-hour start could not be overtaken. Before he reached the Sensée he had learned of the Allied crossing, and when with a few hundred horsemen he reached the area south of Arleux about eleven o'clock he was confronted by Marlborough's forces drawn up in strength, and narrowly escaped capture.

Thus were the "*ne plus ultra*" lines pierced without a shot being fired. "This success", wrote Marlborough to Secretary of State St. John, "must give a great reputation to Her Majesty's arms in all parts."[134] The troops' great feat of marching was indeed worthy of the highest praise and bore striking testimony to the excellence of their morale; but behind it all was the military genius which could devise and put into execution a plan which has been called "the most perfect example of a full and successful strategic surprise achieved through an exact calculation which the old wars have to show."[135] It was indeed "the most uncannily indirect of all his approaches."[136]

## The Siege of Bouchain

For three days Marlborough rested, as stragglers rejoined their regiments. He was now within striking distance of Arras, Cambrai and Bouchain. In the hope of regaining some of his lost prestige Villars offered battle in front of Cambrai, but the Duke realized that to accept the challenge with his inferior numbers would be disastrous, and although the Dutch Deputies, unexpectedly bellicose, urged action, he turned instead to the siege of Bouchain, which had been his intention from the first. In defence of this decision (for which he was severely criticized by his political enemies) he wrote to Heinsius:

> I own, had it been practicable, there is no comparison between the advantages of a battle and what we can reap by a siege, but there is not one general or other officer that has the least judgment in these matters but must allow it was altogether impossible to attack the enemy with any probable hopes of success; I cannot but think it very hard, when I do my best, to be liable to such censures.[137]

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Until Marlborough should declare his hand Villars could not move, for to shift eastward to protect Bouchain would leave Arras open to attack. Thus the Duke retained the initiative, and on the night of August 6-7 passed his whole army across the Scheldt three miles south of Bouchain, without any interference from the French. The task of reducing Bouchain was attended with difficulties unlike any encountered by Marlborough in previous sieges. Built at the junction of the Sensée and the Scheldt, the fortress had the natural protection of inundations from the Scheldt to the east, and an all but impassable area of marshland about the Sensée to the south-west. Marlborough established his main camp north-east of Bouchain, but immediately passed his right wing across the Scheldt below the town, constructing enough bridges to allow rapid transfer of his whole force to the left bank if necessary. Villars moved his army of 100,000 men into the angle between the Scheldt and the Sensée, sending a strong force under Albergotti across the latter river to occupy the village of Wavrechin, about two miles south-west of the fort. Here Albergotti constructed an entrenched camp and established communications with the Bouchain garrison by means of the Cow Path—a narrow track which followed a dyke through the Sensée marshes. This he laboriously protected with a double screen of fascinades—bundles of long faggots lashed together between the willow trees for a distance of two miles.

The French position at Wavrechin not only prevented Marlborough from completely encircling Bouchain: it posed a serious threat to his communications with Douai. The Allies depended upon these to get the siege train up the Scarpe from Tournai, for French retention of Valenciennes blocked the Scheldt below Bouchain. In trying to read the enemy's mind Marlborough appreciated that any major effort by Villars to raise the siege was more likely to be made west of Bouchain than east of the Scheldt, for the latter move would have left the Allies free to march on Arras. Although badly outnumbered the Duke was willing to accept a battle if the French offered one. He therefore moved the bulk of his army to the Scheldt's left bank, and called in 6000 Dutch labourers to enclose by a double line of entrenchments a lane seven miles long and two miles wide leading from the Scarpe to his lines of investment about Bouchain. There remained the severing of the enemy's last link with the besieged. Copying the French example the besiegers pushed double lines of fascinades into the marsh from north and south, and on August 17 Marlborough launched a force of 600 British and Dutch in an attack upon four French companies holding the Cow Path. In places the water was up to the necks of the advancing grenadiers (one ensign short in stature being borne high on the shoulders of one of his men). There was little enemy resistance, and with the taking of the Cow Path Bouchain was completely isolated. Four days later the siege train began arriving, and the batteries were at work by the end of the month. The defenders inflicted heavy losses on the Allies, who also came under bombardment from Villars' guns. "The whole French army being so camped that they are seen by the garrison of Bouchain", wrote Marlborough on September 3, "makes the defence the more obstinate".[138] Finally on September 14 the place capitulated, the besiegers having suffered 4000 casualties. Marlborough's insistence on unconditional surrender was a sharp reproof to Villars for his failure to interfere effectually with the siege.

To the great relief of the French Marlborough did not follow up the capture of Bouchain, though only two small

fortresses, Quesnoy and Landrecies, lay between him and the path down the valley of the Oise to Paris. But no provision for further sieges was forthcoming from London; for, unknown to Marlborough, peace negotiations had reached a stage where England was ready to forsake the Grand Alliance. The siege of Bouchain was thus the Duke's last military operation.

## Marlborough's Dismissal

Marlborough arrived home in November, in time to take part in the debate in which the Tory ministry sought to obtain Parliament's acceptance of the preliminary peace proposals made to France. He defended himself against the charge that he was one "of those who delight in war" and was therefore deliberately seeking to prolong the struggle; but he declared that "the safety and liberties of Europe would be in imminent danger if Spain and the West Indies were left to the house of Bourbon."[139] Stimulated by his lead the Whig majority in the House of Lords rejected the preliminaries and defeated the Government—which, however, still had a fairly solid Tory Commons behind it. The Earl of Oxford and his ministers now resorted to drastic measures to gain their ends. They needed a majority in the Lords, and in order to prevent a serious renewal of the fighting in 1712 they wanted a Commander-in-Chief who would be less friendly to the Allies and more amenable to Tory instructions. They therefore induced the Queen to create a dozen new Tory peers to carry the Upper House, and they unscrupulously set out to blacken Marlborough's reputation in order that his replacement might arouse the minimum of public displeasure.

The means to do this were at hand. Since May a Parliamentary commission had been investigating alleged abuses in the public expenditure. Its findings led to a charge being laid in the House of Commons that between 1702 and 1711 the Duke had received from contractors more than £63,000 for the supply of bread and bread-wagons to the British forces. This, as Marlborough pointed out to his accusers, was a long-established perquisite allowed the Commander-in-Chief in Flanders to be used for the purchase of intelligence. "I do assure you. . .", he had written earlier to the commission, "that whatever sums I have received on that account have been constantly employed in the service of the public, in keeping secret correspondence, and getting intelligence of the enemy's notions and designs."[140] He was further charged with appropriating 2½ per cent of the pay of British-hired foreign auxiliaries—a sum amounting to £280,000. He was able to show that these deductions had been agreed upon by William III with the foreign princes concerned, to form a secret service fund, and that Queen Anne had authorized him to receive the money and use it in the manner prescribed. That it had been well spent was proved by the excellence of the Duke's intelligence service; indeed there is little doubt that he paid out much more than these two sums for that purpose.

But his arguments were without avail. On December 31 Queen Anne dismissed Marlborough "from all his employments", and the *Gazette* for New Year's Day announced the appointment of the Duke of Ormonde as Commander-in-Chief (the Ministry shortly afterwards confirming to him the very perquisites which had just been declared illegal). The news was received in the capitals of the Allied countries as an outrageous example of base national ingratitude; but at Versailles Louis XIV triumphantly exclaimed, "The affair of displacing the Duke of Marlborough will do for us all we desire."[141]

The miserable record of events in 1712 was to show the accuracy of the Grand Monarch's prediction. When the Duke of Ormonde took the field with Eugene, he was under express instructions not to hazard a battle, but indeed to enter into private correspondence with Villars. However he supplied a covering force for Eugene's siege of Quesnoy, which fell early in July. Before Landrecies could be invested a two-month armistice was concluded with France, and Ormonde was ordered to withdraw his troops to Dunkirk. It was a most humiliating episode for the men whom Marlborough had led so often to victory. The foreign auxiliaries in England's pay refused to be separated from Eugene and quit the Allied camp. The Dutch commandants at Tournai and Bouchain denied the retiring British passage through their towns, so that the troops were compelled to bridge the river barriers with their own pontoons. When the suspension of hostilities was announced at the head of each regiment there was heard a "general hiss and murmur throughout the camp". A contemporary historian relates that officers were so "overwhelmed with vexation that they sat apart in their tents . . . and for several days shrunk from the sight even of their fellow soldiers". Many deserted to serve with the Allies, "and whenever they recollected the Duke of Marlborough, and the late glorious times, their eyes flowed with tears."[142]

After the withdrawal of the British troops things went badly with Eugene. A crushing defeat of the Dutch at Denain compelled him to abandon the siege of Landrecies and fall back to Tournai. By the end of the year Villars had regained Quesnoy, Bouchain and Douai. These French successes further strengthened their hand at the formal peace conference which assembled early in 1713.

By the Treaty of Utrecht (the collective name for a series of agreements signed during 1713) Spain and the Indies were retained by Louis XIV's grandson, Philip V, who renounced all claim to the French throne. Thus all the blood which had been shed in Spain to secure that country to the Hapsburgs went for naught. The former Spanish Netherlands became the Austrian Netherlands, and a modified Dutch Barrier was set up which included many of the frontier fortresses captured by Marlborough, although some, notably Lille, were restored to France. England came off best, acquiring Gibraltar and Port Mahon (Minorca) in the Mediterranean; the Hudson Bay settlements, Newfoundland, Acadia and St. Kitts in North America; and elsewhere in the New World important trading privileges, including the monopoly of the carriage of African slaves to America. Whatever recriminations might be brought against England for breaking up the Grand Alliance in order to seek a peace profitable to herself (forty years later William Pitt called Utrecht "an indelible reproach of the last generation"), the increased stature which she acquired during the War of the Spanish Succession and the substantial gains which came to her must be largely credited to the general who, having led the Allied armies to an unparalleled series of triumphs, now found himself disgraced and stripped of all his honours.

In November 1712 Marlborough left England in self-imposed banishment, to remain in the Low Countries until the death of Anne in July 1714. On the accession of George I he returned home, and was restored to his former posts of Captain-General (now a merely honorary office) and Master-General of the Ordnance. Advancing age and ill health prevented him from taking an active part in public life. He died on June 16, 1722 at the age of 72, and was buried with great pomp and ceremony in Westminster Abbey. At his funeral were heard for the first time the commands which now form part of the ceremonial at all military funerals: "Reverse arms", "Rest on your arms reversed".[143]

Few will deny that Marlborough was Britain's greatest military commander—indeed, many will agree with Lord Wavell that "he has claims to be considered the most gifted of all time."[144] In appraising the six whom he regards as the strongest claimants to this honour Wavell rates Belisarius as Marlborough's equal in "imagination and originality", and places them first "as the two most gifted and ablest soldiers of whom I have read." Below these he puts Frederick the Great and Wellington, "two of the soundest and most single-minded soldiers", in strategy the latter being "sure and steady rather than brilliant"; next come Napoleon, "on the whole an indifferent tactician", and Lee, whose chief defect he finds "a lack of hardness".

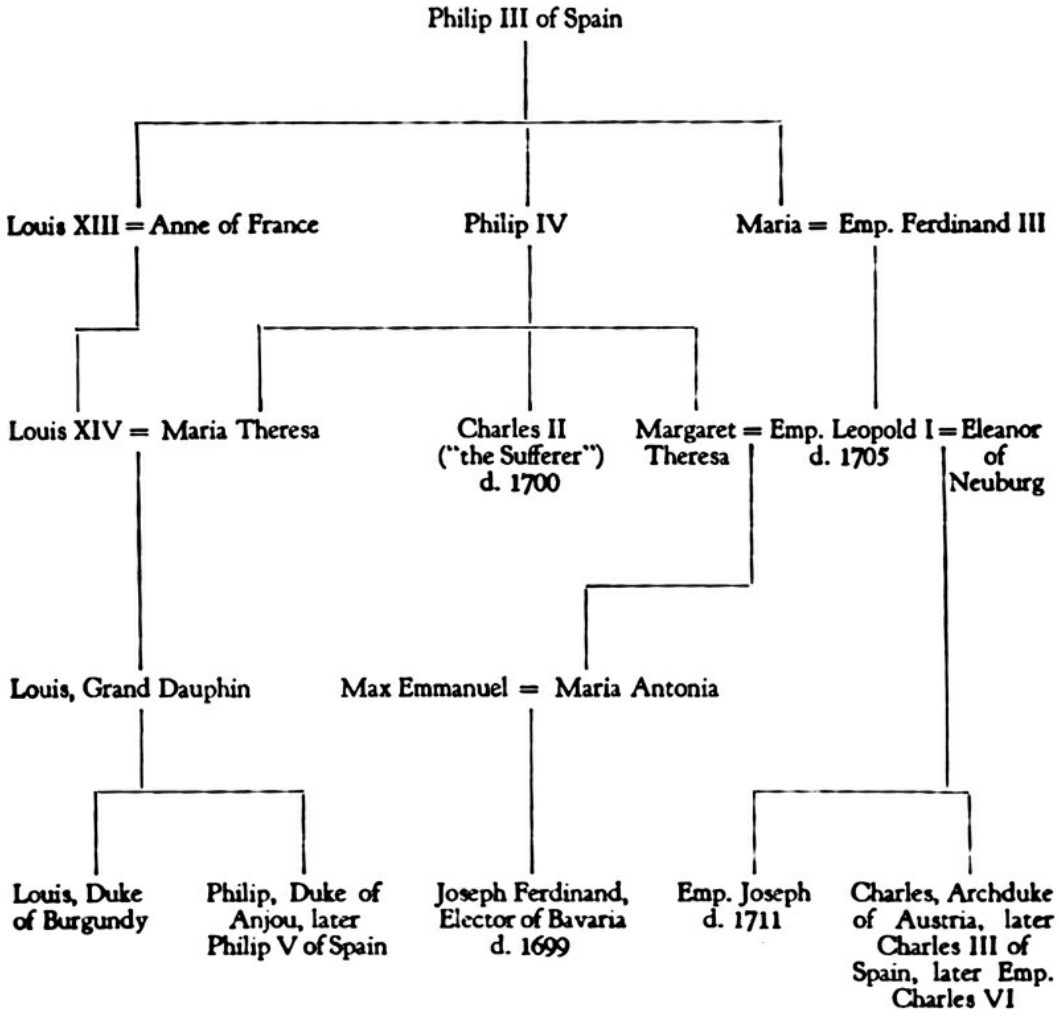
Marlborough owes his place at the head of the list to his outstanding qualities as diplomat and statesman, strategist and tactician, and as a leader of men. The control he exercised over England's foreign policy, particularly in holding together the Grand Alliance, was more effective than that of many a Foreign Minister, and at his zenith his powers over domestic policies were virtually those of a Prime Minister. As a strategist he always took the wide view, seeing the war as a whole in which the needs of Italy and Spain had to be considered in relation to those of the Western European theatre. One of the first to recognize the possibilities of amphibious warfare (witness the capture of Port Mahon and the proposed descent upon Abbeville), he has been acclaimed fit "to rank as high among naval strategists as in his own special art." As we have seen, the restrictions imposed by his allies prevented him from carrying out much of his planned strategy; but the success of the glorious venture to the Danube in 1704 shows what might have been accomplished had he been permitted to put into action the daring scheme which he had projected for the 1706 campaign.

But it was as a tactician that Marlborough chiefly excelled. Each of his great victories reveals his brilliance—his keen eye for ground, his uncanny ability to pick out and capitalize on the enemy's weaknesses, the simplicity of his plan of action, the vigour with which he launched the attack, his judicious commitment of his reserves involving generally the full employment of all his forces, his masterly deception of the enemy, and above all his effective co-ordination of the fire power of his infantry and artillery to pave the way for the devastating shock tactics of his cavalry. To this military sense Marlborough added those other personal qualities which mark the great leader. Above all—to use the tribute paid to him by Voltaire—was "that calm courage in the midst of tumult, that serenity of soul in danger, which is the greatest gift of nature for command."[145] The meticulous care which he devoted to the administrative arrangements for the welfare of his troops, the inspiring example of his bravery on the field of battle, and the geniality which came naturally to him even in times of adversity, all combined to deserve the affection with which the English soldiery regarded "Corporal John".

Marlborough's greatest memorial is to be found in the added prestige which his campaigns brought to British arms. Under him the British Army earned a place second to none in Europe, and in his great victories many famous British regiments find the source of their long and treasured traditions. Proud indeed are those units which bear on their colours the names of Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde and Malplaquet. In the long history of war no one man did more to establish British military reputation on a firm and lasting basis than John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough.

# APPENDIX "A"

## Table of the Spanish Succession



# APPENDIX "B"

## Sources and Books for Further Reading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Belloc, Hilaire, *The Tactics and Strategy of the Great Duke of Marlborough* (Bristol, Arrowsmith, 1933).

du Bosc, Claude, *The Military History of the Late Prince Eugene of Savoy and of the Late John Duke of Marlborough* (London, du Bosc, 2 vols., 1736). This almost contemporary work contains accounts by participants in the various campaigns.

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't Hoff, B. Van (ed.), *The Correspondence (1701-1711) of John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough, and Anthonie Heinsius, Grand Pensionary of Holland* (Utrecht, Kemink en Zoon, 1951).

Liddell Hart, B. H., *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (London, Faber & Faber, 1954).

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Taylor, Frank, *The Wars of Marlborough, 1702-1709* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2 vols., 1921). A good detailed account of the campaigns up to Malplaquet.

Trevelyan, G. M., *England under Queen Anne: Blenheim* (Toronto, Longmans, Green, 1948). From the outbreak of the War to the Battle of Blenheim.

—— *England under Queen Anne: Ramillies and the Union with Scotland* (Toronto, Longmans, Green, 1948). Carries the War up to the Battle of Oudenarde.

—— *England under Queen Anne: The Peace and the Protestant Succession* (Toronto, Longmans, Green, 1948). From Malplaquet to the end of the War.

# Index

# FOOTNOTES:

*Memoirs of the most remarkable Military Transactions from 1683-1718* (1st edition, 1746).

The Hon. Sir John Fortescue, *Marlborough* (London, 1932), 168.

The English army, at the end of the war 87,000 strong, was reduced to 7000 regulars.

Luxembourg, Namur, Charleroi, Mons, Ath, Oudenarde and Nieuport.

The Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill, *Marlborough, His Life and Times*, Bk. I, (London, 1949), 265.

William Coxe, *Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough* (London, 1905), Vol. i, 58.

G. M. Trevelyan, *England under Queen Anne: Blenheim* (London, 1948), 144.

It is questionable whether Marlborough's troops used the "Brown Bess" musket. See *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* (London), vol. XXXIII, 69.

The Royal Regiment of Artillery did not come into existence until 1716.

A. W. Wilson, *The Story of the Gun* (Woolwich, 1944), 25.

Churchill, Bk. I, 568. He is writing after the First World War.

Coxe, vol. i, 90.

Churchill, Bk. I, 580.

Called by Marlborough's English troops "Boiled Duck"—now 's-Hertogenbosch.

Coxe, vol. i. 94.

In referring to the Principles of War we shall use the following list: *Selection and Maintenance of the Aim*, *Maintenance of Morale*, *Offensive Action*, *Security*, *Surprise*, *Concentration of Force*, *Economy of Effort*, *Flexibility*, *Co-operation and Administration*.

Trevelyan, *Blenheim*, 326.

Although some historians have followed Archdeacon Coxe in giving Prince Eugene of Savoy the credit for persuading Marlborough to come to Bavaria, no documentary evidence, as Churchill and Trevelyan both point out, has been found to support this position.

F. Taylor, *The Wars of Marlborough, 1702-1709* (Oxford, 1921), vol. i, 154.

Trevelyan, *Blenheim*, 344.

Churchill, Bk. I, 729.

The approximate figures generally accepted for unit strengths at the beginning of a campaign are 150 for a squadron and 700 for a battalion.

Coxe, vol. i, 160.

Churchill, Bk. I, 758.

C. T. Atkinson, *Marlborough and the Rise of the British Army* (New York, 1921), 193.

Churchill, Bk. I, 765.

Churchill, Bk. I, 779. Mr. Churchill has drawn upon a report by the Archduke Joseph to the Emperor dated April 12, 1704. He thus modifies Coxe's statement that the Margrave pressed the claims of his seniority and agreed only with considerable reluctance to share the command by alternate days with Marlborough.

Churchill, Bk. I, 792.

Churchill, Bk. I, 798.

The "covered way" encircled the fortress between the "glacis" (outer sloping bank) and the "open ditch". From seven to nine feet deep, it had a "banquette" or firing-step from which infantry could fire down the glacis.

Churchill, Bk. I, 802.

Trevelyan, *Blenheim*, 362.

Taylor, vol. i, 180.

General Sir George Murray (ed.), *The Letters and Dispatches of John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough* (London, 1845), vol. i, 330.

Coxe, vol. i, 176.

*Dispatches*, vol. i, 339.

Churchill, Bk. I, 807.

B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (London, 1954), 96.

Churchill, Bk. I, 819.

Coxe, vol. i, 180.

B. Van 't Hoff (ed.), *The Correspondence of John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough, and Anthonie Heinsius, Grand*

*Pensionary of Holland* (Utrecht, 1951), 118.

Churchill, Bk. I, 839.

*Dispatches*, vol. i, 373.

*Dispatches*, vol. i, 375.

Churchill, Bk. I, 838.

Churchill, Bk. I, 847.

The numbers vary in different sources. Churchill gives a total enemy strength of 84 battalions and 147 squadrons, numbering about 60,000 men.

*Dispatches*, vol. i, 400.

Col. Blood was Second Engineer of Great Britain. He commanded the artillery by virtue of his appointment as Chief of the Ordnance Train.

*Dispatches*, vol. i, 403.

Churchill, Bk. I, 861.

Taylor, vol. i, 223.

Tallard was sent to England and given a house in the country, where he introduced the cultivation of celery to the local gentry.

Thus two French sources, Susane, *Histoire de l'Infanterie Française*, Tome 2, 331; and Cmdt Andolenko, *Recueil d'Historiques de l'Infanterie Française*, 29. Churchill and some other writers have the colours "burned".

*Dispatches*, vol. i, 408-9.

"The Battle of Blenheim", by Robert Southey.

Sergeant Millner's *Journal* (1701-12), cited in Churchill, Bk. I, 872.

*Dispatches*, vol. i, 435.

Taylor, vol. i, 233.

Trevelyan, *Blenheim*, 397.

Taylor, vol. i, 261-2.

Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*, 100.

Belloc, *The Tactics and Strategy of Marlborough*, 90.

Coxe, vol. i, 214.

Coxe, vol. i, 220.

Atkinson, 241.

Coxe, vol. i, 229.

Churchill, Bk. I, 902.

G. M. Trevelyan, *England under Queen Anne: Ramillies and the Union with Scotland* (London, 1948), 49.

Coxe, vol. i, 245.

Churchill, Bk. I, 909.

*Dispatches*, vol. ii, 55.

*Ibid.*, 61.

*Dispatches*, vol. ii, 74-5.

Trevelyan, *Ramillies*, 53.

*Dispatches*, vol. ii, 197.

Coxe, vol. i, 314.

Van 't Hoff, *Heinsius Correspondence*, 206, 208.

Van 't Hoff, 227.

*Dispatches*, vol. ii, 518.

Churchill, Bk. II, 84.

The significance of this concealed way is dealt with in some detail in Belloc, *The Tactics and Strategy of Marlborough*, Ch. IV.

Churchill, Bk. II, 99.

Coxe, vol. i, 424.

*Ibid.*, 426.

Coxe, vol. i, 427.

For a more detailed commentary on the battle in the light of the Principles of War, see Lt.-Col. A. H. Burne, *The Art of War on Land* (London, 1944), Ch. 9.

*Dispatches*, vol. iii, 29.

Van 't Hoff, *Heinsius Correspondence*, 269.

*Ibid.*, 300.

Coxe, vol. ii, 46.

*Dispatches*, vol. iii, 357.

Van 't Hoff, 356.

*Dispatches*, vol. iv, 61.

*Dispatches*, vol. iv, 94.

Churchill, Bk. II, 350.

Atkinson, 335.

Churchill, Bk. II, 360.

Coxe, vol. ii, 267.

du Bosc, *The Military History of the Late Prince Eugene of Savoy and of the Late John Duke of Marlborough*, vol. ii, 56.

Coxe, vol. ii, 267.

Coxe, vol. ii, 272.

*Dispatches*, vol. iv, 165.

Coxe, vol. ii, 312.

du Bosc, vol. ii, 81.

Atkinson, 364.

Coxe, vol. ii, 340.

*Dispatches*, vol. iv, 108.

Coxe. vol. ii, 346.

Coxe, vol. ii, 389.

*Dispatches*, vol. iv, 496.

Van 't Hoff, 456.

Churchill, Bk. II, 592.

A detailed description of the battlefield is given in Maj. A. H. Burne, "Marlborough's Battlefields Illustrated: Malplaquet" in *The Journal of the Royal Artillery*, vol. ix, 42-53.

Atkinson, 395.

A number of historians (including Atkinson and Taylor) declare that Marlborough intended the Dutch effort to be a demonstration only, and that the Prince of Orange disobeyed orders in turning it into a full-scale and very costly attack. But Marlborough himself has left no record of any such orders; indeed, as Trevelyan points out, had he planned a feint he would undoubtedly, as at Ramillies, have kept the intention secret from the Dutch commander.

Trevelyan, *England under Queen Anne*, vol. 3, *The Peace and the Protestant Succession*, 16.

Atkinson, 405.

Coxe, vol. ii, 462.

Among the French casualties was a young Canadian ensign from Three Rivers, Pierre Gaultier de la Vérendrye, who was wounded nine times and left for dead. He survived, to become the great explorer of the Canadian West.

Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*, 104.

du Bosc, vol. ii, 113.

*Dispatches*, vol. iv, 636.

Cited in Burne, "Marlborough's Battlefields Illustrated: Malplaquet", 51.

du Bosc, vol. ii, 150.

Atkinson, 431.

Trevelyan, *The Peace and the Protestant Succession*, 88.

*Dispatches*, vol. v, 262.

*Ibid.*, 270.

*Dispatches*, vol. v, 330.

Belloc is one of the few writers to deny the existence of such a plot, declaring that Marlborough's intentions all along were to hold Arleux (*The Tactics and Strategy of the Great Duke of Marlborough*, 222).

Coxe, vol. iii, 225.

Extract from *Kane's Memoirs*, cited in Coxe, vol. iii, 226.

*Dispatches*, vol. v, 429.

Belloc, 230.

Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*, 105.

*Dispatches*, vol. v, 443.

Coxe, vol. iii, 239.

Churchill, Bk. II, 906.

Coxe, vol. iii, 262.

*Ibid.*, 281.

Cited in Coxe, vol. iii, 317.

Fortescue, *Marlborough*, 154.

Field-Marshal Earl Wavell, *The Good Soldier* (London, 1948), 37.

*Ibid.*, 7.

[The end of *Marlborough and the War of the Spanish Succession* by G. W. L. Nicholson]