

The Battle of Raszyn 19 April 1809

Jack Gill, U.S. of America

Included in Austria's strategic design for 1809 was an operation against the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. Intended to knock Poland out of the war, shield the Habsburg monarchy from Russian intervention and draw Prussia into the conflict as an ally, this task was entrusted to General der Kavallerie Archduke Ferdinand Karl d'Este, commanding VII Corps, approximately 30,200 men in twenty-five battalions, forty-four squadrons and fourteen batteries. If he was successful against the Poles and the Russians remained quiescent, Ferdinand was hopefully given the rather grandiose mission of turning west and crossing the Elbe to rendezvous with the Main Army in south-central Germany. Attempting to follow his orders but delayed by bad weather and worse roads, the Archduke crossed into Poland on 15 April and headed for Warsaw. In response, General de Division (GD) Prince Joseph Poniatowski assembled the 14,000 men and forty one guns of his small Polish-Saxon army in the excellent position along the Utrata stream (also referred to as the Mrowa, Rnowa, and Ruswa) at Raszyn about ten kilometres south of the capital and waited for the enemy.

The army's position was well chosen, offering the best chances for the Polish general's inexperienced and outnumbered forces. The Utrata was a small watercourse, but its banks were exceedingly marshy and recent rains had rendered the low ground almost impassable to formed bodies of troops. In the area of the battlefield, bridges afforded unhindered crossing at only three points: the villages of Michalowice, Raszyn and Jaworow. The roads leading to these bridges, however, were carried over the marshes on narrow dikes and thus easily covered by the fire of infantry and guns posted on the heights north of the stream. The villages themselves formed excellent strong-points and essentially defined the major elements of the Polish Army. Général de Brigade (GB) Lukasz Bieganski on the right at Michalowice (two battalions, four guns); GB Ludwik Kamieniecki on the left at Jaworow (two battalions, six guns); two more Polish battalions with the infantry and artillery of General-Major (GM) Ludwig von Dyhern's Saxon contingent occupied the centre around Raszyn. Poniatowski also placed an advanced force under GB Michal Sokolnicki (three battalions, six guns) at Falenty across the Utrata and kept the Polish 1st Chasseurs, a squadron of Saxon hussars and five horse guns in reserve two kilometres north of Raszyn. The other Saxon hussar squadron and the elite company of the Polish 5th Chasseurs (i.e., half a squadron, there being two companies per squadron in the Polish cavalry) were stationed to guard the extreme right flank near Blonie and a battalion (II/6) and two guns were held at Wola. Finally, GB Aleksander Rozniecki deployed a screening force of four cavalry regiments and four

horse guns to cover the main position: 3rd and 6th lancers along with the remaining 2 1/2 squadrons of the 5th Chasseurs were on the right with vedettes at Nadarzyn, two squadrons of the 2nd Lancers were near an inn called 'Zur Bequemlichkeit' (Wygoda Karczma), and the third 2nd Lancers squadron was apparently north of the Utrata (probably on the left flank). Another infantry regiment (the 12th) was marching south from Thorn but was still some distance away and would not reach the Warsaw area until 20 April.

Advance to Contact

The first days of the campaign had been frustrating for the young Archduke Ferdinand. Confident in his numerical superiority, he had hoped to bring the Poles to battle quickly so he could destroy them and continue with his broader mission. But Poniatowski kept his forces concentrated at Raszyn and only a thin screen of Polish horsemen opposed the Austrian advance. When they dispersed to their bivouacs around Tarczyn and Kotorydze on the night of 18 April, therefore, the men of VII Corps had seen almost nothing of the enemy.

Archduke Ferdinand expected more of the same on the 19th as he pushed his troops slowly north towards Warsaw. In the hopes of surprising the Poles, however, he sent the GM Johann Frieherr von Mohr's advance guard along the concealed route from Kotorydze to Janzewice; Mohr's command was to be followed by the Corps' infantry while the bulk of the cavalry took advantage of the superior Tarczyn-Raszyn road. Flank protection was to be provided by four companies of III/Vukassovich and a squadron of Kaiser Hussars on the left. (Parole to Nadarzyn) and the 2nd Siebenbürger Walachen Grenzer on the right (Szczaki to Dawidy).

Mohr's troops moved first, departing their various encampments and picket lines around 10 a.m. to follow patrols that had already been active for two hours. Delayed and disordered by the poor condition of the road, however, the advance guard did not reach the northern edge of the woods until about 1 p.m. and then only in a considerable state of disarray. To allow his infantry time to reform, Mohr posted his guns to the front and rode ahead toward Janzewice with the cavalry. Here he found the two squadrons of the Polish 2nd Lancers in the low ground near the 'Zur Bequemlichkeit' inn, and, hesitating to act without knowing his commander's intentions, he pencilled a hasty note to the Archduke and sat back to await further instructions.

Ferdinand was on the main road with the cavalry near the town of Lazy when he received Mohr's message. Still expecting nothing beyond some skirmishing with Poniatowski's rear guard (Mohr had

made no mention of Polish infantry), he immediately set off in the direction of Janezewice, five and a half squadrons of Palatinal Hussars and both cuirassier regiments in his wake. Feldmarschall Lieutenant (FML) Karl August Freiherr von Schaueroth was left behind at Lazy with the remaining Palatinal squadrons and the cavalry battery; assuming command of the four Vukassovich companies the lone squadron of Kaiser from Parole, he was to protect VII Corps' left flank.

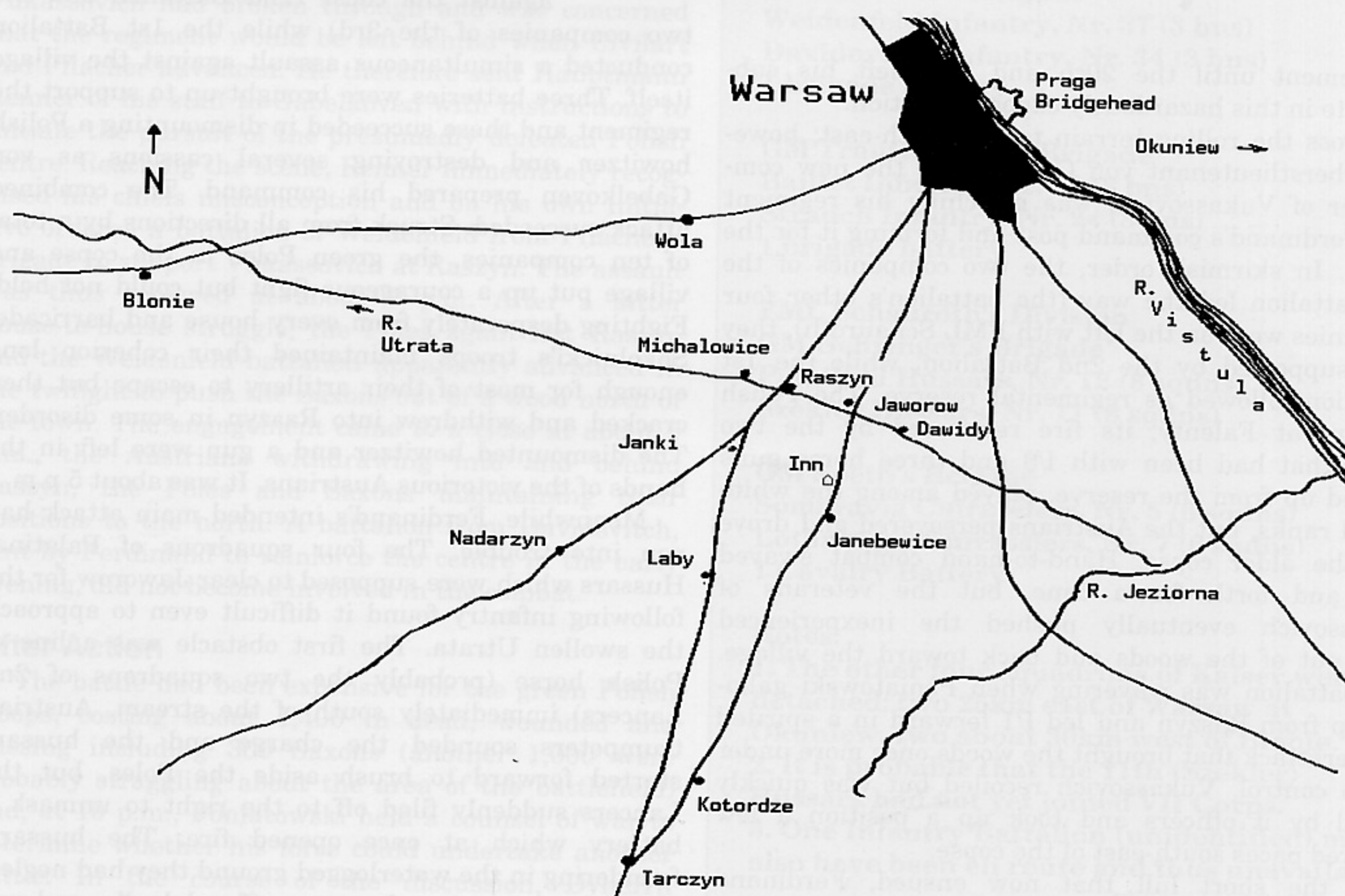
Arriving at Janezewice, Ferdinand made preparations to attack the Polish cavalry, calling forward Mohr's infantry and artillery to support his mounted men (GM Karl Graf Civilart's brigade replaced the advance guard in the position along the northern rim of the woods). Trotting forward in two lines, hussars in the lead, the Austrian cavalry compelled the Poles to retire without a fight but the marshy ground precluded effective pursuit and the Polish troopers were able to escape unscathed.

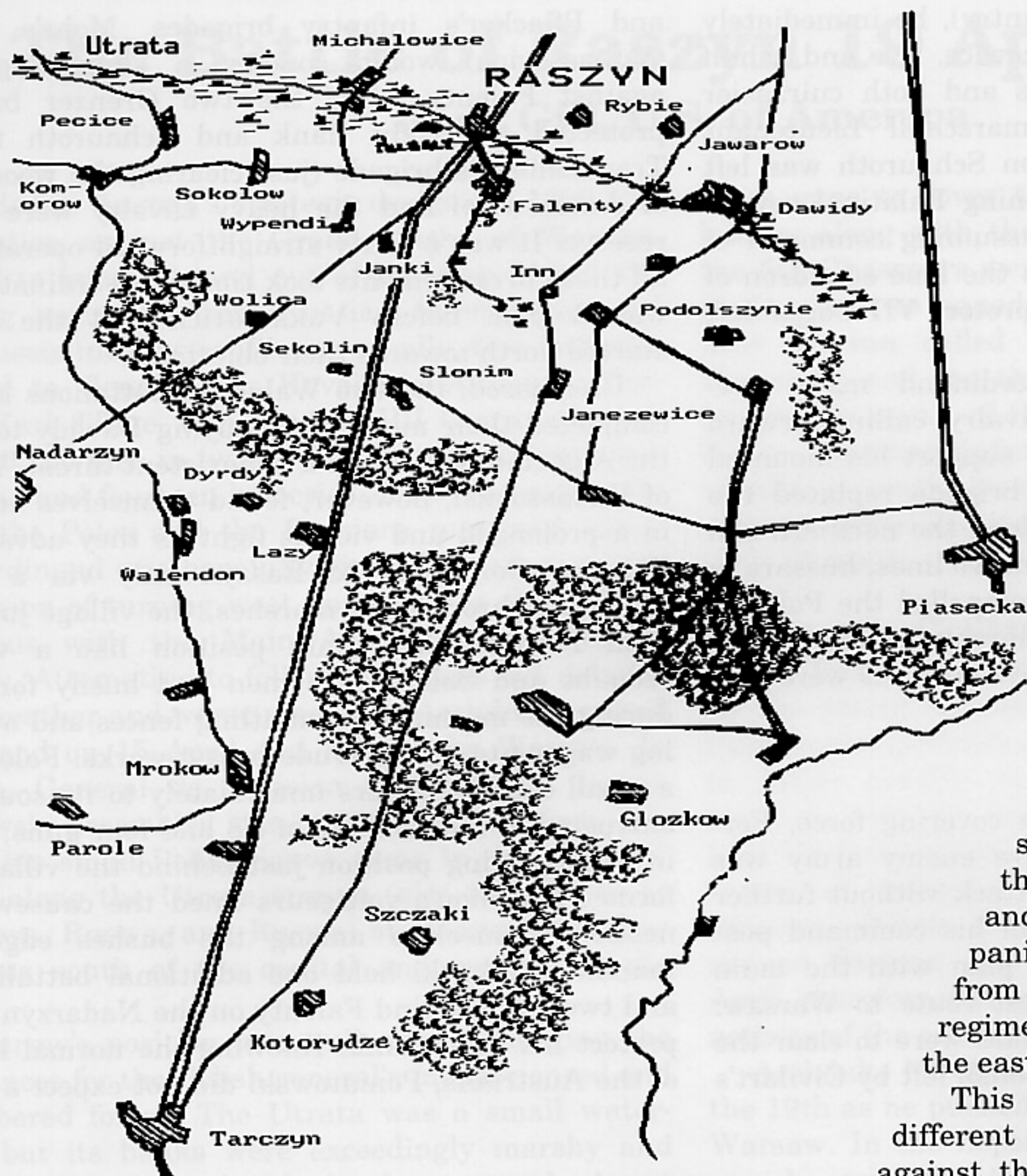
The Austrians Attack

Having chased off the Polish covering force, Ferdinand could see that the entire enemy army was before him, and he decided to attack without further delay. The orders he issued from his command post near the inn outlined a simple plan with the main effort at Jaworow on the shortest route to Warsaw: four squadrons of Palatinal Hussars were to clear the way for an advance against the Polish left by Civilart's

and Pflacher's infantry brigades. Mohr's infantry (Vukassovich) would conduct a supporting attack against Falenty while the two Grenzer battalions protected the right flank and Schaueroth the left. Trauttenberg's brigade (just clearing the woods south of Janezewice) and the heavy cavalry were held in reserve. It was a fairly straightforward operation, but all these arrangements took time to co-ordinate, and it was 3 p.m. before Vukassovich and the Grenzer started north towards their objectives.

Unopposed, the two Walachen battalions had soon completed their mission, occupying Dawidy to protect the Austrian flank from a nonexistent threat. The men of Vukassovich, however, found themselves embroiled in a prolonged and vicious fight as they advanced on Falenty. Connected to Raszyn only via a narrow causeway through the marshes, the village jutted out from Poniatowski's main position like a veritable redoubt and Sokolnicki's men had busily fortified it during the morning, dismantling fences and overturning wagons to create crude breast-works. Falenty and a small copse of alders immediately to its south were entrusted to the fusiliers of I/8 and four guns; I/1 was in a supporting position just behind the village. The former battalion's voltigeurs lined the causeway and nestled themselves among the bushes edging the marsh. Sokolnicki held one additional battalion (I/6) and two guns behind Falenty on the Nadarzyn road to protect his right flank. Knowing the normal lethargy of the Austrians, Poniatowski did not expect a serious





Schauroth's small command to his left near Janki. Schauroth had swung west toward the Dyrdy woods after separating from the Archduke around 1 p.m. Charged with shielding the Austrian left, his men pushed through the forest and on to Wolica, following the cavalry of the Polish screening force as it withdrew to the north. When Poniatowski pulled Rozniecki's regiments back behind the Utrata to join his reserve, Schauroth to move his men forward to the line Wypendy-Janki, a perfect location from which to support a renewed assault on the Falenty wood. Schauroth soon had in his hands a note from the Archduke directing just that and two of the III/Vukassovich companies were sent to hit the Poles from the west while the bulk of the regiment undertook another effort from the east and south.

This time, von Gabelkoven chose a different tactic; sending eight companies against the copse (2nd Battalion and the two companies of the 3rd) while the 1st Battalion conducted a simultaneous assault against the village itself. Three batteries were brought up to support the regiment and these succeeded in dismounting a Polish howitzer and destroying several caissons as von Gabelkoven prepared his command. The combined attack succeeded. Struck from all directions by a total of ten companies, the green Poles in the copse and village put up a courageous fight but could not hold. Fighting desperately from every house and barricade, Sokolnicki's troops maintained their cohesion long enough for most of their artillery to escape but then cracked and withdrew into Raszyn in some disorder. The dismounted howitzer and a gun were left in the hands of the victorious Austrians. It was about 5 p.m.

Meanwhile, Ferdinand's intended main attack had run into trouble. The four squadrons of Palatinal Hussars which were supposed to clear Jaworow for the following infantry found it difficult even to approach the swollen Utrata. The first obstacle was a line of Polish horse (probably the two squadrons of 2nd Lancers) immediately south of the stream. Austrian trumpeters sounded the charge and the hussars started forward to brush aside the Poles, but the Lancers suddenly filed off to the right to unmask a battery which at once opened fire. The hussars, foundering in the waterlogged ground they had neglected to examine in advance, suffered badly under a

engagement until the 20th and thus left his subordinate in this hazardously exposed position.

Across the rolling terrain to the south-east; however, Oberstlieutenant von Gabelkoven, the new commander of Vukassovich, was marching his regiment past Ferdinand's command post and forming it for the attack. In skirmish order, the two companies of the 3rd Battalion led the way (the battalion's other four companies were on the left with FML Schauroth), they were supported by the 2nd Battalion, while the 1st Battalion followed as regimental reserve. The Polish artillery at Falenty, its fire reinforced by the two pieces that had been with I/6 and three horse guns hurried up from the reserve, played among the white coated ranks, but the Austrians persevered and drove into the alder copse. Hand-to-hand combat swayed back and forth for a time, but the veterans of Vukassovich eventually pushed the inexperienced Poles out of the woods and back toward the village. The battalion was wavering when Poniatowski galloped up from Raszyn and led I/1 forward in a spirited counterattack that brought the woods once more under Polish control. Vukassovich recoiled but was quickly rallied by its officers and took up a position a few hundred paces south-east of the copse.

In the short lull that now ensued, Ferdinand noticed Austrian hussars and infantry from FML

peppering of Polish canister as they tried to extricate themselves from their predicament. The Somariva Cuirassiers, attempting to gain the Polish left and succour their comrades, were also caught in the treacherous mire and had to retreat out of range in disorderly haste. The Austrian advance only resumed when a cavalry battery pulled up and compelled the Poles to retire across the stream. Slowly picking their way past ponds and brooks, the troopers of Palatinal finally reached the stream at about 4 p.m. only to discover that the withdrawing Poles had removed the bridge and all local bridging material.

Moreover, the normal banks of the Utrata were completely flooded. Cavalry operations under these conditions were clearly pointless and Ferdinand impatiently ordered Civilart to get his infantry across the obstruction without delay. Confounded by difficult terrain and Polish bullets, however, the Habsburg foot soldiers had no better luck than their mounted brethren and the Archduke's main attack soon dissolved into a time consuming and ultimately fruitless search for bridging materials. A wider flanking manoeuvre via Dawidy was deemed inadvisable given the lateness of the hour.

Back in the centre, the Austrians pursued their advantage and pressed into Raszyn itself but fire from the Saxon guns brought their advance to a halt and a sudden counter-attack by Dyherrn's infantry hit them in the left flank and threw them back across the Utrata. With his attention focused on getting Civilart's men across at Jaworow, however, Ferdinand was unaware of the reverse at Raszyn. He believed Vukassovich had broken through and was concerned that the regiment would be left behind when Civilart and Pflacher advanced. He therefore sent Hauptmann Renner of his staff to Gabelkoven with instructions to initiate the pursuit of the presumed defeated Polish centre. Reaching the scene, Renner immediately recognised his chiefs misconception and on his own initiative ordered a battalion of Weidenfeld from Pflacher's brigade to support Vukassovich at Raszyn. The assault was thus renewed at about 7 p.m. After a bitter house-to-house struggle, the Poles again lost Raszyn and the Weidenfeld battalion apparently advanced in the twilight to push the Saxons out of a wood north of the town. The engagement came to a close at about 9 p.m., the Austrians withdrawing into and behind Raszyn, the Poles and Saxons maintaining their positions to the north. A battalion from Davidovitch, sent by Ferdinand to reinforce the centre in the early evening, did not become involved in the combat.

After Action

The battle had been expensive for the green Polish troops, costing about 1,400 in dead, wounded and missing including 300 Saxons (another 1,000 were probably straggling about the area of the battlefield) and, at 10 p.m., Poniatowski held a counsel of war to determine whether his force could undertake another battle. In the course of the discussion, Dyherrn informed the Prince that his command, bound by

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Austrian VII Corps

**Commander: General der Kavallerie
Archduke Ferdinand Karl d'Este
Chief of Staff: Oberst Brusch**

**Advance Guard: GM von Mohr
Kaiser Hussars, Nr.1 (4 sqdns)
1st Siebenbürger Walachen Grenzer,
Nr. 16 (1 bn)**

**2nd Siebenbürger Walachen Grenzer,
Nr. 17 (1 bn)**

**Vukassovich Infantry, Nr.48 (3 bns)
Two companies of pioneers
1 light and 1 brigade battery**

**FML Mondet's Division
GM Civilart's Brigade
de Ligne Infantry, Nr. 30 (3 bns)
Kottulinsky Infantry, Nr. 41 (3 bns)
1 brigade battery**

**GM Pflacher's Brigade
Weidenfeld Infantry, Nr. 37 (3 bns)
Davidovitch Infantry, Nr. 34 (3 bns)
1 brigade battery**

**GM Trauttenberg's Brigade
Baillet Infantry, Nr. 63 (3 bns)
Strauch Infantry, Nr. 24 (3 bns)
1 brigade battery**

**FML Schaueroth's Division
GM Gehringer's Brigade
Palatinal Hussars, Nr. 12 (8 sqdns)
Szekler Hussars, Nr. 11 (8 sqdns)**

**GM Speth's Brigade
Somaravia Cuirassiers, Nr. 5 (6 sqdns)
Lothringen Cuirassiers, Nr. 7 (6 sqdns)
1 Cavalry Battery**

Notes:

1. The other four squadrons of Kaiser were detached: two 25km east of Warsaw at Okuniew, two about 30km west of Blonie.
2. It is probable that the 11th (Szekler) Hussars had not yet joined VII Corps.
3. One Infantry Battalion (unidentified) may also have been en route and thus unavailable.

Polish - Saxon Forces

Commander: GD Prince Joseph Poniatowski
Chief of Staff: GB Fiszer

Covering Force: GB Rozniecki
2nd Polish Lancers (3 sqdns)
3rd Polish Lancers (3 sqdns)
5th Polish Chasseurs (2 1/2 sqdns)
6th Polish Lancers (3 sqdns)
4 Polish horse guns

At Falenty:
GB Sokolonicki
I/1st Polish Infantry (1 bn)
I/6th Polish Infantry (1 bn)
I/8th Polish Infantry (1 bn)
6 Polish guns

At Michalowice:
GB Bieganski
3rd Polish Infantry (2 bns)
4 Polish guns

At Raszyn:
2nd Polish Infantry (2 bns)

GM von Dyherrn's command
I/von Oebischelwitz (1 bn)
Einsiedel Grenadier Battalion (1 bn)
König Grenadiers (2 companies)
von Dyherrn Grenadiers (2 companies)
von Rechten Grenadiers (2 companies)
14 Saxon guns (Batteries Kotsch and Semder)

Central Reserve:
1st Polish Chasseurs (3 sqdns)
squadron/Saxon Hussars (1 sqdn)
5 Polish horse guns

At Jaworow:
GB Kamieniecki
II/1st Polish Infantry (1 bn)
II/8th Polish Infantry (1 bn)
6 Polish guns

At Blonie:
company 5th Polish Chasseurs (1/2 sqdn)
squadron/Saxon Hussars (1 sqdn)

At Wola:
II/6th Polish Infantry (1 bn)
2 Polish guns

En route from Thorn:
12th Polish Infantry (2 bns)



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orders he had received on 15 April, would have to depart for Saxony immediately; he had only stayed on for this first battle because of the gravity of the situation. Considering the loss of Dyherrn's troops and his own casualties from the day's fight, Poniatowski decided to retreat on Warsaw during the night and accepted a temporary cease-fire offered the next day by Ferdinand. Under the terms of the cease-fire, the Poles evacuated their capital on the 21st and withdrew to the north, allowing the Austrians to enter the city but sparing it the ravages of a siege. Dyherrn took this opportunity to lead his men home, praised for having 'fought valiantly' but leaving behind a degree of resentment for abandoning an ally in his darkest hour.

The Austrians had lost considerably fewer than the Poles, a total of about 600 (over 250 from Vukassovich alone), but it was an unsatisfactory victory for Ferdinand. Possession of Warsaw was advantageous but had little significance as long as the Polish Army was at large. That army, roughly handled but hardly destroyed, would eventually recover, force the Archduke out of Poland and seize the province of Galicia from the Habsburg throne.

Polish-Saxon Strengths (as of late March 1809)

1st Polish Chasseurs 730
 2nd Polish Lancers 800
 3rd Polish Lancers 760
 5th Polish Chasseurs 505
 6th Polish Lancers 709
 1st Polish Infantry 1,642
 2nd Polish Infantry 1,742
 3rd Polish Infantry 1,927
 6th Polish Infantry 1,346
 8th Polish Infantry 1,500
 12th Polish Infantry 700
 Polish Artillery 700
 Saxon Infantry 1,619
 Saxon Hussars 200 (estimates vary from 178 to over 300)
 Saxon Artillery 300-350

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The First Empire Christmas Competition Result.

We Have a Winner!

For your delectation, below are listed the questions and answers to the first, First Empire Christmas Competition. We received a bucket load of responses, many were amusing, (some intentionally, some otherwise!), and many of you had put in a considerable amount of effort. If, however, your name isn't Steve Bird, of Seal, Sevenoaks, Kent, then you ain't won! So congratulations to Steve and now you can see how you fared!

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Where was Napoleon born?
A: Ajaccio, Corsica | 12. Which Marshal became Governor of Naples on 23 July 1808?
A: Marshal Pérignon, for all those who put Murat, sorry but you were wrong, Murat became King! |
| 2. When was Napoleon born?
A: 15 August 1769 | 13. Who was Blücher's Chief of Staff of 1815?
A: Count von Gneisenau |
| 3. At Napoleon's coronation, from whom, against protocol, did Napoleon take the crown, in order to crown himself?
A: Pope Pius VII | 14. What is the name of the artist whose painting appeared on the cover of issue 5 of First Empire?
A: J.B. Schiavonetti |
| 4. Which advertiser in this issue (#9), markets and manufacturers AB figures?
A: Wargames South | 15. What is the popular name of the 3eme Régiment étranger?
A: Regiment Irlandais or Irish Legion.
(I decided to accept either) |
| 5. What was the name of the ship used during the escape from Elba?
A: l'Inconstant | 16. Who was responsible for returning the remains of Napoleon II from Austria to Paris?
A: Adolph Hitler...honest! |
| 6. What was the title held by Napoleon's son at his death?
A: Duke of Reichstadt | 17. Who became Colonel-Général of the Artillery and Marines of the Imperial Guard in 1804?
A: Mortier |
| 7. What was the full name of the father of Eugene, Vice Roy of Italy?
A: Alexandre - Francois - Marie, Viscount de Beuharnais | 18. In what year was the Polish Guard batalion formed?
A: 1813 |
| 8. Where was Murat executed? A: Pizzo | 19. Which Kingdom was the Grand Duchy of Warsaw a part?
A: Saxony |
| 9. At Waterloo, which 'allied' Prince was charged with the defence Smohain and Frischermont?
A: Prince Bernard of Saxe Weimar | 20. Who portrayed Napoleon in the Dino de Laurentis film 'Waterloo'?
A: Rod Steiger |
| 10. What was Ney's ducal title?
A: Duc d'Elchingen | |
| 11. In which Bavarian town did Berthier meet his death?
A: Bamberg | |

Well if you got them all correct and didn't win or if you are still kicking yourself, better next luck next time. Perhaps you should have a go at the Napier Competition on page 41? Always remember it is not the taking part that counts it is the WINNING!