

Murat's Last Charge:

The Battle of Tolentino 2-3 May 1815

Jack Gill, U.S.A.

In the spring of 1815, months before the blood and thunder of Waterloo brought the Napoleonic era to a close, a brief campaign in central Italy heralded the demise of Marshal Joachim Murat's Kingdom of Naples. Seen by some as the first glimmering of the Italian independence struggle and by others as the last act of a confused and desperate man, this war opened with Murat launching a bold offensive into northern Italy and ended two months later with a complete victory for his opponent, Feldmarschalleutnant (FML) Friedrich Freiherr von Bianchi commanding the Austrian 'Army of Naples'. The principal engagement of the campaign, and hence the Neapolitan army's last major battle, was fought at Tolentino on 2 and 3 May. Given Colin Allen's fine series of pieces on Murat's army, it seems an appropriate moment to examine this obscure engagement.

A Hasty, Hopeful Expedition

The Italian campaign of 1815 grew out of Murat's desire to unite all of Italy under his own sceptre and his belief that a bold stroke against the Austrian forces in the northern half of the peninsula would inspire the people of Italy to throw off Habsburg domination. Doubtless pushed by Machiavellian spouse, Caroline Bonaparte, Murat had renounced his emperor during the calamitous days of 1813-14. He thus retained his throne as the Allied powers shipped Napoleon off to Elba and demolished the old Kingdom of Italy, retaking some lands and dividing the remainder between the Pope and a clutch of exiled dukes and princes. Upon Napoleon's return to France, however, Murat again heard the sounds of glory in the distance and rediscovered the bonds of loyalty that still tied him to his old master. On 15 March, against the advice of his ministers and queen, he decided to take up the sword against Austria and began making preparations for a strike north as the 'liberator of Italy'. In doing so, he managed to irritate Napoleon, incite Allied retaliation and seal his own doom.

Political and strategic considerations aside, Murat should have been deterred by the state of his army. In addition to manpower shortages that left most regiments understrength, many of the soldiers in the ranks of the Neapolitan Army in 1815 were new recruits, inexperienced, poorly trained and ill-equipped. Artillery was in short supply, the existing equipment deficient and the draft horses 'in a deplorable state' according to one officer. The cavalry horses too were mostly young and inadequately trained (although the 1st Regiment seems to have been an exception). Moreover, morale and discipline, never the strong points of Neapolitan units, were

generally poor to execrable. Raised by the forced enrolment of prisoners, deserters, draft evaders, and other malcontents, many regiments thus began to melt away as soon as the campaign opened and proved fragile entities on the battlefield. These problems were especially acute in the newer regiments, particularly the 9th Line, 10th Line and 4th Light. As Murat's chief of engineers recalled, the army was 'a numerous troop, with little discipline, disorganised in its administration, scarcely armed, richly dressed, courageous, presumptuous'. Easily enthused in moments of victory, it would quickly slide into disorder, indiscipline and disintegration in times of crisis.

Good leadership could have ameliorated or corrected some of these faults, but the calibre of officer in Murat's army was generally low and many of his generals - most notably his chief of staff, Armand Millet de Villeneuve - were notoriously indolent and incapable. Jealous rivalries hindered cooperation and few had any great faith in their comrades, their king or their cause.

The Habsburg forces presented a very different picture. Besides being better equipped, trained and provisioned, most of the Austrian units in Italy had much more combat experience than their foes. Leadership, at least at the junior levels, was also generally superior. Scattered all over the peninsula in small garrisons, they would be unable to act offensively for several weeks, but reinforcements were en route and the senior commander in Italy, General der Kavallerie Johann Graf Frimont von Palota, had instructions to attack as soon as possible. His broad directions outlined two specific objectives. First, his mission was to destroy the Neapolitan Army and thereby eliminate the threat to Austrian forces operating on France's Alpine frontier. Second, he should not waste time chasing Murat deep into southern Italy, but should endeavour to engage the Neapolitans as far north as possible (that is, near the Po River).

In contrast, Murat appears to have had no plan of campaign whatsoever. Departing his capital on 17 March, he rode northeast to Ancona where his line cavalry division and two line infantry divisions had been stationed since the end of the previous year's hostilities and where Lieutenant General (LTG) Giuseppe Lechi's 3rd Division was slowly assembling. Here he dithered and consulted while the well-informed Austrians gathered their forces. Finally, on 27 March, after a confused counsel of war, King Joachim decided to launch his offensive and the next morning his brightly uniformed, fragile army, about 40,000 strong, marched north toward the Po valley. In the meantime, poorly coordinated with the actions of the main army, the two small Guard divisions had crossed the border into the Papal territories on the 22nd. Murat's vague concept appears to have been that these two forces would unite at Bologna, but as





Murat

the campaign opened, they were separated by the daunting heights of the Apennines and vulnerable to defeat in detail. The 4th Division and a variety of militia units remained behind to guard the kingdom.

For a week, Murat's men made good progress. Offering occasional resistance, the dispersed Austrian detachments fell back and the king marched up the coast, turning

inland at Rimini to make a triumphal entry into Bologna on 1 April. Instead of pushing on to the weakly-guarded Po, however, he wasted three days in issuing proclamations and vainly attempting to rally Italian volunteers to his flag. He only resumed the advance on the 4th, pushing back an Austrian rear guard, but losing over 300 deserters from the engaged division (LTG Michele Carascosa's 1st). His entrance into Modena was poorly received and his recruiting agents met with little success; indeed, in some cases they were chased and harassed by local citizens. Murat began to lose confidence in himself and his schemes.

Still he persisted. Leaving Carascosa near Carpi, he took the 2nd Division northeast (Lechi formed a link between the other two divisions), encircling the citadel of Ferrara on the 6th and finally reaching the banks of the Po on 7 April. The same day, on the other side of the mountains, Generals Pignatelli-Strongoli and Livron brought their Guard troops into Florence on the heels of the retreating Austrians.

At the Po, the Neapolitan advance came to a halt. Hoping to use the river line as a flank shield for a march on Milan, Murat spent another day (8 April) trying to reduce an Austrian bridgehead north of Ferrara but was unable to dislodge the defenders. Murat now lost his nerve and the initiative. On the 10th, an Austrian reconnaissance in force struck General Guglielmo Pepe's brigade at Carpi and two days later a foray from the bridgehead pressed the blockading Neapolitan force back. The next morning, however, when the Austrian attack was renewed in concert with a sally from the citadel in Ferrara, the Habsburg troops found the enemy's lines deserted. Having ordered the Guard to join the main army, Murat had skillfully slipped out during the night and begun the long retreat that would lead to Tolentino and the downfall of his kingdom.

Retreat and Pursuit

Several days passed before the Austrians could launch a full pursuit, but by the 16th Frimont had united most of his force in Bologna and was prepared to advance. Given the generally weak state of the Neapolitan Army and the need for a speedy end to the campaign, Frimont adopted the risky strategy of dividing his main body into two columns. The eastern force, approximately 15,500 men commanded by Generalmajor (GM) Graf Adam Neipperg, was to push down the coast, keeping close contact with Murat and delaying the Neapolitan retreat, while the energetic Bianchi with 12,000 men slipped over the Apennines

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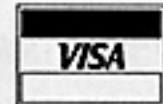
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and hurried south toward Foligno. With luck, these two forces would catch and crush Murat somewhere near Ancona. Simultaneously, GM Laval Graf Nugent would depart Pistoia and move on Rome via Florence with a small third column (3,300). Encountering no resistance, Nugent entered Florence on 16 April (the Neapolitan Guards had departed the day before) and marched into Rome on 3 May, just as Murat's fate was being decided at Tolentino.

Neipperg followed Murat and gained several bright successes, humiliating the Neapolitans and eroding their morale, but his pursuit lacked drive and energy. As a result, the Neapolitan king was able to concentrate his army, Guards and line, north of Ancona in late April. Operationally, his situation was good, indeed exciting in its possibilities. Though much weakened by desertion, Murat still commanded some 28-32,000 men and would outnumber his opponents if he could face them individually. With five days' march separating the two Austrian columns, his united force, using interior lines, was in an ideal position to defeat Bianchi and Neipperg in detail. Even Murat could not fail to recognise his opportunity and he resolved to strike Bianchi with four divisions while Carascosa's men held off Neipperg. The army's morale bolstered by a victory, he then hoped to turn north, join Carascosa and defeat Neipperg.

Bianchi, meanwhile, reached Tolentino with his main body on 1 May, cutting Murat's principal line of withdrawal. Now in command of the Austrian Army of Naples (Frimont had been called away to the north), he established his men in a good blocking position astride the main road and ordered Neipperg to hasten his advance against the Neapolitan rear. Although he knew he was outnumbered, he evidently had enough confidence in his men - or enough disdain for his foe - to expect them to hold Murat until Neipperg could arrive to complete the destruction of the enemy army.

Learning that evening that Murat had arrived near Macerata with the 2nd Division and his Guard, and that Neipperg would not be able to provide support before the expected clash, Bianchi none the less disposed his troops for battle on the morning of 2 May. GM Senitzer commanded on the left with two battalions of Chasteler and one of Wacquart on the ridge in front of Madia, and one battalion each of Hiller and Simbschen along with a squadron of dragoons along the heights north of Casone. Athwart the main road at the Osteria della Rancia and behind it in reserve were one battalion each of Simbschen and Erzherzog Karl, the 9th Jäger Battalion, three or four squadrons of dragoons and four of hussars under Generals

Neapolitan Order of Battle

Commander: King Joachim Murat

Chief of Staff: LTG Millet de Villeneuve

10th Line Regiment (2 bns)	(1,000)
Officers Battalion	(250)
Artillery Reserve:	10 guns
Sappers	(5-700)
Guard Infantry Division: LTG Prince	(2,500-3,000)

Pignatelli-Strongoli

Brigade: Colonel Taillade

1st Velite Regt. (2 bns)
 Voltigeur Regt. (2 bns) (third battalion in Naples)

Brigade: Colonel Merliot

2nd Velite Regt. (2 bns)
 8 guns

Guard Cavalry Division: LTG Livron (1,000 - 2,000)

Brigadiers: Generals Campana and Giuliani

Guard Hussars
 Guard Chevaulegers
 Guard Cuirassiers
 Guard Lancers
 4 guns

2nd Infantry Division: LTG d'Ambrosio (6-7,000 infantry)

Brigade: Brigadier General d'Aquino

3rd Light Infantry Regt. (3 bns)
 2nd Infantry Regt. (3 bns)

Brigade: Brigadier General Medici

6th and 9th Infantry Regts. (3 bns each)
 2nd Chevaulegers (500)
 10 guns

3rd Infantry Division: LTG Lechi (6-7,000)

Brigade: Brigadier General de Majo

1st Light Infantry Regt. (3 bns)
 4th Infantry Regt. (3 bns)

Brigade: Brigadier General Caraffa

7th and 8th Infantry Regts. (3 bns each)
 3rd Chevaulegers (300)
 10 guns

Notes:

1. All strengths are estimates.
2. The Officers Battalion was assembled from officers of the former Army of Italy.
3. The 10th Line was originally slated for the 4th Division but joined the main army in late April
4. Other units possibly present include:
 - a. Murat's Guardie del Corpo
 - b. A newly-organised battalion of some 600 volunteers.
 - c. Volunteer cavalry unit organised in early April ('Chasseurs of Bologna')
 - d. One battalion of Guard Grenadiers (at least one battalion was in Naples).

Mohr was responsible for both the centre and the right. GM Eckhardt was posted at San Severino with a battalion of Erzherzog Karl and another hussar platoon to watch the extreme left. Tolentino itself, its homes loopholed for defence, was held by the remaining battalion of Erzherzog Karl. All in all, Bianchi had in hand approximately 9,800 infantry, 933 cavalry and 28 guns.

While Bianchi acted with resolution and celerity, Murat allowed his opportunity to slip away. His plan to exploit his central position was good but its success depended on speed and determination that Murat and his weak chief of staff proved incapable of providing. They failed, for example, to conduct reconnaissances of the terrain and roads near Tolentino and Macerata even though they expected to fight over this ground and had plenty of time to gather information before the Austrians arrived (they could have sent staff officers to scout the area as early as the 27th). Intelligence on the enemy was also poor. The Guard cavalry and two battalions of the 10th Line (and perhaps the 'officers battalion') were in Macerata on the 29th and they were joined by the rest of the Guard and the king himself by the evening of the 30th, but Murat appears to have been completely ignorant of Habsburg strength at Tolentino. He thus wasted the first day of May with feeble and pointless reconnaissances despite his numerical superiority. For much of the day, he faced only Bianchi's advance guard, but he allowed his probes to be repulsed and permitted the outnumbered Austrians to occupy several key features of the prospective battlefield (such as the village of Monte Milone). Furthermore, he inexplicably left Lechi's 3rd Division nearly a day's march away to the north-east. General Angelo d'Ambrosio's 2nd Division, however, did arrive, giving Murat a slight numerical superiority over Bianchi for the next day's battle: some 10-12,000 infantry, 1,500-1,700 cavalry and 32 guns.

Tolentino: The First Day

Murat's intentions on the 2nd are unclear, but he apparently only planned a 'necessary reconnaissance of the Austrian positions', hoping that a limited advance would suffice to push Bianchi out of his position. This would help explain why he only employed a portion of his army on the first day of the battle. Leaving the Guard infantry and four of d'Ambrosio's battalions in Macerata as a reserve, he formed two principal columns of attack with his remaining troops: nine squadrons of Guard cavalry, d'Ambrosio's other eight battalions and the 10th Line. The left column (Generals Livron and Campana), composed of the cavalry, most of the guns and some infantry, would advance up the Chienti valley while the right, infantry and some guns under the capable d'Ambrosio, moved on Monte Milone. Two small infantry columns would serve to connect the principal forces. As for the rest of the army, Lechi was to bring seven of his battalions and his cavalry to Macerata, leaving behind five battalions as a support for Carascosa who would continue to contain Neipperg. Although his men had been in position since the previous day, Murat was slow to move and the attack columns did not begin until late morning.

The left column, moving down the road from Macerata to Osteria Sforza Costa, encountered Bianchi's vedettes around 11:30 a.m. and pushed them back, capturing a detachment of Jägers and nearly taking Bianchi as well. Fortunately for the Austrian commander, a squadron of hussars quickly pounded up to extricate both him and the hapless Jägers. In the valley, the Habsburg hussars scored another success when three squadrons

Starhemberg and Taxis. Vedettes were located as far forward as the Osteria di Sforza Costa and Monte Milone was occupied. Across the Chienti near Vamoccio were another battalion of Hiller, the Modena battalion and an hussar platoon. FML Baron

repulsed the leading six squadrons of the Neapolitan left column at the first bridge west of Sforza Costa. But this little victory was temporary. The Neapolitan cavalry rallied on its approaching infantry and Starhemberg withdrew behind the small stream running from Castelletto to Palomaredo. Before long, pressed by active Neapolitan skirmishers, he was falling back again, this time to the line Monte Milone to Trebio to Osteria Monte Milone. The Austrian infantry repulsed the 3rd Light's courageous efforts to storm the heights around Santa Lucia, but were compelled to retire as d'Ambrosio's column made progress toward Monte Milone.

The loss of Santa Lucia also forced Starhemberg's men in the valley to withdraw and they established themselves at a new position near the Osteria della Rancia. The Neapolitan cavalry pursued vigorously, however, surrounding and capturing the trail company (from Simbschen) of the Austrian rear guard. Ordered to hold his ground but with no additional support, Starhemberg committed his last reserve to the line, his company of pioneers. Fortunately for Bianchi, Starhemberg was able to hold the Neapolitan left column in check and the fight in this portion of the battlefield settled into an exchange of musketry and artillery fire.

On the Neapolitan right, d'Ambrosio's men, encouraged by the presence of their monarch, had by now occupied Monte Milone and were preparing to continue their advance. The Austrians performed well, but the weight of numbers gradually forced them back across the open, rolling heights of Canto Gallo toward their main positions between Casone and Madia. Bianchi, however, had no intention of allowing the enemy to bivouac so close to the heart of his defence and, at about 5 p.m., he ordered GM Senitzer to push the Neapolitans back behind Vedova. Unfortunately for Murat, d'Ambrosio was badly wounded at about this time and had to turn over his command to the irresolute and incompetent Luigi d'Antonio. As a result, Senitzer, advancing across the meadows in splendid form at the head of four battalions, found that the Neapolitans withdrew quickly before him, offering almost no resistance. As evening drew on, the Austrians were thus able to clear the heights of enemy troops, leaving d'Aquino to collect his somewhat disordered men in the woods south of Monte Milone. Bianchi, satisfied with the retreat of the Neapolitans, left a chain of pickets opposite the woods and quietly withdrew Senitzer's men to the main position around Madia during the night.

Curiously, Murat too seems to have been satisfied with the day's action. He should not have been. Whereas Bianchi had held his own, Murat had failed to exploit his numerical advantage or to press home his potentially successful attacks. The king had displayed his old ardour and energy; he seemed to be everywhere on the field, inspiring his men, rallying them and leading them forward. Though mercurial in mood, the men had done well, showing themselves courageous and occasionally enthusiastic if susceptible to sudden and drastic discouragements; the Austrian reports were unanimous in praising the bravery of Murat's soldiers on the first day of the battle. Neapolitan leadership, on the other hand, was generally weak, as exemplified by d'Aquino's inexcusable behaviour. Moreover, the king's activity was local in effect. He could rouse a battalion for another charge but could not provide the grand tactical direction or energy necessary to crush Bianchi or even to push him out of

Austrian Order of Battle at Tolentino

Commander: Feldmarschalleutnant Friedrich Freiherr von Bianchi	
Division: FML Baron Mohr	
Brigade: GM Graf Starhemberg	
9th Jägers	(1,043)
Modena battalion	(400)
4 ³ / ₄ sqdns Prinz Regent Hussars (Nr. 5)	(441)
pioneer company	(161)
cavalry-battery	(6 pieces)
Brigade: GM Senitzer	
Wacquart Infantry Regt. (Nr.) - 1 bn	(969)
Simbschen Infantry Regt. (Nr. 48) - 2 bns	(1,848)
Hiller Infantry Regt. (Nr. 2) - 2 bns	(1,971)
6-pdr brigade battery	(8 pieces)
Division: GM Baron Eckhardt	
Brigade: (commanded by Eckhardt)	
Chasteler Infantry Regt. (Nr. 27) - 2 bns	(1,490)
Erzherzog Karl Infantry Regt. (Nr. 3) - 3 bns	(2,426)
6-pdr brigade battery	(6 pieces)
Brigade: GM Baron Taxis	
Grossherzog Toscana Dragoons (Nr. 4) - 6 sqdns	(726)
Banal Grenz Regt - 1 bn*	
Szuliner Grenz Regt. - 1 bn*	

*did not arrive until approx. 8 May

Artillery Reserve: 8 pieces

The numbers above include the following detached forces near the battlefield;

Hauptmann Mühlwerth with one hussar platoon, one Jäger company, and two infantry companies (these probably from Senitzer's battalions), Lieutenant Colonel Meininger with one (possibly two) dragoon squadrons

his position. His subordinates were incapable of filling the resultant gap.

Tolentino: The Second Day

Murat's plan for 3 May foresaw a general attack by three different columns. In the centre, General Pignatelli-Strongoli would drive on Casone with the infantry and cavalry of the Guard, the 10th Line and practically all of the Neapolitan artillery. Murat hoped that the pressure created by Pignatelli-Strongoli's advance would force Bianchi to commit his reserves and portions of the Austrian left wing to the Chienti valley. As Bianchi weakened his left, d'Aquino, reinforced on his right by Lechi with General Ignazio Caraffa's Brigade, would debouch from the woods and roll up the Habsburg troops in the Madia position. Four battalions and two squadrons from Lechi's Division would form a third column under General Luigi de Majo; they would cross the Chienti, brush aside the Austrians at Vamoccio and attack Tolentino from the south to cut off Bianchi's line of retreat.

Covered by a dense morning fog, Murat's troops assembled in the Chienti valley and began their advance: infantry to the north and south, Guard cavalry along the highway in the centre. Despite the determined resistance of the Austrian defenders, the attack made progress. Before long, Neapolitan batteries were established west of Osteria della Rancia along the

edge of the Casone stream and, most important, Guard infantry was able to push through Guiboli to seize Casone itself. It was time for d'Aquino to launch the decisive assault and Murat at Casone sent repeated orders directing the new commander of the 2nd Division to advance.

D'Aquino's men, however, were scattered all over the countryside foraging for the victuals which the commissaries had neglected to provide and he thus contented himself with sending forward some skirmishers to harass the retiring Austrians and one battalion of the 2nd Line to hold Vedova. The rest of the division remained in the woods. These dispositions invited counterattack and Bianchi quickly obliged. While Oberst Paumgarten led forward Regiment Chasteler to scatter the Neapolitan skirmishers, the lone available squadron of dragoons was ordered to charge their supports, the battalion of the 2nd Line. The unfortunate men of the 2nd Line had no time to form square before the cavalry was upon them and in moments, both they and the skirmishers were either sabred, captured or dispersed. D'Aquino was too distant and too disorganised to help and two squadrons sent by the furious Murat were delayed by some marshy ground.

Despite this setback for the Neapolitans, Murat's situation was still good. It was about noon, all of Bianchi's troops (except Eckhardt's small detachment) were committed, the Neapolitan Guard held Casone, and most of d'Aquino's and Lechi's troops had not yet entered into the fight. The king redoubled his efforts to get d'Aquino moving (oddly, he neither relieved his inept subordinate nor took control of the attack himself). Unfortunately, when d'Aquino finally did advance, he did so in the worst formation imaginable. Evidently terrified that more of his command would suffer the fate of the skirmishers and 2nd Line, d'Aquino formed his division into four large squares and ordered them forward across the broken ground between the forest and Madia. Just when the situation demanded a rapid attack in a flexible formation, he selected one which was slow to form and slower to move.

Echeloned from the right with three squares in the first line followed by the fourth, the unwieldy masses made their painful way across the Canto Gallo, raked by Austrian artillery and musket fire despite support from some of Murat's guns over by Casone. Hit hardest by the Austrian lead and iron, the first square (that on the right front) began to waver and Bianchi, judging his moment nicely, launched two newly-arrived squadrons of dragoons against its right flank while three infantry battalions (two from Chasteler, one from Wacquant) advanced to attack the other squares. The shaken Neapolitans did not await the dragoons' charge. Despite the efforts of their officers, the men of the first square turned and fled across the hills to the forest; their panicked flight infected the second square as well, and it too broke without actually coming into contact with the Austrian attackers. Only the third square (2nd Line), inspired by Murat who had sped across the meadows with a tiny escort, held together and retreated in good order. Reaching the edge of the wood, it joined the fourth square and deployed into line of battle to protect the shattered battalions of the first two squares.

Fortunately for Murat, Baron Taxis at the head of the Austrian dragoons, took a roundabout route in his pursuit and got bogged down in some wet ground. By the time he and his troopers had extricated themselves, it was too late to turn the disordered Neapolitan withdrawal into a rout. As Weil points out, had Taxis taken a straight course, the entire 2nd Division

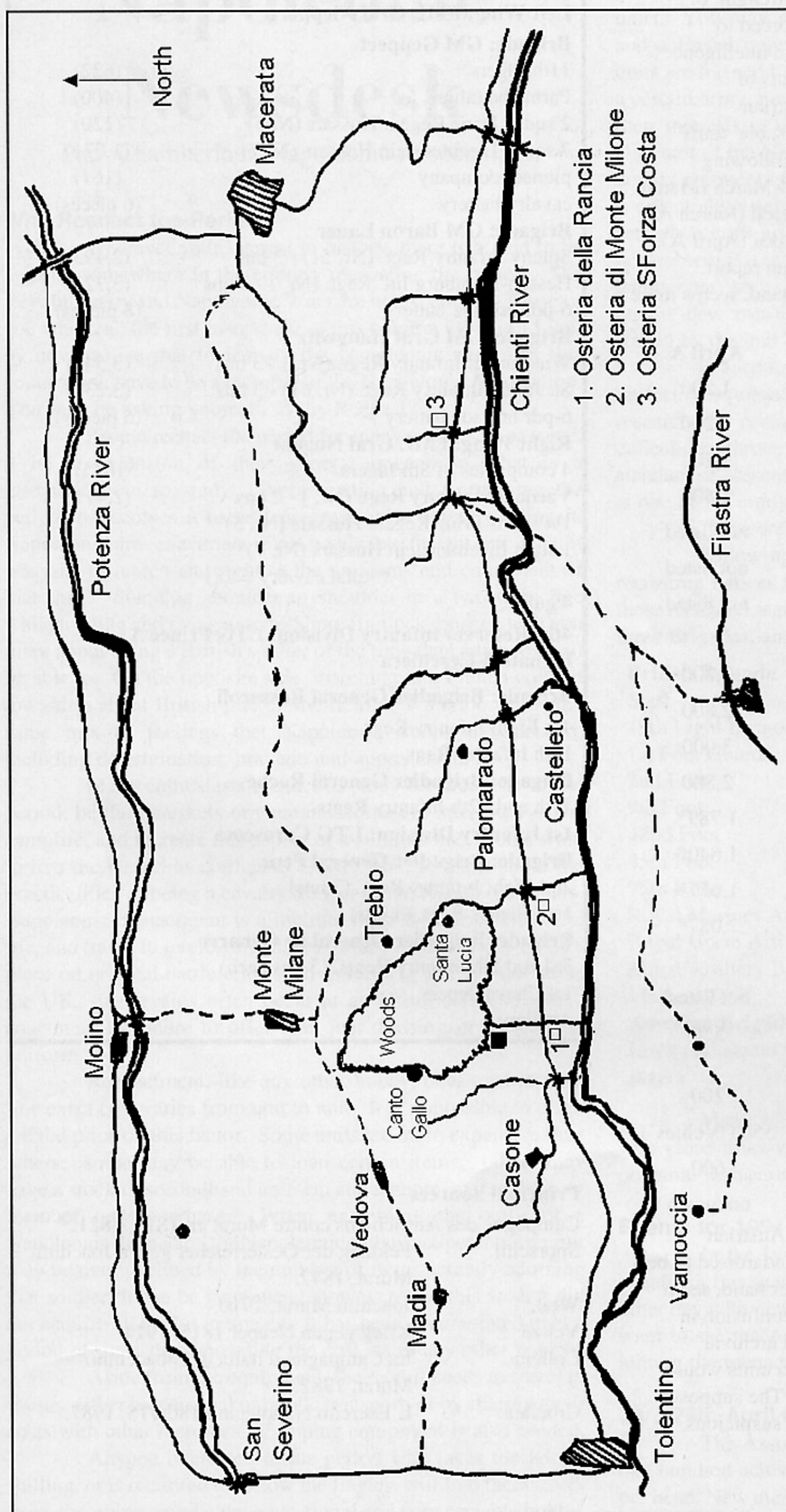
might have collapsed and Murat, his right in ruins and his centre compromised, would have had to break off action shortly after noon. As it was, the king would need every moment to reform his right because a new danger was now threatening from Monte Milone.

GM Eckhardt, following Bianchi's instructions, had moved from San Severino to Molini with his small detachment and was now approaching Monte Milone. Murat, however, quickly sent two rallied battalions to hold the town, and these troops not only succeeded in repelling two attacks by Eckhardt but also remained masters of this critical position for the rest of the afternoon.

To Murat's frustration, this small success was followed by another reverse. The retreat of the 2nd Division gave Mohr an opportunity to recover Casone and after a brief, hot struggle, the Austrians were again in possession of this key point. Furthermore, Majo's feeble effort to seize Vamoccio and threaten Bianchi's rear had faltered and his detachment remained stalled in front of the little village.

This series of setbacks evidently unnerved Murat and, although his army was by no means beaten, he concluded that the battle was lost and decided to retreat on Macerata as soon as nightfall would allow a safe disengagement. Unfortunately, when his chief of staff, Millet, prepared the written orders for the withdrawal, he inserted the word 'immediately', setting in train a chain of disasters that would culminate in the complete dissolution of the Neapolitan Army. Millet soon recognised his error, but the damage had been done. On receipt of the written order, General Pignatelli-Strongoli directed his men to pull back, giving little apparent thought to the details of the withdrawal or the overall battle situation. His officers pleaded with him to appeal the order, a staff officer from army headquarters brought verbal confirmation of the mistake in timing - all to no avail. The stubborn general stuck to his decision and rode off to Macerata, leaving his troops to retreat as best they could. Murat too had gone back to Macerata and Millet, although in a position to witness the impending catastrophe, did not make the short ride to Pignatelli-Strongoli's position to correct matters. The Neapolitan cavalry held together but the withdrawing infantry soon became a disordered mob.

With his foe clearly wavering, Bianchi ordered his men to advance and they were soon pressing the crumbling Neapolitan army back in all sectors. Even south of the river, where Majo outnumbered the Austrians, the poorly-led Neapolitan units gradually began to lose their cohesion as the afternoon slid towards evening. Fortunately, the rear guard at Monte Milone kept up a tenacious defence, holding off Taxis and Eckhardt until the fall of night. By evening, other than a small blocking force at Sforza Costa and the rear guard falling back along the road from Monte Milone, the Neapolitan Army, more by accident than design, was clustered around Macerata in a confused, nearly leaderless, tangle. Demoralised, poorly-supplied and exhausted from the day's long battle under a hot sun, the huddled soldiers were made yet more miserable by a violent, drenching rainstorm. At an impromptu conference, Murat received only lugubrious news from his feeble and insubordinate collection of generals. Pignatelli-Strongoli, d'Aquino and Lechi all reported that their divisions had disintegrated or that the few remaining troops were in such a state of discouragement that they were likely to throw down their arms and flee at the first sight of the Austrians.



These dark appraisals, though exaggerated, depressed Murat and, instead of relieving his negligent division commanders, he grew irresolute and indecisive. The squabbling among the generals as each attempted to justify his own behaviour and castigate his comrades, could only have increased the king's dolour. In short, Murat decided that the army would abandon the good road through Tolentino, link with Carascosa's Division and continue its wretched retreat to Naples along the poor byways south of Ancona. Caraffa's Brigade, which had sat idle in Macerata throughout the day, was sent to the south-east with a *chevauxlegers* regiment to secure the route of passage.

End of the Realm

At a cost of 820 casualties (210 dead, 457 wounded and 143 missing or captured), Bianchi had won an exemplary defensive battle against an enemy more than double his strength. On the other hand, the Habsburg commander estimated Neapolitan losses to be about 1,722 and the number of prisoners grew hour by hour when the withdrawal began on 4 May. Initially, however, Murat's army, in the words of General d'Ambrosio, 'rallied itself spontaneously and against the intentions and the dispositions of many of its generals'. The cavalry and artillery were in good order and Colonel Baurin of the 6th Line had maintained his regiment's cohesion. Despite the general demoralisation and prevailing confusion, most of the men slowly rejoined their battalions. Time, provisions and good leadership might have restored the situation, but all of these were lacking and the enemy was close behind. Thanks to the discipline of the 6th Line and the cavalry, Murat, exhibiting all of his energy and valour, was able to hold off the immediate pursuit, but Caraffa panicked and there was no alternative but to retire as rapidly as possible. The Neapolitan Army truly melted away during this long retreat back to the kingdom. The Guard infantry alone lost 500 deserters on 5 May and by the 11th, Murat's strength had dwindled to about 10,000 beaten men. Although he flirted briefly with notions of continued resistance, Murat realised that the dream had come to an end and turned over command to General Carascosa on 15 May. Four days later, he and a small following embarked on a pair of fishing boats and sailed into the darkness.

Neapolitan Strength Estimates

With no Neapolitan archival record for the strength of Murat's army at Tolentino, the historian is forced to construct his own estimate based on Austrian intelligence assessments and the often imprecise statements of participants. To complicate matters, the Austrian assessments include a number of unrecognisable units under the heading of the Royal Guard. The following presents a Neapolitan strength report of mid-March (March N), and Austrian assessment for the same period (March A) and an Austrian assessment for the end of April (April A); all are exaggerated, particularly the Neapolitan report. Lechi's report of 25 April (*), on the other hand, seems more accurate.

Guard Infantry	March N	March A	April A
1st Velites	1,125	923	1,200
2nd Velites	1,164	1,064	1,200
3rd Velites (?)	not listed	not listed	1,200
Voltigeurs	1,536	1,456	1,800
Grenadiers	not listed	not listed	not listed
Sappers (?)	818	no figure	not listed
2nd Artillery (?)	818	340	not listed
Line/Light Infantry			
3rd Light/2 Div	2,335	2,203	2,800
2nd Line/2 Div	2,229	2,046	2,800
6th Line/2 Div	2,425	2,147	3,000
9th Line/2 Div	1,611	1,488	2,800
1st Light/3 Div	2,289	2,062	1,789*
4th Line/3 Div	2,250	2,051	1,640*
7th Line/3 Div	2,100	1,845	1,657*
8th Line/3 Div	2,340	2,062	2,087*
Cavalry			
Guard Lancers	390	313	not listed
Guard Chevaulegers	487	323	550
Guard Cuirassiers	440	200	200
Guard Hussars	518	426	550 ('Velites')
2nd Chevaulegers	808	625	600
3rd Chevaulegers	828	363	unknown

From the table, it is readily apparent that the Austrian assessment of late April is too vague and standardised to be of much use. The March reports, on the other hand, seem more reliable, but apparently suffered some confusion in transcription or translation from the original archival material: it seems odd, for example, that two units would have exactly the same number of men (818). The supposed 'Guard Sappers' and '2nd Artillery' are also suspicious.

Additional Austrian Order of Battle

Left Wing: FML Graf Niepperg

Brigade: GM Geppert

11th Jägers	(622)
Parma battalion	(400)
2 sqdns Prinz Regent Hussars (Nr.5)	(220)
7 sqdns Liechtenstein Hussars (Nr.7)	(1,071)
pioneer company	(161)
cavalry battery	(6 pieces)

Brigade: GM Baron Lauer

Spleny Infantry Regt. (Nr. 51) - 3 bns	(2,493)
Hessen-Homburg Inf. Regt. (Nr.) - 3 bns	(3,722)
6-pdr brigade battery	(8 pieces)

Brigade: GM Graf Haugwitz

Wiedrunkel Infantry Regt. (Nr.) - 3 bns	(3,544)
St. Julien Infantry Regt. (Nr. 61) - 3 bns	(3,233)
6-pdr brigade battery	(6 pieces)

Right Wing: FML Graf Nugent

4 companies of 8th Jägers	(675)
Vacquant Infantry Regt. (Nr.) - 2 bns	(2,411)
1¼ sqdns Prinz Regent Hussars (Nr. 5)**	
1 sqdn Liechtenstein Hussars (Nr. 7)**	
**total cavalry = 281	

4 guns

4th (Reserve) Infantry Division: LTG Prince A.

Pignatelli-Cerchiera

Brigade: Brigadier General Rossaroli

4th Light Infantry Regt.
10th Infantry Regt.

Brigade: Brigadier General Roche

11th and 12th Infantry Regts.

1st Infantry Division: LTG Carascosa

Brigade: Brigadier General Pepe

2nd Light Infantry Regt. (3 bns)
1st Infantry Regt. (3 bns)

Brigade: Brigadier General de Genarro

3rd and 5th Infantry Regts. (3 bns each)
1st Chevaulegers
Artillery

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