

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02373-3 - The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812, Volume 2

A. T. Mahan

Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE
INFLUENCE OF SEA POWER
UPON THE
FRENCH REVOLUTION AND EMPIRE.

CHAPTER XII.

EVENTS ON THE CONTINENT, 1798-1800.

DISORDERS OF FRANCE UNDER THE DIRECTORY.—DISASTROUS
WAR OF THE SECOND COALITION.—ESTABLISHMENT OF THE
CONSULATE.—BONAPARTE OVERTHROWS AUSTRIA AND FRAMES
AGAINST GREAT BRITAIN THE ARMED NEUTRALITY OF 1800.—
PEACE OF LUNÉVILLE WITH AUSTRIA.

WHILE Bonaparte was crossing the Syrian desert and chafing over the siege of Acre, the long gathering storm of war known as the Second Coalition had broken upon France. It had been preceded by a premature outburst of hostility on the part of the Two Sicilies, induced by the excitement consequent upon the battle of the Nile and fostered by Nelson;¹ who, however influenced, was largely responsible for the action of the court. Despite the advice of Austria to wait, a summons was sent to the French on the 22d of November, 1798, to evacuate the Papal States and Malta. A Neapolitan army of fifty thousand men marched upon Rome; and five thousand were carried by Nelson's ships to Leghorn with the idea of harassing the confidently-expected retreat of the enemy.²

¹ See, for instance, his letter to Lady Hamilton, Oct. 3, 1798 (Disp., vol. iii. p. 140), which is but one of many similar expressions in his correspondence.

² Nels. Disp., vol. iii. p. 177.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02373-3 - The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812, Volume 2

A. T. Mahan

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2

WAR OF THE SECOND COALITION.

Leghorn was at once surrendered ; but in the south the campaign ended in utter disaster. The French general Championnet, having but fifteen thousand men, evacuated Rome, which the Neapolitans consequently entered without opposition ; but their field operations met with a series of humiliating reverses, due partly to bad generalship and partly to inexperience and the lack of mutual confidence often found among untried troops. The French re-entered Rome seventeen days after the campaign opened ; and the king of Naples, who had made a triumphal entry into the city, hurried back to his capital, called upon the people to rise in defence of their homes against the invaders, and then fled with the royal family to Palermo, Nelson giving them and the Hamiltons passage on board his flagship. The peasantry and the populace flew to arms, in obedience to the king's proclamation and to their own feelings of hatred to the republicans. Under the guidance of the priests and monks, with hardy but undisciplined fury, they in the field harassed the advance of the French, and in the capital rose against the upper classes, who were suspected of secret intelligence with the enemy. Championnet, however, continued to advance ; and on the 23d of January, 1799, Naples was stormed by his troops. After the occupation, a series of judicious concessions to the prejudices of the people induced their cheerful submission. The conquest was followed by the birth to the Batavian, Helvetian, Ligurian, Cisalpine, and Roman republics, of a little sister, named the Parthenopeian Republic, destined to a troubled existence as short as its name was long.

The Neapolitan declaration of war caused the ruin of the Piedmontese monarchy. The Directory, seeing that war with Austria was probable, decided to occupy all Piedmont. The king abdicated on the 9th of December, 1798 ; retiring to the island of Sardinia, which was left in his possession. Piedmont was soon after annexed to the French Republic.

On the 20th of February, 1799, having failed to receive

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02373-3 - The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812, Volume 2

A. T. Mahan

Excerpt

[More information](#)*WAR OF THE SECOND COALITION.*

3

from the emperor the explanations demanded concerning the entrance of the Russian troops into his dominions, the Directory ordered its generals to advance. Jourdan was to command in Germany, Masséna in Switzerland, and Schérer in Italy. The armies of the republic, enfeebled by two years of peace and by the economies of a government always embarrassed for money and deficient in executive vigor, were everywhere inferior to those of the enemy ; and the plan of campaign, providing for several operations out of reach of mutual support, has been regarded by military critics as essentially vicious.

Jourdan crossed the Rhine at Strasburg on the first of March, advancing through the Black Forest upon the head waters of the Danube. On the 6th Masséna crossed the river above Lake Constance, and moved through the Alps toward the Tyrol, driving the Austrians before him on his right and centre ; but on the left he entirely failed to carry the important position of Feldkirch, upon which would depend the communication between his left and the right of Jourdan, if the latter succeeded in pushing on as ordered. This, however, he was unable to do. After some severe partial encounters there was fought on March 25th, at Stokach, near the north-west extremity of Lake Constance, a pitched battle in which the French were defeated. Jourdan then saw that he had to do with largely superior forces and retreated upon the Rhine, which he recrossed above Strasburg on the 6th of April.

On the 26th of March, the day after the defeat of Jourdan at Stokach, Schérer in Italy attacked the Austrians, who were occupying the line of the Adige, rendered famous by Bonaparte in his great campaign of 1796. The events of that day were upon the whole favorable to the French ; but Schérer showed irresolution and consequent delay in improving such advantages as he had obtained. After a week of manœuvring the two armies met in battle on the 5th of April near Magnano, and after a long and bloody struggle

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02373-3 - The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812, Volume 2

A. T. Mahan

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

WAR OF THE SECOND COALITION.

the French were forced to give way. On the 6th, the day that Jourdan retreated across the Rhine, Schérer also fell back behind the Mincio. Not feeling secure there, although the Austrians did not pursue, he threw garrisons into the posts on that line, and on the 12th retired behind the Adda; sending word to Macdonald, Championnet's successor at Naples, to prepare to evacuate that kingdom and bring to northern Italy the thirty thousand men now so sorely needed.

Jourdan having offered his resignation after the battle of Stokach, the armies in Germany and in Switzerland were united under the command of Masséna; whose long front, extending from the Engadine, around the sources of the Inn, along the Rhine as low as Dusseldorf, was held by but one hundred thousand men, of whom two-thirds were in Switzerland. In the position which Switzerland occupies, thrust out to the eastward from the frontiers of France, having on the one flank the fields of Germany, on the other those of Italy, and approachable from both sides by many passes, the difficulties of defence are great;¹ and Masséna found himself menaced from both quarters, as well as in front, by enemies whose aggregate force was far superior to his own. Pressed along the line of the Rhine both above and below Lake Constance, he was compelled to retire upon works constructed by him around Zurich; being unable to prevent the junction of the enemy's forces, which approached from both directions. On the 4th of June the Austrians assaulted his lines; and, though the attack was repulsed, Masséna thought necessary to evacu-

¹ In an entirely open country, without natural obstacles, there are few or none of those strategic points, by occupying which in a central position an inferior force is able to multiply its action against the divided masses of the enemy. On the other hand, in a very broken country, such as Switzerland, the number of important strategic points, passes, heads of valleys, bridges, etc., are so multiplied, that either some must be left unoccupied, or the defenders lose, by dissemination, the advantage which concentration upon one or two controlling centres usually confers.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02373-3 - The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812, Volume 2

A. T. Mahan

Excerpt

[More information](#)*WAR OF THE SECOND COALITION.*

5

ate the place forty-eight hours later, falling back upon a position on the Albis mountains a few miles in his rear.

During the two months over which these contests between Masséna and his enemies were spread, the affairs of the French in Italy were growing daily more desperate. After the victory of Magnano the Austrians were joined, on the 24th of April, by twenty thousand Russians under Marshal Suwarrow, who became general-in-chief of the allied armies. On the 26th Schérer turned over his command to Moreau ; but, although the latter was an officer of very great capacity, the change was too late to avoid all the impending disasters. On the 27th the passage of the Adda was forced by the allies, and on the 29th they entered Milan; the French retiring upon the Ticino, breaking down the bridges over the Po, and taking steps to secure their communications with Genoa. Pausing but a moment, they again retreated in two columns upon Turin and Alessandria; Moreau drawing together near the latter place the bulk of his force, about twenty thousand men, and sending pressing invitations to Macdonald to hasten the northward march of the army of Naples. The new positions were taken the 7th of May, and it was not till the 5th that the Austro-Russians, delayed by the destruction of the bridges, could cross the Po. But the insurrection of the country in all directions was showing how little the submission of the people and the establishment of new republics were accompanied by any hearty fidelity to the French cause; and on the 18th, leaving a garrison in Alessandria, Moreau retreated upon the Apennines. On the 6th of June his troops were distributed among the more important points on the crest of the range, from Pontremoli, above Spezia, to Loano, and all his convoys had safely crossed the mountains to the latter point. It was at this moment that he had an interview with Admiral Bruix, whose fleet had anchored in Vado Bay two days before.¹

¹ See ante, vol. i. p. 313.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02373-3 - The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812, Volume 2

A. T. Mahan

Excerpt

[More information](#)

While events were thus passing in Upper Italy, Macdonald, in obedience to his orders, evacuated Naples on the 7th of May, at the moment when Moreau was taking his position on the Apennines and Bonaparte making his last fruitless assault upon Acre. Leaving garrisons at the principal strong places of the kingdom, he hurried north, and on the 25th entered Florence, where, though his junction with Moreau was far from being effected, he was for the first time in sure communication with him by courier. There were two routes that Macdonald might take, — either by the sea-shore, which was impracticable for artillery, or else, crossing the Apennines, he would find a better road in the plain south of the Po, through Modena and Parma, and by it might join the army of Italy under the walls of Tortona. The latter course was chosen, and after a delay too much prolonged the army of Naples set out on the 9th of June. All went well with it until the 17th, when, having passed Modena and Parma, routing the allied detachments which he encountered, Macdonald reached the Trebia. Here, however, he was met by Suwarrow, and after three days' desperate fighting was forced to retreat by the road he came, to his old positions on the other side of the mountains. On the same day the citadel of Turin capitulated to the allies. After pursuing Macdonald some distance, Suwarrow turned back to meet Moreau, and compelled him also to retire to his former posts. This disastrous attempt at a junction within the enemies' lines cost the French fifteen thousand men. It now became necessary for the army of Naples to get to Genoa at all costs by the Corniche road, and this it was able to do through the inactivity of the enemy, — due, so Jomini says, not to Suwarrow, but to the orders from Vienna. By the middle of July both armies were united under Moreau. As a result of the necessary abandonment of Naples by the French troops, the country fell at once into the power of the armed peasantry, except the garrisons left in a few strong places; and these, by the help of the British navy, were also reduced by the 1st of August.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02373-3 - The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812, Volume 2

A. T. Mahan

Excerpt

[More information](#)*WAR OF THE SECOND COALITION.*

7

This striking practical illustration of the justness of Bonaparte's views, concerning the danger incurred by the French in Upper Italy through attempting to occupy Naples, was followed by further disasters. On the 21st of July the citadel of Alessandria capitulated; and this loss was followed on the 30th by that of Mantua, which had caused Bonaparte so much delay and trouble in 1796. The latter success was somewhat dearly bought, inasmuch as the emperor of Germany had positively forbidden Suwarrow to make any further advance before Mantua fell.¹ Opportunity was thus given for the junction of Moreau and Macdonald, and for the reorganization of the latter's army, which the affairs of the Trebia and the subsequent precipitate retreat had left in a state of prostration and incoherence, from which it did not recover for a month. The delay would have been still more favorable to the French had Mantua resisted to the last moment; but it capitulated at a time when it could still have held out for several days, and Suwarrow was thus enabled to bring up the besieging corps to his support, unknown to the enemy.

Meanwhile Moreau had been relieved by Joubert, one of the most brilliant of the young generals who had fought under Bonaparte in Italy. The newcomer, reaching his headquarters on the 2d of August, at once determined upon the offensive, moved thereto by the wish to relieve Mantua, and also by the difficulty of feeding his army in the sterile mountains now that ruin had befallen the coastwise traffic of Genoa, by which supplies had before been maintained.² On the 10th of August the French advanced. On the 14th they were in position at Novi; and there Joubert saw, but too late, that Suwarrow's army was far larger than he had

¹ It is said that the old marshal on receiving these orders cried: "This is the way armies are ruined."

² Jomini, *Guerres de la Rév. Fran.*, livre xv. p. 124. Martin, *Hist. de France depuis 1789*, vol. iii. p. 50. It was just at this moment that Nelson sent a division to the Gulf of Genoa to co-operate with Suwarrow. (Nelson Disp., vol. iii. p. 431.)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02373-3 - The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812, Volume 2

A. T. Mahan

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8

WAR OF THE SECOND COALITION.

expected, and that the rumor of Mantua's fall, which he had refused to credit, must be true. He intended to retreat; but the Russian marshal attacked the next morning, and after a fierce struggle, which the strength of their position enabled the French to prolong till night, they were driven from the field with heavy loss, four general officers and thirty-seven guns being captured. Joubert was killed early in the day; and Moreau, who had remained to aid him until familiar with all the details of his command, again took the temporary direction of the army by the agreement of the other generals. Immediately after the battle Suwarrow sent into the late Papal States a division which, co-operating with the Neapolitan royalists and the British navy, forced the French to evacuate the new Roman republic on the 27th of September, 1799.

At this moment of success new dispositions were taken by the allied governments, apparently through the initiative of Austria; which wished, by removing Suwarrow, to keep entire control of Italy in her own hands. This change of plan, made at so critical a moment, stopped the hitherto triumphant progress; and, by allowing time for Bonaparte to arrive and to act, turned victory into defeat. By it Suwarrow was to march across the Alps into Switzerland, and there take charge of the campaign against Masséna, having under him an army composed mainly of Russians. The Archduke Charles, now commanding in Switzerland, was to depart with the greater part of the Austrian contingent to the lower Rhine, where he would by his operations support the invasion of Holland then about to begin.

On the 13th of August,—the same day that Bruix entered Brest, carrying with him the Spanish fleet, and two days before the battle of Novi,—the expedition against Holland, composed of seventeen thousand Russians and thirty thousand British troops, sailed from England. Delayed first by light winds and then by heavy weather, the landing

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02373-3 - The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812, Volume 2

A. T. Mahan

Excerpt

[More information](#)*WAR OF THE SECOND COALITION.*

9

was not made till the 27th of the month. On the 31st the Archduke, taking with him thirty-six thousand Austrians, started for the lower Rhine, leaving General Hotze and the Russian Korsakoff to make head against Masséna until the arrival of Suwarrow. The latter, on the 11th of September, immediately after the surrender of Tortona, began his northward march.

At the moment the Archduke assumed his new command, the French on the lower Rhine, crossing at Mannheim, invested and bombarded Philipsburg; and their operations seemed so far serious as to draw him and a large part of his force in the same direction. This greatly diminished one of the difficulties confronting Masséna in the offensive movement he then had in contemplation. Hearing at the same time that Suwarrow had started from Italy, he made his principal attack from his left upon the Russians before Zurich on the 25th of September, the right wing of his long line advancing in concert against the Austrian position east of Lake Zurich upon its inlet, the Linth. Each effort was completely successful, and decisive; the enemy being in both directions driven back, and forced to recross the streams above and below the lake. Suwarrow, after a very painful march and hard fighting, reached his first appointed rendezvous at Mitten two days after the battle of Zurich had been lost; and the corps that were to have met him there, fearing their retreat would be cut off, had not awaited his arrival. The old marshal with great difficulty fought his way through the mountains to Ilanz, where at length he assembled his exhausted and shattered forces on the 9th of October, the day on which Bonaparte landed at Fréjus on his return from Egypt. By that time Switzerland was entirely cleared of Russians and Austrians. The river Rhine, both above and below Lake Constance, marked the dividing line between the belligerents.

The Anglo-Russian attack upon Holland had no better

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02373-3 - The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812, Volume 2

A. T. Mahan

Excerpt

[More information](#)

fate. Landing upon the peninsula between the Zuyder Zee and the North Sea, the allies were for awhile successful ; but their movements were cautious and slow, giving time for the local resistance to grow and for re-enforcements to come up. The remnants of the Dutch navy were surrendered and taken back to England ; but the Duke of York, who had chief command of the allied troops, was compelled on the 18th of October to sign a convention, by which the invading force was permitted to retire unmolested by the first of December.

During the three remaining months of 1799 some further encounters took place in Germany and Italy. In the latter the result was a succession of disasters to the French, ending with the capitulation, on the 4th of December, of Coni, their last remaining stronghold in Piedmont, and the retreat of the army into the Riviera of Genoa. Corfu and the Ionian Islands having been reduced by the combined Russian and Turkish fleets in the previous March, and Ancona surrendered on the 10th of November, all Bonaparte's conquests in Italy and the Adriatic had been lost to France when the Directory fell. The brave soldiers of the army of Italy, destitute and starving, without food, without pay, without clothing or shoes, without even wood for camp-fires in the bitter winter nights on the slopes of the Apennines, deserted in crowds and made their way to the interior. In some regiments none but officers and non-commissioned officers were left. An epidemic born of want and exposure carried off men by hundreds. Championnet, overwhelmed by his misfortunes and by the sight of the misery surrounding him, fell ill and died. Bonaparte, now First Consul, sent Masséna to replace him.

In Germany nothing decisive occurred in the field ; but in consequence of some disagreements of opinion between himself and the Archduke, Suwarrow declined further co-operation, and, alleging the absolute need of rest for his soldiers after their frightful exposure in Switzerland,