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## Napoleon's Chiefs of the Staff

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## NAPOLEON'S CHIEFS OF THE STAFF.

By CAPTAIN A. VICKERS, Indian Army.

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WHEN the Emperor Napoleon abdicated in 1814, most of his veteran marshals transferred their allegiance to the White Standard of Louis XVIII. Among these turncoats was Marshal Alexandre Berthier, Prince of Wagram. Tired of war and longing for the enjoyment of his well-earned wealth and position, he failed to rejoin his master a year later, when the faithful soldiery had reclaimed their "Little Corporal" as Emperor of France once more.

Napoleon, the child of Fortune, was so accustomed to success, and so confident in himself, that he became blind to the possibilities of failure. So excellent had been the work of his Chief of the Staff, Berthier, that the smart promulgation of his orders and the smooth running of his plans had become assured. Once his able lieutenant had received his instructions, the Emperor was able to rest assured that his orders would be carried out with skill.

A glance over the pages of Berthier's history will help us to realize how much Napoleon depended upon him. How, by working always together, they well understood each other. How Berthier must have become so intimate with the working of the Emperor's great mind that he could issue the orders of his master in a manner which would ensure obedience. He became so accomplished in the duties of the General Staff, and so well acquainted with the characters of all the Emperor's Marshals and Generals to whom important orders had to be given, that the loss of his services must be regarded as one of the chief causes of the failure of Napoleon's last campaign.

Alexandre Berthier, a product of Carnot's system, first springs to prominence in 1797 as one of the heroes who rallied the Grenadiers for the fierce struggle on the bridge at Arcola in company with Buonaparte.

The following year, 1798, he is again on the Staff in Egypt, and is selected as one of the small party of confidants to accompany Buonaparte when he deserted the army and slipped away from Egypt in a small vessel, which, narrowly escaping capture by Nelson, landed him on the coast of France.

In 1799 Berthier, as a confidential assistant of the First Consul, quietly raised a powerful reserve army to back up the schemes of his master. The divisions of this force were raised in various parts of France and were kept ready for instant

mobilization. The organization of this force was an experience of the greatest value to Berthier as Chief of the Staff in subsequent campaigns.

The year following (1800) we find him among the Alps reconnoitring and studying the passes. From his advice and reports Napoleon planned his great "coup," when on May 14th his army swept across the Alps and astonished the world. The details of this daring and brilliant move were left to Berthier.

Like most military officers, he was a true sportsman; during the short intervals of peace in those stormy times he amused himself as Master of Hounds. In 1804 he is created Marshal. A reward for his skill as Chief of Staff.

We have some interesting details of Napoleon's method of work during the vigorous campaigns of 1805-6. At one in the morning he entered his office where secretaries were already at work, found all reports from divisions ready at his hand, and then, pacing the floor, he would dictate his despatches and orders for the coming day. The orders when completed were handed to Berthier. By 3 a.m. they were on their way and reached the separate corps from Headquarters just before the soldiers set out on their march. It was by such perfect machinery that accuracy in both command and obedience was assured. When travelling, the seats of the Imperial carriage could be converted into a couch for Napoleon's frequent night journeys, but ordinarily Berthier and Murat took turns in sitting by his side during the Prussian campaign of 1806.

In 1807 Berthier was created Duke of Neuchatel, and two years later he was again Chief of the Staff in the fifth campaign against Austria. In this year he discovered a plot to murder the Emperor, noticing just in time the youth who was bent on doing the deed.

The Emperor's esteem and confidence in Berthier were made very clear to the world in 1810 when he was created Prince of Wagram, and, still greater honour, was sent as Ambassador Extraordinary to marry Maria Louisa by proxy at Vienna. Up to the last we find Berthier always at Napoleon's side. During the amazing manœuvres of the French Army by which he endeavoured to check the steady advance of the Allies upon Paris he frequently took counsel and advice from Maret and Berthier. Finally, when the enemy are at the gates of Paris, a council of war is held for the last time. Ney, Bertrand, Maret, Caulincourt, Oudinot, McDonald and Berthier are there. They stand, these splendid men, raised to eminence and wealth by their faithful service to the Emperor. Schooled in the art of war by that master mind. Experienced in the hardships of campaigns, and familiar with the horrors of war. They feel that the end has come. They are weary of fighting, and long for peace and domestic life. The Emperor, humbled by adversity, pleads with them to lead their soldiers

once more for a final effort, but they firmly refuse and boldly leave no course open for Napoleon but to abdicate. So ended the career of Berthier. He took no further part in the affairs of Napoleon.

A very different man was Napoleon's next Chief of the Staff in his last campaign of 1815.

As far back as 1800 we find Marshal Soult a commander of a force. His career was one of independent command and enterprise, calculated to enhance his reputation as a great general and army commander. Such experience is not suitable training for the duties of the Staff, which are essentially subordinate, and which require disinterested effort and self-effacement in the endeavour to perfect the schemes of the man in supreme command. In 1800 Soult commanded an army at Tarentum, and again in 1803 held an important command in "The Army of England," at Boulogne. He was created Marshal for reasons of policy as much as for his military reputation. In 1805, at 36 years of age, he commanded an army corps. As early as this he was esteemed as a man who knew his profession and had practised it with success. He was self-reliant and enterprising. He held important commands at Austerlitz, Jena and Eylau. In November, 1808, we find him in Spain with an independent command of two corps cutting off Blake's retreat from Espinosa. When, under stress of more important affairs in Central Europe, Napoleon left the Peninsula, Soult was appointed to succeed him in command there, and pursued Sir John Moore to the coast.

In 1809 he conspired for the crown of Portugal. He became Commander-in-Chief of the French forces in the Peninsula after Talavera and won the battle of Ocana; but his jealousy and bickering with King Joseph and the other Marshals made his successes useless. In 1810 he displayed his character plainly in his jealousy of Massena.

When Wellington's victorious veterans were forcing their way through the passes of the Pyrenees, Soult was despatched against them, until the abdication of Napoleon put an end to what promised to be a serious invasion of France.

With the return of Louis XVIII, fortune again favoured Soult with a position of independent authority as Minister of War. This was a political move calculated to soothe the wrath of Napoleon's soldiery, who were being shamefully treated by the new Government.

It seems clear that whatever Napoleon's reason was for selecting Soult as Chief of the Staff in 1815, it cannot have been because he was experienced or familiar with the duties of such an appointment. There is evidence that the Emperor missed his old Staff Officers at Waterloo; especially his trusty Chief of the Staff, Berthier.

As of old, his plan of campaign was masterful and brilliant. The opening events, planned at leisure before the advance, were

auspicious. By a superb march during the night of the 13th, Napoleon's Army had gained a most advantageous position. From this point, however, failure began. Soult was unaccustomed to the position of Chief of the Staff. The confusion and uncertainty of secret movements before the enemy are always a fruitful source of blunder.

As opposing armies draw near, the chief commander relies more and more upon the intelligence of his Staff, both in collecting reports and in distributing his orders.

The old Staff machinery under Berthier, which ran so smoothly, had gone; and as a result we find the failure of Napoleon at Ligny, Quatre-Bras, and Waterloo directly due to confusion in regard to orders and neglect to send in reports.

On June 15th, 1815, when fighting began on the right bank of the Sambre, the French were advancing in three columns. The left, under Reille, drove back the Prussians. A rapid advance of the other two columns would have cut off the Prussians under Ziethen. But Napoleon's Staff, untaught by experience, sent only one messenger with the important orders to these two columns. The messenger fell and broke his leg. The order was not delivered and Soult was justly blamed for this.

Napoleon wasted four hours at Charleroi, where he stood in idleness waiting for news from these detachments. For this also his Staff is to blame.

At 4.30 p.m. on this day (June 15th), Marshal Ney arrived. He was at once rushed into the command of the columns advancing on Quatre-Bras. No proper orders were given to him, but only hasty verbal instructions from Napoleon. He had as yet no organized staff, and only a vague idea about the situation. When he met Wellington's troops at Frasnes, he was so uncertain as to the wishes of the Emperor that he called a halt and went back for orders. Surely in this we see the neglect of the Chief of the Staff.

On the next day (June 16th), the wanderings of D'Erlon between Quatre-Bras and Ligny, and the frightful quandary in which he was placed as to his duty, adds no lustre to the glittering staff of Napoleon.

On the battlefield of Waterloo we find Soult quarrelling with Ney over the waste of cavalry. Orders for the co-operation of the three arms were not given; with the result that each arm was used separately and without support from the other two.

It has been said of Napoleon that at Waterloo he failed in control of his subordinates. But it was the intelligence and tact of a good Staff that Napoleon required and lacked to enable him to make the proud, jealous and over-confident Marshals work together. So it is evident that the mishaps and regrettable incidents of the 15th to 19th June, which brought about the Emperor's defeat, are not alone due to his physical decline and the determination of the Allies, but largely also to the absence of an efficient Staff, without which no General can hope for success.