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**This Day I Conquer or Die:
The Battle of Bleinheim, 1704**

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ABSTRACT

Proportional to its effect on culture and history, the Battle of Blenheim is one of the most under-represented and under-researched events in military history. It saved the Grand Alliance between Holland, England, and Austria from being knocked out of the War of Spanish Succession and cemented the reputation of John Churchill, the First Duke of Marlborough (1650–1722), as a brilliant commander. In a few short hours, Marlborough had guaranteed the safety of Vienna—previously threatened by an army of 50,000 men—and finally brought the Grand Alliance to a true offensive footing. The glorious Sun King’s court was taken over by emotional sobriety unseen in its 43 years since taking power: as historian James Falkner said, “When the dreadful news arrived, no one could credit the scale of defeat for French arms, and Louis XIV was so stunned by the news that it was thought at first that he had suffered a stroke.” In sheer numbers, the Grand Alliance had captured an enormous amount of men and materiel that made sure that the French would not rebound for years. Camille d’Hostun de la Baume, duc de Tallard (1652–1728), the French commander, was imprisoned for seven years in England. This paper will provide support for the thesis that the Franco-Bavarians lost due to disunity of command, disunity of combat arms, and a lack of experience in their commanders.

Keywords: *En Muraille*, platoon firing, line, Reiter, canister/partridge, round shot, shell, artillery, Marlborough, Churchill

Este día venzo o muero: la batalla de Blenheim, 1704

RESUMEN

Proporcional a su efecto en la cultura y la historia, la Batalla de Blenheim es uno de los eventos menos representados y menos investigados en la historia militar. Salvó a la Gran Alianza entre Holanda, Inglaterra y Austria de ser eliminada de la Guerra de Sucesión española y consolidó la reputación de John M, el primer duque de Marlborough (1650–1722), como comandante brillante. En unas pocas horas, Marlborough había garantizado la seguridad de Viena, previamente amenazada por un ejército de 50.000 hombres, y finalmente llevó a la Gran Alianza a una posición verdaderamente ofensiva. La corte del glorioso Rey Sol se apoderó de una sobriedad emocional nunca vista en los 43 años desde que asumió el poder: como dijo el historiador James Falkner: “Cuando llegó la terrible noticia, nadie podía dar crédito a la magnitud de la derrota de las armas francesas, y Luis XIV estaba tan aturdido por la noticia de que en un principio se pensó que había sufrido un derrame cerebral”. En números absolutos, la Gran Alianza había capturado una enorme cantidad de hombres y material que aseguró que los franceses no se recuperaran durante años. Camille d’Hostun de la Baume, duque de Tallard (1652-1728), el comandante francés, fue encarcelado durante siete años en Inglaterra. Este documento respaldará la tesis de que los franco-bávaros perdieron debido a la desunión del mando, la desunión de las armas de combate y la falta de experiencia de sus comandantes.

Palabras clave: *En Muraille*, tiro de pelotón, línea, Reiter, bote/perdiz, tiro redondo, proyectil, artillería, Marlborough, Churchill

战胜或战死的一天：1704年布伦海姆战役

摘要

与对文化和历史产生的影响成比例的是，布伦海姆战役是军事史上代表性被低估、研究最为缺乏的事件之一。这场战役挽救了荷兰、英国、奥地利大同盟，使其免于在西班牙王位继承战争中战败，并加强了第一代马尔博罗公爵约翰·丘吉尔（1650 - 1722）作为一名杰出指挥官的声望。短短几小时内，马尔博罗确保了维也纳的安全——此前维也纳受到五万名士兵的威胁——并最终将大同盟带到真正的进攻性地位。

路易十四的壮丽王宫笼罩在其43年掌权以来从未见过的阴霾下：正如历史学家James Falkner所说的那样“当可怕的消息传来，没人能相信法国军队的战败程度，并且路易十四因过于惊讶而一开始被以为中风了”。大同盟以绝对数量俘获了大量士兵和资源，确保法国在几年内无法崛起。法国指挥官Camille d'Hostun de la Baume, duc de Tallard (1652 - 1728) 在英国被关押了7年。本文将提供证据证明，法国和巴伐利亚方面失败的原因包括指挥的不团结、作战军队的不团结、以及指挥官缺乏经验。

关键词: En Muraille, 轮射 (platoon firing), 防线, -Reiter, 榴霰弹 (canister), 圆弹丸 (round shot), 弹壳, 马尔博罗, 丘吉尔

The French Army

There is rarely an example in military history where an army backslid as much as the French army did in the leadup to the War of the Spanish Succession. Under the Marquis de Louvois (1641-1691), the French army had built up towering dominance over their enemies by the usage of innovative theory and the enforcement of discipline. Unlike most other European armies, the officer corps of the French army had taken a major interest in military theory. The question now became whether the army could back up its book smarts with victories on the field. This question was answered during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), as French armies repeatedly defeated their foes at battles such as Rocroi (1643), Freiburg (1644), Second Nordlingen (1645), and Zusmarshausen (1648). Further victories under the Bourbon banner would soon come during the Fronde,

as Henri de la Tour d'Auvergne, Viscount of Turenne (1611-1675) battled Louis de Bourbon, Prince of Conde (1621-1686), and saved the royal family from capture more than once. King Louis XIV's (1638-1715) keen interest in the army had fostered its successes and royal support; he accompanied the army during the Fronde (1648-1653) and Dutch campaigns (1672-1678). During the Battle of Faubourg St. Antoine, Louis watched the battle from afar atop a hill, and campaigned in Brabant with Turenne and the Conde. He had also on many occasions spurred reform within the army, especially during the wars for the Low Countries.

This rapid improvement of the armed forces would at first appear to herald a future of French military dominance, but due to factors both internal and external, it did not. Some innovations, such as the militia system (which was essentially early conscription) were accidentally disadvantageous for the French.

The reason for this was religion. As the French army expanded, reaching 280,000 in 1678, they inevitably recruited Protestants, despite the French state being Catholic. Although some such as Turenne were extremely loyal, others were not quite as loyal. Frederick Schomberg, 1st Duke of Schomberg (1615–1690), and some 12,000 other troops would eventually flee to France's Protestant enemies, proving that religious divides in Europe ran deeper than mere doctrine. While alone not enough to destroy the structure of the army, there was no doubt that such a hemorrhage of men damaged it significantly and rattled the French to the core.

This major bloodletting of troops probably not only affected their manpower pool, but may have also caused "brain drain." Among the men who had fled the French army were 600 officers crucial to the development of military theory. French cavalry tactics were still remarkably primitive leading up to the War of the Spanish Succession, as they still tried to charge into battle as though they were Reiters, riding up to a target before halting and firing their weapons. While one cannot with complete certainty say that the cause of the slow progress after the French heyday was the desertion of so many officers who otherwise would have been valuable theorists and leaders, it is hard not to draw a correlation between the desertion and the brain drain.

During the first years of the War of the Spanish Succession, the French were hurrying their populace to the

recruiting stations. The historian Rene Chartrand puts it nearly humorously: "Recruiting sergeants took almost anyone who could walk with a musket." They had even put militiamen into regular units, meaning that the French were now affected by religious, quality, and quantity problems. These were not mere growing pains: they were systemic problems that ran deep in the army, brought about by the higher command, which could only be mended by new reforms that never arrived.

Indeed, the weakness of the French army was uncovered in full by Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736). Eugene was a military genius, among Napoleon's list of "great captains." During his campaign in Italy from 1701–1702, he repeatedly forced back several French armies nearly twice his size. Within scarcely a few months, the French were pushed back almost to Milan itself.

As stated previously, the issue of generalship was one of the major deciding factors of the battle of Blenheim. At the battle, the two French generals were Marsin and Tallard. Relative to their peers, Marsin and Tallard were completely new and thus unsuited to command of large forces, Marsin having never commanded more than 500 cavalry in his career. John Tincey has suggested the possibility that Marsin received his Marshal's baton mainly as a result of the praise of Tallard rather than his own skill. Despite his seeming competence, Marsin was inexperienced at a time when inexperienced generals' blunders could lead to catastrophe.



Marshal Tallard, commander of Franco-Bavarian forces at Blenheim. Unknown artist.

Tallard was the other French general at Blenheim. He was the primary commander of the French forces and was also relatively inexperienced. He had won his Marshal's baton at Speyerbach just a year before Blenheim, attacking a divided Allied force and bringing it to near annihilation. This was the primary catalyst for the seeming downfall of the Grand Alliance in southern Germany that year, directly leading to the Battle of Blenheim. However, he had his faults. The primary issue was his leadership style, something that would come to haunt him during the Battle of Blenheim. He was not particularly hard on his officers, as demonstrated at Blenheim, and preferred luxury to everything else. Thus, like Marsin, he was the wrong man for the specific job he was given.

Marlborough's Army

Even with the aforementioned defects in France's army, there was no reason to assume the French would lose at Blenheim. English forces under Marlborough had largely been halted the year before the Battle of Blenheim, being forced to give up plans to attack the Low Countries after losing thousands of Dutch troops in a botched attempt to take Antwerp. However, they had several major advantages.

Marlborough was friends with Turenne before his death, who was described as his "tutor in war" by Garnet Wolseley, 1st Viscount Wolseley (1833–1913). This means, ironically, that Marlborough's knowledge on how to defeat the French came from the French. He also had experience campaigning against the Moors, gaining an extraordinary amount of experience. It would have been rare to find a general quite as competent and experienced as Marlborough, who could draw on all sorts of experiences from the misty fields of England to the shores of Morocco.

But perhaps more importantly, he was not afraid to innovate. One of the most important innovations in 18th century military history was platoon firing, in which a battalion would be divided into four "firings," which would each fire on their initiative, effectively creating a monstrous wall of continuous musket fire. It would, like all other forms of volley fire, break down in the middle of battle, but in the early stages of a battle its value was priceless. Such

a thing was not something that Marlborough would fail to use, and it would become a key part of English tactics, proving its worth consistently.

Another revolutionary but much less known aspect of English tactics was the *en muraille* formation. This would involve a cavalry force forming up into a wedge and packing each rank knee-to-knee before charging an enemy force. It was used at Ramillies, devastating the French cavalry and destroying their morale. As a rule of thumb, in the era of gunpowder, a densely packed wall of infantry or cavalry was enough to make enemy morale plummet. Another instance of a “wall” of troops advancing was at Mollwitz in 1741, where Kurt Christoph von Schwerin’s (1684–1757) troops under Frederick the Great were described as a moving wall as they pushed ahead. The Austrians buckled under the weight of Schwerin’s troops, withdrawing from the field in disgrace after what should’ve been an easy victory.

Lastly, Marlborough’s companion in many of his battles, including at Blenheim, was Prince Eugene of Savoy. Although born in France, he was denied permission to join the French army, pushing him into the arms of the Austrians. Eugene was a brilliant commander, a “great captain” by Napoleon’s standards. Not afraid of the smoke and din of battle, he had campaigned against the Ottomans in his early career, winning numerous victories for Austria, before fighting in the War of the Spanish Succession against the French in northern Italy. French armies, many two times bigger than his,

repeatedly withdrew in his presence. In a few months, Eugene had maneuvered his way from Venice to the gates of Milan, delivering a heavy blow at Chiari to a French army twice his size.

Going into the campaign and battle, Marlborough had a massive advantage in leadership, and a large advantage in quality and tactics. In a vacuum, victory was certain, but if we look closer at the campaign, a different story unfolds.

Marlborough Begins His March: From the Netherlands to Donauworth

Marlborough had suffered a major defeat at the hands of the French as he attempted to attack Antwerp. However, Marlborough had also previously defeated the French, outmaneuvering them on several occasions, and defeating them in battle, taking 1,700 prisoners. Thus, his strategic defeat was by no means decisive.

What was truly troubling were events in the south. After the Battle of Speyerbach, the French seemed poised to assault along the Danube and strike into the heart of the Holy Roman Empire: Vienna. To many historians and contemporaries alike, it seemed like the Grand Alliance could fall with Vienna in 1704 or 1705.

Unless Marlborough could relieve Vienna, all the blood and sweat over the past years of fighting in Europe would be in vain.

As Marlborough brainstormed a solution, relieving Vienna while si-



John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough. Wikimedia Commons

multaneously keeping the Netherlands defensible was his primary goal. He wanted to draw the French armies after him, securing the Netherlands and allowing him to take his army from the Netherlands to the Danube,¹ where he would force the French into a battle. He would bring no siege train,² and

thus would have to resort to unconventional means of forcing a decisive battle. This would culminate in his march to the Danube, in which Marlborough would purposefully expose his flanks to draw the French after him.³ It was one of his most daring maneuvers, and one that would eventually culminate in the

Battle of Blenheim. Importantly, Marlborough also only had 14,384 British troops according to Robert Parker, although there were of course other men gathered along the way.⁴

In 1890, military historian and officer Theodore Ayrault Dodge wrote: “The one thing which distinguishes the great captains of history from the rank and file of commanders is that they have known when to disregard maxims, and that they have succeeded in disregarding them, and succeeded because of their disregard of them.”⁵ If we accept Dodge’s opinion, then Marlborough was certainly one of the great captains. Perhaps no other general would be as bold as to purposefully expose their flanks, knowing full well it would make them a ripe target for an enemy army. In hindsight, Marlborough’s move made complete sense. As he maneuvered like this, he could both protect the Netherlands by keeping French troops away and he could threaten French lines of communication in Austria, forcing them into a decisive battle on *his* terms. According to John Tincey:

The letter makes Marlborough’s strategy clear. His march to the east would draw French forces after him, leaving the Dutch with local superiority of numbers on their frontiers. The French in pursuit of Marlborough would head to defend the line of the river Moselle and by the time they realized that he was marching into Germany they would be far behind his army.⁶

Marlborough would carefully choreo-

graph a dance around not just the French, but all military convention of the time.

Marlborough was no fool—that much is clear. On top of drawing French troops away from the Netherlands, forcing a decisive battle and spooking them away from Vienna, he would also consolidate his forces by bringing up Prince Eugene from the south and collect garrisons along the way, most notably at Coblenz.⁷ Through his calculated tactics and strategies, Marlborough would bring together disconnected Anglo-Allied forces as the French tried to figure out where exactly he may have been going. Tallard asked Louis XIV what to do, and Louis simply said: “If the Duke marches, then so too must you march.”⁸ This was poor advice for two reasons: intelligence and clarity. Firstly, there was no clear path that Marlborough was taking. Maybe he was besieging Landau, maybe he was going to Ulm, maybe he was even trying to invade France. It was only discovered that he was taking the route to the Danube in the later stages of the campaign, just before the Battle of Schellenberg. Not even the enlisted men in the English army knew where they were going.⁹ Secondly, saying essentially “just march” is not a tactically sound or clear plan. Tallard was left with no clear unified plan, and simply shadowed Marlborough’s army while trying to unite with Marsin.

Thus, Marlborough had completely confused and disjointed the French command. He had not merely thrown a wrench in their plans; he had thrust a saber into their heart and

thrown up smoke in their minds. The French pursuit was left even more confounded by an outbreak of glanders which killed and injured French horses, eventually forcing them to quarantine.¹⁰ This was important as horses were expensive—by English measurements each cost 15 pounds, a small fortune in 1704.¹¹

It seemed that the beginning of the campaign was going wrong for the French, and everything was going just right for the Allies. One anecdote shared by the Comte de Merode-Westerloo in his memoirs showcases this perfectly. On one night, the Comte was playing around with some other officers, trying to blow a foreign horn in the building where they slept. Eventually, after failing several times, they did blow the horn successfully; but this is where the trouble began. Farm animals heard the loud noise and naturally fled into nearby forests, but French troops also scattered into the forests, killing some of the farm animals in a showcase of bad discipline. The enraged locals skirmished with the French, managing to kill a large swathe of men, and causing great embarrassment in the French camp. It is possible that more casualties were inflicted during the crossing of the Black Forest due to this incident than during the actual pitched battles, if Merode-Westerloo is to be believed.¹² However, they did succeed in one thing, which is that they managed to get across the Black Forest without losing many troops, if any. After bluffing around the nearby Austrian forts, Tallard got his army through the Black Forest to unite with Marsin.¹³

This was important as it meant that the French armies were now united, and the Elector of Bavaria could wait for them to arrive as he avoided battle. Marlborough and Eugene were still divided, so this was crucial. But the Elector had different plans.

Fire and Sword: Marlborough in Bavaria

Nearby the fort-city of Donauworth—incidentally where one of the first incidents leading to the Thirty Years' War (the Donauworth Incident) occurred—the Comte d'Arco encamped his army, duly meting out assignments to his officers and setting up tents. Marlborough heard of this and moved ahead to attack, knowing it was an opportunity to strike before the French arrived. The Comte, despite being outnumbered, was ordered by the Elector to move to the Schellenberg. The Elector, so willing to evade Marlborough on every other occasion,¹⁴ decided to give battle on this one day, whether out of a loss of nerve or simply a belief that he would win. Not wanting to waste a good opportunity, he encamped his forces in a position that made it seem as though he was resting for the night,¹⁵ making the Franco-Bavarian commanders confident. However, Marlborough was aware that the more he waited the stronger the enemy position became¹⁶ and he was not going to just let them entrench.

Around 6:00 PM, 50 men of the so-called “Forlorn Hope” were the first to assault the Bavarian position,¹⁷ and

6,000 other men followed these brave troops. The first wave was intense, with M. de la Colonie writing:

It would be impossible to describe in words strong enough the details of the carnage that took place during this first attack, which lasted a good hour or more. We were all fighting hand to hand, hurling them back as they clutched at the parapet; men were slaying, or tearing at the muzzles of guns and the bayonets which pierced their entrails; crushing under their feet their own wounded comrades, and even gouging out their opponent's eyes with their nails, when the grip was so close that neither could make use of their weapons.¹⁸

Was this exaggerated? Probably. However much it was exaggerated, there was an obvious grain of truth within it. M. de la Colonie was a veteran of over a decade at the time of the Battle of Schellenberg, so him stating something so resoundingly emotional was certainly saying something.

Eventually, the Allied soldiers stumbled back down the hill,¹⁹ before renewing their assault later in the evening.²⁰ Importantly, on this second assault, Marlborough had knowledge of a line of whisker gabions that was almost completely unguarded on the Franco-Bavarian left flank.²¹

Marlborough, never one to give up a good advantage, began the second assault with this important intelligence

in mind. While the French were pinned in place, the Allied soldiers began moving around the French flank, eventually encircling them. In the smoke and din of battle, the Bavarians did not realize the enemy infantry in their rear were Allied troops and refused to fire, believing they were reserves or reinforcements.²² The French and Bavarians, now enveloped by fire and their opponents, initiated a futile last stand that lasted only long enough to be remembered in accounts of the battle. Casualties on both sides were immense: 9,000 Franco-Bavarian casualties, with 1,500 Allied deaths and 4,000 Allied wounded.²³ ²⁴ This means that in total, of the 35,000 troops engaged on that day, a sum of 41% became casualties. In comparison, roughly 53% of all troops engaged at the Battle of Cannae became casualties. A quarter of the troops engaged at Shiloh became casualties.²⁵

The consequences of the Battle of Schellenberg were dire for the Bavarians. Marlborough soon laid waste to the countryside—by his order²⁶—forcing the Bavarians to disperse to protect their estates. In his own words, Marlborough wanted to “do our utmost to ruin his [the Elector's] country.”²⁷ Propaganda probably exaggerated the amount of damage done, however. As M. de la Colonie writes, “Although I certainly found a few burnt houses, still the damage done was as nothing compared with the reports current throughout the country.”²⁸ The effect of the raiding still was major, however, as the Bavarians dispersed in the hope of preventing Marlborough's men from doing further damage and importantly, not getting to

the Elector's estates. Marlborough's goal was also to force the Franco-Bavarians into a battle, which would soon occur.

As Tallard advanced to unite with Marsin, Eugene closely shadowed him. He was unable, however, to make any major stands as his army was too weak to stand up to the French.²⁹ Events became dire as the French crossed the Danube at Lauingen and forced Eugene to retreat. Eugene wrote to Marlborough: "The enemy have marched. It is almost certain that the whole army is passing the Danube at Lauingen."³⁰ Marlborough read the letter and quickly rushed towards Eugene to aid him, realizing his chance for a decisive battle could come soon.

The joint Allied army encamped nearby the plain of Hochstadt. Dividing the plain were the Nebel Stream and the Danube River. These were major obstacles, as the Danube was impassable without a bridge, and the Nebel required a significant amount of construction labor to cross. But the Allies had one advantage, which was intelligence.

The Allies were accompanied by the "Old Dessauer," who was present at the same spot the battle was fought just a year before. He had fought another battle, deemed the "First Battle of Hochstadt," on the exact same ground. Thus, the Allies had some important level of intelligence on the terrain and how to cross, which was perhaps invaluable.

Another asset the Allies had was French overconfidence. As they had forced the Austrians under Eugene to retreat in front of them, and they had

managed to force the Allies to work while the clock was ticking, they believed they were in a superior position. As Tincey writes, "When the Franco-Bavarians advanced to the north bank of the Danube they considered themselves to be facing an outmanoeuvred, demoralized and, to all intents, defeated Confederate army."³¹ He is certainly right. On the skirmishes before the battle truly began, the Comte de Merode-Westerloo states:

When I saw our troops falling back I also returned to the camp, and sat down to a good plate of soup in Blindheim along with my generals and colonels. I was never in better form, and after wining and dining well, we one and all dispersed to our respective quarters ... I don't believe I ever slept sounder than on that night.³²

Then imagine the shock of the French officers when they realized the Allies were going to attack. Marlborough's cavalry were the first to rise to the attack: "the ... plain ... [in whole] appeared to be covered by enemy squadrons" as Westerloo put it.³³ Perhaps a large part of the reason was not by the fault of the French, but because the Allies had deceived them. From the skirmishes, several Allied soldiers had been captured, but these were under orders to tell the French that the Allies were going to retreat.³⁴ Thus, the French were unpleasantly surprised to discover that they had been lied to, and the Allies were not retreating, but advancing.



Marlborough's March to the Danube, 1704. Maps courtesy of the United States Military Academy Department of History.

The First Blow is Struck: Marlborough Attacks

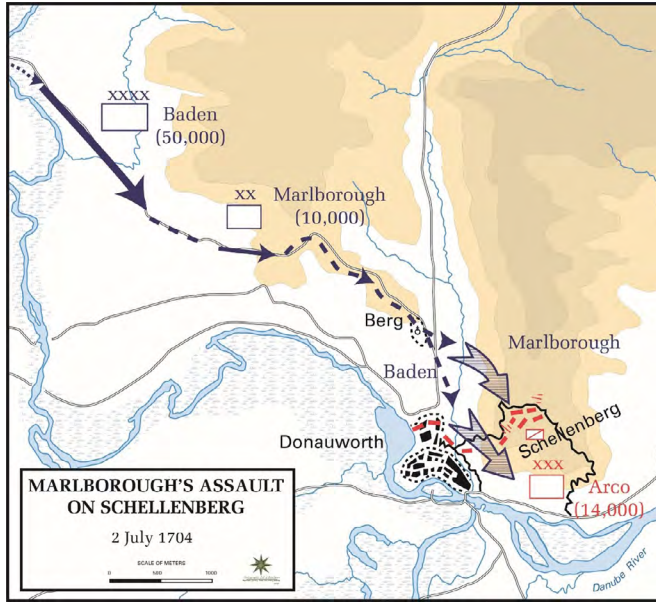
Caught by surprise, the French position was now perilous. They did have a series of breastworks nearby the village of Blenheim, yet they were divided in the sense of tactical opinion. As Marsin, the Elector, and Tallard observed the situation, they decided to head to the Church tower nearby Blenheim and call together a council of war. Tallard believed that the French cavalry were best suited to stay behind the Nebel stream and should have charged down towards the stream once the Allies crossed, while Marsin and the

Elector both said they should contest the crossing directly.³⁵

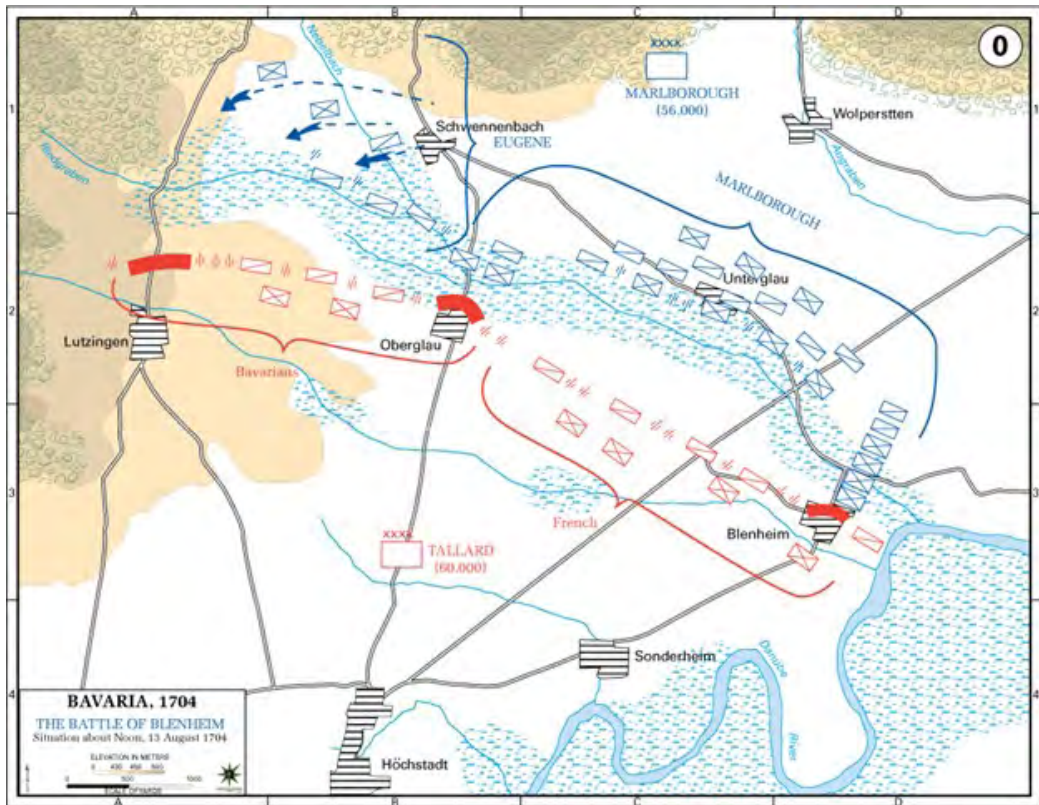
Rather than both sides uniting, they all went their own way. As Napoleon once said, “if you weaken your means by dividing your forces, or break the unity of military thought ... you will have lost the most favorable occasion.”³⁶ No greater example of this can be found than the Battle of Blenheim.

Either way, Marlborough was now advancing. Tallard and the Franco-Bavarians made new fortifications by throwing up unmanned wagons, cutting down trees and vineyards to give better views, etc. On Tallard's side, they had failed to secure the narrow area be-

This Day I Conquer or Die: The Battle of Blenheim, 1704



The Battle of Schellenberg, 2 July 1704. Maps courtesy of the United States Military Academy Department of History.



Battle of Blenheim. The two armies in position, noon of August 13, 1704. Maps courtesy of the United States Military Academy Department of History.

tween the marshy Nebel and the Fuchsberg hill. This was crucial ground, but Marlborough was opposed by practically no French troops.³⁷ Next on Marlborough's list was to attack Blenheim itself. He gathered near Unterglau, although the area was soon lit ablaze by French gunners.

French forces at Blenheim were placed like so: nine battalions manned the village itself, while three stayed in the nearby cornfields, and eleven were placed behind them.³⁸ Marlborough was at a disadvantage, as he was attacking an army in position, but he still could rely on tactical superiority and surprise to defeat the Franco-Bavarian army.

Although Marlborough himself was in position, his right wing under Prince Eugene was not yet ready. It would take several hours for him to be organized, and 30 minutes after Eugene told Marlborough he was in line at 1:00 PM, Marlborough gave the order to attack.³⁹

John Cutts's men would be the first to attack. One of his brigadiers, Rowe, gave the order that no man would or should fire until he had struck the first blow with his sword on the outer French breastworks.⁴⁰ The French showed proper fire discipline, as they waited and waited until the opportune moment to fire. Rowe, having given an order that could not be followed through, was repulsed on his first attack. In fact, he was taken in the flank by the elite *Gens d'Armes* of the French cavalry, who nearly destroyed his brigade completely. At one point, the Allies lost a colour⁴¹ that had to be recap-

tured later in the battle. However, the Allies had a trick up their sleeve. Nearby, on the French flank, Allied troops lied in wait. These sprung upon the *Gens d'Armes*, who routed, seeing they were outflanked and nearly completely encircled.

Of course, the French troops nearby were demoralized by this occurrence, but even more important was the demoralization of the French command. Tallard tried desperately to rally the *Gens d'Armes*, failing consistently, watching as his greatest squadrons melted away from the field.⁴²

Marlborough met with Cutts and ordered him to stop his attacks. But the brainless commander decided to attack once more, driving the French from the outskirts of Blenheim before being repulsed for the second time.⁴³

While the Allied strength was never enough to attack Blenheim successfully, it was enough that the French commander who was stationed in Blenheim decided to stack up 12,000 troops on the area, who never moved other than to counter-attack. Thus, 5,000 Allied men pinned 12,000 French and Bavarian men.

The Bloody Fields of Hoechstaedt: Oberglau

With Cutts launching his final attack for just the moment, the fighting around Blenheim had for the moment ceased. Although the French made a few uncoordinated counterattacks, these never got far. What was becoming the primary

focus of the battle was the center. There was barely any infantry support for the French cavalry in the center, and Marlborough was just the general to exploit this. He now put into effect his primary tactic: shifting the center of focus of the battle. Previously, the battle had been centered on Blenheim, but now Marlborough wanted to shift it to Oberglau in a maneuver that would truly show his genius.

He began his attack. The Danish cavalry surged forth, but try as they might, they could never truly get lodged into the Franco-Bavarian positions. Shortly afterwards the Prince of Holstein-Beck entered the fray, advancing with two brigades of Dutch infantry but being repulsed, himself becoming mortally wounded. Allied forces were consistently harassed in their flanks, and it seemed the collapse of their center was imminent.

Marlborough did not panic, however. He moved up nine cannons loaded with canister shot and placed some of his elite cavalry in a position to threaten the flank of any attacking French forces. Not wishing to share the fate of the *Gens d'Armes*, the French cavalry never attacked. Marlborough's center was secure.

The Comte de Merode-Westerloo charged with his cavalry across the Nebel stream, breaking through several Allied lines. However, he soon was pushed back and disorganized by a "third line," his troops now tired. This left the Allies in a position to charge the French positions, as they were now tired, while the Allies had not even

committed all their reserves yet. But before that attack, I would like to go into detail on the events on Eugene's flank.

Lutzingen: Eugene's Side

With Marlborough holding the center and pinning the left, one may wonder how Eugene was doing. Ever since the battle began, he had been launching a series of attacks, which had also pinned the French in his sector. Eugene had the Old Dessauer in his ranks, who was not afraid to launch several attacks on Lutzingen, the primary town/anchor point of the French flank. He brought up four Prusso-Danish brigades, who began their assault quickly. French canister and musketry dealt horrendous damage to the Dessauer's men, while his cavalry tried desperately to hold against French charges. Eventually, he was repulsed, losing ten colours as his flank caved in.⁴⁴

The Old Dessauer's cavalry was essentially removed from any further attacks, and so once he attacked again, he was repulsed again due to having barely any cavalry support. Despite this—being disorganized and tired—the French were unable to follow up their success, meaning that the fighting on this side was also essentially stagnant. Crucially, Eugene had pinned the French troopers in place, meaning that when Tallard requested cavalry support from Marsin he was rejected. Marlborough was now set for the decisive attack.

The Winning Stroke: Oberglau Again

Marlborough was in the perfect position. The French cavalry was tired and unsupported, while both French wings were now pinned. He still had not committed his full reserve, made up of cavalry and infantry, and could now begin the winning stroke. At 5:00 PM, 8,000 Allied cavalry clotted forth. Now the moment that the winners or losers were decided had come.

The infantry and cavalry of the Allied army were never unsupported, making them infinitely superior in a tactical sense to the unsupported and tired French cavalry. This was incredibly valuable at Blenheim, as the sort of combined arms of the Allied army had a field day running over the French cavalry. They were quickly defeated, while Blenheim and Oberglau were encircled. Oberglau formed a bottleneck which the French and Bavarians still controlled, and thus to cross the stream Marlborough's only option was to encircle and blockade it. Tallard's flight had also exposed the flank of Marsin, who had to withdraw with the Elector from the field after a couple more hours of fighting.

Tallard was taken prisoner after a few Hessian soldiers recognized him while he was trying to escape. A conversation ensued between Tallard and Marlborough once Tallard got to Marlborough's coach, as Tallard asked Marlborough if he could order his troops

to withdraw from Blenheim. Marlborough refused, replying that he was in no position to ask.

Another part of the conversation is recorded by Tincey. "When the firing was over, the Duke asked Tallard, how he liked the army? He answered, with a shrug, 'Very well, but they have had the honour of beating the best troops in the world.' The Duke replied readily, 'What will the world think of the troops that beat them?'"⁴⁵

The Battle Ends: The (Short) Siege of Blenheim

Marlborough turned his sights to Blenheim. As there were no threats from either the center or the right flank of his army, he could entirely focus on that one area and immediately sent more artillery and troops there. Several batteries were placed outside of Blenheim, which opened fire as the town soon caught ablaze. As French troops tried to escape, they were consistently gunned down, with no escape route to speak of.⁴⁶ When darkness fell, 10,000 French soldiers fell with it.

Aftermath

There were 40,000 French casualties in total. Of these, 14,000 were prisoners, and 20,000 were wounded or killed. Amongst the fallen was Tallard's son, who was killed in action, along with many other French officers and soldiers. Emotionally shattered in defeat, 6,000 hopeless Franco-Bavarian refugees deserted. Some 3,600 tents,

7,000 horses, 5,400 wagons, 100 guns/mortars, 129 colours, and 110 cavalry standards were captured.⁴⁷ However, it is not as if the Allies did not suffer great casualties as well. Eugene lost 5,000 troops, Marlborough 9,000.⁴⁸ Even so, the losses were trivial compared to the reward.

Marlborough had, as mentioned earlier, not taken a siege train with him. But this was of trivial importance after the battle ended. After capturing the French artillery, and obliterating their army, French garrisons that had been left behind after the conquest of several forts were not particularly eager to resist. He soon captured several forts, undoing almost all the work the French had done the year before.⁴⁹ It was the textbook definition of a decisive victory, as French forces before him continually capitulated.

Marlborough's victory was celebrated across England. Near Westminster hall, French standards were paraded around to demonstrate the victory, and Tallard was sent back to Nottingham in captivity. "How could God do this to me after all I have done for him?" Louis XIV asked, after hearing the news of the defeat.⁵⁰

Conclusion

There are several things to draw from the Battle of Blenheim. The two most important are, in my opinion:

1. Unity of command
2. Combined arms

While there is a series of other things to think about, these are the primary controllable issues. As mentioned earlier, Napoleon once said "if you weaken your means by dividing your forces, or break the unity of military thought ... you will have lost the most favorable occasion." Immediately, once Marlborough began his attack, Tallard's army and Marsin's army split. As Tincey wrote: "The army of Tallard was drawn up quite separately from the Franco-Bavarian forces commanded by Marsin and the Elector."⁵¹ This is certainly true, and a large part of the reasoning behind this is that Tallard and Marsin may have had a rivalry, which was a mistake on any day, but catastrophic when facing a unified army such as that of Marlborough's.

With a divided army, neither wing could draw upon the support of the other. At one point in the battle, Marsin refused to transfer his cavalry to Tallard, despite Tallard's requests. As Falkner says, "Tallard ... recommended that Marsin detach some of his army to reinforce the right wing. The younger Marshal, who despite the fears of infection had already sent part of his cavalry to help Tallard earlier in the day, now refused."⁵² Although it is unlikely that disunity of command was the only reason behind the refusal, it was certainly a large part of it. Thus, by dividing their army along personal lines in such a dire moment, the French and Bavarians had doomed themselves unnecessarily.

Perhaps equally or more importantly the French did not have proper support from every combat arm at ev-

ery moment. While near Lutzingen, it was the Allies who did not have proper cavalry support, in every other sector it was the French and Bavarians, who would either only have cavalry or only have infantry. This was caused by a supposed “mental breakdown” (as Falkner puts it) of one of the French commanders, who sent most of his infantry troops into Blenheim, isolating the French cavalry on the plain of Hochstadt. This meant that when the cavalry charged and charged, they were the only combat arm involved in any engagement. The dirty work went consistently to the cavalry, who were by the end of things tired, demoralized, and disorganized. In comparison, every Allied unit near Oberglau or Blenheim had the ability to draw on cavalry and artillery support, and by the end of the battle, many had not even been engaged.

A lost opportunity occurred in the center when the French and Bavarian cavalry failed to charge the Allied forces who were already beaten. If, perhaps, the French and Bavarian cavalry found themselves supported by artillery and infantry, they would have been able to make it across the Nebel and would have split the Allied army in two. This side effect of lack of support may have been one of the biggest reasons the French lost.

Not even Jomini would be able to predict the results. Marlborough’s campaign ran contrary to his belief in always keeping lines of communication/operation secure, and it seems as though Jomini may not have had a firm grasp on the battle. He claimed that

Tallard shouldn’t have attacked along the Danube and shouldn’t have stayed entrenched, when it was clearly Marlborough who attacked along the river.

Nonetheless, Marlborough did exercise some of the principles of war that Jomini laid out, such as attacking the decisive point in a concentrated way. Once Marlborough had successfully pinned Tallard’s flanks, he moved towards the decisive point (that being the Nebelbach) and successfully crossed it, utilizing his reserves and his available troops to that end.

The way in which Marlborough carried out the battle was worthy of Napoleon. The flexibility of Marlborough’s commands might as well have been out of the Battle of Austerlitz or the Battle of Jena. I would go so far as to argue that, in this specific context of flexibility, Marlborough and Napoleon were both equal. Napoleon saved Ney, Marlborough saved the Prince of Holstein-Beck.

An interesting statistic is the difference in artillery between Marlborough and Tallard. While the numbers are different across all sources, there is a consensus that the French had a massive advantage over Marlborough and Eugene. Still, Marlborough managed to apply his artillery at the right moment and the right position, such as during the French counter-attack in the center. This limited but decisive usage of artillery would’ve been remarkably impressive for any general, not just Marlborough. Thus, despite not having a superiority in firepower through artillery, he used it at the right time in the right area, making up for the difference.

Marlborough also had a major effect on his troops and their morale. At the opening of the battle, Robert Parker (present at the battle) noted Marlborough accepted several religious symbols handed to him and exclaimed: "This day I conquer or die." For it to be mentioned in a triumphalist way in a memoir of one of the troops present, it is almost certain that it had a positive effect on the morale of the troops. After the battle, too, Marlborough was remarkably more trusted than before. At the Siege of Bouchain, before Marlborough's assault, Parker also stated:

I must confess I did not like the aspect of the thing...[but] he would not push the thing unless he saw a strong probability of success; nor was this my notion alone; it was the sense of the whole army, both officer and soldier, British and foreigner. And indeed we had all the reason in the world for it; for *he never led us on to any one action, that we did not succeed in.*⁵³

Therefore, the French and Bavarian loss was due to a laundry list of factors, but chiefly their disunity of command and their lack of supporting

combat arms in most sectors. It's not as if the French and Bavarians didn't put up a fight: of the 108,000 troops that were engaged, 44% became casualties, proportionally more than either the battles of Schellenberg or Shiloh. The statistics and the decisive moments of the battle perhaps show why the French thought Marlborough won by luck and not by skill. A few mistakes mended here and there may have been the difference between a decisive victory and a catastrophic defeat. Those mistakes committed turned into blunders that eventually turned into disaster. Many decisive battles end with a bang, but this one did not. It ended with a nuclear explosion large enough to shatter the myth of French invincibility under their glorious Sun King. Gone were the days of French martial superiority scattered like English musket-balls on the field of Hoechstaedt. France could no longer lay claim to the glorious legacy of Conde or military genius of Louvois. Turenne was killed by a cannon ball in 1675, and so were any feelings of French martial superiority over Europe on those August days in 1704. Instead, the enduring legacy of the legendary Duke of Marlborough was forged in blood and iron.

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Notes

1 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Masterpiece*, 30.

2 *Ibid.*, 36.

3 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 44.

4 Robert Parker, *Memoirs of Robert Parker*, 30.

5 Theodore Dodge, *Alexander: A History of the Origin and Growth of the Art of War*, 4.

6 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Masterpiece*, 30.

7 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 43.

8 *Ibid.*, 40.

9 *Ibid.*, 43.

10 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Masterpiece*, 32

11 James Falkner, *Marlborough's War Machine*, 173

12 Merode-Westerloo, Parker and Chandler, *Robert Parker and Comte de Merode-Westerloo: The Marlborough wars (Military memoirs)*, 160

- 13 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Masterpiece*, 28.
- 14 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 49.
- 15 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Masterpiece*, 32.
- 16 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 53.
- 17 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Masterpiece*, 33.
- 18 M. de la Colonie, *Chronicles of an Old Campaigner*, 185.
- 19 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 61.
- 20 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Masterpiece*, 33.
- 21 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 62.
- 22 Ibid., 63.
- 23 Ibid., 67.
- 24 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Masterpiece*, 36.
- 25 Donald Miller, *Vicksburg: Grant's Campaign that Broke the Confederacy*, 84.
- 26 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 72.
- 27 William Coxe, *Memoirs of the Duke of Marlborough*, 210.
- 28 M. de la Colonie, *The Chronicles of an Old Campaigner*, 207.
- 29 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 81.
- 30 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Masterpiece*, 37.
- 31 Ibid., 39.
- 32 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 94.
- 33 Ibid., 100.
- 34 Ibid., 95.
- 35 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Masterpiece*, 48-49.
- 36 Jay Luvaas, *Napoleon on the Art of War*, 89.
- 37 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 92-93.
- 38 Ibid., 106.
- 39 Ibid., 120.
- 40 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Masterpiece*, 53.

- 41 Ibid., 56.
- 42 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 139-140.
- 43 Ibid., 124.
- 44 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 127.
- 45 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Masterpiece*, 90.
- 46 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 163-166.
- 47 Ibid., 178.
- 48 Ibid., 177.
- 49 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 88.
- 50 Cathal Nolan, *Wars of the Age of Louis XIV, 1650-1715*.
- 51 John Tincey, *Blenheim 1704: The Duke of Marlborough's Masterpiece*, 49.
- 52 James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704: Marlborough's Greatest Victory*, 139.
- 53 Robert Parker, *Robert Parker and Comte de Merode-Westerloo: The Marlborough wars (Military memoirs)*, 108. [Emphasis added.]