

When the opportunity arose, Timothy and Michael Hamilton did not hesitate. They were anxious to try themselves out in battle. They had heard of the stories of Wellington on the Peninsula, and of the triumphs of the allies. At the Hamilton estate, war, once again, reigned king of the conversation. With their lady companions by their side, they argued with their father their need to go. Though he had initially instigated his sons' military venture, he now had reservations.

Business was doing well, and, despite the cloud on the horizon, he wished his 'boys' would stay, and ensure it would remain that way. He felt secure with their new relationships as well. He was fond of the ladies and satisfied with their families. He was not ready to see that all fall apart.

Though silent at Lord Hamilton's house, the ladies did not want to see the 'boys' go, as well. This did not help the brothers' argument much. They had designs on a life now, and their concerns were well voiced, when alone with them.

Before the war, on their final excursion to the countryside, they talked and shared affections with one another. The 'boys' minds were pretty made up, however, and there was not much the girls could do to prevent their departure. They did, nonetheless, ensure that their affections would not be forgotten.

Danton, would not be out of service to his country for long. His visit with this uncle reassured him of his life's course. Reaction to the Emperor's return was mixed in the heart of France, however, and Danton's choice to rejoin his former master would not be made without obstacles. The pay he would receive would ensure his family's continued sustenance, but their concerns, over the Emperor's ability to reestablish himself on the continent, lent to discretion on their support of his returning to combat.

At their Parisian domicile, the arguments raged loud.

"I am afraid for you!" His mother voiced, in the usual motherly fashion.

"Don't worry." He responded in the tone of that of a typical son.

They would continue for hours at a time. When they got the chance, his sisters chimed in.

"The state of the Empire isn't secure." They warned. Against such barrages, Danton would withdraw to the memories of warfare to prepare himself for what he knew he would eventually have to do.

At Wagram, the surrender of the Archduke had been achieved with brilliance. His (Danton's) Emperor had feigned a breakout from the tiny of island of Lobau, on which they were besieged, by seizing several small Danubian islands, mystifying the Archduke Charles as to where he would cross the famous river, while all the time he intended to cross it on a pontoon bridge he had constructed some time earlier.

He pulled more troops into Lobau, with those already gathered. There was a rush of excitement in the corps that something tremendous was about to happen. Danton and the men watched the Emperor intensely throughout all of his triumphs. They believed in his magic, and never have up hope in his abilities.

Danton clutched his rifle, and prepared to enter into the uncertainty of combat. On the night of July, they headed out from the island across another pontoon bridge constructed by Massena's IV Corps. They headed not where Charles expected them, at the Aspern bridgehead, but farther east near a place called Gross-Engersdorf.

Charles believed he could no longer contest Aspern-Essling anymore, and that the balance of power had swung to the French side. Napoleon's artillery was built up to 150 guns, so he could cover the exodus from Lobau.

Charles left forces on the Danube anyhow, an Advance Guard the size of a corps. He moved

his main forces to the Bissamber-Deutsch-Wagram-Margrafneuesiedl line. He hoped to cut the French off from the bridgehead, but he did not entrench his men. The Archduke John was expected to come with 12,000 more men.

Napoleon's army finished other bridges to the north, and proceeded northward, on the afternoon of July 5, to pin down the enemy. The advance looked like an opening fan, spreading outward as it moved ahead. Danton and his comrades marched forward, eyes steeled against the horizon.

The Austrians tried unsuccessfully to halt the advance, they had given up interfering with the crossing. The bullets of the Austrian soldiers penetrated the French lines, but Danton and the others held firm. Their eyes soon fixed on the Austrians on the Wagram plateau, the fulcrum of their position.

The intensity of that moment still rested on Danton's mind. The success, or failure, of the army rested on their ability to break that position. It was a moment unlike any other in his life.

The position was strong. It was shielded by a stream passable by infantry, but difficult for cavalry and infantry to pass, due to thickets along its banks. The French deployment had been relatively leisurely, due to the crowding of the men onto Lobau, and the bridgeheads in the north. But the Austrians were slower, and Napoleon, perceiving the enemy was not in place, ordered the attack.

The attack was hasty and piecemeal. The Archduke Charles, however, led his reserve grenadiers forward to check it. Twice the French penetrated the village of Deutsch-Wagram. French Marshall Bernadotte was the last to enter it with the IX Saxon Corps. He was late, as usual, and, had he been on time, they may have held on to the town. Napoleon, as a result, was unable to exploit his enemy's lack of speed.

During an unseasonably cold night, the armies slept. There were, however, occasional firefights, sparked off by nervous pickets. Danton was not a part of the main attack against the town, but Wagram would soon touch him and his comrades of the IV Corps under Marshal Massena, on the left.

Taking advantage of his successes on the previous evening, Charles decide to attack Massena's IV. Massena's men were threatening to take the Austrian flank. Charles would divert against the III Corps on the right, with the help of the Archduke John, when he arrived. But through lack of preparation he did not coordinate his attack. John furthered this dilemma by marching slowly.

However, the assault ensued. The Austrians came on with a steady advance. The heavy firing of their ranks riddled Danton's position. Men began to fall. Massena's men were driven back close to Aspern.

Bernadotte had retreated in the center. The once strong position, built on the village of Aderklaa, was exposed, and the village was lost. Napoleon, fed up with Bernadotte, banished him away from the field.

Led by Masseur, from a carriage pulled by four white horses (he had been injured on July 2 by a horse that fell on him) Danton, and part of the IV Corps retook the village. Danton performed marvelously, leading several shaken men past the Austrian defenses into the small town. He would later be rewarded for his bravery.

It was a moment he would remember, as he flung his musket at the finely dressed Austrian combatants, in their white attire, and spurred his comrades on. They would later be sent farther to the left to head off the advance of Austrian troops, who threatened to cut off the connection of Lobau island to the Danube, and stem the retreat Bernadotte had started. Massena performed this task with his customary skill. He and his men then held the whole left, aided by the massive battery on Lobau. Standing firm against the Austrian advance, Danton and his fellow men fired their muskets at the oncoming tide of enemy soldiers, as Napoleon's cannon roared in the distance.

The French right struck the Austrian left first, disappointing Charles. They pushed them back. French numerical superiority had now declined, but they had better mobility and coordination. In spite of this, both sides fought firmly. Austrian emotion fueled their struggle as the French *elan* began to decline.

Napoleon, however, was fueled by his sense of destiny. With his line of retreat threatened, he chose to go on the offensive, believing the enemy was as confused as his troops. He had MacDonald's V Corps form on the right of Massena, and attacks the Austrians concentrating on him.

MacDonald would be supported by cavalry reserves and the Imperial Guard (Old Guard). 104 guns would give artillery cover. 30,000 men formed a huge hollow square and advanced. The cavalry followed, with infantry forming columns on the flanks. The formation was designed to compel the men to persist forward, or be trampled by the men and horses from the rear.

However, the Austrian artillery caused many of the men to falter. The attack was carried home by less than one tenth of the men remaining. The artillery broke the Austrian resistance and the cavalry and the Old Guard exploited it. Charles' army, broken in two, was forced to withdraw.

Danton was proud of what he had done in that battle, and of the rank of Corporal that was given to him, as a result.

"Don't ignore me Danton." His mother pleaded as she continued to try and talk some sense into him. He could not take much of this longer, and soon would be joining his former master on one last escapade.

At Austerlitz, where Danton first saw combat, the Emperor's army, being deteriorated, headed to Brunn in Austria to wait for resupply. The Russians, under Czar Alexander I and his brother, Emperor Franz II, and the Austrians, under the Archduke Charles, were in need of supply themselves, as winter approached. The two armies decided to go on the offensive and marched to Brunn.

The two sides spied on each other, Napoleon gave the enemy an impression of French weakness, in order to draw them into an attack, while he was planning to go on the offensive just the same.

Scouting ahead, he found a natural defensive position, between Brunn and Austerlitz. Here, they could fight against superior numbers, while the main force prepared for a counterblow.

He sent the IV Corps, under Marshal Nicolas Jean de Dieu Soult, and cavalry, east of Austerlitz, behind the Goldbach Brook, three miles east of the town. He expected the Russians to attack the weak flank, deployed on a high plateau to the east.

Marshal Liou Nicolas Davout would support the flank, if necessary. But the bulk of the French forces, after a long march from Vienna, were concealed by another plateau, to the west of the Goldbach.

Napoleon planned to hurl his remaining forces at the enemy rear, after they had exhausted themselves with the bait in the form of the French right. Late on December 1, he toured his camps to inspire the men. The troops lit bonfires to honor him. Danton, being a rookie, was very nervous in the anticipation of combat. The arrival of the Emperor had the effect on him the Emperor desired for his men. He had seen him up close, for the first time, and was in awe. He'd passed right by their bivouac, surrounded by his aides, wearing his trademark smoked-gray overcoat, and cocked hat, worn sideways. He was short, as Danton had heard, but not as short as he expected.

"Somethin' else huh kid?" A veteran soldier asked, nudging him with his elbow, as Napoleon passed. Danton was too stunned for words, but the feeling was obvious. Whatever doubts he had had dissipated, and he stood ready for combat. Such was the effect Napoleon had on France, and the army, being closer, was certainly no stranger to that.

The campfires led the Allies to believe the French were using a usual technique to conceal a retreat. They grew more overconfident, and the young Czar insisted they attack in the morning. The attack was assured.

They would cross the Goldbach, south of the right flank of the French, turn north and envelop the French and divide the Brunn-Vienna road. Then they would hold the French left, with a secondary attack.

The late autumn temperatures made the ground muddy, especially along the banks of the stream. The lakes in the area were still frozen. A fog developed early in the morning of the 2nd; further

concealing Napoleon's troops, held for the counterattack from the Allies.

The Allies advanced farther to the south than Napoleon had planned for, so he moved most of Soult's men to his offensive plan, and left a small portion of the IV Corps for his defensive plan. Danton remained with the defenders, and braced himself for the attack they all knew was coming. Davout's corps would play Soult's role. Napoleon's orders to Davout failed to reach him, but when the guns sounded, Davout deployed rapidly.

The Allies' plan pulled the main part of the army away from the center, the Pratzen Plateau. Only 16,200 troops under *Feldzeugmeister* Carl Graf Kolowrat-Krakowski and 10,500 reserves under the Grand Duke Constantine, the Czar's brother, remained to defend against a French counter-attack.

The Allies' attack had the effect that was expected by its commanders. Davout was pushed back a mile by mid-morning, but he remained in contact with the center. The fusillade of enemy fire introduced Danton to a world previously unknown. Watching men fall from the hailstorm of bullets left a sickening feeling in his stomach. "I've been trained for this." He tried to tell himself, but this was nothing like the training.

As the attack came on, he and his comrades were forced to withdraw, an action that was to be routine for the early part of that day. Backtracking, and, every-now-and-then, pausing to fire volleys at the attacking army; Danton grew weary of the fight. But they were holding the enemy. Loading his rifle with cartridge and concentrating to ram it in and cock the hammer of his musket, he focused on his superiors' commands and fired into the mass of oncoming soldiers.

The smoke from the repeated discharge of muskets created huge clouds on the battlefield. It was becoming more and more difficult for him to aim at clear targets. At certain intervals they fired blindly, as lieutenants shouted firing orders and sergeants held their ranks firm. However, the 12,500 men that began the French defense held back the 40,000 soldiers of the enemy the whole day.

At 8:00 the next morning Napoleon launched his counterattack. By 10:00 Soult had taken the Pratzen Plateau. The French were now in position to cut the Allied line of retreat and divide the enemy in two.

By afternoon the sun shone through the fog, and the French on the plateau outnumbered the Allies two to one. The Russians on the plateau went on the defensive in a battle that lasted much of the day. After midday, Napoleon pulled Bernadotte's I Corps away from the action it had been fighting on the left, and sent him into battle around the Plateau.

Next, Napoleon ordered the French center to bear to its right, in *manoeuvre sur les derrieres*, and engage the Allied main force in the south and west. The threat precipitated a dramatic countercharge by the Russian Imperial Guard on the plateau. The Guard was early. They were out of breath when they reached the French lines, but did manage to break the first line.

Napoleon dispatched the cavalry of his Imperial Guard in response and the Allies, outnumbered, broke. By 2:30 p.m., the main force of the Allies was cut off. Russian Field Marshal Friedrich Wilhelm, Count of Buxhowden, ordered half of his men to retreat to the east and the rest to fight their way out north, along the Goldbach. Both moves were hopeless and they fled southward.

Many were captured while others tried to flee across the frozen lakes, as cannon balls broke the ice. Along with the horses and guns, many fell into the cold waters.

Marshal Bagration decided to retreat, on the opposite flank, also. The fighting ended between 4:30 and 5 p.m. Too battered and disorganized the French did not pursue effectively and Bagration escaped. The phenomenon of vigorous pursuit, although emphasized in military textbooks, is rare for the greatest of generals in their greatest of victories.

Danton, Napoleon and the French had indeed won a great victory. The swirling battle claimed Danton's combat virginity, and taught him the importance of the military structure he fought under, and great respect for its supreme leader. He would follow "The Boar," a depiction of Napoleon, anywhere.