

# The View from the Marshals Tent

THE BATTLE OF FÈRE-CHAMPENOISE, 25 MAR 1814

## Kevin Zucker

French Marshals Marmont and Mortier, with 18,884 men, were hurrying to join Napoleon on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March. A lively debate ensued between them, over which road to take.

It is the last week of the war. The Marshals have been campaigning continuously against Blücher along the Marne, while Napoleon, repulsed at Arcis, has turned away from his subordinates to threaten Chaumont, the Allied base. What happens next might delay the fall of Paris, as the French defenses could have been 10,000-men stronger with better morale.

Marmont did not have an order from Napoleon telling him which road to take, which way to go. Often Marmont would assume the leadership of the duo, now joined by Belliard with his own opinions. In this case, three heads were not better than one. And suddenly they see the night sky brightly lit by campfires to the east. This led the marshals to avoid the road to Vitry, and proceed along the Somme by way of Soudé Ste. Croix and Sompuis, toward Perthes and St. Dizier.

Napoleon seems to have forgotten that he ordered Marmont and Mortier to come to him. He owed it to his men to go and meet them, at least send a messenger or some cavalry. Or perhaps he did try this. French messengers were getting captured because of Schwarzenberg's troops between them.

On the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup> Marmont was attacked by Pahlen's advanced guard cavalry at Soudé Ste. Croix.

Schwarzenberg took a risk sending his cavalry far beyond their supporting infantry. Neither side expected to encounter the enemy.

The Marshals, after disregarding the enemy campfires, now saw the united armies bearing down upon them, and assumed the infantry was closer than it was. They decided to retreat toward Paris before they saw a single enemy battalion of infantry.

With the enemy (they assumed) heading right at them, they overlooked any other option and prepared for a retreat. How are you going to put the player in this dilemma? This is the fun part! I love the challenges of actual game design.

## Augustin Daniel Belliard



When Murat took command of the Cavalry Reserve in May 1812, Belliard resumed his position as Murat's chief of staff, a post he held during the campaigns of 1806-07. He continued to be involved in the fighting, serving at Koukviaki, [Ostrowno](#), [Witepsk](#), [Smolensk](#), and [Borodino](#). The day after Borodino he was wounded in the leg by a ball at Mojaisk. After surviving the retreat, Belliard was given an honorary title of Colonel General of Cuirassiers. In June of 1813 he was attached to [Marshal Berthier's](#) staff, and in October he fought at [Leipzig](#) where a ball broke his left arm. Regardless of this wound, he fought at [Hanau](#) on October 30<sup>th</sup>. During the defense of France of 1814, General Belliard fought at [Montmirail](#), [Château-Thierry](#), and [Laon](#). He was given command of two divisions of cavalry, fighting at Fère-Champenoise and Paris. When Paris surrendered, Belliard went to Napoleon to give him the news.

The solution will require use of the ALT Reinforcements. If not using the cards, then use of 25.51 is required; our scenario will not work without the threat of unpredictable forces nearby.

The game may not play out like history because of psychological forces, the chaos of war and PTSD. I think that the best we can do is to figure out how to place the gamer in the boots of the officers on the spot, by:

- a) showing all the actual starting locations
- b) giving a March Order that applies to their forces at that time, mirroring the actual order that was in effect.

The challenge for the player is to work with a and b to see if he can do better, given the options that the generals themselves had.