

THE BATTLE OF LEIPZIG

16-19 OCTOBER, 1813

WEB BONUS

 **BACKGROUND ON THE ALLIED COMMANDERS** by Neil Smith

It just wasn't possible to squeeze all the information into the article in WI272 that we would've liked. Instead we're bringing you some background on the four leaders of the Allied army that defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig. We hope these snippets inspire you to dig deeper into the often complicated career paths of these famous men.



THE ALLIED COMMANDERS AT LEIPZIG - SWEDEN

JEAN-BAPTISTE BERNADOTTE

Those familiar with Napoleon's army before 1810 will no doubt double-take on the name Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte listed as his enemy in 1813. That is because Bernadotte started his military career as a French private in 1780. Indeed, he may have stayed below the officer level if not for the Revolution that cleaned out the aristocracy. By 1794, Bernadotte was a brigadier in the new army, and two years later as a general, he commanded the rearguard on the retreat from Theiningen. In 1797, Bernadotte fought with Napoleon in Italy then became French ambassador in

Vienna. Napoleon rewarded Bernadotte with the position of Marshal in the Empire and appointed him governor of Hanover. In 1805, Bernadotte fought with distinction at Ulm then Austerlitz.

Bernadotte's star began to fall in 1806 when he was reprimanded for not fighting at Jena-Auerstadt. Napoleon then stripped him of command during the Battle of Wagram in 1809 and Bernadotte returned to Paris. Fortune favoured Bernadotte, however, when he was elected by the Swedish to become their new king in 1810. He also became commander of the Swedish armies. With his new title, Bernadotte helped inspire the Sixth Coalition to keep fighting Napoleon in 1813 when others weakened in the face of defeat. It was to be Bernadotte's strategy that brought Napoleon to heel at Leipzig.



THE ALLIED COMMANDERS AT LEIPZIG - AUSTRIA

KARL PHILIPP, PRINCE OF SCHWARZENBERG

One of Napoleon's most persistent foes, Karl Philipp, Prince of Schwarzenberg was born to command. Schwarzenberg joined the Imperial cavalry in 1788 and rose to major within four years just in time to fight the French revolutionaries. His earliest claim to fame was leading a successful but reckless cavalry charge in 1794 that routed a French Corps. It would only take another five years for Schwarzenberg to reach the rank of Lieutenant-Field Marshal. In 1800, he commanded a Division during

the crushing defeat at Hohenlinden where he saved the army from almost complete annihilation. In 1804, the title Prince of Schwarzenberg, the title by which is he most commonly known, was bestowed on him.

After a bout of peace, Schwarzenberg was back on his warhorse again in 1805 when he helped a contingent of Austrian cavalry cut through the constricting French lines at Ulm. At the Battle of Wagram in 1809, Schwarzenberg commanded a cavalry division and was then promoted to General of Cavalry. In 1810, Schwarzenberg found himself allied to France through the marriage of Austria's Marie Louise to Napoleon. He then took charge of the Austrian auxiliaries in the disastrous Russian campaign of 1812. Austria's 'normal'



relations with Napoleon were restored in 1813 and Schwarzenberg was appointed to command the Austrian forces. Schwarzenberg was the most senior of the Allied commanders at Leipzig.

THE ALLIED COMMANDERS AT LEIPZIG - RUSSIA

MICHAEL ANDREAS DE BARCLAY DE TOLLY

Much maligned and misunderstood in his day, Barclay de Tolly would command the Russian forces at Leipzig with distinction. He first joined the army in 1767 but does not appear to have seen combat until the late 1780s when Russia campaigned against the Turks. The following five years saw Barclay in action against the Swedes and Poles in quick succession. By then, his star was beginning to rise and he was a major by the turn of the century.

Barclay fought against Napoleon in 1806 at Pultusk then at Eylau the following year when he was wounded. For the next two years he commanded in the Finnish War with distinction. In 1812, Barclay was back fighting Napoleon. It was his idea to draw the French deep into Russia and attack them at their most vulnerable. However, that strategy and his status as an outsider, created distrust at the Russian Court and Barclay was forced to fight at Smolensk. He lost and Kutozov replaced him in overall command. Barclay commanded the right flank at Borodino but he was ill and had to leave the army. Napoleon's attack in 1813 saw Barclay recalled to the army and he was reinstated to overall command when Kutozov died soon afterwards.



THE ALLIED COMMANDERS AT LEIPZIG - PRUSSIA

GEBHARD VON BLÜCHER

Gebhard von Blücher is more commonly known to the English audience as Wellington's redoubtable ally whose Prussian army arrived in the nick of time at Waterloo in 1815. He was that and much more besides. Blücher first surfaced as a precocious 18 year-old, fighting as a Swedish hussar against the Prussians in 1760. He switched sides when captured and never looked back, rising to officer status quickly. He fell out with Frederick the Great, however, and retired to a

farmer's life, but he was soon back in the colours as Major Blücher after Frederick's death. From there he began a meteoric rise through the ranks to a Colonelship then promotion to Lieutenant General in 1801.

In 1806, Blücher took on Napoleon's Grand Army in what became a nightmare for Prussia, losing at Auerstadt, Prenzlau, and Ratekau, where he was forced to surrender. He remained an implacable enemy of France throughout the subsequent peace and was ostracized by the Prussian Court as a result. The renewed war in 1813 brought Blücher back to the fold and he took the reins of the Prussian army at just the right time to lead the drive against Napoleon to the gates of Leipzig.



