

The Russian Eagles over the Alps
Prince Peter Bagration and the Russian operations in the Muothatal Valley
September-October 1799
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By the late 1790s, Revolutionary France succeeded in removing foreign threats to its borders and pursued an aggressive foreign policy, which saw the establishment of sister republics in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Italy. The French expansion, and ideological threat that it presented, threatened European powers and encouraged the formation of the Second Coalition between Austria, Russia, Britain and the Ottoman Empire in 1799. This coalition achieved great success in the spring and summer of 1799, when the Russo-Austrian forces, led by the famous Alexander Suvorov, defeated the French armies and recaptured almost all of Italy. On 15 August 1799, the Allies celebrated a victory at Novi, which virtually expelled French forces from Italy, and began preparations for the invasion of southern France. However, the Austro-Russian cooperation soon deteriorated. Emperor Paul's intervention into Italian politics left the Austrians far less flexible on questions of military policy and the political future of northern Italy. The Viennese court was determined to preserve its position and influence in the peninsula, preferring to lose future Russian support rather than the political advantages the Russian armies had already brought to it.

At the end of August, following his victory at Novi, the Aulic Council ordered Suvorov to regroup his forces for a new campaign in Switzerland, where his army was to join the Austrian forces and two other Russian corps under General Alexander Rimsky-Korsakov and Lieutenant General Maxim Rehbinder. The new plan of action effectively removed the Russians from Italy

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where they could have impeded Austrian ambitions.² Suvorov complained about the new orders and argued about imminent danger of being attacked by much stronger forces commanded by French General Andre Masséna in Switzerland. He refused to divide his forces and insisted on taking entire Russian army from Italy. On 4 September, he reported to Emperor Paul his decision to march at once into Switzerland.³

As the plan for the forthcoming campaign was drafted, it was agreed that the Russian army would cross the Alps through the St. Gothard Pass and move via Altdorf towards Lake Lucerne, where Suvorov intended to join Lieutenant General Johann Friedrich Hötze and Korsakov on the Upper Zurich and launch a coordinated attack against Masséna.⁴ The main flaw of this plan lay in the fact that neither Suvorov nor any of his commanders was familiar with the Alps and could not comprehend what difficulties lay ahead of their troops. The plan specified that the Russians would march from Altdorf to Schwyz on “the right and left shores of the Lake Lucerne”⁵ but there was no road, not even path in this direction and the only way to cross the lake was on a small flotilla, which, in fact, was under the French control. The Austrians staff officers, including Franz Weyrother, failed to provide the Russians with this important information that eventually doomed the entire enterprise.⁶

² Francis to Suvorov, 17 August, in Miliutin, Campaign of 1799, III, 199-200; 415-16; Suvorov to Paul, 3 September 1799, A. V. Suvorov: Dokumenti [hereafter cited as A.V. Suvorov: Documents] ed. G. Mescheriakov, (Moscow, 1949-1953), IV, 295; Atlas Shveitsraskoi kampanii A.V. Suvorova: iz fondov Rossiiskogo gosudarstvennogo voenno-istoricheskogo arkhiva [Atlas of Suvorov's Swiss Campaign: from the materials of the Russian State Military Historical Archive, hereafter cited as Suvorov's Atlas], (Zurich, 2000) 1-6; Louis Hennequin, Zurich - Masséna en Suisse, (Paris, 1911), 1-15; Edourd Gachot, La Campagne d'Helvétie, 1799, (Paris, 1914), 171-172; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799, III, 125-85; Duffy, Suvorov in Italy and Switzerland, 1799, 150-54; Petrushevsky, Generalissimo Prince Suvorov, 641-42.

³ Suvorov to Francis, 28 August 1799, Generalissimus Suvorov: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov (Moscow, 1947) 279-280; Suvorov to Paul, 4 September 1799, Suvorov: Documents, IV 299-300. Also see, Suvorov to Rimsky-Korsakov, Suvorov to Vickham, Suvorov to Vorontsov, Suvorov to Tolstoy, Suvorov to Khvostov, Suvorov to Razumovsky, 29 August - 3 September 1799, A.V. Suvorov: Documents, IV, 285-86, 290-91, 297-98.

⁴ Plan of General Attack on the Enemy in the Minor Swiss Cantons and Subsequent Actions After Initial Success, circa 8-10 September 1799, A.V. Suvorov: Documents, IV, 320-23. Suvorov to Korsakov, Hötze and Linken, 5 September 1799, Generalissimus Suvorov, 282-84; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799, IV, 252-54; Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 9; Suvorov's Atlas, 6-7; Duffy, Suvorov in Italy and Switzerland, 158-61.

⁵ Suvorov to Korsakov, Hötze and Linken, 5 September 1799, Generalissimus Suvorov, 283; A.V. Suvorov: Documents, IV, 303-304.

⁶ Hötze to Suvorov, 10 September 1799, in Miliutin, Campaign of 1799, IV, 255-56; Petrushevsky, Generalissimo Prince Suvorov, 652-54.

The Russian army marched on 8 September, with Prince Peter Bagration leading the advance guard.⁷ A scion of the royal house of Georgia, Bagration had been serving in the Russian army for seventeen years now and had seen service against the Chechen mountaineers, the Turks and the Poles. He gradually advanced through the ranks, becoming a major general in February 1799. For this young and dashing officer, the Italian Campaign proved to be a turning point as he excelled as an advance guard commander and distinguished himself at Brescia, Marengo, Trebbia and Novi. Now, in the fall of 1799, he faced new, even greater, challenges. The story of the Russian advance through the Alps, especially the assault on the St. Gothard Pass and the Devil's Bridge in late September, soon seized the imagination of contemporaries and remained favorite topics to the present day. For the purpose of this paper, we will skirt them and instead concentrate on what happened after the Russian army crossed into the Muotental Valley.

By 25 September, the Russian army, having crossed the St. Gothard Pass and fought its way through the valley of the Reuss River, reached the Lucerne Lake. Unable to cross the lake, which was controlled by the French, Suvorov had no other option but to cross the Rosstock massif through the Chinzig Pass (2,000 m.) and then march west to Schwyz by way of the Muotatal. Bagration was to lead the way over the pass, followed by the main forces.⁸

Bagration moved from Burglen at 5:00 a.m. on 27 September.⁹ His troops included four hundreds Cossacks of Sychov and Posdeev regiments, and two Jäger regiments. Ascending the mountain, the path grew steeper and soon vanished. The soldiers had to climb with slippery soil slithering under their feet. Higher in the mountain, they sank up to their knees in the snow. Bagration and Grand Duke Constantine walked together during entire passage. The nine miles distance took twelve hours to march and Bagration reached Lipplisbuel only in the afternoon of 27 September.¹⁰ He was informed that a French company¹¹ was bivouacked at the village of Muothatal (Muttental). The French expected the enemy attack from southeastern Bisistal direction and were unprepared for Bagration's attack from south. Bagration prudently deployed his dismounted

⁷ Suvorov divided his army in two corps: Derfelden's corps moved to Ceresole and Rosenberg's troops to Alessandria. Disposition for the March from Piedmont to Switzerland, 6 September 1799, A.V. Suvorov: Documents, IV, 305-308.

⁸ Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 60-62; Rostunov, Suvorov, 461-62; Longworth, The Art of Victory, 279; Suvorov: Letters, 732.

⁹ Suvorov's Atlas, 33.

¹⁰ Anon. Suvorov's Campaign in Switzerland, 38-39; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799, IV, 64-65

¹¹ This company, under Adjutant-General Vautrin, was part of the 38th Demi-brigade, send by General Lecorube to defend Muothatal. Duffy, Suvorov in Italy and Switzerland, 198; Suvorov's Atlas, 33-34.

Cossacks to make a flanking movement on the right and the mounted Cossacks to the left, while he led Jägers down the serpentine trail towards the village. A coordinated attack caught the French by surprise, and most of them were captured.¹² Prince Peter, as Suvorov called him, then gathered his forces and spent the night under arms in case the French attacked. His troops lacked provisions and ate various plants they found while Grand Duke Constantine satisfied his hunger with two potatoes, which he bought for astounding 400 rubles in gold.¹³ The main army was still approaching the pass when Suvorov ordered a halt to give his troops time to rest among the rocky slopes.¹⁴ The main army crossed Chinzig the next day and, by 29 September, it arrived to the Muothatal, where the field marshal intended to rest.¹⁵

It was here that Suvorov was informed about the Austro-Russian defeat at Zurich but dismissed as a French ploy to dishearten him. Yet, Russian scouts soon confirmed the disastrous news. On 25-27 September, the French forces under Masséna indeed attacked and routed the Allied forces around Zurich. The remains of the battered Russian army left the city, leaving behind some 2,000 dead, 5,000 prisoners, 10 colors and all their baggage and artillery. The Austrians suffered equally heavy losses, including General Hötze, who was killed.¹⁶

With the main Austro-Russian forces beaten, Masséna initially wanted to block Suvorov in the Reuss valley but was informed by Lecourbe about the Russian advance into Muothatal Valley. Masséna immediately moved General Edouard-Adolphe Mortier's division of 9,000 men towards Schwyz and General Honore Theodore Gazan with approximately 10,000 men to Wessen and Schanis to close the escape venues for the Russian general.¹⁷ Thus, Suvorov's weary 18,000 men, without food and ammunition were now facing superior French army, surrounded by impassable mountains and in cold weather. An escape seemed hopeless and surrender the only choice. One of

¹² Bagration reported 87 captured and 57 killed or wounded. Bagration to Derfelden, 10 October 1799, Bagration's Journal, 50; Suvorov to Paul, 14 September 1799, A.V. Suvorov: Documents, IV, 352; Petrushevsky, Generalissimo Prince Suvorov, 674; Orlov, Gryazev's Memoirs, 95; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 65; Rostunov, Suvorov, 463.

¹³ Orlov, Gryazev's Memoirs, 97.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 96-97; Petrushevsky, Generalissimo Prince Suvorov, 671-73.

¹⁵ Lecourbe to Masséna, 27 September 1799, Lecourbe's Correspondence, 298, 305-307; Suvorov's Atlas, 34; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 67; Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 352-53.

¹⁶ For details on the battle of Zurich see, Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 350-60; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 69-121, 289-312; Petrushevsky, Generalissimo Prince Suvorov, 675-76; Gachot, Campagne d'Helvetie, 350-450; Koch, Mémoires de Masséna, III, 300-400; Duffy, Suvorov in Italy and Switzerland, 217-220. James Marshal-Cornwall, Marshal Masséna (Oxford, 1965) 71-74; Colonel Frignet Despréaux, Le Maréchal Mortier, Duc de Trévise (Paris, 1914), II, 120-31.

participants described the disastrous conditions of the soldiers, "Food was scarce. Our biscuits got wet and moulded; the locals were poor and had been already despoiled by the French. We dug for roots in the valley and ate them... There was so little meat that the necessity forced us to eat parts of animals, which at another time would have disgusted us. Even the hides of cattle were not discarded but cut into small pieces, wound round firewood or turned on a ramrod and so grilled... or eaten half-raw."¹⁸

On 29 September Suvorov called the council of war to discuss the situation and future actions. Bagration, who left the only detailed description of the meeting, was the first to see Suvorov and found the old field marshal dressed in parade uniform, walking in his room and disparaging Korsakov for the loss at Zurich, "Parades... Ceremonies... What an overwhelming self-confidence! Good God! Certainly, that is needed too, but at the proper time... More essential is to know how to wage war, examine the terrain, calculate, be always on alert and perceive how to win... There is nothing clever in being beaten.... To sacrifice so many men in a single day! And what men they were!"¹⁹ Bagration left the room unseen and waited for other generals to arrive. As they entered, Suvorov "rose and closed his eyes and went deep into his thoughts... then he looked at us and his glance pierced us as if by lightning - This was not Alexander Vasilievich, who led the troops in the battle with his dedication and hawk's swiftness.... Oh, no! That was the greatest man, the genius! He was transformed!" Suvorov looked at the gathered commanders and told them, Korsakov has been defeated and his corps scattered from Zurich... So, our plan of driving the French out of Switzerland has been thwarted."²⁰

During the council meeting Suvorov seemed charged with emotions. He blamed the Austrians for everything he had encountered during the campaign.

What can we do now? To go back is disgraceful; I have never retreated in my life. To advance to Schwyz is impossible - Masséna has over 60,000 men and our troops scarcely amount to 20,000 men. We lack provisions, ammunition and artillery... We can turn to nobody for help. We are on the verge of disaster! All that remains for us

¹⁷ LeCourbe's Correspondence, 297-99; Koch, Mémoires de Masséna, III, 384-90; Sout, Memoires, II, 264-67; Barry, The Life of Loison, 67-68; Duffy, Suvorov in Italy and Switzerland, 221; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 122-23; Despréaux, Le Maréchal Mortier, 132-33.

¹⁸ Orlov, Gryazev's Memoirs, 98-99.

¹⁹ Razskazi starogo voina o Suvorove, 211; see also, excerpts in Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 126-30; Petrushevsky, Generalissimo Prince Suvorov, 678-80.

²⁰ Ibid., 211-12.

is to rely on Almighty God and the bravery and self-sacrifice of my troops! We are Russians! And the Lord is with us!²¹

Suvorov's speech seemed to have a profound affect on the generals. Bagration later recalled, "We were astonished... I will never forget that minute! I experienced a strange, unknown excitement in my veins. I was aflame and ready to fight even tens of thousands [*t'ma t'mushaia*] of enemies." Bagration felt as his "blood boiled in me and the heart, it seemed, wanted to fly out of my chest." Others seemed fervent as well; General Wilim Derfelden spoke for many, "We would not disgrace the Russian arms but die with honor. Lead us anywhere you wish, do whatever you want, we are yours and we are Russians!" Suvorov was overwhelmed by these words and he cried.²²

After these emotional outbursts, the council decided to move the army through the eastern exit of the Muotatal Valley - Prigel Pass - Klontal passage and unite with the surviving Austro-Russian forces at Glarus. The advance guard consisted of Bagration's and Austrian General Auffenberg's troops. The army had rations for only five days, but these supplies would now have to be cut to last at least ten days.²³

Auffenberg (2,000 men) marched on 29 September and Bagration²⁴ followed him the next day.²⁵ As they crossed the Prigel pass, the Austrians engaged the French General Molitor with four battalions at Guetentaboden; despite the initial Austrian success, the French disputed every inch of the ground and even counterattacked, forcing the Austrians to retreat; Auffenberg even offered Molitor to negotiate in order to gain time for Bagration's troops reach the battlefield.²⁶ At 3:00 p.m. on 30 September Bagration arrived with his troops. Auffenberg broke off negotiations and began withdrawing his troops closer to the Russians while Bagration deployed grenadier battalions of Dendrygin and Sanaev to attack along the road, supported by the grenadier battalions of Lomonosov

²¹ Ibid., 213-214.

²² Ibid., 214-17.

²³ Council Records, 29 September 1799, in Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 315-16; Razskazi starogo voina o Suvorove, 217-19.

²⁴ Bagration commanded two battalions of Bagration Jager Regiment, 2 battalions of Miller Jager Regiment, 4 grenadier battalions of Lomonosov, Dendrygin, Sanaev and Kalemin, and a Cossack regiment. He was followed by Shveikovsky's division, comprised of Rosenberg Grenadier, Shveikovsky Musketeer, Kamensky and Baranovsky Infantry Regiments and a Cossack regiment. The Cossacks were dismounted.

²⁵ The time of the march is unclear. Suvorov reported 7:00 a.m., Komarovsky showed 5:00 a.m. Suvorov to Paul, 14 September 1799, A.V. Suvorov: Documents, IV, 352; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 131.

²⁶ Suvorov's Atlas, 48-49; Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 344-45; Duffy, Suvorov in Italy and Switzerland, 227-28; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 131-32. Petrushevsky, Generalissimo Prince Suvorov, 681. Some Russian,

and Kalemin. Miller's Jägers and the Cossacks made a flanking maneuver on the left, while Bagration himself led his Jäger regiment on the right flank.

Molitor followed the Austrian movement and attacked them with his troops deployed in four battalion columns. However, he was surprised to encounter Bagration's troops, who unexpectedly attacked him in front and flanks. Bagration personally led the bayonet charge, shouting "Hurrah", and dislodging the French, who lost "more than 70 men killed and 166 captured."²⁷ Molitor withdrew down the plain at the head of Klontaler See and along the path leading to the northern shore of lake. The retreat was executed in darkness, on the narrow track, exposed to the Russian attacks and the cliffs along the lake, and according to Bagration's and Suvorov's reports, dozens of Frenchmen fell into the lake and drowned.²⁸

Glarus was now just several miles further on the eastern end of the Klontaler See; the Allies might have arrived reached it in time if Molitor had not decided to make a stand again. This time, he chose his ground carefully. His troops were deployed at Seeruti on narrow open ground that enabled them to concentrate fire on advancing enemy. Steep cliffs protected his right flank and the lake covered his left. Molitor deployed a line of skirmishers across the clearing and some hundred and fifty grenadiers in a chapel on the hill.²⁹ Auffenberg's troops spearheaded the new attack but were repulsed.³⁰ Around 7:00 p.m. on 30 September, Bagration advanced his grenadier battalions and led four desperate assaults, all beaten back by the French, whose artillery inflicted heavy casualties on the Russians. A participant described the scene of horrible combat. "The enemy took up positions behind the stone fence and hurled grapeshot and bullets at us. Our troops made numerous charges forward, but could not do anything. The enemy heavy fire decimated our warriors [bogatiri] *en masse*."³¹ The weather gradually deteriorated and heavy sleet began to fall in the darkness, forcing

particularly Soviet, authors criticized Auffenberg's decision to negotiate, accusing him of treachery. But it is obvious the Austrian commander simply intended to prolong negotiations until Bagration's arrival.

²⁷ Bagration to Derfelden, 10 October 1799, Bagration's Journal, 51; Suvorov to Paul, 14 September 1799, A.V. Suvorov: Documents, IV, 352-353; Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 344-45. Miliutin recorded Grand Duke Constantine's speech to soldiers, when he urged them to celebrate Emperor Paul's day with a new victory and glory. Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 133.

²⁸ Bagration to Derfelden, 10 October 1799, Bagration's Journal, 51; Suvorov to Paul, 14 September 1799, A.V. Suvorov: Documents, IV, 353; Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 344-45; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 134; Gryazev's Memoirs, 104.

²⁹ Suvorov's Atlas, 49-50; Gachot, Campagne d'Helvetie, 389;

³⁰ One of the Austrian battalion tried to make flanking maneuver by moving along the narrow path on the lakeshore. However, the French checked it as well. Gachot, Campagne d'Helvetie, 389; The Russians sources often neglect the Austrian efforts and concentrate on the Russian troops only.

³¹ Razskazi starogo voina o Suvorove, 245-46.

the Allied troops to cease their attacks. Bagration moved his troops to the nearby heights.³² The main Russian forces bivouacked behind them. Fires were prohibited and the wet and cold weather further increased the misery of the soldiers. “The rain, cold and other miseries savaged our body, not soul. We were angry... and hungry, very hungry. Many had not eaten anything for days.”³³ Prince Bagration spent another restless and miserable night. He was wounded in the left thigh and suffered agonizing pain as he rode along his troops. During the night he encouraged his troops, “We must wait and the Lord will help us ...”³⁴

It was late night, when Prince Peter heard someone calling his name in darkness. It was Suvorov, who came to see him and urged attacking. “Prince Peter! I want to spend the night at Glarus. Those troops and I (he pointed at the column of soldiers) must have rest. We are cold and starving. Peter! We must spend the night at Glarus by all means!” Bagration replied, “We will be there”³⁵ So, despite exhaustion and pain from his wound, Bagration spent the rest of the night preparing his troops for attack. He exploited darkness and bad weather to cover his movement, placing his Jägers and combined grenadier battalions on the left flank. The Miller Jagers, four companies of Austrians and 240 Cossacks were sent on a flanking maneuver on the right to the rear of Seeruti.³⁶

The fighting broke out early in the morning on 1 October, when the French outposts saw the Russian Jägers and Dendrygin’s grenadiers moving, with Bagration leading the frontal assault.³⁷ After a brief combat, the French were overwhelmed and fell back to nearby hills.³⁸ Molitor realized importance of his resistance to halt the Russian advance and gain time for the concentration of the French forces. He decided to fight in depth along the Linth River by holding up a series of defense lines at Netstal, Nafels and Mollis. The French withdrew in perfect order despite Bagration’s attacks

³² The casualties for both sides are unknown; Russians claimed the French losses as 600 killed. Suvorov’s Atlas, 49; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 134-35.

³³ Razskazi starogo voina o Suvorove, 246.

³⁴ Ibid., 246; Also, Petrushevsky, Generalissimo Prince Suvorov, 682-83.

³⁵ Ibid., 247.

³⁶ Suvorov’s Atlas, 50-51; Duffy, Suvorov in Italy and Switzerland, 228-29, 236-37; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 145-46, 323-24.

³⁷ Bagration recalled that a Swiss guide helped him to move the troops across the rough terrain. He generously rewarded him for this help. Razskazi starogo voina o Suvorove, 248, 477.

³⁸ Molitor was threatened by Bagration’s flanking maneuvers and the arrival of Derfelden’s division to reinforce Bagration for a frontal assault.

and preserved all artillery pieces.³⁹ Since fording of the Linth River was impossible, Molitor decided to use this to his advantage by destroying bridge at Netstal and holding positions at Nafels and Mollis. This allowed him to defend the river line and effectively operate on both banks while waiting for Gazan's reinforcements.⁴⁰

Early on 1 October Bagration launched a new attack on Netstal and, despite Austro-Russian numerical superiority, the French defended their positions until afternoon, when the Russians finally fought their way into the city seeking to capture the bridge over the Linth.⁴¹ However, the French destroyed it the very moment the Russians approached the river.⁴² Molitor then occupied strong positions at Nafels.⁴³

Meanwhile, the main Russian army was also threatened by the French forces from the west as Massena's forces closed in on the Russian rear in the Reuss valley. However, in a series of rear guard actions on 30 September-1 October, Suvorov managed to halt the French for a time.⁴⁴ With Massena hard pressing Suvorov from the back, Bagration's mission of breaking through Molitor became of paramount importance.

³⁹ Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 371-72; Suvorov's Atlas, 51-52; For Molitor's report see Gachot, Campagne d'Helvetie, 393.

⁴⁰ Gachot, Campagne d'Helvetie, 393; Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 371-72; Suvorov's Atlas, 51-52; Koch, Mémoires de Masséna, III, 388. Molitor had six infantry battalions (3 battalions of 84th Demi-brigade, 1st and 3rd battalions of 44th Demi-brigade and 1st battalion of 25th light Demi-brigade). However, he could commit only five battalions with seven guns against Bagration. He hoped General Honore Theodor Gazan would be able to reinforce him before the Russian main forces arrived. Gazan had 3 infantry battalions (3rd of 36th Demi-brigade, 2nd of 44th Demi-brigade and 2nd of 25th light Demi-brigade) and three squadrons of 10th Chasseurs á Cheval on the Linth River. He could also dispatch General of Division Ann-Gilbert La Val's Brigade (3 battalions of 94th Demi-brigade, 1st and 2nd battalion of 36th Demi-brigade, 3rd battalion of 25th light Demi-brigade and grenadier battalion of 3rd Division) and 2nd Swiss Demi-brigade of some 300 men. R. von Reding-Biberegg, Pokhod Suvorova cherez Shveysariu 24 Sentiabria - 10 oktiabria 1799 g. (Suvorov's Campaign in Switzerland, 23 September-10 October 1799], (St. Petersburg, 1901). 100-101. This volume was originally published as Der Zug Suvorov's durch die Schweiz (24 Herbst - bis 10 Weinmonat 1799), (Zurich, 1896).

⁴¹ Colonel Komarovskiy led the grenadiers in this desperate charge. He captured a gun, flag and 300 men at Netstal. Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 148, 324.

⁴² Gachot referred to entire Russian company killed in the explosion of the bridge. However, the Russian sources did not acknowledge it. Gachot, Campagne d'Helvetie, 394.

⁴³ According to Russian sources, 300 soldiers, 1 gun and 1 flag were captured. As usual, no precise Russian casualties were available. Auffenberg estimated the Austrian losses at 30 killed, 139 wounded and 71 captured. Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 148-49, 324-26; Suvorov's Atlas, 53; Duffy, Suvorov in Italy and Switzerland, 241; Koch, Mémoires de Masséna, III, 388.

⁴⁴ The French lost between 700-1,000 men, including General Aide-de-camp Lacour. The Russian casualties are unknown, but estimated at 1,000 men. Masséna referred to 600 Russian prisoners. Koch, Mémoires de Masséna, III, 386-87; Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 361-71; Despréaux, Le Maréchal Mortier, 134-35; Duffy, Suvorov in Italy and Switzerland, 230-436; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 136-39, 318-19; Suvorov's Atlas, 45-48; Razskazi starogo voyna o Suvorove, 227-45; Petrushevskiy, Generalissimo Prince Suvorov, 684-85.

After constructed a bridge at Netstal, Bagration marched towards Nafels, where the French took up another strong positions Molitor deployed his three battalions with four guns in front of the town, with his right flank covered by the cliffs and the left flank on the Linth River. To protect the eastern bank of the river, he moved half battalion with three guns to Mollis.⁴⁵ Bagration divided his forces and moved them on both riverbanks. Kamensky's detachment on the right bank quickly proceeded and seized Mollis.⁴⁶ After several hours of fighting and four major assaults on Nafels, Bagration managed to push through the city and reached the bridge across the river.⁴⁷ His troops pursued the French to this new position on the riverbank, but were counter-attacked.⁴⁸ Molitor, meantime, began receiving reinforcements from Gazan, with the 2nd Swiss Demi-brigade arriving first. As he greeted the Swiss soldiers, Molitor reminded them of the Swiss victory over the Austrians at Nafels in 1388 and urged them "to clear your country off of the foreign hordes."⁴⁹ The Franco-Swiss forces then counter-attacked to re-capture Nafels,⁵⁰ with the Swiss singing as they advanced. Molitor simultaneously dispatched a half battalion of 44th Demi-brigade to Mollis, where it drove back the Russian battalion and captured the village.⁵¹

However, Molitor faced tough and tenacious commander like Bagration, who was eager to fight for Nafels. Prince Peter rallied his troops, and renewed his assault on the town.⁵² The Russians again pushed through the city and even captured the bridge. But, the 2nd Swiss Brigade distinguished itself by stiff fighting retreat until the arrival of the grenadier battalion of the 3rd Division, led personally by General Honore Theodor Gazan helped to stem the Russian attack. It was already evening and both sides were exhausted by the fighting. Molitor and Gazan gathered their troops for a final charge, which forced Bagration to fall back to Netstal. Over the next couple of hours, in a desperate bid to gain ground, Bagration launched more than six attacks to break through the French

⁴⁵ Reding-Biberegg, *Suvorov's Campaign in Switzerland*, 102-105.

⁴⁶ *Suvorov's Atlas*, 52; Miliutin, *Campaign of 1799 IV*, 149-50.

⁴⁷ Bagration to Derfelden, 10 October 1799, *Bagration's Journal*, 51-52; Gachot, *Campagne d'Helvetie*, 398-403; Hennequin, *Masséna en Suisse*, 374-75; Miliutin, *Campaign of 1799 IV*, 149; *Suvorov's Atlas*, 52-53; Petrushevsky, *Generalissimo Prince Suvorov*, 682-83.

⁴⁸ Hennequin acknowledged one squadron of 10th Chasseurs, though Gachot described the charge of 2 squadrons. Hennequin, *Masséna en Suisse*, 373; Gachot, *Campagne d'Helvetie*, 396-97.

⁴⁹ Gachot, *Campagne d'Helvetie*, 398.

⁵⁰ Molitor moved 2nd Swiss and 84th Demi-brigade, followed by 3rd battalion of 36th Demi-brigade and 2nd of the 44th Demi-brigade.

⁵¹ In this attack the French recovered the guns they lost in earlier attack.

⁵² Bagration was reinforced with five battalions of 2nd Division (Rosenberg's Grenadier Regiment, Baranovsky II's Musketeer Regiment, one battalion of Kamensky II's Musketeer Regiment) and two Cossack regiments. In total, the Russians had some 5,000 men.

and clear path for the main forces. But all his attempts were beaten off. The town itself changed hands numerous times. Bagration's last assault at 8:00 p.m. had almost succeeded, when 400 men of the 94th Demi-brigade under Pierre Charles Lochet arrived just in time to reinforce the defenders.⁵³ General Gazan personally led the counterattack, which Bagration beat off in the darkness. By 9:00 p.m., after almost sixteen hours of fighting, Suvorov⁵⁴ ordered Bagration to disengage and take positions in front of the Netstal. The French remained firmly in control of Nafels and Mollis.⁵⁵

The Russian army assembled at Glarus by 4 October, while both sides remained inactive at Nafels, mainly because of exhaustion and lack of ammunition.⁵⁶ On 4 October Suvorov summoned a council of war. He intended to break through the French positions at Nafels and march towards Wessen to join the Allied army in Switzerland. He was supported by Austrian officers, who argued that Austro-Russian armies should concentrate at Sargans and replenish themselves from Austrian magazines. But this proposal was opposed by Grand Duke Constantine and other Russian generals, who suggested that the only secure way to unite with the Austrians was by taking the roundabout route over Panixer Pass to the Vorderrhein and then through the valley towards Maienfeld. Constantine emphasized the lack of ammunition and threat of being delayed by the French resistance at Nafels that would give Masséna a chance of surrounding.⁵⁷ The weather was getting worse and heavy snowfall threatened to close the passes. Considering these factors, eight out of ten attending generals voted for the "Russian" plan.

⁵³ Rapport des operations de la brigade du general Molitor, Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 375; Petrushevsky, Generalissimo Prince Suvorov, 683.

⁵⁴ Suvorov observed the actions at Netstal and Nafels from nearby heights. In the evening, he wanted to join the fighting, but Grand Duke Constantine urged him to stay with the main army.

⁵⁵ The French and Russian losses are unclear. Both sides decreased their casualties and exaggerated the enemy losses. Based on Masséna's report to Directory, Hennequin referred to Russian casualties as 400 killed, 1,700 wounded and 200 captured. He acknowledged the French losses at 140 dead and 400 wounded. According to Gachot, the Russians lost 2,126 men (including 431 killed) and the French - 1,137 men (317 killed, 820 wounded). Miliutin estimated French losses at 400 killed and 200 captured. The 2nd Swiss Demi-brigade suffered 117 killed and wounded, including 20 officers. Bagration to Derfelden, 10 October 1799, Bagration's Journal, 51-52; Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 375; Gachot, Campagne d'Helvetie, 403; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799, IV, 326; Generalissimus Suvorov, 306; A.V. Suvorov: Documents, 353.

⁵⁶ Gachot, Campagne d'Helvetie, 411-12; Suvorov's Atlas, 54. Longworth, The Art of Victory, 285; Starkov described an interesting scene at Glarus, where the Swiss locals brought cheese to give to the French. They initially refused to sell it to the Russians, but finally conceded. Razskazi starogo voina o Suvorove, 250-51.

⁵⁷ Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 154-55, 327-29; Petrushevsky, Generalissimo Prince Suvorov, 689-90; Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 377; Gachot, Campagne d'Helvetie, 359-60.

On 5 October the Russian army marched south towards the Panixer Pass and Bagration slowly withdrew his forces from Netstal, leaving a Cossack screen to cover his movement.⁵⁸ Bagration advance guard was now transformed into rear guard but out of 2,700 men he led into the Alps ten days earlier, he now had less than 1,800 men. Some battalions were less than 250 men strong.⁵⁹

With the Russians retreating south, the initiative now passed to the French, who commenced a converging movement to surround the Russians. General Loison moved his 76th and 38th Demi-brigades towards Schwanden; General Mortier's 108th Demi-brigade was moving from Prigel to Glarus and effectively blocked the valley. And most important, General Gazan dispatched the 44th Demi-brigade from Mollis towards Sool while 10th Chasseurs, the 84th and 25th Demi-brigade from Netstal in pursuit of Bagration. As a result, the French forces were diverging on Suvorov's army near Shwanden and threatening to cut the Russian escape route.⁶⁰ The French 44th Demi-brigade, guided by a local peasant, marched all night to arrive at Sool early in the morning of 6 October. At 8:00 a.m. as Bagration's troops were moving to Engi, the 10th Chasseurs engaged the Sychov II's Cossacks and forced Bagration to slow down the march. Meantime, the 25th and 84th Demi-brigades arrived with artillery, forcing Bagration to deploy his troops in the narrow valley of the upper Linth in front of Schwanden.

Bagration arranged his four grenadier battalions in line in the center and placed jagers on both flanks; one company of Bagration Jäger Regiment crossed the river to occupy the Sool village and nearby Soolberg hill, where the French were attempting to set up their artillery pieces. Lacking ammunition and having no artillery, Bagration was forced to launch three bayonet attacks, to pin down the enemy forces and allow the main Russian army to continue its retreat.⁶¹

Surrounded by superior French troops, Bagration soon appealed for reinforcements and renewed his attacks that pushed the French towards Mitlödi.⁶² Perhaps Molitor would have retreated

⁵⁸ To accelerate the march, Suvorov left some 1,300 seriously wounded and sick behind for the French. He personally wrote a letter to Masséna, asking him to take care of the Russian soldiers. Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 155-56; Gachot, Campagne d'Helvetie, 365-67; Suvorov's Atlas, 49, 54; Petrushevsky, Generalissimo Prince Suvorov, 688.

⁵⁹ Razskazi starogo voina o Suvorove, 477; Orlov, Gryazev's Memoirs, 117.

⁶⁰ Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 380-81; Despréaux, Le Maréchal Mortier, 140-42; Suvorov's Atlas, 54-55; Barry, The Life of Loison, 75-76; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799, IV, 155-56.

⁶¹ Petrushevsky, Generalissimo Prince Suvorov, 691-92.

⁶² Suvorov reported that the French lost 150 killed, and 38 captured. Suvorov to Paul, 14 October 1799, A.V. Suvorov: Documents, IV, 353.

but, with the 38th Demi-brigade of General Loison arrived in time to threaten Bagration from the rear. Prince Peter had to dispatch two grenadier battalions to halt their advance and drive them back to Leuggelbach. Simultaneously Molitor's forces⁶³ charged towards Schwanden, forcing Bagration to fight on two fronts at the same time. Bagration realized that his forces were not strong enough to defeat the French and were threatened to be cut off of the main army, which marched to the Panixer. Therefore, he withdrew part of his detachments from Schwanden, where he left a portion of his troops. The French, however, overwhelmed them and forced Bagration to proceed along the narrow path on the right bank of the Linth River towards Engi, some three miles from Schwanden.⁶⁴

Weather gradually deteriorated and heavy snow and blizzards concealed the path. Around 3:00 p.m. Bagration reached Engi, where he held ground for another two hours, repulsing two French attacks, before crossing the Sernf River. The French were soon upon him and for the next two hours Bagration retired fighting for several miles towards Matt and, with no ammunition, led more than twenty bayonet counterattacks before withdrawing through the village.⁶⁵ Receiving a reinforcement of two hundred Jägers, he was able to defend a local cemetery and chapel for several hours until the French brought in artillery and stormed the positions in a savage hand-to-hand fighting.⁶⁶

On 6 October, the Russian army began ascending the Panixer Pass, and the French ceased their pursuit. Bagration's detachment suffered high casualties while covering the retreat of the army, losing some 800 captured, four guns, a supply chest with some 20,000 francs and numerous horses and mules. However, he achieved his objective of protecting the army during its withdrawal in the Alps. Suvorov's men crossed the pass on 7 September and, by the week's end, safely reached Feldkirch. The campaign was finally over.

The 1799 Campaign in the Alps was both a great success and failure. On the strategic level, Suvorov's Swiss Campaign had failed to achieve its goal as he could not reach Switzerland in time

⁶³ Russian sources acknowledged the French strength at 5,000 men. Suvorov to Paul, 14 October 1799, A.V. Suvorov: Documents, IV, 353; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 157. According to Gachot, Molitor gathered some 1,600 men at Shwanden, but he considered only 84th Demi-brigade. Hennequin estimated combined French forces at 2,700 men, including 10th Chasseurs and 25th Demi-brigade. Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 317, 377; Gachot, Campagne d'Helvetie, 414-15.

⁶⁴ Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 157.

⁶⁵ Suvorov's Atlas, 56.

⁶⁶ Bagration to Derfelden, 10 October 1799, Bagration's Journal, 51-52; Suvorov's Atlas, 55-56; Miliutin, Campaign of 1799 IV, 330-37; Duffy, Suvorov in Italy and Switzerland, 246-47. Hennequin, Masséna en Suisse, 380-81; French fought with particular élan. Gachot relates several incidents of their gallantry. Gachot, Campagne d'Helvetie, 417. In the Order to Army in October 1799, Suvorov claimed that, in the fighting against Molitor, Bagration killed and

to prevent the French victory at Zurich. The campaign was based on political insights of Austrian diplomats, rather than on sound strategic calculations. The French fought courageously and contested every inch of the ground. Masséna showed himself as a capable commander who utilized enemy mistakes, achieved a decisive victory at Zurich and came close to surrounding Suvorov in the Alps. The real heroes of the campaign were the Russian soldiers, who fought their way through the mountains, surrounded by the enemy and in terrible weather. No one since Hannibal had ever crossed the Alps in wintertime so rapidly and in such conditions.

The campaign in Switzerland was considered, and is still regarded, by the Russians as the crowning glory of Suvorov's career in spite of its ultimate failure. The campaign contributed to the rise of many generals, including Peter Bagration. Of the Russian generals who served, Prince Peter benefited the most from the campaign. Suvorov praised him for "demonstrating courageous character and most praiseworthy behavior in all of the actions of the campaign."⁶⁷ He distinguished himself as a skillful tactician and resourceful commander of advance and rear guards. He certainly gained from facing capable French commander, including Lecourbe, Molitor and Gazan who contested every inch of the ground. Virtually all accounts praise Bagration for his handling of the rearguard during the retreat. However, one recent study,⁶⁸ based on Gryazev's account, made a serious charge that Bagration abandoned his troops. This accusation is based on incorrect interpretation of the memoirs since Gryazev does not mention Bagration in his account but rather criticizes one of the Russian officers (Lieutenant Colonel Egor Tsukato). The fact that Bagration commanded the rear guard during the entire march over the Panixer Pass is supported by all Russian sources. Had he abandoned his troops at such a critical point, he would have been, at least, reprimanded, if not outright court-martialed, by Suvorov. Therefore, accusing Bagration of abandoning the troops appears to be a gross exaggeration.

A major general at thirty-five, Bagration played a significant role in clearing the way for the main army. He was the first to reach the Alps and last to leave them. This campaign surrounded him

wounded around 1,000 French, captured 8 officers and 317 privates, 2 guns and a flag. Razskazi starogo voina o Suvorove, 263.

⁶⁷ Suvorov to Paul, 14 October 1799, A.V. Suvorov: Documents, IV, 359.

⁶⁸ Christopher Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps : Suvorov in Italy and Switzerland, 1799* (Chicago: Emperor's Press, 1999)

with an aureole of greatness and as a contemporary recalled, “Bagration returned in brilliance of glory and glitter of rewards” that followed him for the rest of his life. ⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Yermolov, Memoirs, 153.