Spain and the Fifth Coalition



BLACK: Feat
BLACK HIGHLIGHT: Enemy Feat
RED: Blunder
BLUE: Personal Assessments

THE PENINSULAR WARS:

THE CAPTURE OF LISBON

Portugal still maintained illegal ties with British shipping, which undermined Napoleon's Continental Strategy. It represented a hole in the Continental System, a British economic gateway into Europe, and also served as a naval support base for Britain and a future staging ground against France (Napoleon already anticipated that this front would eventually see war).

He therefore decided that Portugal had to be occupied. Napoleon would settle the treaty of Fontainebleau with Spain, to make Spain cooperate with him, and allow him to introduce his troops to cross Spanish territory. Then he would send Junot on a campaign to:

- Capture Lisbon
- Capture the Portuguese royal family
- Seize the Portuguese fleet in the Tagus River
- Prevent a repeat of Copenhagen, where Britain had seized a fleet before France could
- Survey Spain and Portugal militarily for future use *(this is important. remember it later)*

Junot would have a very difficult time doing so, but ultimately he captured Lisbon and achieved the rest of Napoleon's objectives, except for capturing the Portuguese royal family, who managed to flee.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp. 598-599.

(Planning Formulation>Strategy Foresight)

NAPOLEON'S PLAN TO TAKE OVER SPAIN

Taking Spain is a debatable decision in his career, as it would later spark many debates over whether it was the right or wrong call. I will obviously give my own opinion on this later, but first we must analyze the plan to achieve it, which Napoleon executed brilliantly.

It would appear that Napoleon had begun planning this even before the takeover of Portugal.

But first of all, why did Napoleon take Spain?

He viewed the Spanish throne as too unstable. Charles IV was incompetent, and his son Ferdinand VII quarreled with him constantly, while real power behind the throne rested with Manuel Godoy. Godoy had previously attempted to outmaneuver Napoleon during the uncertain weeks before Jena, so Napoleon also despised Godoy, seeing him also as potential danger.

1ST PHASE (Infiltrating Spain)

1. Treaty of Fontainebleau: This was ostensibly aimed at capturing Lisbon, but it also served Napoleon's plan on Spain, as it now allowed French troops to legally enter Spanish territory.

2. Seizing key fortresses: Napoleon then moved to capture critical fortresses, allowing him to penetrate Spain deeply and sever its northern communications. The two primary targets were Pamplona and Barcelona, both taken through deception:

- **Pamplona:** French troops staged a bread distribution and a snowball fight while the guards relaxed, allowing French battalions to rush the citadel.
- **Barcelona:** French grenadiers disguised themselves as wounded men carried on stretchers into the fortress.

By early 1808, France already controlled the entrances to Spain and much of its northern communication infrastructure. There were 118,000 French troops on Spanish soil. The occupation had effectively begun before Spain fully grasped Napoleon's true intentions.

2ND PHASE (Exploiting the Spanish Dynasty)

Earlier, he appears to have considered using Ferdinand VII as a puppet ruler against both Charles IV and Godoy. However, events inside Spain soon made the situation even more favorable for him. As in March 1808, the **Mutiny of Aranjuez** erupted. Popular unrest forced Charles IV to

abdicate in favor of Ferdinand VII. Ironically, both Charles and Ferdinand then appealed to Napoleon for support, handing him the opportunity to exploit Spain's internal divisions even further. This led to what became known as the…

- **The Bayonne Trap:**

Napoleon first summoned Charles IV, Ferdinand VII, and Manuel Godoy to Bayonne, under the guise of acting as an impartial mediator in the Spanish dynastic crisis, presenting himself as a neutral arbiter between father and son. However this was a trap, once the Spanish royal family accepted and entered French-controlled territory, where Napoleon possessed overwhelming political and military leverage, they caught in it. From here Napoleon would manipulate the succession process to his will.

1. **His first target was Ferdinand VII:**

Napoleon would persuade Charles IV to reaffirm and secretly declare that his earlier abdication had been made under coercion and was therefore legally invalid.

This declaration was conducted entirely behind closed doors, since Napoleon could not risk the Spanish public discovering that Charles had supposedly regained the throne, especially given the widespread hostility toward him in Spain.

Ferdinand, meanwhile, initially refused to surrender his claim. To break his resistance, Napoleon resorted to manipulation tactics, as he would subtly remind Ferdinand of the fate of the Duke of Enghien, the Bourbon prince Napoleon had previously ordered executed. The implication was unmistakable. Under this indirect threat, Ferdinand eventually yielded.

2. **His Second target was now Charles IV and Manuel Godoy:**

Yet the most significant maneuver was still to come. Charles IV believed throughout the negotiations that Napoleon was acting in his interest and supporting his restoration against Ferdinand. In reality, Napoleon had been exploiting the conflict between father and son from the very beginning. Once Ferdinand had renounced the throne, Charles IV transferred supreme sovereign 'caretaker ‘authority to Napoleon himself through a pre-arranged act of abdication that Napoleon had prepared in advance (this could have been signed even before Ferdinand's abdication which makes it even more impressive.) At that moment, Napoleon revealed his true intentions: he had never genuinely sided with Charles, but had merely used him as a tool against Ferdinand. Napoleon could now claim that he had not conquered Spain by military force, but had instead acquired the crown. Then Napoleon moved against Charles IV and Manuel Godoy, who were escorted into exile in France. And Ferdinand VII was imprisoned at the Château de Valençay, where he remained under French supervision.

Having formally secured control over the Spanish crown, Napoleon next sought a replacement monarch loyal to himself. He ultimately bestowed the throne upon his elder brother, Joseph Bonaparte.

Basically:

Ferdinand VII of Spain → gives crown to → Charles IV of Spain → who gives authority to → Napoleon Bonaparte → who appoints → Joseph Bonaparte.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, p. 598.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp. 605-608.

(Logical Manipulation>Trap Setting>Planning Formulation>Planning Process>Indirect Manipulation>Emotional Inducement>Coercion>Strategy Fortitude>Planning Coverage>Fabrication)

MY PERSONAL OPINION ON TAKING SPAIN

Although the plan itself was ingenious, the broader strategy built around it would ultimately prove to be one of Napoleon's miscalculations. The moment French intentions became clear, Spain erupted. Provincial juntas formed across the country, governors were assassinated, and local armies rose in open defiance of French authority. It had transformed into a decentralized insurrection with no single throat to cut and no capital whose fall would end the war. Britain would recognize the opportunity almost immediately. When the Junta of Seville dispatched an appeal for assistance, London responded with enthusiasm. In some sort of way, it kind of reminds me of Cesare Borgia's maneuver at Sinigaglia, a scheme that was politically brilliant yet ultimately undone by the consequences it set. Napoleon found himself caught in a similar situation, as the very audacity of his plan generated a reaction he was unprepared to manage. But before condemning the strategy, it is worth analyzing it, because on paper, it does hold up rather more convincingly than its critics tend to acknowledge. As bringing Spain under French control would actually have served several interconnected strategic objectives. It would have obviously tightened the Continental Blockade, closing one of its most unreliable sections. But it would also have removed an ally that was very unstable, as under Godoy, it had already demonstrated a willingness to outmaneuver Napoleon during Jena. Plus, bringing Spain into his control would have positioned France to threaten Gibraltar, potentially severing British access to the Mediterranean altogether. And it would have opened corridors toward North Africa and beyond, further extending French reach. Napoleon had recognized Spain as a weakness in his Mediterranean Grand Strategy, an ally too corrupt and too unstable to be trusted, yet too strategically positioned to be ignored indefinitely. If a genuine blunder exists in all of this, it does not reside in the Strategy.. It resides, rather, in Napoleon's emotional understanding. He underestimated two forces in particular; the ferocity of Spanish nationalism, and the depth of Spain's religious identity. His turbulent relationship with the papacy had already made him a

suspect figure in the eyes of devout Catholics across Europe, and Spain was a society in which Catholicism was not merely a faith but a foundational element of their identity. To many Spaniards, resistance to Napoleon was not simply an act, but a moral and spiritual obligation. That said, it would be too superficial to attribute his decision to later take Spain purely to "megalomania". As Spain at the time of the intervention was in a state of visible decay. Its economy was failing, its administration was riddled with corruption, and its royal family had descended into a dynastic crisis so acute and so publicly embarrassing that the population had already effectively forced Charles IV toward abdication during the Mutiny of Aranjuez in 1808. Napoleon observed all of this and drew what seemed like a reasonable conclusion; that the Spanish people were exhausted by misgovernance and might, with time, accept a Bonapartist monarchy that promised reform, modernization, and stability, much as French influence had gradually reshaped political culture in parts of Italy and the German states. He was not entirely wrong in this assessment. A meaningful segment of Spanish society did embrace the prospect of French-inspired reform, and the term *afrancesados* emerged to describe those Spaniards who collaborated with or actively supported the new order. Intellectuals, bureaucrats, and reformers who had long chafed under Bourbon conservatism saw in Joseph Bonaparte's reign at least the possibility of a more rational and progressive administration. But this constituency, while real, was dramatically outnumbered by those who opposed French rule on grounds of patriotism, religion, and simple visceral hatred of foreign occupation. Napoleon had correctly identified the weakness of the old regime;but he had underestimated the resilience of the society beneath it. Even so, the military situation was far from hopeless in the early stages. Napoleon personally took command in late 1808 and demonstrated with characteristic swiftness what concentrated French power could still achieve. Several Spanish armies were shattered rapidly, Madrid was retaken, and British forces under Sir John Moore were driven northward and ultimately forced into a desperate evacuation at Corunna. Had Napoleon been free to remain in Spain and press the campaign to its conclusion, the history of the peninsula might have looked very different. The guerrilla war that came to define the conflict was not some spontaneous and inevitable expression of Spanish character, it was, in large part, a consequence of the fact that France never delivered the kind of overwhelming, sustained military pressure that would have been required to pacify the country decisively. But Napoleon was never free to concentrate fully on Spain, and this is the crucial point that tends to be obscured in popular accounts of the Peninsular War. The War of the Fifth Coalition erupted in 1809, pulling his attention back to Central Europe almost immediately after the Iberian crisis had begun. Then came the deteriorating situation in the East, the growing friction with Russia, and ultimately the catastrophic campaign of 1812. Spain was never resolved because Napoleon was simultaneously managing military commitments across the entire European continent, while Britain ensured that the Iberian theater remained perpetually alive. This brings us to what is perhaps the most important and most frequently misrepresented aspect of the entire question, Spain did not defeat Napoleon. That framing, while rhetorically appealing, is historically misleading. What Spain did was become an unresolved wound, a persistent drain on French resources, manpower, and strategic attention that could never be fully

cauterized, because Britain would not allow it. British support for the Iberian resistance was not merely moral or symbolic. It was material, systematic, and strategically sophisticated. London provided weapons, financial subsidies, naval logistics, secure coastal supply routes, and, crucially, the continuous presence of Wellington's regular army, which gave the guerrilla resistance a conventional military backbone it could not have sustained on its own. Also Napoleon's customary method of war was built around a clear and repeatable logic, destroy the enemy's principal army in the field, seize the political capital, and compel the government to negotiate. This formula had worked with devastating efficiency against Austria, Prussia, and Russia at Tilsit. But it could not work in Spain, because Britain guaranteed that no French victory in the field would ever be truly final. Even after French forces reoccupied Madrid, Wellington could withdraw into Portugal, resupply by sea, reconstitute his forces, and return to the offensive. The war could not be ended by conventional means because one of its principal participants, Britain, was immune to the conventional means by which Napoleon ended wars. This is basically how the Peninsular War ought to be understood, not how people later try to convince you that Spain was able to single handedly defeat Napoleon. Spain was a serious miscalculation, but it was a miscalculation which was later complicated by factors Napoleon could not fully have foreseen, and ultimately rendered fatal only in combination with the Russian disaster. Nor should the genuine achievements of the Spanish venture be entirely overlooked, the political audacity of the Bayonne abdications, which neutralized the Bourbon dynasty without a single battle, and the speed and violence of Napoleon's own military campaign on the peninsula, which demonstrated once again his unmatched capacity for decisive operational action. These, too, form part of the full picture, and any honest accounting of Napoleon in Spain must include them alongside the failures.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE PENINSULAR WAR

Context: After the revolts in Spain, Napoleon realized this was serious, so he sent armies to several places simultaneously under Moncey, Dupont, Bessières, and Verdier. However, they would either stalemate against Spanish troops or outright lose, as was the case with Dupont, who was defeated in detail after dividing his forces.

Upon hearing the news, Napoleon grew angry and realized he had underestimated the Spanish. He decided he would go himself, concluding that the war required his personal genius. He began preparing for a counteroffensive.

Militarily

1. The first thing he did was analyze the situation. He realized that for the time being, Barcelona demanded attention, as it protected the French left flank, communications in northeastern Spain, and French influence in Catalonia.
2. He also called for reinforcements from Germany under Michel Ney.

Diplomatically

1. Napoleon could not simply rush into Spain personally without considering the rest of Europe. His army was enormous, but not enormous enough when divided across the continent. He therefore needed Russia to remain neutral or cooperative, and sought to secure this through direct engagement, though he faced difficulties, as defeats like Bailén and Vimeiro had damaged his reputation. Napoleon attempted to compensate through intimidation. At the Erfurt Conference, he theatrically summoned German princes, staged grand ceremonies and entertainments, and even invited Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, all as a way to overwhelm Alexander.

However, this partially failed because Talleyrand had already begun conspiring against Napoleon, and was putting his Sabotage Strategy in action, thus he was covertly advising Alexander.

Nevertheless, Napoleon managed to secure neutrality and even a promise of support should Austria attack, though the terms were vague. He achieved this only by conceding Russian occupation of Moldavia, Wallachia, and Finland, as well as neutrality in the Russo-Turkish War. He gave up considerable ground, but secured enough to proceed with his preparations.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp. 621-625.

(Strategy Forecasting>Planning Coverage>Planning Process>Analytical Thinking)

THE EBRO CAMPAIGN (1808 NOVEMBER PLAN)

The Spanish intended to execute a pincer attack of the French forces, by advancing armies from both east and west in the hope of cutting French communications with France.

Upon arriving in Spain, Napoleon identified the Spanish plan, and realized the weakness in it. Because rather than concentrating their forces under a unified command, the Spanish had divided their armies to the west and east, while the center was held only weakly. To Napoleon, this was perfect, thus he crafted a plan to destroy the Spanish armies by using this weakness.

1. First he wanted a powerful thrust through the center, this would seize Burgos and place the French army between the separated Spanish forces.

This would cut off their retreat routes and ensure that his forces could be concentrated rapidly.

2. From this central position, he would wait until the Spanish spread out.
3. Once they became vulnerable, French corps would then attack the eastern and western isolated wings simultaneously, thus cutting them from their line of retreat and overwhelming them to finally defeat them.

All while Napoleon himself drove toward Madrid. As once the 2 armies trying to pincer him would be destroyed, Madrid would be vulnerable to him.

Planning Versatility on the OPERATION:

The original plan was partially compromised by two factors, however.

1st: When Marshal Lefebvre violated Napoleon's orders and decided to launch a premature attack against Blake, without Napoleon having reached Burgos yet. This was a problem because Napoleon had wanted the Spanish armies to advance and stretch further into the trap before striking. Instead, the attack alerted Blake to the danger and induced him to retreat.

Recognizing that Blake was now attempting to escape, Napoleon decided to adjust his plan slightly. Instead of attacking both wings simultaneously (which was Step 3) he would now break Step 3 into two separate steps: he would concentrate his forces against Blake in the west, temporarily disregarding the east, and only once Blake was defeated and trapped would he turn his attention eastward.

2nd: Bessières, in charge of Step 1, was so slow in executing it that he took three days and had not even seized Burgos.

Napoleon was furious, and so he replaced Bessières with Soult, then directed Soult's corps toward Burgos. Once Soult finally destroyed the Spanish at Gamonal, he took Burgos Once he had secured the central position, Napoleon shifted Soult north to finish off Blake alongside the other forces converging there. Soult's job was to block Blake's road of escape, encircling him completely. Though Blake managed to escape with a few men, he did so through rough terrain, abandoning all his baggage, supplies, and equipment.

Now that his plan had shifted and stumbled somewhat at Step 1, but with everything recovered, Napoleon continued eastward after defeating Blake. He sent Ney to push southeast to cut off Castaños from Madrid, and Lannes to pursue them directly. Lannes would engage Castaños multiple times and decisively defeat him at Tudela (credit to Lannes tactically, since he had far fewer troops than Castaños yet still managed to destroy him). Ney was then supposed to attack Castaños's escape route, much as Soult had done against Blake, but he arrived late, justified, perhaps, by the terrible state of the roads, likely due to guerrilla activity.

Even though some of Castaños's and Blake's troops managed to escape, Napoleon had secured a clear victory and destroyed both armies with relative ease, despite his marshals performing rather poorly throughout. But why? The answer essentially comes down to versatility. The plan was versatile at its core because it had really only ONE fixed requirement, with everything else being a variable. The fixed requirement (STEP 1: seize the center, place yourself between the two enemy wings) was something Napoleon achieved regardless of Bessières's slowness. Once that was done, he owned all the optionality. Who to hit first, in what order, with which marshal, at what pace, none of those choices were structurally rigid.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp. 632-639.

(Planning Versatility>Planning Formulation>Planning Applicability>Adaptability>Trap Setting>Critical Thinking>Analytical Thinking>Field Envisioning)

THE BATTLE OF SOMOSIERRA

OPERATIONS before Somosierra:

The Spanish fell back to Madrid and attempted to protect the two routes leading to it: the Somosierra Pass (east) and the Guadarrama Pass (west).

Napoleon chose to pin the Spanish army at Guadarrama with the IV Corps, while his main force pushed through Somosierra.

At Somosierra:

At Somosierra, San Juan led the defense. He positioned guns, earthworks, and infantry on the crest, a strong position overall, but failed to occupy the hills on either flank. Napoleon noticed this and, as his infantry began attacking, it moved around the slopes and flanks, pushing the Spanish upward. Napoleon then launched his Polish cavalry as a decisive final blow, and the Spanish line collapsed.

Napoleon had initially ordered uncoordinated charges, resulting in unnecessary Polish casualties. To protect morale, he rewrote events: downplaying Polish deaths, exaggerating their role at Somosierra, and focusing exclusively on the successful charge. He lavished praise on the Poles, and so the legend took hold that the Poles won the battle.

After Somosierra; no organized Spanish army remained between Napoleon and Madrid. French cavalry reached the city's outskirts, and Madrid attempted a defense, but French artillery and assaults quickly broke all resistance. On 4 December 1808, Madrid surrendered.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp. 640-643.

(Observation>Tactics>Fabrication>Propaganda>Misdirection)

Context: After Napoleon took Madrid, he wanted to clean up the remaining resistance, so he dispatched various commanders to do so: Lefebvre to Lisbon, Victor to Seville, Saint-Cyr to Catalonia, and Soult to León and Old Castile.

However, British General Moore was still nearby. He initially retreated to assess the situation, at first concluding that Spain was destroyed and finished, but then realized the Spanish had not given up. Madrid was still resisting, General Caro said he was preparing another army of 15,000 troops, and the Spanish were begging Moore to help. Thus Moore crafted a brilliant strategy and plan.

First, he analyzed the situation and concluded that defeating Napoleon directly was impossible given his genius, but that he could force Napoleon to react. Napoleon could not ignore a threat to his communications, if Moore appeared behind French lines, supply routes would be threatened, communications with France would be threatened, and French prestige would be threatened.

Napoleon would have to respond, meaning a 25,000-man army could potentially redirect hundreds of thousands of French troops. It was a brilliant strategy.

His plan was to:

1. Advance operationally toward Valladolid.
2. Threaten French communications there, forcing Napoleon to turn away from Madrid and southern Spain.
3. Retreat once Napoleon moved to destroy him.

However, both Napoleon and Moore were at a disadvantage due to the fog of war. Moore did not know how large Napoleon's army was, and Napoleon did not know whether Moore was advancing or retreating. Due to this uncertainty, Napoleon assumed Moore was retreating. Moore went through with his plan, and it succeeded, in fact, it went even better than expected. A Spanish guerrilla intercepted an order intended for Soult, which gave Moore crucial insight into Napoleon's intentions. *The intercepted letter mentioned that Soult was ordered to Leave Saldaña and march against Pedro Caro*. From this, Moore deduced that Soult was operating further away and therefore vulnerable. Moore thus struck the isolated corps at Sahagún, simultaneously cutting Napoleon's communications. Napoleon was now forced to change plans entirely, abandoning his march on Lisbon and his push toward Seville, and redirect his forces to try to trap Moore.

Napoleon's response was a massive encirclement: Soult would chase and pin Moore down while Napoleon appeared behind him. But Moore saw it coming and retreated rapidly. He had already appeared behind French lines, struck Soult's corps, and successfully disrupted Napoleon's entire cleanup plan; it was reasonable to retreat. Then luck intervened further. As Napoleon executed his encirclement through the Guadarrama Mountains, disaster struck: blizzards, freezing temperatures, powerful winds, and deep snow cost Napoleon two full days, and Moore escaped. Napoleon had not been defeated in the battle technically, but he had suffered a strategic blow, due to Moore's brilliant strategy, plan and deduction of Soult's corp, the Spanish guerrillas bleeding the French army and seizing Napoleon's letters, the brutal weather that slowed the encirclement, and Moore's ability to think and escape fast had all combined to deny Napoleon his clean finish in Spain.

Then circumstances intervened even more. As Napoleon received word that the Habsburg monarchy was preparing for another war, what would become the War of the Fifth Coalition in 1809, he had to shift his attention accordingly. On top of this came rumors surrounding Talleyrand, Fouché, and Murat. Napoleon actually had very limited information on what was actually happening among them, since Fouché was controlling the flow of intelligence, Napoleon had no idea that Talleyrand had already begun his brilliant Sabotage Strategy. All of this made it impossible for Napoleon to finish Spain.

Napoleon thus would leave the job to his marshals and return home.

Lawday, David. *Napoleon's Master: A Life of Prince Talleyrand*. London: J. Cape, 2006, p. 212.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp. 648-652.

WAR OF THE FIFTH COALITION (NAPOLEON BONAPARTE VS ARCHDUKE CHARLES):

Context: There were 2 parties in Austria; the war party and the peace party. Empress Ludovica, Metternich and Stadion would be supporting and manoeuvring around for the war party. Austria believed it had a perfect chance, Napoleon was distracted in Spain and France was exhausted. Napoleon in this campaign would be fighting against probably his hardest opponent on the battlefield yet; the prodigy Archduke Charles. Napoleon had beaten him during 1797, but this time Archduke Charles would not be at a disadvantage as before.

This would be Napoleon's hardest Coalition War, OPPONENT WISE.



Napoleon would prepare himself. It was hard to get troops at this point, but he did manage to amass 275,000 troops. However, there was a problem, some of these were conscripts with no training, almost 50,000 were from allied German states, and Napoleon hardly had any veterans from his greatest battles.

THE REGENSBURG PLAN

Napoleon wanted to concentrate his scattered corps around Regensburg, hence the name of the plan. But why?

If he managed to do that, from there he could:

- Defend Bavaria
- Strike north and south
- Advance toward Vienna

Napoleon expected the war to occur around April 15, if not even later, as he would reason that Austria would make a formal declaration, issue a diplomatic warning, or perhaps even withdraw its ambassadors from the French office, as it always has done, thus notifying Napoleon.

Napoleon though even had a contingency in case Austria started earlier than expected, which was considered highly unlikely given Napoleon's analysis of the Austrian army and their habits.

- **Original Plan:** If Austria attacked after April 15, the logical move was to concentrate around Regensburg.
- **Contingency:** If Austria attacked before April 15, which was highly unlikely, the French would withdraw and concentrate around Augsburg and the Lech River.

The contingency was considered highly unlikely to activate... but here comes the shocking part: Austria would give no prior warning whatsoever. The Austrian army was also far faster than before, Archduke Charles had spent years reforming and building a professional army, and it was now far more mobile than it had ever been. Archduke Charles had even arrived at the battlefield before Napoleon, who was still in Paris. Upon arriving, Archduke Charles planned to defeat Davout's isolated corps, which was still scattered like the other corps. Napoleon was thus forced to activate his contingency.

But another problem emerged: Berthier had received confused orders, because fog had made it difficult to see the visual telegraph, meaning he did not receive Napoleon's full contingency plan. Nature was working against Napoleon once again. Instead of withdrawing toward Augsburg, Berthier ordered Davout to march toward Regensburg (exactly what Napoleon did not want) completely foiling his contingency, as some corps were still near Augsburg and Ulm while Davout was much further east near Regensburg.

If Archduke Charles managed to capture Regensburg, he would cut the French army in two, isolating and trapping Davout, potentially executing a maneuver similar to what Napoleon himself had done at Ulm. Charles and the Austrian council of war planned a converging attack on Davout: some corps would descend from Bohemia toward Regensburg from north of the Danube, while another six corps advanced through Bavaria.

Napoleon finally arrived at Donauwörth on April 17 and immediately understood that his contingency had been foiled, that Davout was about to be trapped, that his forces were not united, and that the Austrian attack was on the verge of succeeding. Napoleon then realized that his task was to devise a strategy to save Davout.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp. 672-680.

(Planning Formulation>Planning Coverage>Contingencies>Inductive Reasoning)

THE STRATEGY TO SAVE DAVOUT

There were 3 important maneuvers Napoleon would do.

1. **T**he first was to make everyone converge, no longer at Regensburg, but to find a way to reunite his forces at that very moment. Thus he ordered Masséna and Oudinot to advance forward, Vandamme to move toward Ingolstadt, while Davout retreated through Neustadt, until the forces united.
2. **2)** While they united, Napoleon ordered Bavarian allies under Lefebvre to shield Davout during his retreat.

Archduke Charles noticed that Davout was retreating, and the plan to capture him turned into a race against time. Charles changed plans and decided on a double envelopment: Kollowrat would attack from the north, Charles from the south, and together they would pincer him.

3. The final action that would turn the tide, and counter Charles' tactical response was an ambitious plan that would force Archduke Charles into a dilemma. Napoleon ordered Masséna to move rapidly against the Austrian flank and communications at Freising and Landshut. Why?

*If Napoleon managed to do this, he would force Charles to worry about his own rear → Draw Austrian troops away from Davout → Create an opening for Davout to escape → Napoleon would later then strike the weakened Austrian center (this will later become part of another plan, explained in **ABENSBERG-ECKMÜHL OFFENSIVE.**)*

- **The Charles Dilemma:**

Charles suddenly faced two dangerous possibilities due to Napoleon's third tactical move in his strategy to save Davout.

Option 1: Ignore Masséna and Destroy Davout

It would potentially annihilate the III Corps and even gain a decisive victory. BUT Masséna could move behind the Austrian army, Austrian communications with Vienna could be endangered and the army might find itself compromised.

Option 2: Turn Against Masséna

This would protect his communication lines and maintain his retreat routes secure. BUT that would mean Davout would escape, Napoleon would concentrate the French army and Austria would lose its best opportunity to end the war.

Charles would actually choose BOTH options. He divided his attention to protect his communication lines while also continuing to press against Davout. This way he could shift between Option 1 and Option 2, if Masséna could be dealt with quickly, he would commit fully to Option 1; if not, he would need to defend against Masséna. Notice how gradually he made his choice, while some contingents waited to defend against Masséna, others kept operating against Davout, and only once the risk became too great did Charles fully commit to Option 2. Basically, Charles positioned himself across both options before ultimately settling on Option 2.

But in the end, Napoleon won this first face-off. Napoleon's strategy was based on one insight that he perfectly understood: Davout did not need to win, he only needed to survive long enough for the French forces to concentrate. And as Davout retreated, he was also able to repel Austrian attacks, aided by Lefebvre Bavarians and Masséna's advance against Charles' communication lines. Once Davout, Lefebvre, Lannes, and Masséna were all moving toward each other, the Austrian opportunity was slipping away, and finally it vanished entirely. Napoleon had concentrated his forces and adapted masterfully.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp. 680-681.

(Strategy Fortitude>Strategy Complexity>Adaptability>Indirect Manipulation>Tactics>Abductive Reasoning)

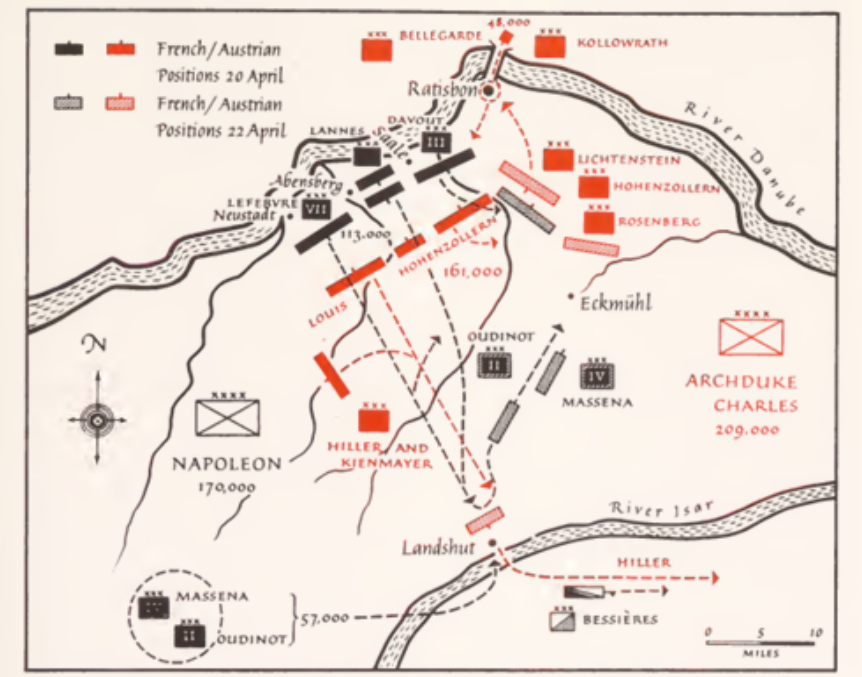
NAPOLEON'S ABENSBERG-ECKMÜHL OFFENSIVE

The 3rd tactical maneuver to save Davout would later be turned into a plan to defeat Charles, taking advantage of the position Napoleon now had after saving Davout.

It would be a three-pronged attack:

1. Davout (III Corps), which had now been stabilized, would hold the northern/left sector near Regensburg. His job was more to fix Austrian forces in place and prevent them from fully concentrating.
2. The main attack, with Lannes, Lefebvre (Bavarians), Vandamme, supporting cavalry, and German units, would strike the Austrian center at Abensberg–Siegenburg, breaking the Austrian army in two and creating a gap in the enemy line. (This was possible thanks to the saving-Davout strategy, as you may recall, one of the things Napoleon had achieved with that strategy was to "create an opening for Davout to escape," thus weakening the center.)
3. Napoleon would continue what Massena was already doing: threatening the communication lines in the lower sector at Landshut and Straubing, this time to cut off their line of retreat.

Napoleon's objective with this would be a large encirclement..



David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp. 684-685.

(Abusing Insecurities>Planning Formulation>Tactics>Misdirection)

CHARLES' ABENSBERG-ECKMÜHL WITHDRAWAL

After Archduke Charles inferred what Napoleon's plans were, he would gradually change strategy. He stopped pursuing the offensive and instead opted to withdraw and preserve his army, that would be his strategy for now. He would make three remarkable tactical responses.

1. Against Davout: even though Charles had been on the offensive here, he stopped trying to destroy Davout and instead chose to contain him through rearguards, while holding key points like Regensburg, which served as an escape route.

Napoleon actually made a blunder here, as he assumed the bridges at Regensburg had been destroyed, as garrisons traditionally do, but failed to account for the fact that those bridges were unusually durable.

2. Against Napoleon's center offensive: Charles stopped trying to hold the line and instead began retreating through available escape routes.

3. Against Massena: Charles took advantage of the fact that Massena was slowing down due to the difficult terrain. Before Massena could reach Landshut in time, Charles used

Hiller's forces as a buffer in the southern sector, then had Hiller safely recross the Isar, thus avoiding complete encirclement and folding his forces into an organized withdrawal.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp. 686-693.

NAPOLEON'S PLAN TO TAKE VIENNA

Once Napoleon had won at Abensberg-Eckmühl but failed to destroy Charles's army, he still found himself in a difficult position. If he pursued Charles, the Austrian army was too far ahead and had devastated Bohemia; Napoleon also recognized that supply lines would be extremely difficult to maintain if he were drawn into that region. On top of that, after he analyzed the available river routes, he realized there were no major waterways to support French logistics. The only disadvantage of not pursuing, of course, was that the Austrian army would remain intact, but there were more if he did.

Thus Napoleon chose not to chase Charles. Instead, exploiting the opening he had created, he would advance on Vienna and capture the Austrian capital, a move that might force Austria to negotiate, or, failing that, draw Charles toward Vienna for a decisive battle that could end the war. Either outcome would be favorable for Napoleon.

Fan fact; this decision would also have helped the French Army of Italy under Eugène de Beauharnais. Napoleon anticipated its importance, as that army would later suffer defeat at the Battle of Sacile, thus Napoleon's choice to advance on Vienna was the correct one.

- **The Plan Itself:**

Now to take Vienna, Napoleon devised a plan with two parts:

1. Davout would cross the Danube and continue pressing Charles. This was somewhat risky, but Napoleon wanted to keep Charles occupied and prevent him from rebuilding his army.
2. Napoleon's main army would march east toward Vienna along the south bank of the Danube. To strengthen his force along the way, he ordered reinforcements:
    - Bernadotte was advancing with his Saxon troops.
    - The Imperial Guard was en route from Spain, passing through Strasbourg.

Hiller was then assigned to slow Napoleon's advance, fighting several rearguard actions along the way. One notable engagement was at Ebersberg, where Hiller defended the bridge, but Masséna broke through with a direct frontal assault.

Eventually Napoleon reached Vienna, and after threatening it with bombardment, on May 13, 1809, the city surrendered without much resistance.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp. 694-695.

(Planning Process>Analytical & Divergent Thinking>Contingency>Prediction>Critical Thinking>Planning Coverage, Strategy Foresight)

CHARLES' THE DANUBE RIVER STRATEGY

Here comes the interesting part, as Archduke Charles unveils a masterful strategy. His strategy was to concentrate his forces, keep the army intact before engaging Napoleon in any way, and wait until he could overwhelm him in numbers, all while remaining strictly on the defensive. But the way he did this was far more intricate and impressive. This strategy would be divided into 4 different actions:

1. First, the Austrian forces in Vienna would withdraw before Napoleon could seize the city, destroying the bridges behind them as they went.
2. Archduke Charles would then link up with Hiller's forces, consolidating his strength.
3. He would then wait, and here's why. Charles knew that the southern front in Italy had been secured, meaning Archduke John's forces, who had defeated Eugene there, were now free to march to his aid.
4. In the meantime, Charles positioned his army on the far bank of the Danube (a river that was wide, deep, swollen from spring rains, and extremely difficult to cross) and put himself on the defensive.

By doing these 4 things, he was concentrating his forces, waiting for John's arrival, and putting Napoleon in a dilemma, much as he had done before against him. Charles had masterfully cornered Napoleon into two options:

- If Napoleon stayed put, Charles could wait for John's arrival, allowing the Austrian army to grow stronger by the day until the balance of power gradually shifted in Austria's favor.
- If Napoleon attempted to cross the Danube, Charles could withdraw, threaten French communications, endanger their supply lines, and exploit the vulnerability of a river crossing to strike at the perfect moment.



David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp. 696-697.

Napoleon would choose both options. He did not leave his side of the bank unprotected, he stationed troops to guard the river: Bernadotte, Vandamme, and Davout. This served two purposes:

1. To prevent the Austrians from crossing to the French side of course.
2. But also to protect French communication lines, Napoleon would be overextending himself with this, and that security was essential

He would then cross the river and establish a bridgehead on the opposite bank, giving his troops a place to land and hold safely. The chosen crossing point was Kaiser Ebersdorf, but why there? Napoleon had carefully analyzed his options:

- Nussdorf: The narrowest crossing and closest to Vienna, which made speed appealing, but the currents were dangerously fast and the heights of the Bisamberg dominated the area, making it a potentially hazardous choice. **He rejected it.**
- Fischamend: A viable option in principle, but far too distant from Vienna. Crossing there would mean overextending his forces beyond what was prudent. **He rejected it.**
- Kaiser Ebersdorf: The currents here were slower and it sat close to Vienna. But most crucially, an island lay in the middle of the river. This made it invaluable, as it could serve as:
    - A staging area for troops and equipment.
    - Protection for the bridges.
    - A forward base for the operation.

This made Kaiser Ebersdorf Napoleon's chosen crossing point.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp. 698-699.

(Analytical Thinking>Observation>Planning Coverage)

THE BATTLE OF ASPERN-ESSLING (ARCHDUKE CHARLES' POV)

Charles, however, had moved quickly. He was already approaching the Danube and was only a few miles away, yet Napoleon had no idea, still believing Charles was far off, somewhere near Brünn.

Charles then occupied the Marchfeld Plain. This position gave him ample room to maneuver while protecting the approaches from Lobau Island, making it an excellent defensive position against a French crossing. He also established observation posts on the Bisamberg Heights, giving him a much clearer understanding of events than Napoleon.

Realizing that a battle was imminent, Archduke Charles saw that the situation played directly into his hands. His strategy revolved around two objectives.

1. The first was to lure Napoleon into a trap.

- Once positioned on the Marchfeld plain, Charles deceived Napoleon into a false sense of security. Aspern-Essling, which lay directly in front of the Austrian position and which Napoleon would order Masséna to seize upon crossing, appeared almost indefensible, an easy prize.
- Charles also deployed his army across the vast Marchfeld Plain. At first glance, this might seem to violate the principle of concentration of force, but the arrangement was carefully strategic. His army was dispersed strategically allowing it to concentrate rapidly when needed. More importantly, this deployment concealed the true strength of the Austrian army. The terrain made observation difficult, and because Charles's forces were spread out over a wide area, Napoleon's scouts could see only fragments of the army. Some reports identified as few as 8,000 Austrians.

  Also a dust storm further helped the deception by obscuring Austrian movements and positions.

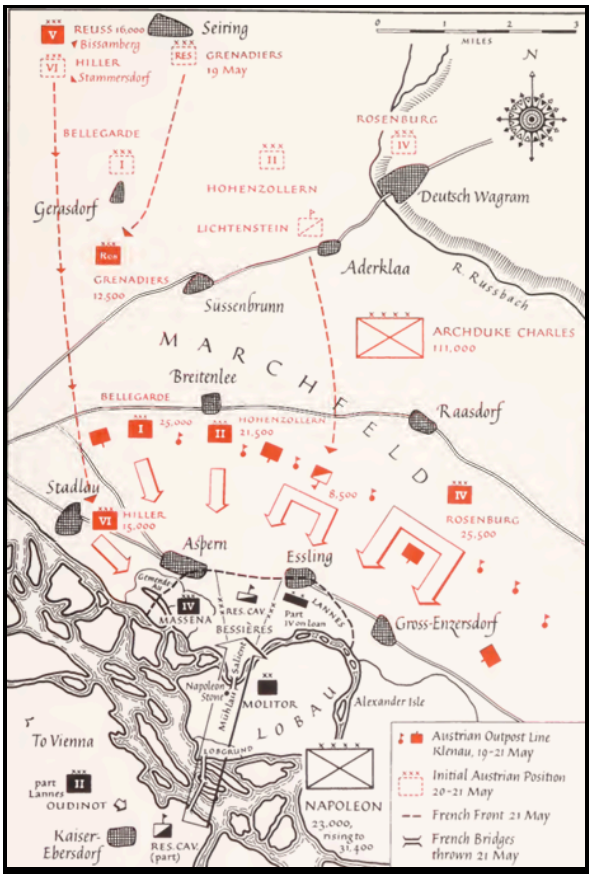
As a result, Napoleon remained convinced that Charles was not yet present, let alone that he was surrounding Aspern-Essling on multiple sides. Masséna, equally deceived, had not fortified Aspern-Essling adequately, leaving it dangerously exposed.

2. The second objective was to destroy the bridges Napoleon relied upon to cross the Danube:

- While Napoleon's forces were crossing, and even as the battle itself unfolded, Charles had no intention of allowing French reinforcements to keep arriving. Suddenly, an Austrian hulk, a large unmanned barge, came floating downstream. The Danube's current carried it straight into the pontoon bridge. This was no accident. Charles continued sending debris down the river throughout the battle: logs, millstones, fireboats, and barges, all exploiting the current to sever Napoleon's lifeline across the Danube.

Once Napoleon had crossed, Charles planned to launch a coordinated assault.

Because the Austrian army had been deployed around Aspern and Essling, multiple formations could attack simultaneously. Three corps would strike Aspern, while two columns would attack Essling. Austrian cavalry positioned between the villages would link the attacks and exploit any breakthrough.



When the plan was finally put into action, the results were disastrous for Napoleon. Aspern in particular became a slaughterhouse as repeated Austrian attacks overwhelmed the French defenders and turned the village into one of the bloodiest battlefields of the campaign.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp.700-703.

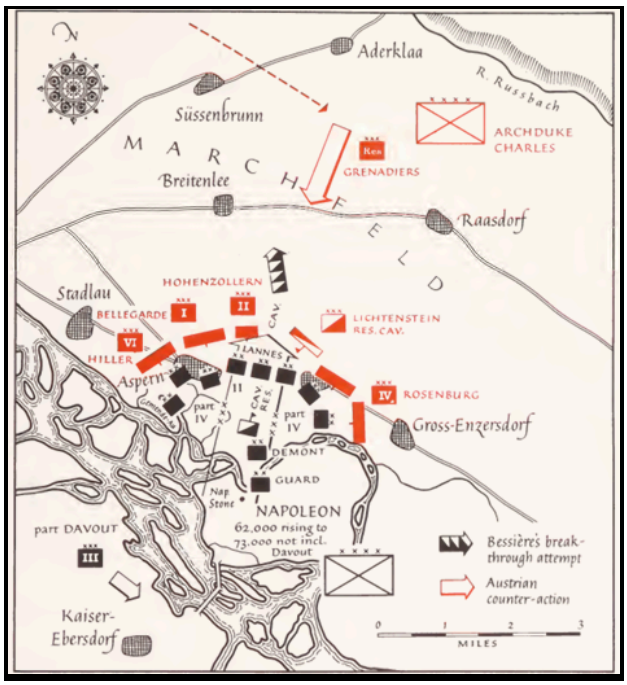
THE BATTLE OF ASPERN-ESSLING (NAPOLEON'S POV)

During the battle Napoleon studied Charles's attacks carefully and inferred correctly; that since the Austrians kept hammering both flanks relentlessly, their center must be weaker. His tactical response was to break that center, split the Austrian army in two, and decide the battle in a single blow. The plan was for Lannes to first pin the Austrian center, fixing it in place, while Davout's reserves (which were still on the other side of the bank) would then come forward and deliver the final blow.

(Abductive Reasoning>Tactical Response)

Charles noticed. And here, in one of his finest moments, he showed personal courage, he seized a regimental colour, placed himself at the head of the grenadiers, and led them forward against Lannes himself. Both sides fought with extraordinary bravery. But just as the moment came for Davout's second wave to deliver the decisive blow, something catastrophic happened: the bridge

broke again. As you may recall, destroying Napoleon's bridges had been part of Charles's strategy from the very beginning. With no reinforcements able to cross, everything now rested on Lannes, who somehow had to hold the center alone.



Then news of the broken bridge quickly reached Charles, and he seized the moment. He unleashed a ferocious assault all along the line, launching general attacks across the entire front. Napoleon, surveying the situation, understood that victory was now impossible. He had been overwhelmed in numbers and was on the verge of collapse. He ordered a retreat. Yet he knew that holding Essling was critical to making that retreat survivable. Beyond being a strong defense position, Essling protected the bridges, the only way back. In a final desperate effort, Napoleon committed his Guard: the Young Guard, several other Guard formations, and his last remaining reserves. In a ferocious engagement, they managed to retake Essling and hold it long enough for the army to fall back to Lobau Island. Once the last men were across, the bridge was destroyed. Napoleon had saved what remained of his army from what had been the most brutal battle of his career.

But the battle left a wound that went beyond the TACTICAl level. During the fighting, Marshal Jean Lannes was struck by a cannonball. His leg was shattered, and surgeons amputated it. For a few days he seemed to be recovering. Then gangrene set in, and killed him. For Napoleon, this was devastating in a way that few losses ever were. Unlike so many of his marshals, Lannes had been a genuine friend, one of the very few men Napoleon truly loved. They had known each other since the 1790s, long before either was famous, forged in the same early campaigns in Italy. Napoleon openly wept when he learned of his death. He sat beside him in his final days and reminisced about those early years together. Of Lannes, he would later say: *"I found him a pygmy and lost him a giant."*

Aspern-Essling was the first time Napoleon had been beaten, fair and square, not only on the battlefield, but psychologically as well. And it had all been at the hands of Archduke Charles, the greatest general Napoleon would ever face.



David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp.704-707.

(Trap Evasion>Deductive Reasoning)

Context: After Aspern-Essling, both Napoleon and Archduke Charles were shaken by what had just happened. They had lost their composure, Napoleon was devastated, while Charles could barely believe he had beaten him. Both committed a blunder here, as that shock lasted nearly a full day before either could regain their footing.

When Napoleon returned to his senses, he was consumed by fury and a desire for revenge. He also understood that he ***HAD*** to win; a defeat like Aspern-Essling threatened to shatter the illusion of invincibility he had carefully cultivated for years. Left unchecked, that crack could spark German nationalism, trigger rebellions, and embolden other powers to join the coalition against him.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, p.708.

(Emotional Understanding)

SECOND DANUBE CROSSING PREPARATIONS

Napoleon then began preparing another crossing, this time with meticulous planning and fortification. The preparations took nearly six weeks, and when he was finished:

- He had built multiple bridges, far more durable than before, and established naval patrols along the river, effectively neutralizing Charles's strategy of sending debris and fireships downstream.

- He transformed Lobau Island into a massive fortified military base, emplacing 129 guns and creating backup connections to the south bank, neutralizing Charles's river strategy further while establishing a strong defensive position.
- He summoned substantial reinforcements, aware that Charles outnumbered him and concerned that Archduke John's forces might link up with Charles. He called upon Eugène de Beauharnais, Jacques MacDonald, Louis-Nicolas Davout, Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, Auguste de Marmont, and Dominique Vandamme, assembling nearly 160,000 men around Vienna by July 1st.

While Napoleon did this, he sent a screening operation to the south and east to conceal these movements.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp.708-709.

(Planning Coverage>Contingencies>Concealment)

Charles, meanwhile, chose to play it safe. He withdrew to his previous position on the Marchfeld plains, specifically behind the Rußbach heights. He strengthened his defenses at Aspern-Essling, adding artillery and militia units, and took time to deliberate over his next move before committing to a strategy.

His plan rested on two hopes: first, that a German uprising against Napoleon would materialize and weaken him from within; and second, that his brother Archduke John would arrive with reinforcements, whom he was still waiting on.

NAPOLEON'S SECOND DANUBE CROSSING STRATEGY

Now comes what may be Napoleon's best strategy of this entire war: the Second Danube Crossing Strategy. To understand this strategy, we first need to look at what happened previously.

One of the main reasons Napoleon failed at Aspern-Essling was that Archduke Charles repeatedly severed his lines of communication across the Danube. As a result, Davout's final charge never took place, Napoleon's reinforcements arrived slowly, and the French were eventually repulsed. Although Napoleon and Charles possessed roughly similar numbers of troops overall, Napoleon was unable to concentrate his entire army on the north bank. Charles, meanwhile, was able to bring a greater proportion of his forces into action and therefore enjoyed a local numerical advantage.

One could infer that Napoleon lost because he failed to concentrate his army quickly enough on the opposite bank. However, Napoleon had already attempted to do exactly that. The real problem was that, in his haste, he neglected the security and reliability of his bridges. They proved too vulnerable, and despite the speed of the operation, that seemingly small oversight had enormous consequences.

The only correct inference:

The lesson Napoleon drew from Aspern-Essling was that success did not depend on concentrating his forces as quickly and **EFFICIENTLY** as possible, but on concentrating them as **EFFECTIVELY** as possible. If crossing the river required more time, then more time would be taken. If crossing the river required more resources, then more resources would be used. Napoleon needed a way to place his army that now outnumbered Charles on the north bank against Charles before offering battle. From this realization emerged Napoleon's strategy for the second crossing. This strategy was built upon deception.

He wanted Charles to believe that he intended to repeat the failed crossing of May, while crossing elsewhere.

First, Napoleon correctly assumed that every major French movement was being observed. Thus, he decided to manipulate the very info gathering Charles relied upon.

The deception was divided into two parts.

1. **Demonstrations around the Mühlau Salient and Labau**

The first step was to push troops into the Mühlau Salient. This salient projected north from Lobau Island toward the Marchfeld Plain. By concentrating forces there and increasing visible activity on Lobau, Napoleon encouraged the Austrian observers on the Bissamberg Heights to believe that he intended to cross in the same direction as before. To the Austrians, the signs appeared obvious: Napoleon was preparing another attack through Aspern and Essling.

Napoleon later would reinforce the misdirection by positioning the Imperial Guard and the IX Corps toward the northern edge of Lobau. And then during the execution of the OPERATION, he created another layer of deception at Stadlau. Unlike the feint at the Mühlau Salient, its purpose was not necessarily to reinforce a misdirection, but rather to introduce another credible threat into Charles' mind. Stadlau sat much closer to Vienna and well to the west of the real crossing site, meaning that Austrian headquarters now had to simultaneously account for Mühlau, Stadlau, the northern face of Lobau.

2. **The bridge OPERATIONS**

The second part was an enormous bridging operation. Chandler notes that more than a dozen bridges were involved, and they served two major purposes.

- The first, already discussed in **"SECOND DANUBE CROSSING PREPARATIONS"** neutralized Charles's previous strategy through a series of carefully planned contingencies.
- But the second purpose was deception. Napoleon openly constructed four bridges in areas where the Austrians could easily observe them. These bridges appeared to confirm that another crossing would occur near Aspern and Essling. At the same time, however, the

real crossing infrastructure was being prepared farther east near Alexander Island, where ten bridges were assembled to carry the main French army across the Danube.

Through these 2 tactics Napoleon was actively feeding Charles false information.

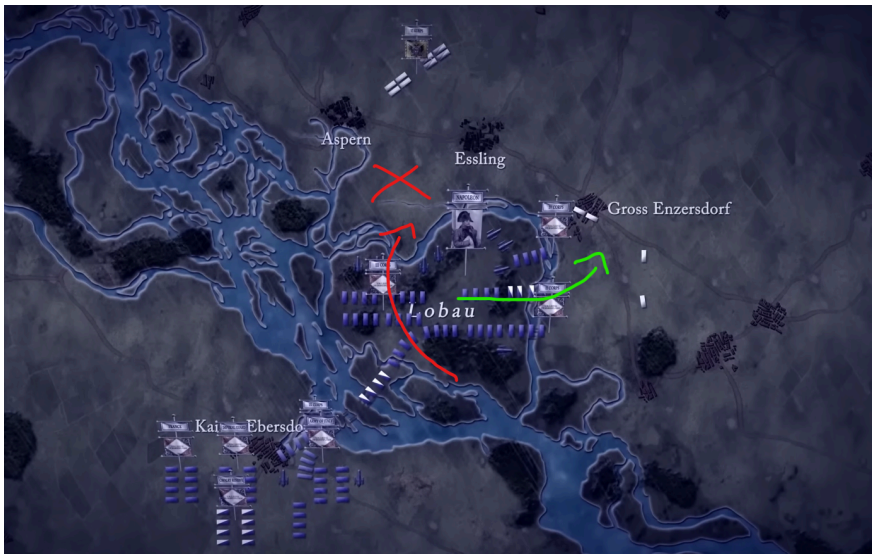
But what was Napoleon's real objective?

His true plan was to cross much farther east, near Wittau, on the opposite side from where he was conducting his demonstrations. This would allow him to:

- Avoid the prepared fortifications around Aspern and Essling, which formed a key part of Charles's defensive strategy.
- Turn Charles's left flank.
- Position himself between Charles and the approaching army of Archduke John, preventing the two Austrian forces from joining together.

Strategy Logistics:

Napoleon was deeply involved and obsessed with planning and execution of the crossing. According to Jean-Baptiste Antoine Marbot, Napoleon and Masséna disguised themselves in ordinary soldiers' coats and approached the river accompanied by a colonel. The colonel entered the water, making it appear to the Australians as though the group was simply going for a swim. In reality, Napoleon was conducting a personal reconnaissance. He was examining the depth of the river, the strength of the current, potential crossing locations, and the sites where bridges would eventually be constructed.



Just to add a final layer of deception, this was all executed during the night.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, pp.709-711.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, p. 713.

(Misdirection>Strategy Fortitude>Indirect Manipulation>Strategy Logistics>Concealment>Planning Coverage>Contingencies>Convergent Thinking>Abductive Reasoning>Analytical Thinking>Info Gathering>Acting Skills)

Context: Due to the various misdirections, Charles was confused. He had started overanalyzing the situation; his mind cycled repeatedly through multiple scenarios, he could take the initiative by attacking while the French crossed, but what if Napoleon outflanked him? (Meaning that even though he was not convinced of Napoleon's outflanking maneuver, he did see it as a possibility.) He could also fall back toward Wagram and position himself at a good defensive position in case it did happen. Charles was severely confused, not knowing what to do. He actually tried to do both, but blundered, as he advanced forward, then pushed back, wasting time instead of committing to a decision. The best decision was to fortify himself and build a defensive line, which he did, though not as effectively. But this was at least better than taking the initiative, as Napoleon could have outflanked him. However, in the end, Napoleon crossed and surprised Charles, as his huge army had now reached the other side while Charles was sleeping. This was an impressive logistical victory.

Masséna then captured Gross-Enzersdorf and Pouzet Island as ordered (Gross-Enzersdorf was the hinge around which Napoleon could protect the bridges)

Before the crossing, Napoleon had already envisioned how his army would be arranged after crossing the river, and he would deploy it as such. His first line, from left to right, would have Masséna, Oudinot, and Davout. Behind them, forming the second line, would be the IX Corps, the Imperial Guard, the XI Corps, and the Army of Italy. Behind everyone would be the cavalry reserves.

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, p. 711.

(Field Envisioning>Planning Formulation)

THE BATTLE OF WAGRAM

- **Charles' and Napoleon's positions**

Once Napoleon got to the other side, Charles backed down, took his army away from the Danube River, and positioned himself at the Rußbach-Wagram line. Meanwhile, Napoleon moved to take the central position and positioned himself in front of and between Charles's wings.

Now both decisions had pros and cons:

Charles positioned himself near the Rußbach heights. It was a strong position, but in doing so he left his center weakened, so once Napoleon positioned himself between his two wings, Charles was in danger. However, Napoleon also faced danger by doing so. With the Danube at his rear,

his communications and retreat depended on the bridges behind him. If the Austrians could break through or disrupt those crossings, the French army could find itself in a difficult position.



Though for now, Napoleon had the advantage.

- **Napoleon's first attack:**

Napoleon then planned his first attack against Archduke Charles. It would involve 3 maneuvers:

- Davout and Oudinot would pin the eastern wing of Charles, prevent reinforcements, and keep them busy.
- Napoleon would then send Bernadotte to attack Wagram itself, to split the army in two. Wagram was near the junction between the Austrian left wing and the weak central area. Once that was broken, he would push toward Helmahof and drive a wedge between the wings. So Napoleon actually didn't want to hit the weak middle part, but rather break the junction to it, as the left wing was the strongest.

  In my opinion, Napoleon did this knowing that if he could neutralize Charles's left wing in the east (which was the strongest) he would isolate the center. If he had only attacked the center, he could have been enveloped by Charles in a maneuver like Hannibal did at Cannae, but Napoleon was prudent, so he chose to isolate the weak part instead of attacking it directly. Interestingly, an Austrian general called Franz von Wimpffen proposed this envelopment idea to Charles, but Charles rejected it. I'm not sure of the reason, perhaps he predicted Napoleon's attack or just wanted better concentration of force, but the point is that he was correct to do so.

- Meanwhile, Masséna would contain the forces near Bisamberg.

(Tactics>Planning Formulation)

Napoleon was not facing just anyone, however, he was facing Charles, and Charles had no intention of making things easy for him.

- Against Davout and Oudinot, Charles reacted rapidly. His troops put up fierce resistance, eventually compelling Oudinot to fall back after Charles managed to reinforce the line with several battalions from the Austrian IInd Corps. With that threat neutralized, Charles wasted no time redirecting those forces against Macdonald, who came dangerously close to shattering the Austrian line.
- Bernadotte fared no better. His assignment had been to seize Wagram and cut the army in two, but the Austrians repelled him and he was driven back to Aderklaa, having accomplished nothing.
- Masséna, by contrast, carried out his part of the plan effectively, successfully keeping the Bisamberg wing occupied. That said, his role was purely to contain, so he posed little real danger to Charles'.

After his first attack failed, Napoleon would spend the night reorganizing, pulling his forces back together into an operational battalion carré with a reserve. He would not lose his composure or motivation, despite Charles having responded perfectly.

(Contingencies)

- **Archduke Charles' first attack:**

Charles, meanwhile, began developing his own plan. He had managed to identify a weakness in Napoleon's formation: Napoleon's left flank in the west, held by Masséna.

- Therefore his main attack would fall against Masséna's wing. To achieve this, III and VI Corps, totaling about 36,000 men, would attack and drive Masséna back through Aspern and Essling toward the Danube crossings. The goal was not merely to defeat Masséna but to threaten Napoleon's bridges, escape routes and communications.
- To support this, the Austrian center would attack Aderklaa, while Rosenberg would attack Davout on the opposite flank, pinning French forces and preventing Napoleon from concentrating against the main Austrian thrust.
- Finally, Charles planned that Archduke John would arrive on Napoleon's left flank during the battle.





Napoleon, however, had his own plan. He wanted Masséna to hold, then Bernadotte and Oudinot to attack frontally, while Davout would swing around Markgrafneusiedl. Once the enemy was sufficiently weakened, Eugène would deliver the decisive blow.

But this plan would not come to fruition, as Charles seized the initiative and struck first.

Suddenly, Rosenberg pushed against Davout, Napoleon was caught off guard and went on the defensive. Davout deserves credit here, since he not only held defensively as Napoleon needed, but he went further and counter-attacked, driving Rosenberg back across the Russbach.

Just as things seemed to be turning around, however, Bernadotte created a disaster. Without consulting Napoleon and without even being attacked, he abandoned Aderklaa on the grounds that his line was too long, and so Charles's weak center walked in and took it with ease. Napoleon was furious and ordered both Bernadotte and Masséna to retake it. But as they advanced, Charles rushed up reserves and grenadiers to reinforce the line and managed to throw the French back. At this point the real attack against Masséna had not even been fully executed, the center had taken Aderklaa with ease while the main attacking force was still on its way. So when they did arrive, just as Charles had planned, they pushed forward toward Aspern-Essling, ready to seize the bridges.

Now came Napoleon's tactical response. Just as the Austrian forces were about to threaten his rear, he realized he was about to get trapped. He debated whether he should let the attack at Aspern continue or not; he could ignore it and win elsewhere, as he had done at Austerlitz. But his army was not the veterans of 1805, and Napoleon perceived that most were already showing signs of panic. If he let Charles's maneuver there be completed, that panic could spread forward through the ranks, and the army was prone to it despite outnumbering the Austrians. He therefore decided not to take the gamble, and to act against that attack. So he delivered one of his best tactical responses.

- He ordered Masséna to break off his corps, which were still engaged against the Austrian center at Aderklaa, and march south toward the army at Aspern, where he would establish a defensive line.

But wouldn't the forces Masséna had been fighting simply push forward unchecked? No. because Napoleon would employ a maneuver he had planned all along.

- He ordered Jean-Baptiste Bessières, Lauriston's Grand Battery, and crucially the reserve cavalry (which, if you recall, Napoleon had reorganized after being repulsed by Charles into an operational battalion carré with a reserve, and which he would now finally put to use) to throw themselves in front of the Austrian advance, buying Masséna the time he needed to redeploy.

Once those maneuvers were completed, Masséna could execute his redeployment.





(Tactical Response>Trap Evasion>Adaptability>Emotional Understanding>Emotional Perception)

- **The final winning attack:**

Meanwhile in the east, Davout was grinding against Charles's left flank. He captured Markgrafneusiedl, which anchored the Austrian left flank. Charles tried to commit his reserve cavalry, but it wasn't enough, and Davout had now turned the Austrian left flank, partially rolling it up just as Napoleon had planned from the beginning. And here things began to go badly for Charles. Archduke John, who was supposed to arrive at the eastern flank and support him, which would have caught Davout between two armies, had still not arrived.

Seeing that everything was going against Charles, Napoleon decided to gamble. He sent Masséna forward, Oudinot forward, and Macdonald forward, and especially at Macdonald's attack, he committed all his reserves to break the Austrian center.

By around 2PM, Charles could see the full picture. In the west, Masséna had foiled his plans at Aspern. On his left flank in the east, Davout was rolling him up. And in the center, he was now being struck with massive reserves. Charles understood that the battle was lost, and he ordered a retreat to save his army.

Napoleon had won, but it was one of his most costly victories. Both Charles and Napoleon suffered more than 30,000 losses each, and both armies were exhausted. Napoleon in particular was deeply uneasy about Archduke John's forces, which had still not appeared, and so he chose to stay put rather than pursue.

And so Wagram ended, one of the hardest battles Napoleon ever had to fight.

(Tactics)

David G. Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon, p. 712-732.

Context: Even though after Wagram, Charles managed to save his army for further resistance, Charles understood what many in Vienna did not, Austria had strategically lost. Charles requested an armistice. It was the final act of a commander who placed the survival of his army and his country above personal pride. Days later, he was removed from command by his own brother, Emperor Francis, and spent the remainder of the Napoleonic Wars largely on the sidelines. The man who had rebuilt Austria's army, won Napoleon's first major defeat at Aspern-Essling, and came closer than any commander to defeating him in an equal battle, was denied the chance to continue. Yet history has been kinder than politics. Though Wagram ended in defeat, Charles emerged with his reputation enhanced rather than diminished. Napoleon himself held him in high regard, and many historians have since judged him to be the best opponent the Emperor ever faced.