

Chapter 1

Napoleon

The Danube, April 1809

The defences of the Bohemian town of Ratisbon looked formidable indeed, Napoleon silently conceded as he swept his telescope along the aged walls and ditches confronting him. The retreating Austrian army had hastily thrown up more earthworks to bolster the existing defences and cannon muzzles were discernible in the embrasures of each redoubt, with more cannon mounted on the thick, squat towers of the old town. Here and there, the white-uniformed figures of the enemy regarded the French host approaching the town. Beyond the walls the pitched roofs and church spires were vague in the last vestiges of the early morning mist that had risen up from the Danube. On the far side of the river Napoleon could just pick out the faint trails of smoke rising up from the Austrian camp on the far bank.

He frowned as he lowered the telescope and snapped it shut. Archduke Charles and his men had escaped the trap Napoleon had set for them. Ratisbon had been in French hands until a few days before, and the enemy had been caught with their backs to the river. But the commander of the garrison had surrendered after a brief resistance, leaving the bridge across the Danube intact. So the Austrians had crossed to the north bank and left a strong force behind to defy their pursuers. Archduke Charles had surprised him, Napoleon reflected. He had fully expected the Austrians to fall back towards Vienna to protect their supply

lines and defend their capital. Instead, the enemy general had crossed the river into Bohemia, leaving the road to Vienna open. Only it was not as simple as that, Napoleon realised well enough. If he led his army towards Vienna, he would be inviting the Austrians to fall on his supply lines in turn. That might be an unavoidable risk.

Napoleon turned round to face his staff officers. ‘Gentlemen, Ratisbon must be taken if we are to cross the Danube and force the enemy to face us on the battlefield.’

General Berthier, Napoleon’s chief of staff, briefly raised his eyebrows as he glanced past his Emperor towards the defences of the town, barely a mile away. He swallowed as his gaze switched back to Napoleon.

‘Very well, sire. Shall I give the order for the army to prepare for a siege?’

Napoleon shook his head. ‘There is no time for a siege. The moment we settle down to dig trenches and construct batteries the Austrians have the initiative. Moreover, you can be sure that our other enemies . . .’ Napoleon paused and smiled bitterly, ‘and even some of those who call us friends will take great comfort from the delay. It would not take much prompting for them to side with Austria.’

The more astute of the officers readily understood his point. Several of the small states of the German Confederation were sympathetic to Austria’s cause. But by far the biggest danger came from Russia. Even though Napoleon and Tsar Alexander were bound by treaty there had been a marked cooling of their relationship over the past months, and it was possible that the Russian army might intervene on either side of the present war between France and Austria.

Napoleon had been surprised by the temerity of the Austrians when they had opened hostilities in April, without a formal declaration of war. Before then there had been many reports from spies that the Austrian army had been reorganised and expanded, and equipped with new cannon and modern muskets. The signs that Emperor Francis intended to begin another war were unmistakable, and Napoleon had given orders for the

concentration of a powerful army ready to meet the threat. Once the campaign had begun, the usual plodding progress of the enemy columns had allowed the French to outmarch them and force the Austrians to fight on Napoleon's terms. The performance of his army had been most gratifying, Napoleon considered. Most of the soldiers who had engaged the enemy so far had been fresh recruits, yet they had fought superbly. But for the failure to prevent the Austrians from escaping across the Danube, the war would already be as good as won.

Napoleon turned towards one of his officers. 'Marshal Lannes.'

The officer stiffened. 'Sire?'

'Your men will take the town, whatever the cost. Understand?'

'Yes, sire.' Lannes nodded, and casually adjusted his plumed bicorne over his brown curls. 'The lads will soon chase the Austrians out.'

'They'd better,' Napoleon replied curtly. Then he stepped closer to Lannes and fixed his gaze on the marshal. 'I am depending on you. Do not let me down.'

Lannes smiled softly. 'Have I ever, sire?'

'No. No, you haven't.' Napoleon returned the smile. 'Good fortune be with you, my dear Jean.'

Lannes saluted, then turned to stride swiftly towards the orderly who was holding his horse. Swinging himself up into the saddle, Lannes touched his spurs in and trotted his mount forward, riding down from the small knoll towards the columns of his leading infantry division as they formed up out of range of the Austrian guns. A brief lull settled over the French positions and then a trumpet signalled the advance and with a rattle of drums the infantry columns tramped towards the enemy fortifications. Ahead of them a screen of skirmishers advanced in loose order, muskets lowered as they looked for individual targets along the line of the Austrian defences.

Napoleon felt his heart harden at the sight of the blue-coated columns closing on the enemy-held town. At any moment the Austrians would open fire and cones of case shot would tear

bloody holes in the brave ranks of his men. But Ratisbon had to be taken.

‘For what we are about to receive,’ Berthier muttered as he strained his eyes to observe the leading elements of the division closing on the enemy defences.

The Austrians held their fire until the French skirmishers had almost reached the wide ditch in front of the town’s walls. Then hundreds of tiny puffs of smoke pricked out along the walls as bright tongues of flame stabbed from the guns mounted on the towers and redoubts. Napoleon raised his telescope and saw that scores of the skirmishers had been cut down, and behind them the leading ranks of Lannes’s columns reeled as they were subjected to a storm of lead musket balls and the iron shot of the guns. The officers raised their swords high, some placing their hats over the points to make them more visible, and urged their men on. The soldiers surged over the lip of the ditch and were lost to view for a moment before they reappeared, scrambling up the far slope and running on towards the wall. Above them, the battlements of the town were lined with the white uniforms of the Austrians, barely visible through the drifting banks of smoke that hung in the air like a tattered shroud. All the while, the attackers were being whittled down as they tried to reach the wall.

Then, quite abruptly, the forward impetus died as the soldiers went to ground, huddling behind whatever cover they could find as they desperately exchanged shots with the enemy. Still more men entered the ditch, crowding those on the far slope who refused to advance any further. The dense mass of humanity presented an irresistible target to the enemy, who swept the ditch with case shot while grenades were lobbed down from the walls. They detonated with bright flashes, shooting shards of jagged iron in every direction, mutilating the men of Marshal Lannes’s first wave.

‘Damn.’ Napoleon frowned irritably. ‘Damn them. Why do they sit there, and die in that ditch? If they want to live, then they must go forward.’

His frustration grew as the slaughter continued. At length the

inevitable happened as the men of the first wave slowly began to give ground, and then the pace increased as the urge to retreat spread through the soldiers like an invisible wave rippling out through their ranks. Within minutes the last of the survivors sheltering in the ditch was hurrying away from the town, leaving the dead and wounded sprawled and heaped before the wall. As the men streamed back the Austrians continued to fire after them until the French were out of musket range, and then only the cannon continued, firing several more rounds of case shot before they too fell silent.

Abruptly, Napoleon dug his spurs in and urged his mount down the gentle slope of the knoll before galloping towards Lannes's forward command point in the ruins of a small chapel. The emperor's bodyguards and staff officers hurried after him, anxiously trying to keep up. Marshal Lannes strode forward to confront the first of the fugitives as soon as he was aware that the attack had failed. By the time Napoleon reached him he was berating a large group of sheepish-looking soldiers.

'Call yourself men?' Lannes bellowed at the top of his voice. 'Running like bloody rabbits the first time we come up against some Austrians who have the balls to stand and fight. Sweet Jesus Christ, you shame me! You shame your uniforms, and you shame the Emperor.' Lannes indicated Napoleon as he approached and reined in. 'And now the enemy are laughing at you. They mock you for being cowards. Listen!'

Sure enough, the faint sound of jeers and whistles came from the defenders of Ratisbon and some of the men looked down at the ground, not daring to meet the eyes of their commander.

Napoleon dismounted and stared coldly at the men gathered in front of Lannes. He remained silent for a moment before he shook his head wearily. 'Soldiers, I am not angry with you. How could I be? You obeyed your orders and made your attack. You advanced into fire and continued forward until your nerve failed. And then you retreated. You have done no less than any other man in any army in Europe.' Napoleon paused briefly to let his next words carry their full weight. 'But you are not in any army in Europe. You are in the French army. You march under

standards entrusted to you by your Emperor. The same standards that were carried to victory at Austerlitz. At Jena and Auerstadt. Eylau and Friedland. Together, we have beaten the armies of the King of Prussia and the Tsar. We have humiliated the Austrians – the very same Austrians who now taunt you from the walls of Ratisbon. They think that the men of France have grown weak and fearful, that the fire in their bellies has died. They think that the enemy they once faced, and feared with good cause, is now as meek as a lamb. They shame you. They laugh at you. They ridicule you . . .’ Napoleon looked round and saw the glowering expressions of anger on the faces of some of his men, just as he had hoped. He pressed home his advantage. ‘How can a man endure this? How can a soldier of France not feel his heart burn with rage at the scorn poured on him by those whom he knows to be his inferiors?’ Napoleon thrust his arm out in the direction of Ratisbon. ‘Soldiers! Your enemy awaits you. Show them what it means to be a Frenchman. Neither shot nor shell can shake your courage, or make your resolution waver. Remember those who have fought for your Emperor before you. Remember the eternal glory that they have won. Remember the gratitude and gifts that their Emperor has bestowed on them.’

‘Long live Napoleon!’ Marshal Lannes punched his fist into the air. ‘Long live France!’

The cry was instantly taken up by the nearest men and swept through the ranks of those gathered around. Other soldiers, further off, turned to stare, and then joined in so that the taunts of the Austrians were drowned out by the tumultuous acclaim sweeping through the men of Lannes’s division. Lannes continued leading the cheering for a moment before he raised his arms and bellowed for his men to still their tongues. As the cheers died away the marshal drew a deep breath and pointed to the first of the soldiers rallying to their regimental standards.

‘To your colours! Form up and make ready to show those Austrian dogs how real soldiers fight!’

As the men hurried off Napoleon could see the renewed determination in their expressions and nodded with satisfaction. ‘Their blood is up. I just hope they can take the wall this time.’

He turned his gaze back towards the enemy's defences. They were less than half a mile from the nearest enemy guns. 'We are still within range here. And so are the men.'

'It would take a lucky shot indeed to hit anyone at this range, sire,' Lannes replied dismissively. 'Waste of good powder.'

'I hope you are right.'

An instant later there was a puff of smoke from an embrasure in the nearest Austrian redoubt and both men traced the faint dark smear of the shot as it curved through the morning air, angling slightly to one side of their position. The ball grounded a hundred yards ahead, kicking up dust and dirt before it landed again another fifty paces further on, and then again before carving a furrow through the calf-length grass and coming to rest a short distance from the front rank of the nearest French battalion.

'Good conditions for artillery,' Napoleon mused. 'Firm ground – the effective range will increase, and the ricochet of the enemy shot is going to cost us dear.'

More Austrian guns opened fire and a shot from one of the heavier pieces grounded just short of one of the French battalions before slicing a deep path through the ranks, felling men like skittles.

Lannes cleared his throat. 'Sire, it occurs to me that we are also in range of the enemy guns.'

'True, but as you pointed out the chances of their hitting us are negligible.'

'Nevertheless, sire, it would be prudent for you to withdraw beyond effective range.'

Napoleon glanced towards the redoubt, noting that the muzzle of one of the guns was foreshortened to a black dot. Abruptly the gun was obscured by a swirl of smoke and a moment later a puff of dirt kicked up just ahead of them.

'Look out!' Lannes yelled a warning.

But before Napoleon could react, the ball grounded much closer, and then again right at their feet. Grit and soil sprayed in their faces as Napoleon felt a blow, like a savage kick, slam into his right ankle. The shock of the impact stunned him and he

stood rigidly, not daring to look down, as Lannes dusted down his uniform jacket with a chuckle. 'As I said . . .'

Napoleon felt his ankle give way, and stumbled to the side, thrusting out his arms to break his fall as he went down.

'Sire!' Lannes hurried to kneel at his side. 'You've been hit?'

The pain in Napoleon's leg was agonisingly sharp and he gritted his teeth as he replied. 'Of course I've been hit, you fool.'

'Where?' Lannes glanced over him anxiously. 'I can't see the wound.'

'My right leg,' Napoleon winced. 'The ankle.'

Lannes shuffled down and saw that Napoleon's boot had been badly scuffed. He felt tenderly for signs of injury. Napoleon gasped and forced himself to sit up. Over Lannes's shoulder he could see several staff officers and orderlies running towards them. Beyond, the men of the nearest battalion were falling out of line as they stared towards their Emperor with shocked expressions.

'The Emperor is wounded!' a voice cried out.

The cry was repeated and a chorus of despairing groans rippled through the ranks of the division forming to launch the second attack. Napoleon could see that he must act swiftly to restore the men's morale, before the chance to seize Ratisbon slipped away.

'Get me on my feet,' he muttered to Lannes.

The marshal shook his head. 'You are injured, sire. I'll have you carried to safety and send for your physician.'

'You'll do no such thing,' Napoleon snapped. 'Get me up. Bring me my horse.'

'As you command.'

The marshal was a powerfully built man and he grasped his Emperor's arm and raised him up easily. Napoleon stood with all his weight on his left foot and fought to hide any sign of the shooting pain that made an agony of any movement of his right leg. He rested his hand on Lannes's shoulder as the latter called for his horse. While one of the Emperor's bodyguard held the reins Lannes carefully lifted Napoleon up into the saddle and

placed his right foot into its stirrup. Napoleon took the reins and breathed in deeply.

‘Your orders, sire?’ Lannes looked up at him.

‘Continue the attack, until Ratisbon is taken.’ Napoleon clicked his tongue and touched his heels in as tenderly as he could, wincing at the fiery stab in his right ankle as he did so. The horse walked forward and Napoleon steered it along the front of the regiments forming up for another attack on the enemy defences. Berthier trotted up and drew alongside.

‘Do you wish me to have your carriage brought forward?’

‘No. I will stay on my horse. Where the men can see me.’ Napoleon held up his hand to greet the nearest battalion, and a cheer rose up, loud and prolonged. It was taken up by the next formation and continued down the line of Morand’s division. Napoleon continued riding along the front rank, forcing himself to smile at his men, and exchanging greetings with their commanders as he passed by.

He reached the far end and turned to make his way back. Marshal Lannes had remounted his horse and trotted it forward so that he stood in full view of his soldiers. Napoleon reined in alongside, and forced himself to keep his expression impassive as another cannon ball grounded a short distance from the division’s band, took the head off a young drummer boy and smashed through the chest of the one behind.

Lannes took off his plumed hat and raised it high as he filled his lungs and bellowed, ‘Volunteers for the ladder party step forward!’

His voice resonated briefly in the warm air, then died away, but not a man moved. Those in the front rank stared ahead, refusing to meet the gaze of their marshal or their Emperor. Those who volunteered to carry the ladders would be advancing right behind the skirmishers and the enemy would be sure to concentrate their fire on such easy targets. The ground in front of the Austrian defences was already littered with the dead and wounded of the previous attack and the memory of the storm of fire from the walls was still fresh in the minds of the survivors.

Lannes stared at the silent, still ranks with a surprised look on his face, which swiftly turned to scorn. 'Is there no man amongst you willing to have the honour of being the first to scale the walls? Well?'

No one moved and Napoleon was aware of a terrible tension building between the marshal and his men. If it was not resolved, and quickly, there would be no second attack. Lannes must have shared the realisation, for he glanced anxiously at his Emperor and then suddenly dismounted and strode towards the nearest of the ladders. As the soldiers looked on, Lannes picked it up and adjusted his position so that he could carry it by himself. He turned towards the men and called out contemptuously, 'If no man here has the stomach for it, then I'll do it alone. Before I was a marshal I was a grenadier – and I am still!'

With that, he turned away and began to march towards Ratisbon, the unwieldy ladder held in a firm grip.

'Good God,' Berthier muttered. 'What on earth does he think he's doing?'

Napoleon could not help smiling. 'What else? His duty.'

For a moment no man stirred, then one of Lannes's staff officers ran forward and stood in his commander's path.

'Sir! You can't do this. Who will command the corps if you are killed?'

'What do I care?' Lannes growled. 'Out of my way, damn you.'

He brushed the officer aside and continued towards the waiting Austrians. The other man stared after him, aghast. Then, recovering his wits, he hurried to catch up, took hold of the end of the ladder and fell into step with Lannes.

'Wait, sir!' one of the other staff officers called out as he and his companions ran forward, snatched up the nearest ladders and hurried after Lannes.

There was a brief pause before the colonel of the nearest battalion turned to his astonished men and bellowed, 'What are you waiting for? I'll be damned if I let a marshal of France take a bullet that's meant for me! Advance!' He drew his sword and swept it towards the town. 'Long live France!'

The cry was taken up by his men and they lurched into movement, running down to pick up the ladders and surging after Lannes and his officers. In an uneven tide of cheering soldiers the rest of Morand's division swept forward, snatching up the remaining ladders as they went. Napoleon felt his blood quicken at the sight and he urged his horse to advance with the rest of the men. The defenders reacted swiftly to the new threat and every gun that could be brought to bear opened fire on the wave of men rushing across the open ground towards the ditch and the wall beyond. A roundshot briefly droned close overhead and Berthier instinctively ducked his head.

'Sire, is this wise? You've already been wounded. I implore you to have your leg attended to.'

'Later. All that matters now is taking Ratisbon.'

'With respect, sire, Marshal Lannes can handle the attack.'

'Really?' Napoleon glanced at his chief of staff. 'You saw the men. You saw how fickle their mood is. If their Emperor is with them, they will not lose heart.'

Berthier bowed his head wearily. 'I am sure you are right, sire. But what if you are killed? Right here, before the men? Not only would the attack fail but it would be a blow to the morale of the whole army.'

Napoleon forced himself to smile. 'My dear Berthier, I can assure you that the bullet that will kill me has not yet been cast. Now, enough of this. We remain with our soldiers.'

'Yes, sire,' Berthier replied meekly and did his best to look unperturbed as they rode on.

Ahead of them, Napoleon could make out the gold-laced uniforms of Lannes and his officers, still leading the attack as they hurried forward. They reached the ditch, half running, half slithering down the near slope before they ran at the far side and scrambled up to cross the last stretch of open ground before the wall. Above them the battlements were lined with Austrian soldiers, firing and reloading their muskets as quickly as possible as the tide of blue uniforms surged towards them. On either flank of Morand's division, the cannon in the enemy redoubts blasted case shot into the French ranks, sweeping several men away at a

time in bloody tatters. Napoleon and Berthier reined in a short distance from the ditch and watched as Lannes and his officers reached the wall. They hurriedly raised the ladder and the marshal sprang on to the lowest rungs and started to climb. On either side other ladders were thrust against the wall and the men of Morand's division streamed up, clambering over the breastworks and falling on the defenders.

Most had fired their muskets as they closed on the wall, and now went in with the cold steel of the bayonet, or used their weapons like clubs as they fought at brutal close quarters with the Austrians. The same fate befell the defenders of the flanking redoubts as the French fought their way in through the gun embrasures and fell on the enemy gunners within. After the death wreaked by their cannon, Napoleon knew that none of the artillery crews would be spared the vengeful wrath of the attackers.

As more men climbed over the walls there was a cheer from those still outside the town as the gates began to open. For an instant Napoleon tensed, wondering if the enemy were about to launch a counter-attack, but as the gates swung back a hatless figure in an elaborate gold-laced uniform emerged from within the town.

'That's Lannes!' Berthier cried out.

'Yes.' Napoleon grinned in relief, and nudged his horse forward towards the ditch. As the horse cautiously stepped down the slope Napoleon saw for the first time the bodies heaped along the bottom of the ditch, some badly torn up by the heavy iron balls of case shot. The horse whinnied until Napoleon leaned forward to pat its flank soothingly and urge it up the far side. Lannes was waving his men through the gate and bellowing encouragement as Napoleon and Berthier rode up to him. Napoleon noted the tear in the marshal's uniform jacket, and the smear of blood on his neck.

'It seems that you are the reckless one now, my dear Jean.'

Lannes looked up, then touched a gloved hand to his neck. It came away with a smear of fresh blood. 'A scratch, sire. Nothing more.'

Napoleon glanced back over the ditch and out across the approaches to the town. He estimated that nearly a thousand Frenchmen had fallen before the walls of Ratisbon. He turned back to Lannes. 'It would seem that you lead something of a charmed life.'

'As do we all, sire, until the day we die.'

They shared a laugh, and Berthier joined in a little uncertainly. Then Napoleon leaned forward to give his marshal fresh instructions. 'Pass the order for your men to clear the town. Meanwhile I want you, and every other grenadier that you can find, to make directly for the bridge. We must capture it intact. Stop for nothing, and having taken it, hold on at all costs. Clear?'

'Yes, sire.'

'Then go.'

As Lannes trotted back into the city and called his staff officers to him, Napoleon and Berthier remained by the gate and the Emperor acknowledged the greetings of the soldiers of the follow-up regiments of the division as they marched into Ratisbon. Many, particularly the young recruits, had only ever seen their Emperor from afar, if at all, and now regarded him with excited curiosity and not a little awe. Some of the older men, with campaign stripes on their sleeves, shouted out informal greetings to Napoleon in order to impress their younger comrades. Napoleon knew that they would be holding court over the camp fires that night, telling tales about the times they had fought at the side of the Emperor when he had still been a young officer.

He waited until the first two regiments had entered the town before following them through the gate. The sounds of fighting had receded towards the river and the faint crackle of musket shots was punctuated by the occasional dull boom of a cannon from the Austrian-held bank of the Danube. There were bodies strewn along the street leading from the gates, both French and Austrian. The dead and wounded had been hurriedly dragged aside so as not to hold up the troops marching through. The living sat propped up against the walls, waiting to be helped to the rear where their injuries would eventually be treated. Some

raised a cheer as Napoleon rode by, others stared blankly, too shocked or in too much pain to care.

Ahead of them the street opened out into a square which the enemy had been using as a vehicle park. The space was lined with the ornately decorated facades that Napoleon had grown used to seeing in the small villages and towns on the banks of the Danube. Artillery limbers, ammunition caissons and supply wagons were packed tightly together in the middle of the square.

On the far side, Napoleon could see the broad route that led to the bridge that crossed the great river. A throng of blue-coated soldiers was pressing across the bridge. Napoleon spurred his horse forward. As he approached the end of the bridge he saw Lannes and his officers on a landing stage to one side. Beyond them the water of the Danube stretched out for over a hundred paces to the first of the small islands that lay between the two banks. The bridge, built on massive stone buttresses, extended right across the great river, passing over the islands to the far side. Napoleon could see that it was so solid that it could not easily be destroyed by gunpowder charges. Dense formations of enemy soldiers and several artillery batteries were clearly visible covering the far end of the bridge. Beyond them, on the slope rising up from the river, sprawled the camp of Archduke Charles's army. Even as Napoleon watched, the French troops on the bridge began to give way under the vicious fusillade of musket balls and grapeshot sweeping the length of the bridge. The men fell back, the more resolute amongst them pausing to fire a last shot from cover before scurrying back to the shelter of the buildings lining the river.

At the sound of hooves approaching over the cobbled road, Lannes turned and he and his officers bowed their heads in greeting.

'Make your report,' Napoleon ordered as he reined in. The pain in his ankle had subsided into a steady throb and he had to force himself to pay full attention to the marshal.

'The town is ours, sire. Most of the enemy managed to escape across the river, but we have a few hundred prisoners, and have

taken twenty guns. A handful of the Austrians are still holding some buildings in the eastern quarter of Ratisbon, but they'll be dealt with shortly. As for our losses—'

'That's not important now. Is the bridge safe?'

Lannes nodded. 'Major Dubarry of the engineers has checked for charges. It seems the Austrians had no intention of trying to destroy the bridge.'

'Good. Then we still have a chance to pursue Archduke Charles.'

Lannes raised his eyebrows momentarily. 'Sire, as you can see, the enemy holds the far bank. We cannot force a crossing here. The enemy has escaped us, for the present.'

Napoleon pressed his lips together and fought to contain his temper. It had been over ten days since he had had a good night's rest and in the sudden surge of anger he recognised the symptoms of exhaustion. Lannes was not to blame. As he stared across the river Napoleon could see for himself that any further attempts to cross the bridge would only lead to a bloody massacre. He felt a sudden heaviness in his heart as he contemplated the impasse. The Austrians had managed to put the Danube between them and their pursuers. If they moved parallel to the French army then they could block any attempt to cross the river and bring them to battle.

He sighed bitterly. 'It seems that the enemy have learned their lesson from the last war. Archduke Charles will think twice before accepting a battle on my terms.'

'We can find another crossing point, sire,' Berthier replied. 'Masséna is marching on Straubing. If he crosses the river before the Austrians stop him, then he can attack their flank.'

'On his own?' Napoleon shook his head. 'Even if Masséna did manage to surprise the Austrians they can simply retreat into the German states to the north, and try to win over their allegiance while drawing us after them, and away from Vienna.' He paused a moment and gently scratched the stubble on his chin. 'No. We'll not play Archduke Charles's game. Instead, we must try to make him follow us.'

'How, sire?'

‘We march on Vienna. I doubt the Austrians will be prepared to let us occupy their capital a second time.’

Lannes gestured to the enemy forces massed on the far bank. ‘And what if they cross back over and try to cut our communications?’

Napoleon smiled. ‘Then we turn on them and force them to fight. My guess is that they will not have the stomach to risk that for a while yet. So, we take the war to Vienna, my friends. Then we shall have our battle.’