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Marshal Davout and the Second Bourbon Restoration

John G. Gallaher

The second abdication of the Emperor Napoleon plunged the French nation into confusion. Its defeated army was retreating in disorder from the battlefields of Belgium, its government was undecided upon a choice for his successor,¹ and as the news of these eventful days spread over the stunned countryside the threat of civil war heightened. Louis XVIII had been biding his time in Belgium while waiting for his fate and that of the French people to be decided on the field of battle. Hardly had the news of Waterloo arrived at Ghent (June 19) when the exiled court began packing for its inglorious return to Paris. However, a second restoration of the House of Henry IV was neither automatic nor assured by the removal of Napoleon. The army was Bonapartist almost to the man; and if the nation shed few tears for the departed emperor, it was divided with respect to the return of the king. The principal architect of the Second Restoration may well have been Joseph Fouché, Duke of Otranto, but the man who made it virtually bloodless, who prevented civil war, and who made possible peace with the allies by controlling the military, was Louis Davout.

Marshal Davout, Duke of Auerstadt, Prince of Eckmühl,² was a

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¹ The emperor abdicated on the condition that his son be proclaimed Napoleon II, even though the boy was with his mother in Vienna in the custody of his grandfather, Francis I. The Chamber of Representatives gave official recognition to the young prince, but the number of staunch Bonapartists was relatively few. Fouché and his small circle of supporters were already considering the restoration of Louis XVIII; others were mentioning the name of the Duke of Orleans; and though they were not so vocal, there were republicans who wished neither an emperor nor a king. See Henry Houssaye, *1815*. III: *La Seconde Abdication—La Terreur Blanche* (Paris, 1905), 83-93; Jean Thiry, *La Seconde Abdication de Napoléon Ier* (Paris, 1945), pp. 91-127; Louis Madelin, *Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire* (Paris, 1937-54), XVI, 336-68; Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, *The Bourbon Restoration* (Philadelphia, 1966), p. 105.

² Born in Burgundy in 1770 into an old noble family, Davout was educated at the

staunch Bonapartist throughout the Empire, the First Restoration, and the Hundred Days. One of the most capable of Napoleon's generals, whose presence at Waterloo was sorely missed, Davout had reluctantly accepted the portfolio of the minister of war at the outset of the Hundred Days.³ His organizational talents⁴ were largely responsible for the creation of the army which the emperor led into Belgium.⁵ When Napoleon returned to Paris on June 21, 1815, he was physically and morally defeated and incapable of making the decisions or taking the actions which would have been necessary to prolong the Empire. At a meeting of the council of ministers held late on the same morning (June 21) only Davout, Lazare Carnot, minister of the interior, and the emperor's brother Lucien spoke out in favor of a course of action which would have continued the struggle. The minister of war advocated the immediate prorogation of the Chamber of Representatives and the concentration of dictatorial powers in the hands of the emperor.⁶ But Napoleon hesitated, and the initiative passed to the Chamber of Representatives. Shortly after noon of the

military schools of Auxerre and Paris. Entering the service of the king in 1788 he rose to the rank of general during the early campaigns of the Revolution. He first served under General Bonaparte during the Egyptian campaign, and in 1801 married the sister of Napoleon's brother-in-law, Aimée Leclerc. Named Marshal of the Empire in 1804, Davout served in every major campaign of the Empire except those in Spain. See Comte Vigier, *Davout: Maréchal d'Empire* (Paris, 1898).

³ Davout tried to refuse the administrative position offered him at the beginning of the Hundred Days declaring that since war was certain he could best serve the emperor on the battlefield. He even pointed out that he had many enemies in the army, that dealing with people was not one of his strong points, and that he tended to be severe. But Napoleon, after telling him that his wife and son were still in Vienna and would not be joining him in Paris, declared to the marshal: "I am alone, alone before Europe. This is my situation! Will you also abandon me?" To this the Marshal immediately replied without hesitation: "Sire, there is only one answer I can make, I accept the ministry!" See Davout, *Correspondance du Maréchal Davout*, ed. Charles de Mazade (Paris, 1885), IV, 351; hereafter referred to as *Corresp. Davout*.

⁴ Davout's principal achievements along these lines were his organization and training of the III Corps of the army during 1802-5; his organization of the military forces in the Duchy of Warsaw (1807-9) and of the Grande Armée of 1812 (1811-12); and his organization of the XIII Corps and the 32nd Military District for the defense of Hamburg (1813-14).

⁵ The task of doubling the size of the army and equipping, training, and reorganizing it fell heavily on the shoulders of the minister of war. Everything was in short supply—men, arms, clothing, shoes, and in particular horses.

⁶ Davout, "Après Waterloo—Paris," *Revue de Paris*, IV (Dec. 1897), 706-7. During his retirement, after the Second Restoration, Davout began to write his memoirs. Only three chapters have survived, and it may well be that he had not written any more than three. Chapter 2 (on the Egyptian campaign) and chapter 3 (on the last phase of the Italian campaign of 1800) are in the Archives of the Ministry of War at the Chateau de Vincennes (K¹ 100). The chapter on the Second Restoration was published in two articles by the marshal's great-grandson, Comte Vigier, in *Revue de Paris*, IV (Dec. 1897), 705-43; V (Jan. 1898), 151-72.

same day the representatives declared themselves to be in permanent session and that any attempt to dissolve them would be an act of high treason.⁷

At this point Davout seemed to realize that the Empire could not survive and that any attempt to prolong it would lead to civil war. "The moment to act had passed."⁸ He therefore made it known that he would not support the use of force against the elected representatives of the people. "The resolution of the representatives," he readily admitted, "was illegal and unconstitutional; but it was a completed act against which there now remained only the use of brutal force."⁹ Napoleon, after unsuccessfully attempting to secure the backing of the Chamber of Representatives, abdicated in favor of his son, the king of Rome.¹⁰

The two chambers nominally accepted the four-year-old Napoleon II, who was with his mother in Vienna, as his father's successor and then appointed a five-man Commission of Government¹¹ to act as an executive in the child's absence. Although Carnot had received the greatest number of votes in the balloting, Fouché outmaneuvered him and became president of the commission. The former minister of police wished to be the principal tool by which the king was restored to his throne, and by thus ingratiating himself to the court, secure a position in the new cabinet of ministers. He had not been caught unprepared by Waterloo. Indeed, he had not believed that Napoleon could consolidate his position on the battlefield.¹² He had been in contact with Talleyrand at Vienna, the British government in London, and the exiled Bourbon court at Ghent. He had also released the royalist agent Baron Eugène de Vitrolles,¹³ whom Napoleon had confined in the Abbaye.

Vitrolles immediately established himself as the king's representative in Paris, although in fact he had no authority to speak for Louis XVIII, who believed him to be still in prison. Nevertheless, his

⁷ *Moniteur*, June 22, 1815.

⁸ Davout, "Après Waterloo—Paris," p. 709.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Bertier de Sauvigny, *Bourbon Restoration*, pp. 106-7; Houssaye, 1815, III, 62-65.

¹¹ The five members of the Commission of Government were Fouché, Carnot, Nicolas Quinette, Louis Caulaincourt, and General Paul Grenier.

¹² See Madelin, *Fouché*, II, 369-79.

¹³ Vitrolles had been sent by the king to the south of France to organize royalist support when news reached Paris that Napoleon had returned from Elba. One of the most active supporters of the royal cause, he was captured and imprisoned first in the dungeon at the Chateau de Vincennes and then at l'Abbaye. See Eugène de Vitrolles, *Mémoires et relations politiques du Baron de Vitrolles* (Paris, 1884), III, 1-43.

house became the center of royalist activity in the capital. Of those who frequented the home of Vitrolles, Marshal Nicolas Oudinot, Duke of Reggio, was one of the most influential. Oudinot, who could look back upon an impressive military record during the Revolution and the Empire, had refused employment during the Hundred Days and had retired to his estate in the country after Napoleon's return from Elba.¹⁴ After Waterloo he came to Paris, where he was quickly denounced to the minister of war by Fouché as a dangerous royalist.

Davout sent at once (June 24) for Oudinot, an old friend, and received from him his word of honor that he would not lead a royalist coup d'état.¹⁵ Having settled this matter, the two men discussed at length the complex problems facing the nation. Oudinot then informed Davout that "he was authorized to tell him on the part of the King, that he Louis [XVIII] regarded him as a man useful to France in the position in which the nation found itself."¹⁶ In fact, Oudinot continued, the king was asking the minister of war if there was not a proposition he wished to make to him. Davout was given to believe that this invitation came by way of Vitrolles, who had full authority to speak for Louis XVIII.¹⁷ Davout at once sat down and penned a letter stating the conditions under which he, and he believed the army and government also, would accept the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty. "The King must enter Paris," he wrote, "without the aid of foreign troops, who must not approach within thirty leagues of the capital; the two chambers and the army must be conserved until an armistice is concluded; a total disregard of all discussions, votes, and legislative acts relative to the events of the past week; and an assurance of the security of Napoleon and his family."¹⁸

This is the first indication that Davout would accept the restoration of the king. Undoubtedly Oudinot exercised some influence over the decision, which reflected an acceptance of reality rather than pro-royalist sympathies. Davout had no intention of playing Fouché's game. He was not interested in personal gains¹⁹ but in salvaging the best possible settlement for France and the army, both of which he saw to be in the greatest danger. His relationship with the government

¹⁴ *Corresp. Davout*, no. 1487, Davout to Oudinot, March 21, 1815, IV, 359-60; and no. 1510, Davout to Oudinot, March 28, 1815, IV, 375.

¹⁵ Davout, "Après Waterloo—Paris," p. 721.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ See further discussion below and Houssaye, 1815, III, 413.

of Louis XVIII during the first restoration had been cool at best. He had been accused of ordering the troops under his command at Hamburg to fire on the white flag of the House of Bourbon during the siege of that city in the spring of 1814. Although he had cleared his name of the charge,²⁰ he had not been welcome at court, nor had he sought service with the king. He could expect little gratitude from the royalists after his major rôle in the government of the Hundred Days. Furthermore, the conditions, which he naïvely believed the king might accept, would in no way have endeared him to the court. Still he had crossed over the line; and from this point on he worked to secure a peaceful return of Louis XVIII, but *always* under such conditions as would save the honor of the army.²¹

Oudinot acted as a liaison between the minister of war and the royalist agent, and even arranged a meeting between the two men. However, as Vitrolles could make no firm commitment without the express approval of the king and communications with the court behind the Allied lines were erratic, nothing resulted from these negotiations.

On June 27 Davout took another major step towards reestablishing the monarchy. With the Anglo-Prussian armies advancing on Paris and the remnants of the French army from Waterloo and Marshal Emmanuel Grouchy's undefeated²² corps falling back under the walls of the capital, Fouché called a conference at the Tuileries which included the Commission of Government, the council of ministers, and leading representatives of the two chambers. Fouché presided over this council and after opening it with a brief but discouraging description of the existing state of affairs, he declared that he saw little hope for resistance. He then asked those gathered to give the Commission of Government the benefit of their thoughts about the best course of action to be followed. "When all of those persons, of whom some had nothing to say and others dared not speak, had exchanged vague words, Davout demanded to be heard."²³ He declared that after having

²⁰ Davout was also accused of having taken money from the Bank of Hamburg and of having made the name of the French people odious during the five-month siege (Dec. 1813–April 1814). In the summer of 1814 he was invited by the king to answer these charges against him. In his *Address au roi* (Paris, 1814) he explained his conduct to the satisfaction of Louis XVIII.

²¹ The final submission of the army which Davout signed on July 14 contained no conditions. See further discussion below.

²² Grouchy had commanded the right wing of the Army of the North on June 17-18. He had pursued the retreating Prussian army after its defeat at the battle of Ligny (June 16) and had not taken part in the battle of Waterloo.

²³ Houssaye, *1815*, III, 180. On this meeting see also the "Procès-Verbal des Séances

studied thoroughly the military situation from the point of view of numbers, matériel, morale of the French army, and the rapid advance of the enemy, he was convinced that there was little point in resistance. "In order to avoid the greatest catastrophe," he said straightforwardly, "it is necessary to rally to the King upon obtaining from him certain essential guarantees."²⁴ His acceptance of the king was, as in his dealings with Oudinot and Vitrolles, based on Louis' acceptance of conditions; and he expounded at length on these guarantees, article by article, which he believed must accompany a Bourbon restoration. The majority of those present were in agreement with the minister of war. Only a few, notably Carnot and A.-C. Thibaudeau, a leading member of the Chamber of Peers, expressed opposition.²⁵

The military situation was growing more critical with each passing day. By June 28 the Prussian cavalry had reached the plains of Saint-Denis within sight of Paris.²⁶ The Chamber of Representatives was paralyzed by indecision; and Fouché, who did not wish to see a military solution before he had attended his own personal political ends, was making no apparent progress. Davout was becoming disgusted with the intrigues of the politicians, so many of whom were guided by personal interests. To save Paris, the nation, and the army from the catastrophe which was about to engulf them he believed that it was necessary to stop the fighting and bring back the king. Neither of these conclusions had come easily or willingly to a professional soldier who had no love for the Bourbon dynasty. Yet, as he wrote to Fouché on June 28: "My motives are inspired by the future; I have conquered my prejudices and my convictions. The greatest necessity and inward conviction has led me to believe that there is no other way to save our nation."²⁷

That same evening Fouché answered the minister of war by authorizing him to enter into negotiations with the enemy for a cessation of hostilities "making all sacrifices which are compatible with

de la Commission de Gouvernement," June 27, 1815, Archives nationales (AN), AF IV, 1933; and Davout, "Après Waterloo—Paris," p. 722.

²⁴ "Procès-Verbal de la Séance de la Commission de Gouvernement," June 27, 1815 (AN, AF IV, 1933); and A.-C. Thibaudeau, *Mémoires* (Paris, 1913), p. 526.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ After the battle of Waterloo, Wellington, whose army had borne the burden of the fighting and had suffered heavy casualties, deferred to Blücher the principal rôle of pursuing the shattered French army. Thus he was at least two days' march behind Blücher when the Prussians reached Paris.

²⁷ *Corresp. Davout*, no. 1770, Davout to Fouché, June 28, 1815, IV, 578; and Davout, "Après Waterloo—Paris," p. 725.

your duty and dignity."²⁸ The latter statement was designed to place full responsibility on Davout in the event all did not go well with the negotiations. The following morning the Commission of Government, with Fouché presiding, added an additional restriction. "I need not tell you," wrote Fouché in a second letter to Davout, "that your armistice must be purely military and that political questions must not be involved."²⁹

Davout sent Generals François Kellermann and Louis Tourton with a letter addressed to General Gebhard von Blücher and the Duke of Wellington in which he reminded them that since the Allies had declared that they were making war against the Emperor Napoleon and since the emperor had abdicated and departed from Paris, no reason to continue the war now existed. He therefore requested an immediate cessation of hostilities.³⁰ The Prussian commander indicated very clearly that he was not interested in halting his victorious march on Paris;³¹ Wellington expressed a desire to end the fighting but declared that there was no head of government with which to negotiate.³²

With the allies, particularly Blücher, preparing to attack Paris, Davout came under suspicion of being a royalist sympathizer when it became known that Vitrolles was present at army headquarters at La Villette.³³ To offset these suspicions the marshal signed a declaration drawn up by a number of generals proclaiming the army's patriotism and its desire to be in accord with the representatives of the people

²⁸ "Procès-verbal de la Séance de la Commission de Gouvernement," June 28, 1815, AN, AF IV, 1833.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, June 29, 1815.

³⁰ *Corresp. Davout*, no. 1774, Davout to Blücher and Wellington, June 30, 1815, IV, 581-82.

³¹ "It is an error to believe that every reason for continuing hostilities between the Allied powers and France has ceased because Napoleon has renounced the throne," wrote Blücher on July 1, 1815, "he has renounced it only in favor of his son; and the resolution of the Allied powers excludes not only Napoleon from the throne, but also all of the members of his family." As quoted in Marquise de Blocqueville, *Le Maréchal Davout, Prince d'Eckmühl, raconté par les siens et par lui-même*. IV: *Un Dernier Commandement, l'exil et la mort* (Paris, 1880), 225-26.

³² Wellington to Davout, July 1, 1815, *Dispatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington, 1799-1815* (London, 1852), VIII, 181-82.

³³ Vitrolles had come to army headquarters at La Villette to discuss with Davout the part he might play in helping to bring about an armistice. While Davout, Vitrolles, and Grouchy were discussing the possibility of sending a letter to the Allied commanders, a deputation from the two chambers arrived, with several generals in their numbers, to present an address to the army which had been voted by the assemblies. Although he had ample time to escort Vitrolles out a back door or to conceal him in the large house being used as headquarters, Davout chose to receive the representatives and officers in the presence of the acknowledged royalist. For accounts of this affair see Vitrolles, *Mémoires*, III, 81-89, and Houssaye, *1815*, III, 240-42.

in their efforts to save France. This document, which was sent to the Chamber of Representatives, also declared that the army would never accept the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty.³⁴ Then two days later (July 2) Davout wrote a repudiation of the address declaring that it had been altered to include the anti-Bourbon statement after he had signed it.³⁵ "It is for you, the guardians of this great nation's destiny," he declared in his letter to the Chamber of Representatives, "to choose a head of government who will restore happiness; it is for us, devoted warriors, that it is reserved to execute without question the resolutions which you dictate."³⁶

Davout's repudiation of the controversial address was received by the president of the Chamber of Representatives the next day, July 3, but not until after the capitulation of the city of Paris (morning of July 3). Historians have generally interpreted the repudiation as merely a political expedient on the part of one who had championed a losing cause.³⁷ However, Davout had declared three days earlier that he would support the return of the king if certain conditions were accepted. In his memoirs, written shortly after these eventful days (although not published until 1897-98), he wrote that he had not been in favor of the address even as a nonpolitical statement; yet, "as we were on the eve of battle, the Marshal [himself] feared that a display of dissension, a disagreement among the chiefs, would only serve to weaken and demoralize the army."³⁸

³⁴ *Moniteur*, July 2, 1815.

³⁵ In his memoirs Davout wrote of the affair: "This address was already written and signed by the Marshal [himself] when it was noticed that there had been an omission and that several modifications were necessary before the final copy would be ready. The Marshal did not have a moment to lose as his presence was needed without delay on the left bank [of the Seine]. Before leaving La Villette he signed a sheet of paper which was designated as the one to have the address written on it in the terms upon which they had agreed. A general, who had libeled him in Belgium, now abused his confidence, which gives some idea of the lack of scruples when political passions are aroused. He substituted for the first part of the address an entirely new statement, drafted by himself, which was nothing more than a violent diatribe against the Bourbons—a declaration that the army would never consent to submit to their yoke. It was useless to insist on using such inappropriate language on the part of the army when it was perfectly evident that, sooner or later, the return of the King would be the inevitable result of this crisis" (p. 733).

³⁶ Davout, "Après Waterloo—Paris," p. 735.

³⁷ Henry Lachouque (*Last Days of Napoleon's Empire* [London, 1966]) states that Davout's retraction was the result of his learning that the Chamber of Representatives intended to print 30,000 copies of the address (p. 157). Houssaye, though sympathetic toward Davout, doubts the validity of the marshal's memoirs on this point (p. 253). Jean Thiry (*Les Débuts de la Seconde Restauration* [Paris, 1947]), another Bonapartist, writes that Davout "dared not refuse to sign the document himself so as not to increase the suspicion already weighted against him" (p. 11).

³⁸ Davout, "Après Waterloo—Paris," p. 734.

Henry Lachouque failed to understand the character of Davout when he wrote of him during these critical days that "civil courage has nothing in common with military courage."³⁹ The marshal was as straightforward and blunt in political matters as he was in military affairs. He had declared himself in favor of a Bourbon restoration before the Commission of Government and representatives of the chambers. He had received generals and representatives of the chambers in the presence of Vitrolles, a known royalist. Furthermore, his actions after the capitulation of Paris give no indication of a man seeking either the favor, or even acceptance, of the restored king.

The events leading to the capitulation of Paris were primarily military, not political. On June 30, after feeling out the defenses of the capital on the right bank, Blücher ordered his army to march around Paris by way of Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Versailles in order to attack the city on its weakest side. But the overconfident field marshal allowed his advance guard to outdistance its supporting infantry, and Davout ordered General Rémi Exelmans to check this rapid advance. Exelmans, with superior numbers, fell upon the unsuspecting Prussians; and in the course of a running battle which ensued virtually the entire brigade commanded by Colonel Sohr was either killed, wounded, or captured.⁴⁰ This brilliantly executed maneuver on the part of Exelmans, which led many to believe—or hope—that Davout would immediately launch a full-scale attack against the overextended and exposed flank of the Prussian army,⁴¹ did little more than slow up the enemy's advance and make him more cautious. By the afternoon of July 2, Blücher's forward units were attacking French positions at Sèvres and Issy.

At the same time Exelmans' cavalry was driving the enemy from Versailles, Fouché was holding a meeting at the Tuileries of the Commission of Government and military representatives from the two chambers. The soldiers present generally agreed that Paris could not be defended and that the wisest course of action would be for the army to evacuate the city. In order to take this momentous step Fouché needed more supporting evidence to convince the Chamber of Representatives that the military situation was hopeless and that the only salvation for France was to recognize Louis XVIII. Thereupon he

³⁹ Lachouque, *Last Days*, p. 157.

⁴⁰ See Houssaye, *1815*, III, 262-66; and Lachouque, *Last Days*, pp. 160-62.

⁴¹ Davout did not believe that the overall military or political situation had changed. Even if he could win a battle he did not believe that the campaign could have been won. See further discussion below.

wrote, with the commission's approval, to Davout demanding that a council of war be held to answer these questions: Are you able to defend all of the approaches of Paris, those on the left bank of the Seine as well as the right? Are you able to fight at all points at the same time without compromising the fate of a million persons? In a word, for how much longer can you answer for the fate of the capital?⁴² These questions were worded in such a manner as to make the military completely responsible for the capitulation of Paris. As Davout pointed out in his memoirs, no general can *assure* his government of victory before a battle.⁴³

The council of war was held during the night of July 1-2 at Davout's headquarters at La Villette. After soliciting the opinion of the marshals and corps commanders present,⁴⁴ he wrote an answer to the president of the commission. "The army is able to defend the city," he wrote, "but not indefinitely; it will not be exposed to a lack of food or shelter; [but while] it is difficult for the army to be attacked at all points simultaneously; should this occur, there would be no possibility of resistance."⁴⁵ Thus, as to the fate of Paris the commander in chief could only reply "that there can be no guarantee in this regard."⁴⁶

Davout knew very well that his response gave the government the opportunity it sought to blame the army for giving up Paris without a fight. "I had no doubts," he wrote later, "but that a battle could have been won beneath the walls of Paris and, by a momentary success, have consoled the sorrow of the nation. If I had listened only to the interest of my own military glory, I would not have hesitated to profit from the opportunity that was offered me. But it would only have served my own interests. The political and military situation had not changed, for the enemy had enormous reinforcements which would soon join them and give them a numerical superiority. We

⁴² Procès verbal de la Commission de Gouvernement," July 1, 1815, AN, AF IV, 1933; also see Davout, "Après Waterloo—Paris," p. 728.

⁴³ Davout, "Après Waterloo—Paris," p. 731.

⁴⁴ Present at the council of war were Marshals André Masséna, Nicolas Soult, Jeannot de Moncey, Adolphe Mortier, Kellermann, François Lefebvre, Philbert Sérurier, Oudinot, Gouvion Saint-Cyr, and Grouchy; and Generals Dominique Vandamme, Drouet d'Erlon, Honoré Reille, Antoine Drouot, Gazan, Sylvain Valée, and Duponthon. Marshal Macdonald had been invited to attend the council but did not. Marshal Michel Ney was not invited; "Accused of treason," said Caulaincourt, "he perhaps no longer felt safe in the middle of these soldiers. Furthermore, he had no command during the defense of Paris nor the retreat behind the Loire." Houssaye, *1815*, III, 277.

⁴⁵ AN, AF IV, 1936.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

would still have been forced to treat [for terms] after a useless shedding of blood."⁴⁷

Early on the morning of July 3 the Prussian army, now in strength in the Issy-Vanves section of the line on the left bank, prepared to continue its harassment of the capital. Davout had shifted all but a few units of his army to meet this threat and, in fact, having a superiority of men and guns at the point of contact, was himself preparing to attack the enemy. This was the battle he had tried to avoid; but failing to obtain an armistice and given the aggressiveness of Blücher, he now believed that he had no alternative but to fight. The two armies were already engaged in preliminary actions when the Baron Louis Bignon, undersecretary of state for foreign affairs, arrived at army headquarters, which had been moved to Montrouge on the left bank of the Seine. Bignon announced that he had been sent by the government with full powers to negotiate the capitulation of Paris. With mixed emotions Davout ordered a halt to his preparations and secured a ceasefire so that the talks could begin. He was relieved that a useless slaughter—one which would have had no effect on the outcome of the campaign—had been avoided; but he also knew that the army strongly desired one last battle, and that, deprived of it, the stability which had been attained since Waterloo would be destroyed.

By the terms of the capitulation the French army evacuated the city of Paris and its fortifications and withdrew to the south bank of the Loire. With the army deprived of the opportunity to avenge the humiliating defeat at Waterloo, morale and discipline sank to a new low. Thousands of men deserted during the dark days that followed. "I have 81 deserters from the 33rd, and 87 from the 86th," wrote General Pierre Berthezene, "in my artillery the desertion is so high that there remain only six men for each train."⁴⁸ Davout, who resigned his post as minister of war, was, upon his request, given command of the army,⁴⁹ which was styled the Army of the Loire.⁵⁰ Under his orders were between 75,000 and 100,000 men.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Davout, "Après Waterloo—Paris," pp. 738-39.

⁴⁸ Berthezene to Davout, July 7, 1815, Archives historiques du Ministère de la Guerre (AHMG), C15 8.

⁴⁹ "Procès verbal de la Commission de Gouvernement," July 6, 1815, AN, AF IV, 1933; and *Corresp. Davout*, no. 1779, Davout to the Commission of the Government, July 6, 1815, IV, 588.

⁵⁰ During the Hundred Days the army commanded by General Maximilien Lamarque, which was operating in the west-central (lower Loire) district of France, used the term "Army of the Loire." Davout's new command now included Lamarque's troops as well as those in the various garrisons of the principal towns and cities south of the Loire.

⁵¹ Determination of the size of the Army of the Loire is difficult because desertions

Before leaving the Parisian area (July 7) Davout appointed a commission of three to represent the army in the capital and to negotiate its submission to the new head of state.⁵² In order that this commission be representative of the army, rather than himself as commander of the army, he appointed General Etienne Gérard (infantry), Marshal Kellermann, Duke of Valmy (cavalry), and General François Haxo (special services). The representatives (Kellermann did not join the other two until July 10) went first to Fouché. But this opportunist, who wanted no part of the army, which he knew was unpopular with the Bourbons, informed them that the Commission of Government was no longer functioning, and that the king had returned to Paris on July 8 and had formed a new government. Therefore, he advised them to see the new minister of war, Marshal Gouvion Saint-Cyr.

The army and its commander in chief now found themselves in a most awkward position. "By its sentiment and tradition," Davout wrote, "the army was a national one; and yet it did not know whom to obey or which cause to champion. An army without a government is a sort of monster which does not understand itself. It would be a reproduction of those bands, those great companies, with which Duguesclin liberated France during the darkest days of our history."⁵³ Its commissioners found neither friends nor sympathy in Paris. The press referred to it as the "Brigands of the Loire"; while the monarchists quite correctly viewed it with suspicion as being Bonapartist and antiroyalist.

On July 10 Kellermann arrived in Paris with new instructions for the commissioners. "The army is ready to swear fidelity to the King and to the laws which govern the nation," Davout wrote, with the approval of twenty-two generals and forty-four colonels and senior officers. "It demands only that which honor ordains: that no Frenchman be proscribed, nor deprived of either his rank or his civil or military position; and that the army be conserved in its existing state until the foreigners have left France."⁵⁴ When these conditions were presented to Saint-Cyr, the war minister replied that it would not be dignified for the king to negotiate with the army and that it should submit to him unconditionally. "I promise you," he told the commis-

continued throughout the month of July, and the archives include no general "situation" for the army. See Houssaye, *1815*, III, 406.

⁵² *Corresp. Davout*, no. 1780, Davout to Generals Gérard, Haxo, and de Valmy, July 7, 1815, IV, 588-89.

⁵³ Davout, "Après Waterloo—L'Armée de la Loire," *Revue de Paris*, V (Jan. 1898), 154.

⁵⁴ Letter addressed to the Comtes de Valmy, Gérard, and Haxo, dated July 9, 1815, and signed by Davout and some twenty senior officers. AHMG, C15 8.

sioners, "that you will be content with the King, and that he will probably grant more than you demand."⁵⁵ When they informed the minister that their instructions required guarantees, Saint-Cyr arranged for their demands to be put before the king and his council of ministers. On July 11 they received a negative reply. The new government absolutely refused to enter into any form of discussion with the representatives of the army until after they had submitted to the authority of the king.

The staunch position taken by the government reflected the unconditional submission of General Jean-Baptiste Milhaud, commander of the IV Cavalry Corps. On July 9 this officer, with the support of about a dozen of his subordinates, had written to Saint-Cyr offering the submission of his army corps. This action was interpreted by the king and his ministers as an indication that the army was not solidly behind Davout and the commissioners who were demanding concessions. The marshal heard of Milhaud's submission on July 13 and immediately realized that there was no longer any possibility of obtaining the conditions he had desired. He, therefore, wrote to Gérard, Haxo, and Kellermann: "You have gained by your conduct the esteem of the entire French army. . . . If you judge that a pure and simple submission would be useful to our unhappy nation, make it; but save the honor of the army, because without that it would no longer be of any use, it would break up entirely."⁵⁶

Yet another factor had to be taken into consideration in offering the submission of the army at this time. Neither Austria nor Russia had taken part in the negotiations which had led to the armistice and capitulation of Paris on July 3. Their armies were still advancing from the east toward the Loire. It was at best questionable as to whether or not they would stop at the river or force a crossing and continue the war. If the army placed itself under the king, whose government would then encompass the entire French nation, it would be difficult for *his* allies to continue hostilities against *his* army.

The unconditional submission of the army was dated July 14.⁵⁷ Virtually all high-ranking officers of the Army of the Loire affixed their signatures to the document.⁵⁸ Its announcement, coupled with the

⁵⁵ Gérard, Kellermann, and Haxo to Davout, July 10, 1815, AN, F^{1c} 1. 26.

⁵⁶ *Corresp. Davout*, no. 1788, Davout to Gérard, Haxo, de Valmy, July 13, 1815, IV, 596-97.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 1790, to the king, July 14, 1815, 598-99.

⁵⁸ Davout had copies of the submission drawn up and sent to corps and division headquarters to be signed. These documents are conserved in the Ministry of War's archives at the Château de Vincennes (C¹⁵ 8).

replacement of the tricolored cockade by the unpopular white cockade of the Bourbons, caused another wave of desertions and resignations.⁵⁹ Davout continued to work to save the remnants of the army in the hope that it would strengthen the hand of the new government in its negotiations with the victorious Allies.⁶⁰ But in less than two weeks he received news of the Ordinance of July 24⁶¹ and resigned his command.

The ordinance was a direct contradiction of the Proclamation of Cambrai,⁶² which the king had issued upon his return from exile on June 28. In the proclamation Louis had declared that he would allow the legislature to decide who should be punished for his actions during the Hundred Days and that no one who had remained loyal to the crown until March 23 (that is two days after Napoleon had reinstated himself in the capital) would be included. However, pressure from the Allies, who were taking a much harder line in 1815 than they had in 1814, coupled with a desire to relieve tensions which had been building up as the result of rumors as to which, and how many, names would be on such a list, persuaded the king to act. As it finally appeared—having undergone some revision—the ordinance provided for the proscription of nineteen army officers accused of treason and ordered to be tried by military courts, and thirty-eight civilians, who were placed under house arrest until such time as their fate could be determined by the legislature.

This was precisely what Davout had tried to prevent by attaching guarantees to the submission of the army. Realizing that he had been tricked and despite the fact that with Fouché's assistance he had made it possible for all of the officers on the list to avoid apprehension, the marshal poured out his bitter disappointment in a letter to the minister of war. After citing the numerous assurances he had received that there would be no proscription but that at worst "several persons would momentarily be deprived of residing in Paris and of approaching the King," he wrote: "I see in the first article the names of Generals Gilly, Grouchy, Clausel and Laborde. If they have been placed there for their conduct at Pont-Saint-Esprit, Lyon, Bordeaux, and

⁵⁹ See the correspondence to Davout in AHMG, C15 8.

⁶⁰ "At last my great ordeal has ended." Davout wrote to his wife on July 14, after the formal submission of the army. "I have conserved for the King and for my unfortunate country a fine army which will render great service in the negotiations which, I hope, will soon begin." Blocqueville, *Le Maréchal Davout*, IV, 260-61.

⁶¹ Published in *Moniteur*, July 26, 1815.

⁶² See Duke of Wellington, *Supplement: Dispatches, Correspondence, and Memoranda of Arthur Duke of Wellington*. X: *Waterloo, The Campaign in France*. . . (London, 1863), 615-16.

Toulouse, it is an error, because they were only obeying orders which I addressed to them in my capacity as Minister of War. It is therefore necessary to substitute my name for theirs. The same observation applies to General Allix, if he was proscribed for his conduct at Lille: for Colonel Marbot, for that which he did at Valenciennes; for General Lamarque, who could have no more against him than the pacification of the Vendée."⁶³

Disappointed, disillusioned, and angry, no longer able to influence the course of events, and determined not to preside over the dismemberment of the army he had worked so hard to preserve, Davout resigned his command of the Army of the Loire and requested permission to retire to his estate at Savigny.⁶⁴ During his last days with the army he did everything possible to warn those officers who were in danger of being arrested and to help them to leave France. "The victims," he later wrote, "such as Colonel Labedoyère and Marshal Ney, had had both the possibility and the means to evade their fate."⁶⁵ On August 1 Marshal Alexandre Macdonald, Duke of Taranto, arrived at Bourges and assumed command of the army, and Davout's military career came to an end.

Davout had labored tirelessly to achieve the political and military settlement which would most benefit the nation and the army. From the battle of Waterloo until he was relieved of command of the Army of the Loire, Davout did all that was within his power to save France from the wrath of the victorious Allies and the army from the vengeance of the returning royalists. He had prevented the horrors that would have accompanied a siege of Paris. He had assured the peaceful restoration of Louis XVIII by preventing the army from championing the Bonapartist cause; and he had rallied the demoralized army and kept at least the majority of its troops in their ranks. He had failed, although not without a supreme effort, to prevent the proscription of the officer corps and the eventual disintegration of the army. His recompense was the disdain of the restored royalist government, which sent him into temporary exile, and harsh criticism from the Bonapartists for allegedly having deserted the emperor in his time of need.

⁶³ *Corresp. Davout*, no. 1824, Davout to the minister of war, July 27, 1815, IV, 629-32; and Davout, "Après Waterloo—l'Armée de la Loire," pp. 165-67.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Davout, "Après Waterloo—l'Armée de la Loire," p. 168.