

Chapter 4 : Jean Bernadotte (III) (1792-1799) – War, diplomacy & politics.

*Where the greatest danger
is the greatest honour.*

Gambattista Marini (1569-1625)

France and neighbouring Britain, Austria, Prussia, Spain, Russia and Sardinia 1792-1815 fought seven separate wars. As in World War I, it was difficult to inflict a decisive defeat on the enemy. Jean was very active. However, what has been most talked about is not individual victories but his rapid advance.

1791	[Volunteers from the National Guard, about 20 thousand men.]
1792	[Volunteers from the National Guard, about 80 thousand men.]
1793	[Limited military service, about 300 thousand men.]
1794	[General conscription, about 1.5 million men.]
1792-03-26	Lieutenant.
1792-11-30	Regimental adjutant.
1793-07-18	Company commander (Captain; 100 infantry).
1794-02-08	Battalion Commander (Major; 500 infantry).
1794-04-04	Half Brigade Commander (Colonel; 3000 men; supplies & foot soldiers).
1794-06-29	Brigadier General.
1794-10-22	Division general (8.5-13.6 thousand men; supplies, infantry, cavalry & artillery).

The advance was a consequence of the manpower supply. In 1789, France had about 1,000 generals, but the majority were overage, incompetent or unreliable. The officers who showed initiative rose in the ranks & replaced them. From 1791 to July 1793, no fewer than 593 generals were replaced. When necessary the new generals were also replaced. In the second half of 1793, five of Jean's generals were guillotined for incompetence. Jean initially complained that no one noticed him, and then that his promotion was so rapid that he too risked being guillotined.

France declared war on Austria April 20, 1792, but the fighting did not begin until a bit into 1793. The French forces were a mixture of volunteers (regular soldiers who had signed on for 2 years) & fast-track conscripts. Jean's duties were training, administration & inspection. He won his first laurels as a disciplinarian. The baptism of fire was on May 17, 1793 - an attack against the Austrian positions at Rülzheim:

Arrived at the battlefield, and before anyone had time to spread out, because the order was not yet given from the vanguard, I heard a general murmur from this vanguard; piercing cries of »sauve qui peut!», everything is lost! was heard; fleeing horsemen spread anxiety and fear among the troops, the artillery fled and the confusion seemed complete, for a disruption of the vanguard, had so quickly spread through the ranks, that the platoons, in the general ruckus started firing at each other, while others sought to save themselves by fleeing. In this sad spectacle I am gripped by indignation and resentment, and when I see no leader around me able to restore order, I hasten to the

mid of the already disordered battalion; I cry, I curse, I beseech, I command; The confusion is such that they do not listen to me. A thousand shots are heard, and I only escape more of them by using my rapier to turn the cannons in the right direction (redressant les canons). I fly to the rear of the battalion, who now has become the vanguard; My horse goes down, but I will not let go. »Soldiers,» I cry, »This is the assembly point, forced to give way to the fierce movement, you shall not go any further. Ye shall fight; I am convinced of that; your bayonet and your courage is your defence. Let the enemy flee as the cowards they are, these men are unworthy of freedom, but let us, faithful to our station, die if we must, but while shouting our battle cry: Live the Republic! Live the nation! Let us join together, my friends, and advance against these paid slaves, let us go against them with the certainty of defeating them, and we shall prevail!» Speak, convince, act, be obeyed, all this was the work of a moment; The soldiers listen to me, they again and again repeat: »let us go against the enemy, led by the adjutant of the regiment!» I forced them into battle order, and I stop the confusion that could have spread to all six battalions, behind us. I summon the artillerists to their stations and command the guards to shoot those artillerists that try to escape.¹

Not only did the conscripts buckle in the face of enemy fire, they also considered it under their revolutionary dignity to take orders. There are many accounts of how the lynched disagreeable officers. One of these depictions includes Jean:

The death of his intimate friend General Goguet [april 21, 1794], afforded him another opportunity of displaying that superior strength of mind and character with which nature had endued him. Prior to the Revolution Goguet was a physician. A desire of making his fortune had led him to the army : abilities, considerable information, daring spirit, and exalted patriotism, brought him through the space of a year from the rank of common soldier to the eminent station of general of division. With all his talents, he was deficient in the experience necessary in the rank he held, in order successfully to command his troops. This defect proved fatal to him. In a rout, his soldiers, deaf to his voice, running away with the utmost precipitation, he lost his presence of mind to such a degree, as to endeavour to rally his soldiers by blows of the sabre : a soldier whom he had thus struck, fired straight upon him with his musket, and killed him upon the spot.

Bernadotte informed of the sad fate of his friend, in whose division he was employed, went the very same day to the regiment's camp in which the assassin served, and required that he should be arrested and punished in the most exemplary manner. Both officers and soldiers answered him, that the author of Goguet's death was not guilty, as he had only repelled force by force. The impunity attending such a circumstance might give rise to the most dangerous consequences to discipline : this powerful motive, and an anxious desire to avenge his friend, induced Bernadotte to persist in his demand : he requested the colonel to assemble the officers and subalterns; they in consequence met immediately. Bernadotte convinced them how reprehensible they would be in shielding the assassin of their general and their friend from the severity of the law, and proved to them, that the result of this culpable indulgence would expose them to a similar fate, should they act in conformity to a regulation which authorizes the striking of any one running away from the enemy. The

¹ Wrangel 1889: ss. 96-97. [Brev från Jean B Bernadotte till brodern Jean E, 1793-05-26.]

murderer [according to other data his captain] was arrested, condemned, and immediately shot.²

Höjer comments: “More than forty years later, Touchard-Lafosse, Bernadotte's biographer, told us that his firm intervention against Gogue's murderers had provoked an indictment from the Welfare Committee, and that as a result the people's representative Goupilleau and Bernadotte's commander, General Ferrand, were ordered to arrest him and send him to Paris, where his fate could hardly be anything but one. This order was issued immediately before the battle on floreal 7, but for practical reasons was not to be executed until after the battle. Bernadotte was left free to command, albeit under surveillance. In the battle he distinguished himself to such a degree that at the end of the day Goupilleau, instead of having him arrested, recommended him for promotion. The Welfare Committee then appointed him divisional general, but Bernadotte declined this promotion as illegal. This anecdote is completely unknown to Bernadotte's former biographer, several of whom have worked in his service, and no trace of it appears to be found in the colossal publication of the correspondence of the Welfare Committee and its agents. It should therefore be regarded with clear mistrust.”³

The *Armée de Sambre-et-Meuse* was formed on 29 June 1794 by the merger of the Northern Army (which included Jean) and two other army corps. Jean was appointed Brigadier General & a few months later Division General. It is as such he is depicted on the so-called “Örebro portrait“. After the Rehn campaign of 1794-96, the *Armée de Sambre-et-Meuse* split. Jean's division was ordered to Italy, where the fighting continued until the end of April 1797.

All combat depictions 1792-1815, insofar as they contribute some knowledge to Jean's person & competence, have been collected into a chapter of their own, where I also make an attempt to evaluate him as divisional general & supreme commander. (See Chapter 11.) Here is only to be commented on the tremendous brutalization & emotional blunting that it meant to year after year endangering one's life. Jean was known for his contempt for death, both for his own death and for the death of others. It has not been possible to find any clear cut psychiatric symptoms, but he was repeatedly on sick leave suffering from diffuse ailments, perhaps a depression. I quote another draft memoir:

»In 1793 Bernadotte wanted a free constitution, and for this prize would have wanted to defend the monarchy. He had with horror experienced the events of August 10, 1792 [when the Tuileries Palace was stormed and the royal family was imprisoned].

»One day he was at Nahe, procuring fodder, when a courier arrived from Paris, addressed to the representative of the people of the army, Merlin de Thionville. Merlin broke the dispatch and uttered aloud to those present: »The king has been guillotined.« Bernadotte said nothing, but fell down on the horse's neck. Mrs. Merlin asked quickly: »How are you?« Bernadotte straightened himself up again, saying, »I thought I was a better Republican than I now find«. - Merlin replicated: »Your feeling does you honour!« (Merlin was otherwise one of the most ardent republicans.)

»Bernadotte was enthusiastic about the country's defence and fought for *freedom* even under the tyranny afterwards named the terror. From the front of the victorious

² Sarrazin 1813: vol. 5, s. 425.

³ Höjer 1939b: ss. 31-32.

armies, he saw one party after another rise and fall, like the bubbles on a boiling surface. Formally his headquarter was part of the government; he obeyed its commands but did not take a stand in the conflict that ravished the country; nevertheless he suffered from the rumour of the crimes that smeared the revolutionary cause. He pitied the fate of the royal family; a sentiment which, if it had been known to his surroundings, would have been a crime during these wretched times.»⁴

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On March 2-4, 1797, Jean & his army had advanced across the Alps into Italy and he was in Mantua, a few miles outside Milan, where he met his *Général en chef* & future relative Napoleon Bonaparte. There is no reliable information about the meeting. Napoleon commented on Jean's stately appearance. Jean thought that Napoleon made himself wide at the top: "I saw a man of twenty-six to twenty-seven years, who tried look like he was fifty, and such does not bode well for the Republic." Napoleon arranged for Jean to receive his share of the spoils for which Jean seemingly was very grateful. Napoleon believed in this way to have bought his loyalty - it was his usual method - but Jean never remained bribed. Much later Jean penned his memories of the meeting:

My first impression of Bonaparte was very peculiar. I saw a small figure, his posture and manner blunt (brusque). He was dressed in a coat with large pockets and with a tail reaching the calves. His face was very thin, his complexion yellowish. The hair smooth and *powdered*. The mode of expression is forceful and occasionally dismissive (tranchant). His way of being seemed very reticent. The utmost respect that was shown to him implied to me that I saw a person who would never be content to remain a mere citizen. The conditions of the Italian army were also different from those of our own armies. The commander was treated as a sovereign. The officers did not sit down in his presence, and kept a reverent distance. His wife, and sister Pauline shared the same expression of the reverence shown the *Général en chef*, who already seemed to be trying out his dictatorship role. He received his new companion in the most flattering way; as long as one did not question his superiority; it manifested itself as much through what he said as through the strange impression of his outward personality. And in the like manner he impressed all who surrounded him. He seemed to embrace me with goodwill.⁵

The much talked-about enmity seems to have been founded at a later meeting in October, where Napoleon tried to determine the strengths and weaknesses of his division general by quite mercilessly grilling Jean about his military skills.⁶ Since Napoleon had graduated from the military college in Paris, Jean was definitely at a disadvantage, he both felt & appeared like an idiot, but countered with the argument that his simple background made him a truer revolutionary general than Napoleon who was of the nobility.

After this humiliation, Jean undertook extensive self-studies in military history, politics & everything else. In the autumn of 1798, while at the university town of Giessen, he was even awarded an honorary doctorate for his studies in history, statistics and economics. Jean's knowledge in these fields became extensive, if sprawling. It amused him to act wiseacre in all contexts. He did not converse his guests. He lectured them.

⁴ Memoarutkast av Karl XIV Johan. I: Swederus 1877: ss. 475-476. [Ur Berndt von Schinkels samling.]

⁵ Memoarutkast av Karl XIV Johan. I: Swederus 1877: ss. 484-485. [Ur Berndt von Schinkels samling.]

⁶ Barton 1914: ss. 273-276.

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Jean's plans for the future were vague. I quote from the memoirs of Paul Barra, the politician. He has much to say about Jean the two years between the 18th Fructidor, 1797 & the 18th Brumaire, 1799. However, nothing he says can be interpreted as Jean at that time seeking, or even being capable, of playing a political role:

Peace, coming after a war or six years, had left a large number of generals without commands; it was a most difficult thing for the Government to satisfy all these men, who had acquired habits of activity akin to perpetual motion, and who had conceived towards the close of the war a desire for wealth, for which glory could not compensate. As it is in human nature oftentimes to deceive one's self as to one's own desires, while seeking to deceive others, many of these military men, following upon all the hardships they had endured, believed themselves to be aspiring to a well-earned rest, and sought to play the role of Cincinnatus¹. Bernadotte, who could readily be classified in the category of both deceivers and deceived, talked of nothing else but rest; he dreamed that he would like to retire to some country-place – or rather, he publicly proclaimed that to be his dream. This is at least what he was wont to say to me with the outpouring of what he was in the habit of styling the innermost thought of his “bowels.”⁷

¹ Roman consul who, having saved Rome from an invasion, is said to have retired to his farm, sated with glory.

Immediately after the Fructidor coup of September 4, 1797 (18th Fructidor), in which Barras was part of the victorious side, Jean was in Paris to assure him of his loyalty. The coup was the end of a power struggle within the directorate. A number of royalists were sent to the tropics, the dry guillotine as it came to be called. Jean was worried about sharing their fate.

[At our meeting Bernadotte remarked] that from the very time he had joined the Army of Italy with his division of the Army of Sambre-et-Meuse he had had cause to complain of Bonaparte's treatment of him; that he had, by way of a pastime, sought to stir a civil war in his army; that he had not found him, Bernadotte, who boasted of “being a Republican in his very bowels,” Republican enough – he, Bernadotte, who prided himself on being a child of the Revolution, one of the born soldiers of liberty, of that liberty to which he owed his successive promotions on the field of battle. “And yet I must confess,” he went on to say, “that I was a non-commissioned officer, and on very good terms with my colonel.” “And with your colonel's wife, I remarked, with a smile. (She was a Mme. d'A —; she had become enamoured of her sergent, who had a smart appearance, and in particular a pair of well-shaped legs: he was nicknamed “Sergeant Belle-Jambe.”) Bernadotte looked down with a modesty which nowise denied Mme. d' A — and went on to say: “I have never bowed and will never bow to any tyranny; I pride myself on being a determined Jacobin, in life and unto death.” Bernadotte told me, in support of all these fine utterances, that he had not in the least absented himself or held aloof on the 18th Fructidor, as had been unjustly said of him; he was ready to serve the Directorate if a sign had been made to him : in which case, perhaps, the aristocrats, the counter-revolutionists, the Royalists – in a word, all the monsters who do not belong to the human species, would have had a harder time with

⁷ Barras 1895: del 3, s. 170.

him than with General Augereau. "By the living God!" exclaimed our Béarnais, in a loud voice (this was his usual form of Béarnais oath), "if I had but had in front of me all those vile slaves, those satellites of tyranny, this sword so familiar to the Austrians would have made the acquaintance of the aristocrats of my country! They shall become acquainted with it, by the living God!" he repeated, in a tone which would have been heard beyond the precincts of the Luxembourg Palace had we not been in the farthest closet of my department.⁸

Jean's biographers have had difficulty with all this calculating peasant shrewdness. However, his environment seems to have expected no less. Jean was offered stations equivalent to a military governor: Pacification of Marseille and the surrounding area was a suggestion. Jean preferred a foreign command - Ile de France, Réunion, India, Ionian Islands, Portugal, Louisiana - with himself as *Général en chef*. He ended up accepting the post of ambassador to Vienna for "patriotic reasons". Jean's diplomatic career had the same background as his promotion to General. Diplomat was a noble profession. At the time of the revolution, the nobility occupied 90 percent of the senior diplomatic posts. The bourgeoisie had to settle for *chargé d'affaire* posts & like:

By 1799 the "courtesans" had resigned or had been recalled or dismissed. Individuals from what Broglie called "the secondary ranks of the former diplomatic corps" who had been unable to obtain important posts under the old regime moved up the diplomatic ladder. Even they were suspect, often under scrutiny, and were dismissed or resigned. Incompetents (not that they were exclusive to the revolutionary governments), political cronies, ideologues, and increasingly because of their growing power, army officers held diplomatic positions. Periodically the revolutionaries purged the diplomatic corps using ideology as their criteria. They attacked not only the nobles, but also those who had worked under or sympathized with the old regime, and those who had allied with particular political factions. Political ideology rather than merit or experience became the prime consideration for diplomatic appointments.

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In a candid conversation on 16 June 1798 Talleyrand complained about France's envoys. He was both dispirited and alarmed when he noted that France only had "fools" abroad. Pierre Louis Guinguené at Turin staged ridiculous scenes, Garat at Naples had become the laughing stock of Europe, P.-J.-Marie Sotin de la Coindière at Genoa made ill advised decisions as did Charles de Delacroix de Constant at The Hague. Talleyrand complained that the Directory only wanted to employ former members of the Convention - and he could have added that some of them were regicides. The result was that Europeans abhorred the French republic. As late as 1799 ideological considerations or the desire to appoint cronies or generals rather than talented or experienced diplomats still dominated nominations.⁹

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January 11 to April 15 1798, Jean was France's ambassador to Vienna, almost a Urias-posting as the two countries were preparing for yet another war. The mission was to emphasize the leading role of the French Republic. In that capacity, Jean was highly unwelcome, but dutifully cultivated his diplomatic contacts. It didn't go down well. The rest of the staff also

⁸ Barras 1895: del 3, ss. 171-172.

⁹ Frey & Frey 2004.

lacked experience, so he had little help. On April 15, Barras received a letter in which Jean asked to be replaced:

I have put my character to the test citizen director, and I am convinced that I am not suited to a diplomatic career; my organization will not suffer my remaining any longer among men whom I hate.¹⁰

The letter was written on the morning of April 13. In the afternoon of the same day the following took place: Vienna was preparing to celebrate the anniversary of volunteers taking up arms against the French when Jean had a tricolour hanging from the embassy. This was met with stone throwing. Jean tried in his usual way to harangue the crowd, about 300 people, whom he in a loud voice, read roars, and in incomprehensible French threatened to maim, kill or worse unless they dispersed. Instead, the crowd entered the embassy, tore down the tricolour and vandalized the interior while the embassy staff barricaded themselves upstairs. Jean took the event as a pretext to return to France, but was ordered to remain in Ranstadt while the affair was being investigated.

On April 24, Napoleon appeared in the company of the Foreign Minister Talleyrand to inform the Directorate of the details of the riot & Jean's role in provoking it. The directors wondered how he could be so well informed, but let it be. Napoleon had until now tacitly opposed Jean, blocking his career. This was the first time he had publicly criticized him. The criticism seems to have been primarily about Jean's poor judgment, that he did not heed Napoleon's warning about the popular mood & that Jean had de facto deserted his post by leaving Vienna.

In his memoirs, Napoleon considered the appointment a mistake, the military did not fit as diplomats.¹¹ There have since been suspicions that Napoleon, through his machinations, had Jean appointed to a post for which he was not fit, but that has not been possible to confirm. The incident was widely publicized and subsequently penetrated in detail.¹² The conclusion was that Jean wanted to defend the honour of France, which was difficult to criticize. Since Jean's effective term of office was no longer than two months, he did not achieve much, but there are some anecdotes of him wandering the saloons.

On May 22, Jean was back in Paris where he at a reception met his future wife Desirée Clary, whose sister was married to Napoleons brother. It must have been love at first sight at least from his side. 14 days later he proposed through a common acquaintance & on August 17 they married. No one in Jean's family attended the wedding, which is usually interpreted as a conflict. Jean was always reticent on the subject.

The deciding factor for Desirée was that Jean was “a man capable of butting heads with Napoleon“. The marriage contract was generous: She was allowed to manage her dowry. Jean's motives were mixed but honourable. In a draft memoir much later, Jean wrote that he could not have made a happier choice. She had both head and heart. She was small with a fine figure, good looking without being “beautiful“.¹³ According to Secretary of State Armand Richelieu, she was also his “family spy“.¹⁴

¹⁰ Barras 1895: del 3, s. 240.

¹¹ Bonaparte red. 1823: del 1, ss. 219-232.

¹² Masson 1882: ss. 147-250; Barras 1895: del 3, ss. 239-250; Dry 1906: vol 2, ss. 333-468; Höjer 1939b: ss. 127-165.

¹³ Memoarutkast av Karl XIV Johan. I: Swederus 1877: s. 494. [Ur Berndt von Schinkels samling.]

¹⁴ Höjer 1939: s. 166.

During the summer of 1798, Jean's former commander, Marquis d'Ambert, was arrested for visiting England a few years earlier and had therefore been placed on a list as an emigrant and deserter. He was arrested in late June, tried in a court martial & sentenced to the firing squad. d'Ambert invoked his friendship with Jean, who unsuccessfully attempted to have the sentence lifted. d'Ambert was executed on July 2.¹⁵ There is an alternative version that Jean was promised that if d'Ambert returned to England, no one would stop him. Jean visited him in prison with that offer. d'Ambert thanked him very much, but said that he could not stand England and preferred to die on French soil.

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In early 1799, Jean attempted to be elected delegate of the Pau district to the council of the 500, but failed. Instead, from July 2 to September 14, he tried another Urias-posting, this time as minister of war. His predecessor, Mr. de Mureau, had applied to be dismissed after four months. Jean's appointment had been preceded by extensive discussions on the required skillset of the replacement:

Sieyès thinks that a Minister of war need not be a soldier; it is sufficient that he should be an administrator. I reply to Sieyès that if he had seen military matters at as short range as I have he would know that it is impossible to be a good general without being a good administrator; for the first thing to do before setting an army in motion and directing it to towards the point where it is to win a victory is to provide for its existence. To provide for its existence means to feed, clothe, and arm it. All this is within the province of the general as well as of the administrator; or, rather, if the general is not an administrator in this respect, he is nothing. I believe, contrary to the opinion of Sieyès, who fears to see at the head of the Ministry of War a general of ability, that we should choose a man who has won the confidence of the army – one whose resolute character will carry weight. Just at present all is in a state of dislocation: some of our generals have been deprived of their commands, and are on the point of being brought to trial; the soldiers are worn out with fatigue, and ask to return to their homes, to drag them from which nothing less than a powerful voice is needed; a man held in high estimation by his character and deeds is required. I ask my colleagues if they are not of my opinion. All share it, even Sieyès, who makes me a sign of adhesion most flattering for the principle, but implying also that one should beware of putting it into application. I propose Bernadotte for Minister of War. Gohier and Moulins second my motion. Sieyès, who, I had imagined, was on my side just now, opposes it. He says that Bernadotte is a hot-headed man, a Gascon if ever there was one, a man who did not make up his mind to become a patriot until twenty-four hours ago; that this is no guarantee for his future conduct; that a republic needs the truth, that Bernadotte is in no wise inclined to submit to this law, that he belongs to the land of Henri IV., and is a liar like the good king. Sieyès was going to pursue his argument, with the endorsement of his colleague Roger-Ducos, who supports him through thick and thin, and would have supported him had he even said the exact contrary. At the close of his speech Sieyès proposed the intendant commissary of War Alexandre.

I resume speaking in order to say that Bernadotte is indispensably the man we need at the present time; just now we have not only to preserve the public spirit of France, but we have to give it an impulse, and to revive it in all branches of the war of the administration. I add that Bernadotte, brought up in the art of war, is acquainted with

¹⁵ Höjer 1939: s. 166.

the whole of its hierarchy, from the lowest to the highest rank; that he has been an honest and enlightened administrator in his sphere; that he has the genius of organization; that he is capable of strong and extensive combinations; that, appointed by us five months ago Commander-in-chief of the Army of Italy, previous to the appointment of Schérer, he declined the post, giving admirable reasons for his refusal – reasons full of wisdom and enlightenment, which have been unfortunately and cruelly justified by all the disasters in Italy.¹⁶

Sieyès's negative attitude towards Jean becomes somewhat more understandable when Barras refers to a discussion about Jean's role on 18th Fructidor two years earlier. After a briefing with Jean on the military situation in Holland, Barras let slip that Jean might be more skillful as a military than as a politician:

We were all struck with admiration at the fecundity of views and means of Bernadotte and the lucidity of his explanation on a subject [military strategy] which he succeeded in making plain even to Sieyès and Roger-Ducos, of whom no profound knowledge of the geography and topography of war could be expected. ... While I saw Bernadotte behave so splendidly in military matters, and reveal so great a capacity, I asked myself whether this was the same man I had seen hesitating in so strange and almost childish a fashion, not to put it more strongly, in matters political – the man who, at the time of the 18th Fructidor, and even at the 30th Prairial, a milk-and-water revolution, if it can even be called a revolution, showed himself so timid and uncertain,

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[I thus spoke to a colleague.] It was greatly to be desired that Bernadotte, “so strong in military knowledge, might perhaps be a little stronger in politics.” Sieyès heard me, treasured up the words that had escaped my lips, and gave their meaning a far greater extension than I had intended. “Yes, indeed,” had remarked Sieyès, “it is greatly to be desired; for though I have listened with genuine satisfaction to his military exposition, I am far from according the same adhesion to all his political pretensions. Bernadotte himself does not know exactly what they are; he has hesitated a long while before becoming a patriot, at a time when it was not permissible for any one not to be one, since reason dictated that course. Now that it is allowable to think twice about patriotism – and especially Jacobinism, which seeks to palm it self off as patriotism – here is Bernadotte trying to be more of a Jacobin than all of us together. This shows a lack, first, of taste, and, next, of common-sense. The Jacobins were all very well when it was necessary to disorganize and overthrow. Now it is a question of reorganizing and reconstructing. Bernadotte appears not to understand this, and to look upon us as Chouans. He bawls of Fatherland and liberty at the top of his voice; he would fain scream like an eagle, while at the best whistles like a blackbird – which he indeed resembles, for he is at heart too good to be a decided bird of prey. I am willing that he should direct and make war; but as regards politics and revolution proper, he is a child, and a dangerous child.”¹⁷

Since Jean's time as Secretary of War was also cut short, it didn't last more than 2 months, it is difficult to expect any great works. According to Barras, he did well however:

No sooner had Bernadotte been appointed a Minister, and uttered his first vows of Republicanism, than he immediately became an object of terror to the Royalists; they

¹⁶ Barras 1895: del 3, ss. 450-451.

¹⁷ Barras 1895: del 3, ss. 547-550.

nicknamed him "the man of Vienna with the little flag"; they remarked that he was "going to plant little flags everywhere"; but rising superior to all these bawlings of the aristocracy, Bernadotte, really in his place at the ministry of War, surrounded by a good staff and filled with the noble sentiment of the mission he had to fulfil, was not long in justifying the expectations the patriots felt the need of placing in him, as well as the reasons which had moved me to demand his appointment. In a first proclamation replete with sentiment he had declared that he "would not rest until he had obtained food, clothes, and arms for his old comrades".¹⁸

Jean's untactical performance fitted Sieyès plans. Jean attempted to steer a middle course between royalists, Jacobins and Bonapartists, which worried them all, as they did not know where they had him. Furthermore, one of his first actions was to improve the economic follow-up to reduce corruption, which seems to be a sure way of attracting further enemies. His policies also caused conflict. He treated his department as if it were a military command. He himself appeared at four or five in the morning and worked 15-16 hours. Officials were ordered to work from seven in the morning until ten in the evening and each day forced to listen to Jean's fiery proclamations. I quote Barra's summary:

Called to the Ministry under the most critical circumstances, after the disaster and death of Joubert at Novi (15 August, 1799-28th Thermidor, Year VII.), Bernadotte gives proof of activity and resoluteness against both the Royalist uprisings at home and the coalition. It is he therefore who has paved the way, by his good administration, for the two great triumphs – of Brune in Holland, at Bergen (19th September, 1799), and of Masséna in Switzerland, at Zurich [25th & 26th September, 1799]. Bernadotte, a prey to the hostility of Sieyès, who covets the portfolio of War for his protégé, Marsecot, is none the less driven from office.¹⁹

Jean's own account concentrates on his contributions to the army's supply of perishables and manpower, which seems more reasonable.²⁰

Since the reason for sacking Jean was political, Sieyès chose not to acknowledge the cause. Jean received a letter on the morning of September 14 stating that his resignation had been accepted, apparently an oral threat from a few days earlier, that if he did not get his way on a matter it was impossible for him to continue. In a public letter the next day, Jean denied that his resignation was voluntary, accepted it without protest, but asked for a pension because after 20 years of service in the army he was too old for field service, which was granted. The officials of the Ministry of War appear to have been grateful when he disappeared and the activity could return to civilian waters.

It has been assumed that Sieyès's intention was to eliminate Jean as a factor of power in the face of Napoleon's takeover on 18th Brumaire. Höjer has produced a variety of details that can be interpreted as Jean in his capacity as Minister of War tried to build a political position as a unifying force. While holding discussions with the Royalists of the Directorate, he received delegates from the Jacobin Club Société du Manège. However, during the coup d'état in 18th Brumaire (November 9, 1799), he again refused to chose sides.

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¹⁸ Barras 1895: del 3, ss. 461-462.

¹⁹ Barras 1895: del 3, preface, s. xxvi.

²⁰ Bernadotte 1824.

The prelude to 18th Brumaire has been analysed in detail. Forsell (1929) concludes that most authors use Sir Walter Scott's history, which contains an appendix²¹ about 18th Brumaire. This appendix was written by Jean himself. The Brumaire coup, according to Scott (i.e. Jean), was not so much a seizure of power as a way for Napoleon to save himself from the consequences of the Egyptian fiasco where he, as later in Russia, left the entire army behind to perish. Jean's attitude at the time would have been that for family reasons he "gave his word not to act as an individual citizen against Napoleon, but that he would do so, if he were also urged by a public person." Cautious at the top it may seem, but posterity has tended to overestimate Jean's political ambitions. He was not a Napoleon, although like him he believed in his fate.

²¹ Scott 1827b; Touchard-Lafosse 1838; Schinkel 1852.