

Chapter 5 : Jean Bernadotte (IV) (1800-1810) – Interregnum.

*Tired of being massacred within the country,
the French submitted to Napoleon,
who had them massacred abroad.*

Unknown French author

In 2003, a large-scale French project about Jean's path to the Swedish throne & what he accomplished there was initiated. Initially the hypothesis was that Jean's brilliant French career made him a natural choice as heir to the Swedish throne.

First to publish was Petitau (2007) who tried to make Jean a typical member of the Napoleonic bourgeoisie: Jean, however, was both typical (lawyer, military) & not (neo-Jakobin, hostile to the empire). Under these conditions Petiteau had difficulty explaining his prominence as Marshal and Prince of Ponte-Corvo, but assumed it was due to his marriage to Desirée Clary. As it is expressed in Napoleon's memoirs (1823):

If Bernadotte became a marshal of France, and prince of Ponte-Corvo, and at length a king, it is to this marriage that he is indebted for all. Desirée, the reigning queen of Sweden, was the object of Napoleon's earliest attachment: he was to have married her. When he became Emperor, he took a pleasure in making his sister-in-law the wife of a marshal, a princess, and finally a queen. ... All the errors, and foolish actions of Bernadotte, during the Imperial reign, were constantly pardoned on account of this marriage.¹

Cherrier (2007) in the same project agreed:

ABSTRACT. As an individual in history, the example of Bernadotte, a general in the French Republic, a maréchal of the Empire and Prince of Pontecorvo highlights a political career within a society that turned classical political structures upside down. His political path raises many questions. If he had not become King of Sweden, it would have seemed to the observer that Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte was a man of missed opportunities or aborted ambitions. Using the opportunities opened up by the Revolution and its wars – he was not the only one to do this – he rose to prominence as a general and, while the frontiers between the military and politics broke down, he even became a Minister with the Directory. He left this position rapidly, however, and, during the Brumaire, missed the opportunity to assert himself, as he was suspected too strongly of neo-Jacobinism. From then on, was he no more than one of the many children of the Revolution who had no other choice but to serve the cause of the First Consul and soon to be Emperor? The answer is more subtle.

Although he was certainly just a spectator during Brumaire, he nevertheless asserted himself as one of the first batch of Maréchals. Set aside after Wagram, he obtained, however, imperial approval to be the heir to the Swedish throne. As brother-in-law to King Joseph, he was connected to the Imperial family but as opposed to those like Murat or Eugène de Beauharnais, he was able to maintain his position during the Napoleonic collapse. Finally, after being out of the spotlight for a long time, because of Napoleonic grandeur, the former Jacobin would be the only child of the Revolution to found a dynasty. Bernadotte thus reveals himself as a man of paradoxes, the result of his itinerary that we need to examine in the light of Napoleon's

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

career. Both men fought to acquire and monopolise political resources, in a quest for legitimacy during an era that had thrown out traditional forms. More than opportunism or a simple science of circumstances, it appears that Bernadotte's career path was an example of consummate political art, which political science, through the theory of mobilisation, can shed some light upon.

Cherrier explains Jean's cautious behaviour by Jean, after a life in the barracks & in the field, not having any real political base. He was known, in some quarters even admired, but lacked both political credibility, “connections“ & the means to pursue his interests. That would change. Over the next 10 years, his colleagues in *la famille de Sambre-et-Meuse* advanced in the ranks and were able to back him, he received political, administrative & diplomatic missions which he this time handled with exemplary caution. As dissident in the vicinity of the throne he had broad political support from both the left and the right and he accumulated money. Peace, family life and socializing with civilians also benefited him. Jean started to calm down. Every day was not the last. He read widely, including the classics, and moved in society. Another draft memoir:

He did not meet in other places than at home, since he was not occupied by work. He had a small place in the west of Paris at Mousseaux, where he had established a park. There he also had a doe who took food out of his hands, or lay down at his feet. He surrendered to a tranquillity that had the character of melancholy. He spent as much time at this retreat as he could. The calm, the mother, the son and the home became his life - he who, a few years before, set in motion great armies and developed an unusual activity.²

In 1805, Jean's “semi-civilian“ life ended. He was forced back to active duty. I list his career highs & lows the period 1800-1810:

1800-01-24 to ?	Member of the Conseil d'État (Council of State).
1800-04-18 to 1802-05-21	<i>Général en chef</i> of Western Army. The pacification of the Chouan Rebellion.
1802-03-25	[The Peace of Amiens.]
1802-12-31	Appointment: Governor of Louisiana, Ambassador to Washington.
1803	[Out of favour]
1804-05-19	Marshal of France, member of the Senate (French House of Lords).
1804-05-14 to 1805	Military Governor of Hanover & war service.
1806-06-05	Knighted to Prince of Ponte-Corvo.
1807-07-14 to 1809	Military Governor of Hamburg-Bremen-Lübeck & war service.
1809-07 to 1810-06	[Out of favour]
1810-06-25	The visit of Lieutenant C O Möller.

² Memoarutkast av Karl XIV Johan. I: Swederus 1877: s. 501. [Ur Berndt von Schinkels samling.]

Jean's political duties in the Conseil d'État and Senate have not been noticed - he had too little influence - but they constituted his political education before the royal office.

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On April 18, 1800, Jean was appointed *Général en chef* of the Western Army, principally to pacify Brittany, where the Royalists had a strong base. He seems to have handled the mission well, but showed such a glaring lack of enthusiasm for the Bonaparte government that he, quite rightly, was suspected of intrigues. Jean socialized with the political opposition and with opponents of the regime such as Lafayette, Constans, Mme de Staël & Mme Récamier, with whom he discussed means to limit Napoleon's power.³

In order to get his restless generals out of the way, Napoleon tried to transfer them to the diplomatic services. In Jean's case as governor of Louisiana or ambassador to Rome or Washington. Jean stalled, things got in the way and it ended in nothing. With the Treaty of Amiens on 25 March 1802, a large number of officers were put on half-pay, possibly also Jean. There's an episode about his financial problems this time:

In 1802 or -03, his brother-in-law Napoleon helped him out of a disastrous stock exchange speculation in which he allegedly indebted himself with the sum of 400 thousand francs (about 20 million SEK in today's money value) in borrowed money (possibly by General Pierre Augereau.) The loan seems to have had to do with Louisiana: either it was a land purchase or an investment in the slave trade.⁴ Jean at the time literally threw himself at Napoleon's feet, promising him eternal fidelity in exchange for help to repay the loan. Napoleon believed him serious, but it was (as usually with Jean) only theatre. Still in 1815 Napoleon was livid at the memory: "He is an actor in Roman costume, who announces some beautiful verse about freedom, honour and the like but who has all the inclinations of a theatre-usher [known for their shameless fawning]: he is what he is."⁵

Jean then was out of work for an entire year. What he did is unclear. He may have been ill for some time. In 1804, faced with the Empire, he again promised Napoleon his support. There is no information on how or why, but perhaps his finances, as suggested above, were on the ropes. His appointment to Marshal of France, later Prince of Ponte-Corvo, brought him both honour and money. However, Napoleon did not trust him. Höjer summarizes:

Bernadotte's opposition during the consulate may explain some peculiarities in his position over the next five years. He is continuously used in service outside the borders of France: Hannover, Ansbach, Hamburg, Dresden. Napoleon thus keeps him away from the plots of Paris, while Bernadotte was allowed to operate in a relatively independent position without being under the emperor's immediate pressure. Napoleon was neither happy to give him command of French troops but of foreign troops: Bavarians, Spaniards, Dutchmen, Danes, Poles and Saxons. In this case, however, Bernadotte's winning personal qualities and ability to handle people certainly played an important role. When, after five years, Bernadotte anew commends French troops on French soil, the relationship between him and the Emperor is compounded by a new, difficult crisis, the first of which was the Swedes giving him the opportunity to

³ Höjer 1939: ss. 260-261.

⁴ Olivier 2010.

⁵ de Suremain 1902: s. 329. [Brev från greve Charles-Louise de Sémonville, 1816-05-25.]

exercise a completely independent command and to give him a lasting place in the history of Europe.⁶

The crisis that Höjer refers to is their conflict during the Battle of Wagram, which ended in Jean July 10, 1809, being divorced from his command. Due to a misunderstanding, he was then ordered to Antwerp to assist in their defence. Napoleon sent Fouché a letter deploring the situation:

You shall let him know that I have been dissatisfied with his proclamation to the Saxon,¹ which to them bestow an honour which they do not deserve, while they have been fleeing all day on the 6th; that I have not been less dissatisfied with his proclamation to the National Guard, in which he says that he had no more than 15,000 men, while I had 60,000 men at the Scheldt; that even if he had not had more than 10,000 men, it is criminal for a general to inform the enemy and Europe of his strength; that he has no tact; that I have been dissatisfied with the fact that he has provisionally granted the Swedes' petition² and thus compromised me in relation to the Russians; that he receives letters from a bunch of intriguers in Paris; that I know that he is not foolish enough to believe their messages, but that this is not appropriate; that I cannot tolerate intrigue; that it is his duty and his interest not to go astray; that he should abandon this bitch³, and not receive her letters; that, if he does not, he will be unhappy. The Prince of Ponte Corvo has acquired much money in Hamburg; he has also acquired money in Elbing; In exchange I get this bad Polish business and his behaviour at the battle at Eylau. I am tired of schemers, and it is a scandal, that a man, whom I have heaped with favours, lends his ear to wretches, whom he knows and whom he can judge (*apprécier*). You shall tell him that he has not received a person or a letter, without me knowing about it; that I know the little weight he attaches to that fact; but to entertain correspondence with these people and to receive them, it is to encourage them.⁷

¹ After the Battle of Wagram in July 1809.

² Spring 1809. The Swedish government submitted a request for a cease-fire for the opening of peace negotiations.

³ Probably Mme de Staël.

Jean then had no posting for almost a year. What he did is unknown. When Lieutenant C O Mörner contacted him on June 25, 1810, he was about to visit the spa in Plombier together with his wife, child and servants. Probably he was restless and prepared for anything - even to take on the Swedes' problems.

⁶ Höjer 1939b: s. 275.

⁷ Alin 1899b: ss. 60-61.