

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume II

The Baden Contingent – Chapter 2

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CHAPTER II

CAMPAIGN OF 1806-1807

SIEGE OF DANZIG

Prussia could not take its part in the creation of the Confederation of the Rhine. Its ill-considered arming forced the Emperor to prepare everything for a new campaign.

The employment of the Confederation of the Rhine contingents entered into his calculations; the very territory of the Confederation was going to be for him an excellent base, where he could operate his concentration and then unleash his legions well beyond the geographical line of the Rhine.

From the 19th of September, 1806, all the preparatory work of the movements of the Grande Armée was finished; Berthier was informed of the points where the concentration of our German allies must be made: for the Baden, it would be in Bad Mergentheim. The Chief of Staff replied without delay to the Emperor, at Munich, where he was at the moment, that the dispatches intended for the princes of the Confederation were ready in his portfolio, and that his aides-de-camp would carry them a quarter of an hour after he officially learned that the French minister had left Berlin.

Finally, the events took place and on 21 September, at the palace of Saint Cloud, Napoleon formally requisitioned the contingents of the Confederation:

"The Grand Duke of Baden is invited to order that his troops be placed without delay in condition to march, with all their field equipment."

To avoid seeing the princes of the small sovereign houses of Germany take service abroad (which was very common at that time, when Prince Eugene Württemberg, for example, commanded a corps of the Prussian army) the Emperor wrote from Mainz to the Crown Prince of Baden, husband of Princess Stephanie de Beauharnais:

"The Grand Duke must have received the requisition for his contingent. Let me know if you intend to command it; let me know how strong it is and when it will be at the meeting point. Press as far as possible your movements. I would like you to exclude me from passing information on the Mannheim road by Neckarelz and Würzburg."

The spontaneous offer of the Prince of Baden to serve under our eagles crossed with the letter of the Emperor, who, with such zeal, replied to him on 30 September, to congratulate him:¹

"My son, I'm getting your letter of the 27th. I approve of your desire to go to war. I will see you with pleasure near me. You can go to Bamberg for the 4th or 5th of October and send your horses there. If you can at once conduct your regiment with some squadrons of cavalry and some artillery on the spot, that will be convenient. I will leave the infantry in some places on the side of Bamberg until all your body can meet. I imagine that for all these

¹Rambaud, *Germany under Napoleon I*, page 155.

arrangements you have the approval of the Grand Duke. Press as far as possible the departure of your troops corps. The princes of the Confederation are moving. It is good not to be too late."

But to encourage good resolutions was not enough for the Emperor: he wanted to know, to know quickly, how the execution was carried out; he wrote at the same time, from Mainz, to General Rapp:

"... Going to Würzburg you will pass to Karlsruhe, where you will see the Grand Duke. You will see above all the hereditary prince to know if he commands his body, what will be its strength and what day he will be reunited ..."



(D'après une gravure de l'époque.)
CHARLES LOUIS FREDERIC
(After an engraving of the period.)

It was at Würzburg, in fact, that the Baden contingent was definitely to meet. On the 5th of October, two battalions of Baden arrived there, and 3,000 men of the same nation are presented there (the Emperor to the Chief of Staff, Würzburg, 5 October). On the 12th of the same month, the commander of the division of the troops of Baden received from Berthier the order to carry himself from Würzburg to Schleiz; but the next day, 13 October, the situation was changed: the curtain was torn, the Prussian army was caught in flagrante delicto of maneuver on the left bank of the Saale and the Baden received the order, -- sent from Gera, at 3 in the morning, -- to go on Bayreuth and no longer on Schleiz.

The Baden contingent therefore took no part in the battle of Jena on 14 October. But after the victory, it would not remain motionless: the staff of the Grand Armée would use it first, with our other German allies, to ensure the lines of communication, and then to escort inwards the innumerable columns of Prussian prisoners.

From Bayreuth, the Baden went to Plauen:

The Emperor to the Chief of Staff.

Weimar, 17 October 1806

"... Send the order to the Baden troops to be returned to Bayreuth, to head on Plauen."

Then, from Plauen, the Chief of Staff by an order of the 20th of October sent them to rejoin at Halle the headquarters of the army.

We know how the Emperor kept watch over the execution of his orders. A report sent on 23 October to the Chief of Staff by General Legrand, commander at Bayreuth, contains the following information concerning the Baden:

"... The division of the troops of Baden, under the command of Major General Clossmann, passed the 22nd in this city; it left on the 23rd to take a position at Hof. This division is 82 officers and 2,839 troops in strength; it has 6 pieces of cannon, 2 howitzers, 71 caissons and 131 men of the train ..."

The Baden thus occupy Hof, while the French army swept like a torrent the remains of the Prussian corps to the North Sea. The Emperor having entered Berlin; he then Baden the Baden tighten:

The Chief of Staff to General Clossmann, commanding the troops of Baden.

"The intention of the Emperor, General, is that the body you command, notwithstanding any subsequent order you would have received, (will) go directly to the town of Spandau where he will await further orders."

The first Baden troops reached Spandau on 5 November; a report from the commandant of this town indicates, on the aforementioned date, the arrival of a 178-strong Baden detachment. General Corbineau, appointed governor of Spandau, had the following month a rather curious difficulty with the troops of Baden:²

General Corbineau, Governor of Spandau, to the Emperor.

6 November, 7 o'clock in the evening.

"... I have ordered the commandant of the town to employ in the escort of prisoners the troops of Hesse, Nassau, and Baden, in the end to return the escorts to their corps, in accordance with to Your Majesty's instructions. This order is thwarted by another brought by the aide-de-camp of His Highness the Prince of Baden; the commandant of the town, who has little garrison and does not know how to escort the prisoners if he no longer has the troops of Baden, has thought it his duty to suspend the order brought by the aide-de-camp of His Highness, having, moreover, only the opinion from the Chief of Staff that these troops must have a particular destination."

It is useless to add that General Corbineau was approved.

The 2nd Brigade of Baden, mobilized with extreme slowness, had not yet joined; and the Emperor's discontent was revealed by the letter he sent from Berlin on the 28th of October to General Clarke, Governor of Erfurt:

"... the Baden troops must arrive in Erfurt: write to my Minister with the Grand Duke to find out why these troops are not coming."

A disposition taken on 14 November in the cabinet of the Chief of Staff gives us the number of Baden at this time of the campaign:³

²Foucart, *The Prussian Campaign*, Prenzlau-Lübeck.

³Foucart, *The Prussian Campaign*, Prenzlau-Lübeck.

Troops of Baden.

	men	horses.
1 st Brigade: Infantry, 3 regiments.	2,857	
-- Artillery	203	210
-- Hussars	25	26
2 nd Brigade	<u>1,069</u>	<u> </u>
	4,154	236

A portion of this 2nd Brigade only departed Hanau on 20 November ...

For some time the Emperor had been thinking of using the allies of the Rhine Confederation on the Oder. An order of the day of the 4th of November, completed on the 10th of the same month, ordered all the isolated and detachments of Baden to join at Stettin. The Baden troops, after having supplied 2,000 men for the garrison of Küstrin (Kostrzyn nad Odrą)⁴ (letter from the Emperor to Marshal Davout, Berlin, 5 November 1806), would then be employed more actively, partly at Kolberg's headquarters, and especially that of Danzig under the command of Marshal Lefebvre.

Siege of Danzig (Gdańsk).

To reduce the great Prussian fortress, defended by 18,000 men and the brave Field Marshal von Kalckreuth, Marshal Lefebvre had little more than an equal number of soldiers: only 3,000 French, 2,200 Baden, 5,000 to 6,000 Polish newly raised and barely educated, 2,500 men of the North Legion, Polish or Russian deserters; finally, 5,000 Saxons, vanquished at Jena.⁵

Since the beginning of the campaign, the Baden had not seen the fire, and the work of a siege was quite unknown to them. So we should not be surprised if they showed themselves at first rather mediocre and earth movers of very bad temper, in spite of the presence of their prince, who bravely put himself at their head in the trenches of the place:

The Emperor to Marshal Lefebvre.

Osterode, 31 March 1807.

"...The Crown Prince of Baden goes to you to take the command of his troops ... I recommend you the good to treat and not to suffer that he exposes himself more than he is suitable."

Combat of Dirschau (Tczew).

The first serious fight before Danzig took place on 23 February 1807, at Dirschau.⁶

General Dombrowski, reinforced at Mewe (Gniew) by the Baden of General Menard, attacked the Prussians established at Dirschau. The Baden advance guard, commanded by General Puthod, had established itself on the Danzig road; Dirschau was taken after a vigorous fight in which the Poles and the Baden, irritated by the obstinate resistance of their adversaries, did not give any quarter... Meanwhile, General Puthod was fighting on the road to Danzig with an enemy column leaving the town; he was able to restrain it with his Baden until the taking of Dirschau had made some new forces available; General Menard then came running and the Baden together repulsed in Danzig

⁴Foucart, *The Polish Campaign*, page 51.

⁵Thiers, *The Consulate and Empire*, VII, page 418.

⁶*Campaigns of Napoleon*, XVII, page 87.

the enemy column, which lost 800 men and 12 officers.

As a result of this fight, the Poles and the Baden settled at Dirschau, General Menard holding the right and leaning on the Vistula.

When the troops which were to complete the siege army arrived, the Baden took post at Wonenberg, Neukau, Schudelkau, and Sniekau; the dragoons and hussars of Baden were at Wonenberg.



1807. — LE MARÉCHAL LEFEBVRE

COMMANDANT LES TROUPES DE SIÈGE, A DANTZIG.

(Extrait de l'*Histoire de France* d'Henri Martin).

(Combet et Co, éditeurs).

1807. -- MARSHAL LEFEBVRE COMMANDING THE SIEGE TROOPS AT DANZIG.

(Extracted from Henri Martin's *History of France*).

(Combet and Co., editors).

LEFEBVRE (François-Joseph), Duke of Dantzig, Marshal of France. Born in Rouffach (Haut-Rhin) in 1756, died in Paris in 1828. -- Son of a miller; enlisted at age 18 in the French Guards, where he became a sergeant in 1789. Brigadier General in 1793, Major General in 1794. Decided the victory at Fleurus. 1796, Altenkirchen, Wetzlar. 1797, Neuwied. 1799, Stokach. Ensured the success of 18 Brumaire, by invading the Hall of Five Hundred with 25

grenadiers. Marshal of the Empire. Commanded at Jena the foot Imperial Guard. 1807, takes Danzig; made Duke of Dantzig. 1808, commanding the 4th Corps of the Army of Spain. 1812-1814, Commanded the Guard; Montmirail, Champaubert. -- Aligned with Louis XVIII, who made him Peer of France.

The trench was opened on April 1st. At this date, the troops entrusted to Marshal Lefebvre were divisioned as follows:

10th CORPS. -- MARSHAL LEFEBVRE.

Chief of Staff: Major General DROUET.
 Commander of the Artillery: Brigadier General LAMARTINIÈRE.
 Commander of Engineers: Battalion Chief LARCHER-CHAMONT.

MICHAUD Division:

12th Light (French).
 1st Legion of the North (Prince Radziwil).
 5 Saxon battalions.

CROWN PRINCE'S Division of Baden:

Lieutenant General Clossmann.
 Brigadier General Ménard.
 Major Generals Vicenti and Gorbeck.

19 th Line (French).	
Life Guard Regiment of Baden, 2 battalions...	796 men.
Crown Prince -- -- 2 battalions...	660 --
Margrave Louis -- -- 2 battalions ...	695 --
von Harrant -- -- 2 battalions...	670 --
Chasseurs à Pied of Baden	60 --

2,881 men.

GEILGUTT Division:

2nd Light (French).
 44th Line (French).
 Paris Guard Regiment.
 2 Polish regiments.

GARDANNE Division:

7th Light (French).
 3 Saxon battalions.
 2 Polish regiments.

DE POLENTZ Cavalry Division:

19 th and 23 rd Chasseurs à Cheval (French).	
Baden hussars, 1 squadron...	136 horses.
Baden light dragoons, 2 squadrons...	288 --
Saxon cavalry.	
Polish cavalry.	

On the night of the 2nd to the 3rd of April, the besieged succeeded in retaking the Kalke-Schanze redoubt which had just been seized, and which was occupied by soldiers of the Northern Legion and Baden.⁷

All the difficulties of a regular siege exasperated the brave Lefebvre, who would have liked to overturn everything "with the chests of his grenadiers..." He complained bitterly to the Emperor, attacking the engineers, the artillery, and especially the allied troops:

"... Germans are inclined to desertion; we are obliged to feed them better than French soldiers to prevent them from spreading into the villages... They are good only to devour the supplies, and too unwilling to escalate... If the Saxons are fighting well, they show little goodwill to work; the Baden are not good at work or under fire... I must rid myself of all these people."

The Emperor hastened to reply to the Marshal, by shouting at him and encouraging him, as he so well knew how to do:⁸

"... There is nothing extraordinary that 20 Baden skirmishers have fled in front of the Cossacks. One must be accustomed to those troops who are cowardly, but make a lot of noise. Often even the good French infantry has been surprised."

And he adds a little further:

"... You do not know what to complain about and insult our allies."

"... You wanted troops, I have sent them to you, I'm preparing to again; and, like an ingrate, you continue to complain, without even thinking of thanking me. You treat the allies and especially the Poles and the Baden, without any care. They are not used to fire, but it will come. Do you believe that we were as brave in '92 as we are today, after fifteen years of war! Have indulgence, old soldier that you are, for young soldiers who begin and who have not yet your cool in the midst of danger. The Prince of Baden, whom you have with you, has wanted to leave the sweets of the court to lead his troops to the fire. Express to him my respect, and consider him with a zeal that his fellow-men scarcely show me. The chests of your grenadiers, which you want to put everywhere, will not overthrow any walls... Your glory is in taking Danzig: take this town and you will be happy with me."

Occupation of Holm Island.

During the extension works of the 3rd parallel, a very strong sortie of the garrison was repulsed after a violent fight where the Baden Major von Stockhorn was particularly distinguished.

The expedition which made us masters of the Island of Holm was executed in the night of the 6th to the 7th of May. Two columns crossed the Vistula in twelve large boats: the first column, composed of Guards of Paris and a detachment of the 12th Light, landed on the island under the fire of a redoubt which was scaled and taken from the Russians; the second column, formed of Baden and Poles of the Legion of the North, under the command of Adjutant-Major Aumé, animated by the example of the French, boldly threw himself upon the enemy, and took 300 men and 200 artillery horses.

After the futile attempt of General Kamenski to unblock Danzig and his failure in the Nehrung, the town, threatened with an assault for which everything was arranged, decided to capitulate.

On 16 May 1807, the Rheinbund troops made their triumphant entry into the great Prussian fortress and the Emperor "testified his satisfaction to the besieging troops".

Among the Baden who distinguished themselves in the siege, we must first mention the crown prince, who risked his life in the trenches; Baron Stockhorn, Corporal Hetzler, and Lieutenant Saint-Ange, all of whom were solemnly

⁷ Thiers, *Consulate and Empire*, VII, page 507.

⁸Rambaud, *Germany under Napoleon I*, page 178.

decorated with the Legion of Honor, under the walls of Danzig, by the hands of their prince; Major Brücken, who at Dirschau fought against superior forces, should be mentioned again; the Adjutant General von Porbeck, etc.⁹ The Emperor, satisfied, sent to the Grand Duke of Baden 4,000 fusils and 600 horses taken from the Prussians.

It was for the Baden the end of the campaign: they remained in garrison at Danzig and in the northern towns, and did not appear in Heilsberg or Friedland.

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⁹ Rambaud, *Germany under Napoleon I*, page 179.