

# The Napoleon Series

## The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume II

### The Baden Contingent – Chapter 4 Part II

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#### CHAPTER IV

##### CAMPAIGN OF 1812

COMBATS OF CZAZNICKI AND BATURY.  
BATTLE OF THE BEREZINA. -- COMBAT OF ILIA.

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#### **Battle of Berezina (28 November).**

Oudinot and Ney fought victoriously on the right bank of the river, with 9,000 to 10,000 men, against the 30,000 Russians of Chichagov: the road of Zembino (Zyembin) was therefore free for the retreat of the army.

On the left bank, Victor, with the Girard Division, the brigade of Berg, and the brigade of cavalry of Colonel von Laroche (Hussars and Light Horse of Hesse), in all 5,000 men, was struggling with Wittgenstein. He sent to the Baden Brigade, which had crossed the Berezina, the order to return as quickly as possible to the left bank: General von Hochberg recrossed the Berezina with his infantry, but renounced, because of the congestion of the bridges, to cross his artillery; it remained on the right bank. It was learned at this moment that the division of Partouneaux was made prisoner, with the exception of a single battalion, the 4<sup>th</sup> of the 55<sup>th</sup> Regiment which formed the extreme rear-guard and which came to reinforce the Baden: it had 220 men and brought with it four pieces of cannon. The Delattre Brigade had also fallen into the hands of the enemy...

The sufferings of the soldiers are dreadful: a terrible snow storm blew that day and the horses had on their backs a thickness of half a foot...

"The center of the position was Studianka. To the right of the village, a small plain is found, which extends to the banks of the Berezina, limited in front by the wooded heights of Old Borisow. No ground obstacle could prevent the march of the enemy on this portion of the field of battle, from where the bridges were in sight and in the field of action of its artillery. To the left of Studianka, a plateau extends to the last houses of the village: it was a good position; but the lack of troops did not allow him to occupy it entirely. Between this plateau and the heights occupied by the enemy, 800 to 900 paces distant, a very practicable valley ended near the village by the plain mentioned above."

"The Baden Brigade, with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 55<sup>th</sup> commanded by the battalion commander Joyeux and the four French pieces of 12, formed the right of the line, from the edge of the Berezina to the houses of the village of Studianka. The Berg Brigade held the plateau, having the Girard Division to its left; the latter, without any point of support: the cavalry (hussars of Baden and Hessian Light Horse) was placed behind it. The artillery, 14 pieces in all, was distributed on the height of which a line of skirmishers occupied the base."

"After having put in battery numerous artillery, the Russians attacked our left; first, they fired on the Baden Light Battalion and the 55<sup>th</sup> Battalion commanded by General Linng, which lacked cartridges. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Baden 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, Major Cornély, then advanced and, without firing a shot, repelled the Russians with bayonets beyond a thicket where the battalion was established. In this engagement, Lieutenant von Strauss, General Hochberg's orderly officer, had a horse killed under him; a moment later, Stier, the general's orderly hussar, was carried off by a cannonball: his horse was used to bring back the drum major of the light battalion who was shot... The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment then relieved the light battalion."

"An attack by the Berg Brigade, supported by the Baden hussars, failed on the center of the enemy line."

When the Russians made another attack on our right, Marshal Victor had the cavalry charged; General Fournier, wounded at the beginning of the action, left the command to Colonel von Laroche: the two regiments, presenting together 350 horses, rushed on a square which they broke and made 500 prisoners from the Russian 34<sup>th</sup> Eiger Regiment; two squadrons of enemy cuirassiers wanted to protect the retreat of the infantry: they were immediately approached by the hussars. Colonel von Laroche receives a bayonet blow, a sword cut on his left cheek and a shot through his shako: seriously wounded, he was taken prisoner, but soon rescued by the Chef Logis Springer, of the hussars. The regiment of hussars was ruined in this fight: barely 50 men crossed the Berezina the next day under the command of Lieutenant von Preen. The regiment had left more than 150 men dead, wounded or missing on the Berezina battlefield."

"The Baden artillery, which remained on the right bank, were placed in batteries on the banks of the river and thus protected our right wing, where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, then the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment successively relieved the battalions of the first line."

"The fire only stopped at night. Although he had victoriously preserved his positions of the day, Marshal Victor feared that a general offensive of the Russians would overwhelm the feeble remains of his army corps at Berezina. He went to General von Hochberg, congratulated him on the distinguished conduct of the Baden troops, assuring that they were the only ones on which he fully reckoned, that he would not fail to report to the Emperor, and that the latter would be able to express to them his particular satisfaction for having deserved well of the Grand Armée..."

"The Marshal had received during the day a strong contusion; Generals Girard, Fournier, Damas, Geither were wounded; General Daendels, fallen into the water, had had to abandon his command; of all the general officers still present in the 9<sup>th</sup> Corps, Count von Hochberg was alone safe and sound... The Baden infantry had 28 officers killed or wounded, and more than 1,400 men hors de combat; among the wounded there were again General Linng, Colonel von Laroche, Lieutenant-Colonel von Grolmann, Captain von Kalenberg... In short, there remained under arms the 900 Baden, 300 Poles of the Girard division, about sixty men from the Berg Brigade, and an insignificant number of soldiers from the two Saxon regiments. The French artillery was covered with glory, in its struggle against an incomparably larger enemy artillery."

"General von Hochberg was supping in his bivouac, "with a bottle of Rhine wine, and a hare which his dogs had taken during the battle," when the Marshal gave the order to repair the bridges during the night. The grenadier company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment would occupy the big bridge to ensure the passage of the army corps... The congestion was such that we almost abandoned the artillery to cross the infantry... The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment remained on the left bank in the copse taken from the Russians: several orders, sent to bring it back, realized that this battalion is cut off... General Hochberg, not wanting to give it up, promised a medal to a non-commissioned officer if he brought back the battalion... Finally, this last battalion joined, and at 1 o'clock in the morning the Baden crossed the bridge."<sup>1</sup>

On 29 November, the 9<sup>th</sup> Corps went to Zembino, preceding the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Corps; on 2 December, he took the service of the rear guard with the remains of the 2nd Corps under the orders of General Maison. The latter settled around noon near the village of Chotawiczi to allow the artillery to cross a forest. Doumerc formed the extreme rear guard with the cavalry of the 9<sup>th</sup> Corps, that of the 2<sup>nd</sup> no longer exists. The Baden artillery, in the long defile of the forest, put its servers who were still mounted at the head of his column and managed to sweep away all that prevented it from advancing, knocking out of the carriages blocking the passage: the battery was saved, but the reserve park remained out of the defile fell into the hands of the Russians.

This bad march finished, the retreat became orderly, covered by some companies of Baden and Polish voltigeurs. Beyond the forest, Marshal Victor faced the enemy; he placed the brigade of Baden on the right side of the road, behind a slight height, and the Girard Division on the direction of the line of retreat; two batteries strengthened the position. When the Russians came, they were received by a fire that stopped them. At ten o'clock in the evening Victor went back in the direction of Ilia.

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<sup>1</sup>*Denkwürdigkeiten*, pages 65, 66, 68, 70 and 71.

### **Fight of Ilia (3 December).**

At the height of this village, General von Hochberg remains with the Baden brigade, in support of the French sappers charged with destroying a series of bridges after the crossing of the columns; the artillery of Baden, which was also guarding behind, responded favorably to the Russians, and at nine o'clock the Baden joined the army corps.

The next day, 4 December, the cold became intense; fifteen men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment, ordered from picket for the night, are found frozen in the morning

### **Battle of Malodeczno.**

General Daendels left his command at Berezina; his successor, General d'Hervilliers, having been wounded, it was General de Hochberg who replaced him at the head of the division; the 9<sup>th</sup> Corps, at this moment, did not have, in all, the strength of a regiment... The brigade of Baden was so much experienced by the last combats and by the cold that it had to undergo a new organization: the two provisional regiments previously formed were reduced to four battalions of 120 to 200 men each.

The Russians having pretended to pronounce a serious attack near Malodeczno, the Baden stopped them by a charge with the bayonet.

The 6<sup>th</sup> of December, the cold reaches 20 degrees. It had been necessary to abandon, the day before, the French battery of 12; the Baden battery was only going with extreme difficulty. The next day, the last drummer of Baden was frozen ... There are only 50 Baden under arms when arriving at Osmiana ... Of the eight Baden artillery pieces, seven are abandoned, and the eighth remained on the next day, in front of Vilna. The company of grenadiers of the regiment, guarding Marshal Victor on the night during which the fire devoured the house where he lodged, was only obliged, in the heat of the flames, to escape the death

The remains of the 9<sup>th</sup> Corps reached Vilna on the 8 December; the day before, the Baden flags had been unfastened, the poles broken and the fabric rolled around the body of three non commissioned officers. A church was given to each body as a gathering place, and the survivors of the Baden Brigade receive the biscuits and shoes that made up the load of a convoy sent for them from Karlsruhe.

The Baden arrive on 12 December in Kowno (where, something that had not been seen for a long time, every man sipped a ration of rum) and the 18<sup>th</sup> at Konigsberg. General von Hochberg found there:

the depot of his brigade, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel St. Julien;  
90 reinforcements for the Hussars Regiment;  
108 convalescents;  
a new armament for an infantry regiment;  
new uniforms for the troops.

All that could be loaded on carriages hitched with the horses of the hussars was sent to Danzig; the rest was sold on the spot. The hussars retook their horses at Danzig; there, the Baden received the order to go to Marienwerder, the point designated for the gathering of the debris of the 9<sup>th</sup> Corps.

As of 30 December, a personnel disposition gives the following figures for the Baden contingent:

Officers	42	including	18	ill or injured.
NCOs	111	--	21	--
Musicians	15	--	4	--
Soldiers	369	--	69	--
Horses	71	--	14	--

It was a total of 537 men, of whom only 425 were able to carry arms, including the men of the depots and the reinforcement of hussars. The Baden who had taken part in the campaign and retired counted in this figure only for

145: it is all that remained of the beautiful brigade of Baden

One last misfortune was still to strike the contingent: the detachment of the hussars was surprised, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January, 1813, near Marienwerder, by a strong party of Cossacks; after an honorable but unhappy fight, nearly all the horsemen who composed it were killed or taken prisoner.

On 15 January, the 9<sup>th</sup> Corps was dissolved; the generals, the isolated officers, and the little Baden detachment of 42 men still under arms with Captain Pfnor were given up to the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps, under the command of Prince Eugene.

Marshal Victor, appointed to the command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps, did not separate from General von Hochberg without addressing to him the following letter;<sup>2</sup>

*Marshal Victor to Lieutenant General Count W. von Hochberg.*

Nackel, January 15, 1813.

"The Emperor calls me to the command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps of the Grand Armée; I leave with regret that of the 9<sup>th</sup>. Moving away from you, sir General, I take with pleasure the memory of the attachment you have marked me with. I will always keep it, as well as the will to show you how much I am sensitive to it."

"I beg you to inform the troops under your command that I have, under all circumstances, been pleased with the manner in which they have served, they have acquired rights to the benevolence and rewards of the Emperor; I will hasten to solicit them, so please send me as soon as possible the work you have done on this subject."

"I have the honor to renew to you, General, the assurance of my very distinguished consideration."

*The Marshall,*

Duke of BELLUNE.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of January, General von Hochberg arrived at Posen, where he was ordered to send back to the Grand Duchy the cadres of the whole brigade of Baden, to serve for new formations:

*General of Division Daendels, to Lieutenant-General Count von Hochberg.*

Posen, 21 January 1813.

"The order of march which I have the honor to transmit to you for the troops of Baden which is here cannot be used for the officers, non-commissioned officers and sick soldiers who are at Custrin."

"I invite you, General, to send them off by the most direct route, by the intervention of the general governor of this fortress."

"Permit, General, that I commend myself to your memory, hoping that you will come in the Spring to take command of a new Baden column, which will always be conducted under your orders like the one with which you will return to your country."

"Accept, my dear Count, the assurances of my friendship and my most distinguished consideration."

*General of Division,*

DAENDELS.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>*Denkwürdigkeiten*, page 218.

<sup>3</sup> *Denkwürdigkeiten*, page 218

The Emperor gave the decoration to seventeen officers or NCOs of Baden, and General von Hochberg even received from him the Officer's Cross of the Legion of Honor, which he had nobly won in this terrible campaign.

General Linng brought back the survivors of the Baden Brigade to their country; this glorious debris returned to Karlsruhe on 18 February 1813, bringing back all their flags, which they had managed to save in the heroic and disastrous retreat.

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