

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume I

The Regiment of Frankfurt – Chapter 13

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THE
REGIMENT OF THE FRANKFURT

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEFENSE OF DANTZIG IN 1813

D'Hédouville, Charge d'Affaires of France in Frankfurt, wrote on 30 January 1813 to the Minister of War of the Grand Duchy, General von Eberstein:

...Danzig is provisioned for a year, has 3,000 men in good troops, good generals, and to govern an officer whom it suffices to only to name, General Rapp...

The fortress had received many improvements since Marshal Lefebvre seized it in 1807. Despite the three great dangers to which his garrison was exposed, -- the typhus which killed 16,000 men, the lack of food, and the heterogeneous composition of the besieged troops, -- Rapp made a defense which remained historical. He was an Alsatian, and, as such, showed the Germans a paternal friendship for which they were quick in being grateful.

The garrison under his command included:

The 7th Division (General Grandjean), composed of Poles, Bavarians and Westphalians;
The 30th Division (General Heudelet), made up of French 4th battalions;

The 33rd Division (General Destrées), including the Neapolitan troops;
The 34th Division (General Franceschi), to which belonged the Frankfurt Regiment.

This division, of which all the regiments had taken part in the Russian campaign, was thus formed:

French 22nd Light Infantry Regiment... 12 officers. 152 men.

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Some officers and some soldiers of Frankfurt, who had remained behind, had been able to join their corps in isolation before the commencement of the blockade which was established on the 18th of January; during the whole of the preceding week, the Germans had been at the forefront, while the rest of the garrison was foraging behind them to complete the supplies of the place.

In order to better assure the service, Rapp entirely separated the sick from the valid men: the first were distributed in hospitals organized by nation, for the greater good and the greater consolation of the sick and the wounded. The Germans, whose usable strength no longer corresponded to four regiments, were reduced to two, numbered 5 and 6. Frankfurt was able to supply 17 officers and 40 men for this formation.

The two German regiments, with a total strength of about 1,000 men, on the 21st of January, regained the outposts towards Ohra and Stolzenberg under the command of Colonel Heeringen.

Combat of 4 February.

On the 4th of February Rapp sent out two columns, one Polish, the other German; the latter was directed towards Schidlitz and Wonneberg: following a violent combat, 256 Germans are surrounded, and killed or captured by the enemy; Lieutenant-Colonel Horadam managed to escape; but Colonel Heeringen was mortally wounded and 28 officers fell into the hands of the enemy. The prisoners, placed by the Russians in the choice of being deported to Siberia, or of taking service in the Russian-German Legion, decided on the latter; when they were sent to Stargard, they almost all managed to escape en route and return home.

As a result of this catastrophe, the German Brigade, reduced at the end of February to 1,300 men (including 800 at the hospitals), was formed into a single battalion, to which some Württembergers and Mecklenburgers were added. This battalion, remaining glorious to the former Princely Division, took the name of "Battalion of Europe"; 23 nations were represented: Württemberg, Frankfurt, Baden, Hesse, the five duchies of Saxony, the three duchies of Anhalt, the two principalities of Schwarzburg, the two principalities of Lippe, the four principalities of Reuss, that of Waldeck, and the two duchies of Mecklenburg. The command was given to the former chief of the 4th Regiment of the Rhine, Colonel von Egloffstein, and to Lieutenant-Colonel Hoppe, of the Anhalt Battalion, of the 6th Regiment.

On 8 February, the Poles made a brilliant sortie: when they came back, black with powder, into the town, Rapp made them read a proclamation of the Russians which invited them to abandon Napoleon... The Poles respond enthusiastically by the cry of *Vive l'Empereur!* Almost all the garrison was present at this scene, which made a deep impression on the soldiers, "even on the Germans."

Combat of 5 March.

The Russians pronounced an attack on the town; the German Battalion, sent to the defense of the suburbs of Altschottland and Ohra, lost 8 officers and 98 men; Colonel von Egloffstein and Horadam were wounded; the enemy makes 28 prisoners; Schuler, in his *"History of the Schwarzburg Contingent from 1807 to 1815,"* says that:

A Russian general, addressing these prisoners, said to them: "How can, you Germans, fight against us? Do not you

know that Austria and Prussia are with us, and that yesterday we beat General Reynier utterly?" -- A corporal from Schwarzburg then came out of the ranks and made this simple answer: "General, we cannot know in the town what is happening outside; besides, we are soldiers, and we must obey those who command us! "

Combats of 8 and 10 March.

The garrison made sorties to bring supplies into the city. The "Battalion of Europe," in these two operations, had for its mission making false attacks on the lines of the besiegers, on the opposite side to that of the real sortie.

General Franceschi, being dead, was replaced by General Devilliers.

The latter, -- said Captain of Soden,-- although French, knew, by his character and his manner of being, to conciliate the affection and the devotion of the Germans.

Great Sortie of 9 June.

General Grandjean, with the Bavarians, Poles and Westphalians, will occupy defensively the plateau which extends in front of Zigankenberg (Suchanino). General Devilliers, with the 34th Division, established himself at Dreilinden, east of Pitzendorf. General Heudelet attacked with the 30th and 33rd Divisions on the Schidlitz-Ohra front. Horadam, in his "Journal", says that:

The German battalion remained from 11 to 1 o'clock behind a movement of ground, and stray bullets came constantly to flatten themselves against the bayonets. When they went forward, Prussian Landwehr were jostled and pursued far enough, when suddenly a brilliant "Vivat!" was heard; it was Rapp who, with his staff, was riding the whole line of battle on horseback. He shouted as he passed the battalion, "Brave Germans! I have just learned that the Emperor has won two great victories near Dresden, and has arrived on the Oder; he can bring peace! The Germans cheered the governor, and their cheers were heard by the Prussians and Russians, who responded with cries of anger... Towards evening, an attack of Bashkirs and Cossacks was repulsed by three discharges at good distance; many horses were killed and soldiers immediately came out of the ranks to cut off these horses the best pieces of meat... The battalion had suffered greatly and had little more than 400 men.

The armistice.

The next day, the 10th of June, a courier from the Emperor arrived at Danzig: it was the captain of French hussars Plantat, who spreads bundles of French and Saxon newspapers; he announced the armistice concluded with the Allies and brought for the garrison 10 crosses of the officer and 100 of knight of the Legion of Honor to give to the choice of the governor.

The next day's grand parade: Rapp brought out those who are going to be decorated; the cannon thunders, the drums beat, the troops present arms, while the governor himself attached the crosses to the breasts of the bravest: Colonel von Egloffstein, Lieutenant-Colonel Hoppe and Lieutenant Colonel Horadam are numbered among the elected officials.

The officers who are redundant in the troop are soon after formed into two battalions of 400 men; Generals command them, colonels serve as captains, and captains and lieutenants are in the rank of simple soldiers. A third battalion is composed of all the employees of the commissariat, the treasury and the police station; the four "N's" that distinguish the men's uniforms from this battalion are jokingly called by the Germans: *Nur Nicht Nach Norden!* (especially not to the north)...

Combat of 29 August.

While the Poles were fighting with the Russians at Diwelkau, the 34th Division, commanded by General Bachelu, was engaged in a fierce battle at Pitzendorf. The "Battalion of European" in a column divided by division, supported by the cavalry of the generals Cavaignac and Farine, captured two redoubts; it lost several officers and 36 men in this affair and did not return until evening into the town; the Poles were so distinguished on their side that the officers of the garrison offered by acclamation a sword of honor to the brave Major Schembeck, of the 10th Polish,

who had left that day 23 officers on the field of battle.

The "Battalion of Europe" was sent on the 16th of September to the fort of Neufahrwasser; the favorite distraction of the Germans was the hunting for cannon balls, which the Anglo-Russian fleet riddled the village; 10,000 projectiles were collected; the artillery of the town paid them and used them for the service of the canons of the defense.

The Allies had spread in the city a proclamation which invited the Bavarians to desert; Rapp caused the troops of this nation to be assembled, and made them read this factsheet which pushed them to treason; all protested their fidelity to the French cause; the Westphalians, the Saxon artillery and the "Battalion of Europe" joined the Bavarians to declare that they would remain until the end with their French brothers-in-arms.

Finally, the food was completely exhausted; furthermore, the dissolution of the Confederation of the Rhine made the situation of the German troops difficult; Rapp decided to surrender.

The capitulation.

The garrison was to return to France, under the condition of remaining one year and one day without taking up arms against the Allies. But the Emperor Alexander did not ratify this convention; he demanded that the French troops should be sent to Russia as prisoners of war... The famous Captain Chambure, who, at the head of his Frankish corps, had distinguished himself during the siege by prodigies of courage and daring, then proposed to loot and burn the city, and then make a bayonet attack through the enemy lines; fortunately for all the brave survivors, and for the inhabitants, this extreme measure was rejected by Rapp; the garrison had largely satisfied the requirements of military honor.

On the 1st of December, the troops left the place; the French left in captivity, but the Germans did not follow them and returned to their homeland.

Their farewells were touching; these brave men swore an eternal esteem, a foolproof friendship... All embraced and many even exchanged their swords. Thus were these valiant warriors separated; faithful to the voices of their kings, the Germans submissively went to fight those whom they had served. -- (BERNAYS, from a French memoir.)

17 officers and 60 men from Frankfurt left Danzig: that was all that remained of the Prince Primate's regiment!

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