

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume I

The Regiment of the Saxon Duchies – Chapter 14

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THE
REGIMENT OF THE FRANKFURT

CHAPTER XIV

THE 1813 CAMPAIGN AND THE DEFENSE OF GLOGAU

When Dalberg learned, at the beginning of 1813, of the extermination of the Frankfurt regiment sent to Russia, (5 officers and 31 soldiers, it was said, had escaped the disaster alone...), he determined to make the greatest efforts "To ensure the independence of the states of the Confederation of the Rhine."

An Imperial decree did not fail to put him on notice to reform his federal contingent of 2,800 men at once. The Prince-Primate hastened to order 2,000 uniforms, as many fusils and to write to the French Senate:

...The misfortunes of France are a new cause to admire the most august character, the tutelary genius of France, who knew how to prevent the effects of unforeseen losses and make it the occasion of a new glory...

Never had the Emperor displayed, as at that time, his marvelous qualities of organization; the Allies believed the French armies destroyed and our country at their mercy; but Napoleon stamped the soil of France with his foot: it brought out new armies armed with young men, even children, but these children were supervised by the "ghosts" of Russia, by the last "old men" of Empire, --and they would be the victors of Lützen and Dresden, --and the immortal soldiers of the campaign of France!

A decree of 12 March, fixing the organization of the Grande Armée, said, Article 13:

The contingents of Hesse-Darmstadt, Baden and Prince Primate will form a division called the 39th.

The next day, the Emperor wrote to Marshal Ney, commander of the 3rd Corps of the Grand Armée:

...I also placed under your orders the 39th Division, composed of the Hesse-Darmstadt Brigade, the Baden Brigade and the Prince Primate's Regiment...

It was necessary for Dalberg to make an immediate levy; the number of men required could not be attained; Hanau's Department, instead of 200 men, gave only 9 ... The Prince-Primate, desperate by the lack of zeal of his subjects, wrote on 27 March to his ministers Zweyer and Eberstein:

...I gave my word that the battalion of Frankfurt would be ready, 1 April; to march on Würzburg; my word as Prince was given... Whether the fusils are old or new, no matter, they must be there; old people can shoot; and if they do not shoot, take the bayonet and attack the enemy with it. I declare to you that both of you will be dealing with Napoleon and myself if the battalion does not leave on the 1st of April.

This energetic language produced its effect: a battalion, numbering 860 men, bearing No. 2, and under Major Unkelhauer's orders, was ready on the appointed day. The battalion of Spain kept the No. 1 and the two battalions of the Great Army of Russia were considered completely missing.

The quality of this new troop of Frankfurt left much to be desired; some soldiers, returned from Spain as sick or wounded, formed the elite of the corps of his officers; the others, coming from the militia, were not worth much. As for the rookie men, they had little confidence in their fusils, which often fired only after nine or ten successive attempts...

The Emperor left Paris to rejoin the army; he arrived at Mainz on the 16th of April, where he received a visit from the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Baden, the Grand Duke of Hesse-Darmstadt, the Duke of Nassau, and the Prince-Primate; he encouraged his allies, assures them of his solicitude to guarantee the safety of their States and makes them share his hopes.

Spurred by the contact of Napoleon, Dalberg organized a new battalion, under No. 3, with the cadres brought back from Spain by the brave Vogt; on the 22nd of April, he ordered a fresh levy of 900 recruits to complete the Spanish battalion, and to set up depot companies at Frankfurt for all the troops in the field.

The 2nd Battalion, which was conducted on 12 April to Würzburg, was to be first stationed there; but the Emperor sent from Erfurt, on the 26th of April, the following order to Marshal Ney, stationed at Weimar:

Withdraw the battalion of the Primate Prince which is at Würzburg and if not needed to increase the Marchand Division (39th Division)... I guess your headquarters will be tonight at Auerstaedt You will be in charge of guarding the exits from Dornburg, where you can place the Marchand Division...

The battalion was sent to the army; it lost in a month so many people by desertion that, on 14 May, it counted only 320 men.

In the middle of April, General Marchand, commander of the so-called "German" Division, had under his orders:

3,676 infantrymen and artillerymen,
450 Baden dragoons,
4,329 infantrymen and Hessian gunners,
600 infantrymen from Frankfurt,

in all 11 battalions.

This division, with four French divisions, formed the corps under the command of Marshal Ney.

The 2nd Battalion of Frankfurt took part in the battle of Lützen. A letter dated 17 July 1813, from Lieutenant-Colonel Unkelhairser to General Count Marchand, concerning proposals for the Legion of Honor, mentions that:

On the 27th of April, the Frankfurt battalion, under the orders of General Spitzenberg, expelled the enemy from Jena; that at the battle of Lützen, the battalion in charge of the defense of the village of Mücheln gave proof of its valor; that after having remained a few days at Leipzig defending the city against the enemies who surrounded it on all

sides, the Frankfurters were ordered to go to Torgau, where the governor, Count de Lauer, detached them at the end of the bridge.



Marchand.
(*France militaire.*)

Marchand. (*Military France.*)

The 2nd Battalion was also distinguished at Hoyerswerda, where it was engaged against the Prussian regiment "Leib," the elite of the army of Yorck. Finally, it was sent to Glogau to be part of the garrison of that place.

The 3rd Battalion, under the command of Major Heusenstamm, was also directed to Glogau; before it arrived, he had an unfortunate affair, in which 350 men were surrounded by a party of 200 Cossacks.

The Truce of Pläswitz lasted from 10 June to 16 August. During this period Austria weighed with all her strength on the cabinets of the German sovereigns of the Confederation of the Rhine, to detach them from the French cause; the king of Württemberg had the loyalty to give evidence of this to the Emperor.

The subversion was practiced openly by the Allies, in the German troops in the service of France; defections were numerous during the armistice and they increased considerably after it was denounced. Dalberg complained that in the department of Hanau alone, 90 deserters from the Frankfurt regiment had returned quietly to their homes, regardless of the severity of the military penal code.

But, --said Fain, in his curious *Manuscript of 1813*, --the soldiers of the Confederation, returned from the swagger of their Teutonic adulation, wanted to be *beating* but not *beaten*... What the Germans had so long called their glory, they now called their oppression, and their self-esteem proclaimed as the triumph of their liberation epoch when they were merely changing Emperor...

Undeterred by the events, Dalberg used the period of suspension of hostilities to begin the organization of new units: a battery, a company of foot-jäger and a squadron of hussars; but these formations could not be ready in time, and it was the Allies who finally used them against us after the dissolution of the Confederation of the Rhine.

Defense of Glogau.

The two Frankfurt battalions had arrived at Glogau during the period of the truce; they were soon joined by the brave Major Vogt, who brought them a reinforcement of 2 officers and about 400 men.

A second detachment, numbering 190 soldiers, did not reach Glogau. Stopped at Torgau by the resumption of hostilities, it was employed in the defense of this place.

The Glogau garrison, of which General Laplane was governor, included 9,000 men. Half of the troops were French, and the other half were Croats, Saxons, Spaniards, and the Frankfurt regiment.

The Prussian General Blumenstein came to besiege the place with battalions of the Russian and Prussian landwehr and some bad cannons. The operations presented no interesting feature from the military point of view, the siege corps remaining on a political defensive and relying on the heterogeneous composition of the garrison to surely bring the surrender of the city.

The besieged alone showed vigor.

On 22 September, a reconnaissance of 400 men left the town; in this number are 138 soldiers of the elite companies of Frankfurt. The next day, 400 men of the Prince Primate's regiment made a second sortie, in which they were supported by 300 Frenchmen. On the 23rd, there is a general sortie; the Frankfurt regiment remained on this day in reserve; in spite of the desertions which multiplied from day to day, it still counted 1200 men.

The affair of the 10th of November was the bloodiest and most glorious of the siege; the trench had just been opened against the square; General Laplane made a sudden attack on the works of the besiegers, and succeeded in filling or destroying them:

This day, he says in his report, cost the Prussians 1,200 men; we had 60 dead and 500 wounded, including 14 officers, including the two battalion chiefs of the Frankfurt regiment, MM. Vogt and Unkelhauser

The battalion of Major Unkelhauer had particularly distinguished itself in the attack of a Prussian redoubt.

Towards the end of November, news from abroad reached Glogau; the disastrous consequences of the Battle of Leipzig and the dissolution of the Confederation of the Rhine; the Prussian general commanding the corps de siege redoubled at this moment his attempts to drive the foreign soldiers of the garrison to desertion; Croats, Saxons, and Frankfurt escaped in flocks ... Major Heusenstamm of the Prince Primate Regiment deserted, too. General Laplane was obliged to provide all the guard service with the French troops.

The Frankfurt officers sent the governor 7 January 1814, the following letter:

The General knows that we have fulfilled our military duty, in all circumstances, as good Allied troops must do. We are proud to serve under his command, and we flatter ourselves with having satisfied the general governor. We have placed our glory at our service, so long as the States of Confederation have been the allies of France; but it is said that these states have left this alliance and united with the Allied powers, Austria, Russia, and Prussia. It is now duly acknowledged that the Confederation of the Rhine is dissolved, that all Germany has embraced the cause of the powers, and that all the German troops have united with those of the Allies.

We have learned that our general-in-chief had sent an officer of the Grand Duchy to the commander of the blockade corps, on the left bank of the Elbe, to demand the return of the Frankfurt Regiment to his country. We also know the answer of the commander of the blockade corps, made on the 5th of this month to the above-mentioned letter of our general-in-chief; this answer expressly says that the alliance that has existed up to now with France no longer exists. Our duty is thus changed, we have another destination and we would be cruelly affected if the general did not surrender to our desire, giving leave to the regiment under his orders and allowing us to return to our homeland.

He cannot escape the general whom we, as soldiers, must answer to the call of our country, and that we should expose ourselves to the worst eventualities if we persist in bearing arms against it; the well-known sentiments of justice and loyalty of the general do not allow us to doubt that he is surrendering to our desire, the fulfillment of

which, in the present circumstances, is the object of our most ardent wishes.

On the 8th of January, the governor replied to this letter, that this desire to leave was based on the false reports of the occupation of the Grand Duchy by the combined armies, that the documents about which it was spoken did not present any character of authenticity, and that consequently he could not believe it; that if, really, an officer from Frankfurt was with General Blumenstein with the mission of provoking the troops of Prince Primate to abandon their post, it could only be a threat to his country, which had abandoned the cause of his prince as General Thielmann in the preceding campaign; the Frankfurt officers had to think well that their honor was at stake; it was on the orders of the Emperor and Grand Duke that the Frankfurt regiment had been appointed to enter the composition of the garrison of Glogau, and it could not be allowed to leave without another order of these princes; until the arrival of this order, the governor counted on the zeal so often manifested of the officer corps and on the sentiments of honor which characterized them.

A loyal correspondence continued to be exchanged between the governor and the Frankfurt officers until 22 January. At this date, Laplane learned that the foreign troops were plotting to fall on the French and to give the town to the enemy; he resolved to dismiss the whole non-French part of the garrison. On the 26th of January, Croats, Spaniards, Saxons and Frankfurt came out of the city, leaving 4,000 Frenchmen who defended themselves until April.

The *Journal of Frankfurt* of 1 March 1814 states:

Yesterday, the Grand-Ducal troops of Frankfurt, leaving Glogau with Major Vogt, returned to our city; our joy at finding our compatriots has been much diminished, seeing their nobility halved ...

3 officers and 43 men also returned from the Torgau garrison detachment.

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