

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume I

The Regiment of Frankfurt – Chapter 2

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THE
REGIMENT OF THE FRANKFURT

CHAPTER II

DALBERG AND THE CONFEDERATION OF THE RHINE

After the Treaty of Pressburg, which had destroyed the power of Austria in Germany, there was only one cry among all the German princes: it was to resort to the support of France for the establishment of a new and more solid state of affairs than the old.

Dalberg had the ambition to revive under the name of "Alliance of the Princes of the Rhine" the ancient "Alliance of the Rhine" concluded in 1658 by Mazarin with the archbishops of Mainz and Trier, the bishop of Munster, the princes Waldeck, Hesse-Darmstadt, Württemberg, etc. Seeing the impossibility of creating this new political situation independent of all foreign suzerainty, he frankly decided to accept the French influence.

The main idea of the "Confederation of the Rhine" was from him. He brought to the Emperor the general lines and the fundamental principles; the prodigious workman was quick to assure its execution, and to build the edifice which was to shelter half of Germany under our flag for seven years.

Dalberg wrote on 19 April 1806:

The German nation needs a regeneration of its constitution ... Francis II could become emperor of the East, to make him head of the Russians; and, in the person of Napoleon, would be reborn the empire of the West, as it existed under Charlemagne, when it included Italy, France, and Germany...

The agreement was easily made: on 12 July 1806, the "Confederation of the Rhine" was concluded, under the protectorate of Napoleon. Dalberg received, with the title of Grand Duke, the sovereignty of the city of Frankfurt, the earldom (county) of Reineck, the possessions of the princes and counts of Lowenstein-Wertheim, and some territories of the order of Malta. Napoleon made him Prince Primate and Chairman of the Confederation Council.

It was on 9 September 1806 that Dalberg took possession of his new sovereignty in Frankfurt. It was handed to him by the French commissioner Lambert, at the sound of the cannon and the carillon of the bells. On the borders of the new state, poles were planted with the arms of the ancient electorate of Mainz, bearing the old electoral wheel and the inscription "Sovereignty of the Prince-Primate"; on the other side it read "Confederation of the Rhine".

"The new order of things," said Bernays bitterly, "was at least a good thing: it was to simplify Macedonian confusion, which was called the map of Germany."

The following letters, drawn from the Emperor's correspondence, will give an exact view of the political character of the Confederation:

THE EMPEROR TO THE PRINCE-PRIMATE.

Saint-Cloud, 13 August 1806.

I do not want to delay a moment in expressing to Your Highness all the pleasure I feel of the new bonds that have just been established. I have an obligation to protect the states of Confederation; the happiness of the peoples and sovereigns composing this Confederation will be part of my own; their rights and interests will always be sacred to me, and I will defend them with energy. I am pleased to give him this assurance, as well as that of the perfect friendship I have for him. I will read with the greatest attention the fundamental statutes which Your Highness sends me, and I already hold them, by that alone that they come from him, as proper to fulfill the goal that the Confederation proposes. I will not delay, moreover, to write more specifically on this object.

I know that your Highness would have preferred the Confederation to embrace all the states of the German Empire; but how does one get in between Sweden, Prussia and Austria? As to Hesse and Saxony, I could do nothing but what I did; to leave them full and complete freedom. It is good that they should know that they are perfectly free, that no power will be used in the case of forcing their hands, and that they are unreservedly masters of following the interest of their sovereignty. But as long as these princes testify directly or indirectly to the desire to be part of Confederation, you can put them, in my name, safe from any fear of resentment from anyone. I have not manifested my intentions to my cabinet, my ministers to these princes have received no instruction, so it is in my desire to leave them complete and absolute freedom.

THE EMPEROR TO M. DE TALLEYRAND.

From Rambouillet, 22 August 1806.

...As for the Confederation of the Rhine, write to Mr. Hédouville (brother of the General, Minister of France in Frankfurt), that the basics sent to me by the Prince-Primate appear to me good, but that they must be made to taste of the other princes of the Confederation, and make sure that they impede as little as possible in their independence; that we must wait a little longer for everything to be done; that the first act which it seems appropriate to do is an act of inviolability of the territory of the Confederation, to prohibit the passage to any one, and to agree to rescuing each other, if it was violated... My intention is that no Prussian or other can pass on the territory of the Confederation, and no Confederate grants passage without the consent of all...

Finally, the Emperor writes to the Prince-Primate, on 2 September 1806, from Saint-Cloud:

My brother, the forms of our communications in our capacity as Protector with the sovereigns assembled in Congress at Frankfurt have not yet been determined, we have thought that none of them were more suitable than to address the present to Your Eminence Highness, so that he may share it with both Colleges. In fact, which organ could we naturally choose more than that of a prince whose wisdom has been entrusted with the preparation of the first fundamental statute?

We would have waited until this statute had been issued by the Congress and would have been given to us in communication, if it were not to contain provisions which concern us personally. That alone must have led us to take the initiative ourselves to submit our feelings and our reflections to the wisdom of the Confederation princes.

When we accepted the title of Protector of the Confederation of Rhine, we had only the intention of establishing in law what had actually existed for several centuries. By accepting it, we have contracted the double obligation of guaranteeing the territory of the Confederation against the foreign troops, and the territory of each Confederate against the enterprises of the others. These obligations, all conservative, please our hearts; they conform to those sentiments of benevolence and friendship which, under all circumstances, we have not ceased to give proof to the members of the Confederation.

But here we are limited to our duties towards her. We have no intention of arrogating to ourselves the portion of sovereignty exercised by the Emperor of Germany as suzerain. The government of the people whom Providence has entrusted to us occupies all our moments; we cannot see our obligations increase without being alarmed. Since we do not want to be able to attribute to us the good that sovereigns do in their states, we do not want to be accused of the evils which the vicissitude of human things can introduce into it.

The internal affairs of each state do not concern us. The princes of the Confederation of the Rhine are sovereigns who have no suzerain. We recognized them as such. The discussions that they may have with their subjects cannot therefore be brought to a foreign court of law. The Diet is the only conservative political tribunal of peace among the various sovereigns that make up the Confederation.

Having recognized all the other princes who formed the German Corps as independent rulers, we cannot recognize anyone as their overlord. It is not relations of suzerainty which bind us to the Confederation of the Rhine, but reports of simple protection. More powerful than the Confederation princes, we want to use the superiority of our power, not to restrict their rights of sovereignty, but to guarantee their fullness.

Are not these feelings the same as those of the *Moniteur*, who said, as early as 1801, after the peace of Lunéville:

...No, France will never cross the Rhine, and its armies will not cross it any more, unless it is necessary to guarantee the German Empire and its princes, which inspires it so much interest by their affection for her, and by their usefulness for the equilibrium of Europe...

Enthusiasm was immense throughout southern Germany, when the establishment of the Confederation was learned; princes and subjects, soldiers and writers celebrated with envy the new order which had just been instituted.

Already, after the campaign of 1805 and the brilliant victory of Austerlitz, a number of German officers who had taken refuge in England had come to return to service in the army of Southern Germany, thus forgetting their old political convictions. As for the German writers of that time, their lyricism exceeded all limits: one of them explained that the Bavarians, as descendants of the Celts-Boyens (Boyer-Bayern) were not Germans, but Gauls, and they had the same common stock as the French... Another wrote that the French were descendants of the Franks who, under Charlemagne, with their brothers of Swabia, Bavaria, and Hesse, had fought the Wends; thus, the French were real Germans, and Napoleon the successor of Charlemagne!



TALLEYRAND.

(Extrait de l'histoire de France d'Henri Martin).

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