

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume I

The Regiment of Frankfurt – Chapter 5

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THE
REGIMENT OF THE FRANKFURT

CHAPTER V

WAR OF SPAIN (1808)

The events of Spain had determined Napoleon to send to the Peninsula a strong army of occupation; not wishing to disgrace French troops to Germany, where he foresaw future conflicts, he drew heavily on the German contingents of the Rhinebund, and the Grand Duchy of Frankfurt received, in August 1808, the order to form for the army of Spain an infantry regiment with two battalions.

The embarrassment was great at Frankfurt; General von Zweyer reported, on the 4th of August, that he had only 1,478 men ready to enter the field, -- and that it was absolutely necessary to raise 600 recruits, in order to reach the figure of 1,857 men demanded by the Emperor, -- and, in addition, be able to form a small depot; this levy threatened to be done only with the greatest difficulty, when a blessed courier of the Count von Beust arrived from Paris, announcing that Napoleon was content with a single battalion.

On 11 August, the order was issued to immediately carry the battalion to the strength of 980 men, and to direct it to Mainz, where it was to be placed at the disposal of General Kellermann.

The battalion, only 853 strong, was assembled at Frankfurt on the 24th of August; it had 6 companies including:

1 company of grenadiers,

4 companies of fusiliers or center,

and 1 company of voltigeurs.

Each company had 140 men in the rank; with the grenadiers marched six sappers wearing the fur cap and the long beard, as in the French army.

The battalion staff consisted of:

- 1 Lieutenant-Colonel.
- 1 battalion commander.
- 1 adjutant-major.
- 1 pay officer.
- 1 surgeon-major.
- 2 surgeon assistants.
- 2 battalion warrant Officers.

1 flag bearer.

- 1 corporal-drummer.
- 1 master-tailor.
- 2 black smiths.

Each company counted:

- 1 captain.
- 1 1st lieutenant.
- 1 lieutenant.
- 1 sergeant major.
- 1 fourrier.
- 4 sergeants.
- 8 corporals.
- 2 drummers (2 horns in the company of voltigeurs).

121 soldiers.

Lieutenant-Colonel von Welsch was placed at the head of the battalion; he was to report monthly to the Prince Primate. These reports will often be cited in the course of this study.

Before the departure, the officers were warned that they should carry only a porte-manteau as luggage, any kind of canteen being absolutely forbidden in Spain.

On 25 August, the battalion left for Mainz by boat; it arrived there on the 26th and was reviewed by Kellermann and General Duprat; the impression was good, and the Emperor received a favorable report:

...This battalion is very handsome: the grenadier company especially, and the first rank were of the greatest beauty. The uniform is: white coat, without lapels; collar, cuffs and turn backs red; the company of voltigeurs wears the green coat, cut like the hussars; collar, cuffs and red cuffs; the grenadiers have for their headdress the furred cap; the voltigeurs a green and black shako; fusilier companies have the hat... (COSTA DE SERDA, page 9).

Directed on Bayonne with a day off for three days in route, the battalion passed through Landstuhl, Saarbrücken, Saint Avold, Metz -- (where General Royer made it change 794 fusils for new French fusils) -- Brienne, Troyes, Sens and Orleans. In this city, the Frankfurters receive effects sent for them from Paris by the central stores of the war; they were French coats, shoes, shakos and pompoms: the latter, intended for fusilier companies, were light blue, white, yellow or green, according to the numbers of the companies. It was at Orléans that Lieutenant Colonel Welsch learned that his battalion was part of the 4th Army Corps, commanded by Lefebvre, and the Leval Division.

The order of battle of the Leval Division was as follows:

1st *Brigade*: Colonel von PORBECK (from Baden).

Baden Regiment.
Nassau Light Infantry Regiment.
1 battery from Baden.

2nd *Brigade* (mixed): General CHASSÉ (Dutch).

1st Battalion of the Dutch 2nd Regiment.
2nd battalion of the Dutch 4th regiment.
Dutch 3rd Hussars.
1 Dutch mounted battery (3rd Horse Artillery Company).
1 company of Dutch sappers-miners.

3rd *Brigade*: General GRANDJEAN (French).

Hessian Regiment "Erbprinz".
Frankfurt Battalion.
1 battalion of the Paris Guard.
1 half battery of Hesse.

Arrived 18 October at Bayonne, Chateauroux, Périgueux and Mont-de-Marsan, the battalion continued on Biarritz, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Urrugne and Irun; only 150 people from Frankfurt, who crossed the frontier, would one day see their country again.

The seven-year war in Spain that spanned from 1808 to 1814 was a veritable chaos of combat, an inextricable melee of operations, and, if it is difficult to describe, it is more difficult to follow it methodically....

Also, by restricting as much as possible all that relates to the general operations, we will try to trace, year by year, the movements and the feats of arms of the battalion of Frankfurt until 10 December 1813, day of its defection and of his passage into the English ranks; we will then return back to see the part taken by the troops of the Grand Duchy in the campaigns of 1809, 1812 and 1813.

At the moment when the Frankfurt battalion entered Spain, the military situation was as follows:

ANGLO-SPANISH ARMY.

Left. -- General Blake was in Bilbao with 4,000 men and held the country between the sea and the Upper Ebro.

Center. -- The army of Estremadura was at Burgos on the road to Madrid, 20,000 strong. General Castaños was at Tudela with the 20,000 men of the Army of Andalusia. Palafox, with the 20,000 men of the Army of Aragon, was in Zaragoza.

Right. -- The Army of Catalonia blockaded in Barcelona the French General Duhesme.

Reserves. -- 10,000 Spaniards were concentrated at Somosierra, and 30,000 English massed in Valladolid.

FRENCH ARMY.

Lefebvre and Victor were opposed to Blake.

Soult and Ney, with five divisions, advanced between Miranda and Vitoria; behind them came the Guard and the cavalry reserve.

Moncey was facing Palafox with 4 divisions.

Finally, Saint-Cyr left Perpignan to go and deliver Duhesme at Barcelona.

Arrived at Vitoria, the battalion of Frankfurt had the honor to be designated to form the guard of honor of Marshal Lefebvre; the latter took command of his troops at Durango on 24 October. (Welsch Report, November 1808.)

Battle of Durango (30 October).

Blake was beaten by Lefebvre; the Frankfurters, placed in the guard of the artillery and the luggage, did not take part in the action, but were immediately after engaged in the pursuit, to which the divisions of Leval, Villatte and Sebastiani contributed (November 1st). The Frankfurt 4th Company was left alone in Durango with some Dutch hussars to guard the convoys.

Fight of Valmaseda (Balmaseda) (8 November).

Blake was pushed on Espinosa; he was attacked by the 4th Corps; General Leval engaged Baden and Nassau in the front line, while Frankfurt and the Paris Guard formed his second line. Victor joined Lefebvre and the enemy was defeated.

After these successes, Lefebvre returns his army corps to Reynosa, where the battalion of Frankfurt was stationed, while Nassau, Baden and the Paris Guard went with Soult to operate against the English General Moore.

The battalion spent 15 days at Reynosa, then was sent by Valladolid to Madrid with the whole Leval Division; on the 9th of December arrived at an hour's march from that capital with 240 men under arms; the next day, the Emperor reviewed the battalion and was astonished at its small numbers. Welsch replied that he had a company in Logrono, his sick at Bilbao...in short, that he has out 7 officers and 200 men. The Emperor, displeased, ordered Leval to have everyone brought together and did not grant any crosses of the Legion of Honor to the battalion he found too weak. Great was the disappointment in the battalion of the Prince Primate, because Dalberg had insured an annual pension of 100 Thalers to any Frankfurter decorated...

Leval's division remained in Madrid to guard King Joseph.

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