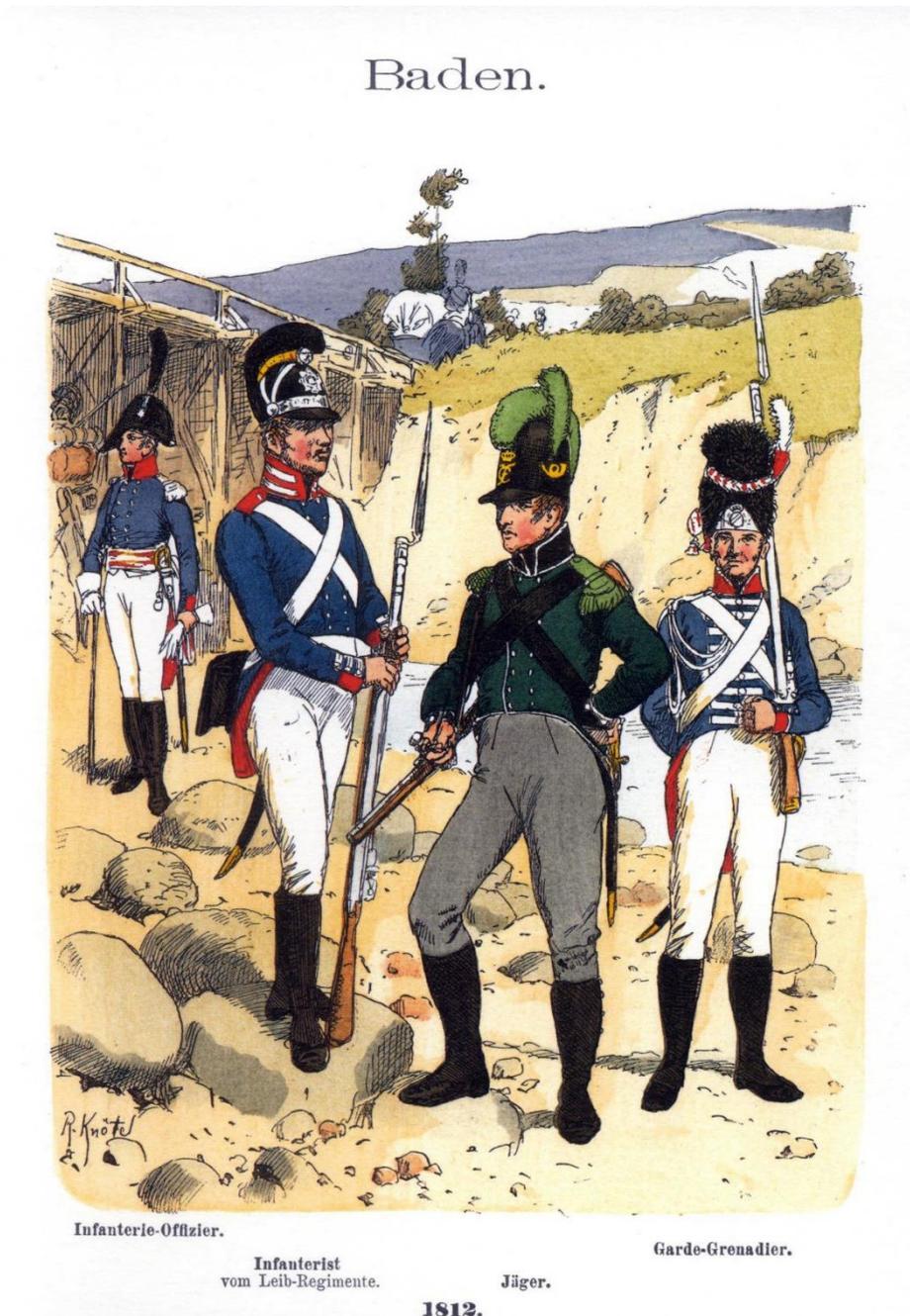


## The Napoleon Series

### The German and Dutch Troops in Spain Chapter 4 Part I: Events of 1813 – 14

By: [Richard Tennant](#)



**The Baden 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in 1812  
by Richard Knötel  
(Courtesy of the Antony Broughton Collection)**

Marshal Soult arrived at Bayonne on the afternoon of 11 July 1813; on the morning of

the following day he had taken over from the hands of King Joseph the command of the Armies of Spain. The detailed orders for the reorganisation of the army were published on 15 July. D'Armagnac's Division of the Army of the Centre was split-up. The two French Regiments of his old division were joined with the surviving unit of the Army of the Centre, Cassagne's Division but with D'Armagnac taking overall command as the 2nd Division with Chasse and Gruardet as brigade commanders.

Apart from the nine marching divisions a reserve of eighteen battalions was formed under General Villatte: this included Neuenstein's Rheinbund Germans now reduced to only four battalions. The Nassau Chasseurs were transferred to Pierre Soult's Cavalry Division. Villatte had in total over 17000 infantry and whilst there was some weak stuff amongst them, the greater part were experienced troops in no wise inferior to the units of the marching divisions. Soult used this reserve to replace brigades cut to pieces in the battles of the Pyrenees but it still remained quite capable of being used as a fighting unit since it had four batteries of Field Artillery, as well as the foreign cavalry and a proportion of sappers and engineers. Whilst it appears to have been Soult's intention to use it in an active fashion this was foiled by the caution or timidity of Villatte who discharged the orders given him in a very half-hearted way.

### **Battle of the Nivelle: 10 November 1813**

On the inner (landward) side of the western sector of Soult's front was a group of redoubts, trenches and batteries on the northern side of the Nivelle called "The Fortified Camp of Serres" from the name of the village enclosed in its midst. In the Serres lines he had concentrated all Villatte's reserve except the weak Italian brigade of St. Pol. The right wing was not subjected to any real attack but only noisy diversions.

### **Battle of the Nive 9-10 December 1813**

Combats of Barrouillet 10-12 December: On the night of the 10 December the two battalions of the 2nd Nassau and the Frankfurt Battalion walked over from the French lines and entered those of the British. This was one of the results of Leipzig. When Napoleon had been driven out of Germany all the Petty Princes of the "Rheinbund" hastened to make their peace with the victorious allies; the Duke of Nassau was one of the not-unwilling converts to the cause of "Liberty of Europe". He had one regiment serving with Soult, another with Suchet in Catalonia. He sent secret agents overland to explain the situation to his colonels. Kruse, commanding the 2nd Nassau Regiment, in Villatte's Reserve Division, received his message and contrived to get into communication with an old German friend in Wellington's Camp, Baring of the Kings German Legion. Kruse settled matters with the officers commanding the Baden and Frankfurt Battalions which were brigaded with his own regiment. On the night of 10 December, Villatte's reserve being on rearguard duty before the position of Barrouillet, the chance came. But when Kruse was managing his manoeuvre he found his way blocked by a French regiment of another brigade - this little difficulty he got over by persuading the colonel of the 34th Leger to take a side path as he himself had found the road before him encumbered with other troops. The way being clear, the Nassau and Frankfurt Battalions marched into Barrouillet.

The Baden Battalion failed to follow from a chance cause -its commander Major Henning, who had been wounded that afternoon, was in on the secret, the second in

command was not and, failing to understand the eccentric direction in which his comrades were marching, kept on following the 34th Leger. The brigade commander was Oberst von Neuenstein, also senior commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Baden, although, with his brigade duties he obviously left the battalion to the Major. The three battalions which had escaped marched through St Jean de Luz on the following day with trumpets sounding and colours flying with their aims and everything in the highest condition and their clothing nearly new, about 1400 strong, showing every sign of enthusiasm they were at once embarked at Passages and returned home. The excellent band was not able to be in the field when the chance came to change sides and was left behind. Soult disarmed the Baden Battalion the next day. Suchet had already been informed of what was planned and had disarmed the Nassau, Wurzburg and Westphalian units in Catalonia.

The 2 Dutch battalions had been withdrawn in 1811; the 2 battalions of Hessen-Darmstadt were captured at Badajoz; the 2 battalions of Nassau and the 1 battalion from Frankfurt had defected, leaving the 4th Baden, once a regiment of 2 battalions, finally reduced by battle casualties to be the one remaining representative of a proud record; this unit together with its artillery was disarmed by its allies although as a mark of respect the officers were allowed to retain their swords.

## **Conclusion**

In the five years between 1808 and 1814 these units had proven themselves to be steady, first-class veteran troops respected by their enemies even if not always getting due recognition from their allies. They entered Spain as a full division of 9 battalions (including the two Dutch) complete with artillery and cavalry. They excelled in the minor skirmishes and ambushes which characterised the war in the Peninsula; as the notorious Guerillero Chief, Camillo, said about a proposed ambush on some Hessians "gentlemen, we will leave them alone. They sell their lives for more than they are worth." They earned, with bravery, their various battle honours some of which were carried with pride by some of their successors until after the First World War.

## **Battles**

Combat of Meza de Ibor 17 March 1809  
Battle of Medellin, 29 March 1809  
Battle of Talavera 27 July 1809  
Battle of Ocaia 19 November 1809  
Siege of Badajoz (Hessians) 6 April 1812  
Combat of Majalahonda (Westphalians) 2 July 1812  
Battle of Vittoria 21 June 1813  
Combat of Araquil 24 June 1813  
Battle of Nivelle 10 November 1813  
Battle of the Nive 9 December 1813

## **Appendix: Orders-of-Battle**

The Army of Spain as reorganised by Marshal Soult

Reserve Division General Yillatte -July 1813

German Brigade, Oberst Neuenstein, (Baden)  
2nd Nassau Regiment, Oberstleutnant Kruse 2 Battalions  
4th Baden Regiment, Oberstleutnant Henning 1 Battalion  
Infantry Regiment of Frankfurt 1 Battalion  
Baden Foot Artillery 1 Company

Pierre Soult's Cavalry Division included:

Nassau Chasseurs a Cheval 1st and 2nd Squadrons

In July 1813 the 1st Squadron had arrived to supplement the, by now depleted, 2nd Squadron which had been in action for five years. By October 1813 the Nassau Chasseurs a Cheval had been transferred to the command of Marshal Suchet in Catalonia. When they were disarmed on 25 November the total strength amounted to 12 officers and 231 men.

### Sources

Dr. Lienhart and R. Humbert.

J.M. Bueno and H. Achard who have used "1808-1814 Badische Truppen in Spanien paintings in Musee de L'Armee de Baden-Baden".

Martin Woodrow and Gerry Embleton, *Military Dress of the Peninsular War*.

Philip Haythornthwaite, *Uniforms of the Peninsular War 1807-1814*.

J. Tranie and J.C. Carnigniani, *Napoleon's War in Spain*, but the cockade is incorrectly described as green and white.

T. Wise, *Artillery Equipment of the Napoleonic Wars*.

Keith Over, *Flags and Standards of the Napoleonic Wars*, who based his data from Baden on information supplied by Otto von Pivka.

Terence Wise, *Flags of the Napoleonic Wars* (1), who used Keith Over, Otto von Pivka and R.O. Morris (Tradition No 72).

Placed on the Napoleon Series: August 2018