

# The Napoleon Series

## The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume IV The Regiment of the Saxon Duchies – Chapter Three Part II

By Commandant Sauzey

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### THE REGIMENT OF THE SAXON DUCHIES

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#### THIRD CHAPTER

#### WAR AGAINST AUSTRIA (1809)

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##### II. -- The insurrection of the Tyrol.

Before following the regiment of the Saxon Duchies in its short and bloody expedition to the Tyrol, it is necessary to go back a little, and to recall briefly the events which had just taken place in this part of the theater of war.

The Treaty of Pressburg had ceded the Tyrol to Bavaria, "with its former rights, and nothing otherwise," as it had been very particularly specified. Now, in a country whose loyalty had always been ardent towards the House of Habsburg, and in spite of the formal promises of King Maximilian Joseph of Bavaria not to change "one iota" the Tyrolean constitution, the first Bavarian minister Mongelas upset all the institutions and customs of the country: the religious question was his stumbling block. The government having declared that it would appoint the parish priests, and that the bishops should intervene only for their consecration, the three Tyrolean prelates at Chur, Trente, and Brixen protested: they were expelled, and their temporal power seized; in their turn, the priests protested: the secular clergy was suppressed and dispersed; sermons and preaching made the first ferments of revolt rise among the simple, pious, and independent peasants of the Austrian Alps.

The clumsiness of the Bavarian agents exasperated the inhabitants every day by making them regret the ancient Austrian domination: the suppression of the Tyrolean States, the introduction of the Bavarian Code, the concentration of power in the hands of a commissary general, the military conscription, the reduction of paper money, the restoration of stamped paper. Finally, the very appellation of "Tyrol" disappeared and gave place to the banal denomination of "Southern Bavaria", while the old keep of Tirol had given its name to the whole country was sold to demolishers.

The brutalities of the Bavarian commissioner Hofstetten brought to its height the exasperation of the mountaineers; they began to plot, to lay the foundations of an uprising; Archduke John, the former governor of the Tyrol, promised the aid of Austria; delegates went to Vienna, and it was agreed that the declaration of war of Austria should coincide with the explosion of the Tyrol; two Austrian corps, one under Jellachich and the other under Chasteler, would then enter the country by the valley of the Inn and the Pusterthal respectively, and would have no difficulty in dislodging the 4,400 Bavarians full of tranquility who held garrison there.

The principal chief of the Tyrolean insurrection was Andreas Hofer, the *Sandwirth*, as he was called, a simple innkeeper of the Passeyrthal; this pious, upright and brave man, filled with a burning love for his Tyrol, and a great loyalty to the House of Austria, incarnated in a complete manner the race of men whom he was about to lead to the engagements; seconded by intrepid patriots like Josef Speckbacher of Gnadewald near Hall, --the Capuchin

Haspinger, known as the "Red Beard", --Nepomucene of Kolb, --Peter Mayer, --Josef Eisenstecken, --Pierre Kamenater, --the former Austrian Major Teimer, he gave the signal for the uprising on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, on the very day when Austria declared war against Napoleon.

Habituated from infancy to their rugged mountains and making the most from their beloved gaming rifles, the Tyroleans, like the Spaniards, animated by the same religious passions, and admirably favored by nature for a war of partisans, were to be formidable adversaries in their lofty fortresses of rocks, and in the narrow passes of their torrents, the Adige, the Inn, and the Eisack.

The seizure of arms by the peasants began on 11 April with the attack of the Bavarian post of Sterzing, executed by the 5,000 mountaineers of Andre Hofer: disregarding the grape-shot, the latter obtained a complete success; 400 Bavarians, with Major Speicher and two guns, were captured.

At the same time the other corps of partisans attacked the Bavarians to the north; Hall was captured and Innsbruck immediately assaulted. General von Kinkel commanded there the Bavarian troops of occupation of the Tyrol; in all, five battalions, two squadrons, and four pieces of artillery; despite the valor and intrepidity of the Bavarians, after the heroic death of Colonel Dietfurth, the insurgents approached, entered the city, seized the artillery and imposed an unconditional surrender to the debris of the Bavarians. The Tyroleans were in the intoxication of their triumph, when a loud cry was heard in the town: "Here is the enemy! It was a column of French, Bavarian, and Italian recruits, conducted from Italy to Bavaria by General Bisson, who had been surprised by the uprising on the Brenner road; one party was able to retreat to Verona, but the other, supported by the peasants, almost without ammunition and food, arrived after an atrocious march before Innsbruck, where it thought it would find salvation by joining the Bavarians there... Receiving fusil shots, General Bisson could not believe that the city was in the hands of the insurgents; unable to fight with soldiers exhausted and half starved, surrounded on all sides by the exalted Tyroleans of Major Teimer and Andreas Hofer, he was also obliged to lay down his arms ...

In five days of fighting, the mountaineers had captured two generals, 6,000 prisoners, 3 flags, 5 canons and 800 horses.

The next day (13 April) the Austrians entered Innsbruck, conquered by the peasants. The Tyrol was soon afterwards completely evacuated by the French, Chasteler having caused the corps of General Baraguey d'Hilliers, who held the middle of the Adige, to retreat as far as Rivoli. The fortress of Kufstein, alone, was still in the hands of the Bavarians.

The Austrian Commissary General Hormayr took the administrative direction of the Tyrol, General Chasteler organized the Landsturm in battalions to six companies of between 1,000 and 150 men, to each of whom he attached a company of regular jäger.

We had therefore to reconquer the Tyrol; this task was devolved to the Bavarians. Three divisions, under the orders of the Crown Prince of Bavaria, and the generals of Wrede and Deroy, were assembled at Salzburg by Marshal Lefebvre on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April; while the first of these divisions remained at Salzburg to cover the road to Munich, and to observe the corps of Jellachich, the Marshal, in two columns, advanced on Innsbruck with the other two divisions; von Wrede, on 11 May, attacked the Strub Pass, defended by the Austrians and Tyroleans, and won after a violent battle; he then descended to Saint-Johann. Deroy advanced by the Salza and lifted the blockade of Kufstein in passing. Von Wrede attacked at Wörgl the 5,000 men of Chasteler, supported by two squadrons of light horse and 9 pieces of cannon; he beat them, throwing them on Rattenberg and soon entered Innsbruck.

The Bavarians had to avenge massacred prisoners; they had taken considerable losses from the beginning of the operations due to the carbines of the Tyrolean partisans; so they committed all sorts of excesses: slaughtered peasants, pillaged and burnt houses... It was a terrible reprisal that the burning of the village of Schwaz (May 15) ended. Napoleon, on learning of the atrocities which took place in the Tyrol, became angry with the Bavarians, but put a price on Chasteler's head. The latter soon left the country, leaving only 3,000 regular troops.



1809. — TROUPES AUTRICHIENNES

1. Cheval-léger.
2. Chasseur tyrolien régulier.
3. Paysan tyrolien insurgé.

1809. -- Austrian Troops 1. Light Horse. 2. Regular Tyrolean Jäger. 3. Tyrolean peasant insurgent.

Abandoned to themselves, the Tyroleans do not lose confidence: Hofer was their commander-in-chief; he had with him 6,000 peasants, 800 regular Austrians and 6 cannons; he brought them before Innsbruck, occupied by the Bavarians, who number only 8,000 men under General Deroy, since Marshal Lefebvre was recalled on the Danube with the division of Wrede after the days of Essling. The battle began on Bergisel on 26 May; Deroy only had the advantage of keeping his position; the next day, Hofer attacked Innsbruck: Deroy retorted by throwing the Bavarian infantry on the Bergisel, which it succeeded in seizing; but this success was only temporary and the arrival of major reinforcements soon made the mountain people superior. The Bavarian general took advantage of the night of the 29<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> to cover his retreat; he lost 1,500 men hors-de-combat, 5 cannons, 200 prisoners and retired on Kufstein. Hofer entered a second time as a victor in Innsbruck and the Tyrol was again in full power of the insurgents.

The Emperor Napoleon wished to put an end to this always resurgent "Tyrolean Vendée"; the victory of Wagram and the Armistice of Znaim enabled him to dispose of important forces. One of the clauses of the armistice stipulating the immediate evacuation of the Tyrol by the Austrian troops, Napoleon at once ordered Marshal Lefebvre to occupy this country, as well as Vorarlberg, and to effect disarmament there during the very period of the armistice.

Graf von Buol, commanding the Austrians in Tyrol, withdrew with his troops; but with a perfidious duplicity, and on the recommendation of the Archduke John, he left weapons and ammunition to the inhabitants, making the rumor that the French should not set foot in the Tyrol as long as the armistice continued...

In execution of the Emperor's orders, the third Bavarian division (General Deroy) arrived at Salzburg on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July; it was joined on the 25<sup>th</sup> by the 1<sup>st</sup> Division (General Raglovich), and on the 26<sup>th</sup>, as we have seen, by the division of the troops of the Rhine commanded by General Rouyer; these three divisions would enter the Tyrol under the immediate orders of Marshal Lefebvre.

At the same time, the French General Montmarie united under his command the two small Bavarian corps of the colonels of Arco and Oberndorf, and passed from Achenthal in the valley of the Inn by Jenbach. A reserve corps under General Beaumont marched in the valley of the Lech, and would direct a first detachment (General Picard) by

Kempton on Immenstadt; a second (General Lacoste) by Fussen, on Reute; a third (General Lagrange) by Partenkirch on the pass of Scharnitz. --The Württemberg Corps, reinforced by Baden troops, marched on the Vorarlberg. -- General Rusca departed from Gmund on the Drave to Sachsenburg and the Pusterthal; -- finally, all the troops available in Veneto are led with General Castella, by Feltre and Bellune (Belluno) on Cortina and Ampezzo, and with General Perry, from Verona in the Adige Valley. It was 50,000 men who were going to take possession of this elusive Tyrol.



1809. — LE MARÉCHAL LEFEVRE  
Commandant le corps du Tyrol (†).  
(D'après une estampe de l'époque.)

1809. -- MARSHAL LEFEVRE Commander of the Corps of Tyrol.<sup>1</sup> (After engravings of the times.)

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<sup>1</sup>LEFEVRE (François-Joseph), Duke of Danzig, Marshal of France, born at Rouffach (Haut-Rhin) in 1755, died in Paris in 1820. Son of a miller; committed himself to 18 years in the Gardes-Françaises, where he became sergeant in 1789. Brigadier-general in 1791, general of division in 1794. Decided the victory at Fleurus. 1796, Altenkirchen, Wetzlar. 1797, Neuwied. 1799, Stokach. Ensured the success of the 18 Brumaire by invading the Salle des Cinq-Cents with 25 grenadiers. Marshal of the Empire. Commanded the foot Imperial Guard at Jena. 1807, captured Danzig; made Duke of Danzig. 1808, Commanded the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps of the Army of Spain. 1812-1814, commanded the Guard; Montmirail, Champaubert. He rallied to Louis XVIII, who made him a peer of France. His wife gave him 14 children, including 12 sons; none survived: the last two found death in battle.