

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume IV The Regiment of the Saxon Duchies – Chapter Four Part I

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THE
REGIMENT OF THE SAXON DUCHIES

CHAPTER IV

IN SPAIN (1810-1811)

I. -- Operations in Catalonia until 1810.

From the beginning of the affairs of Spain, in 1808, a French army under the command of Gouvion-Saint-Cyr was charged with operating in Catalonia. The geographical situation of this province, separated by high and difficult mountains from the rest of the Spanish territory, explains the distinct character of the operations which took place there, without any effective link between the troops fighting against them, who much more importantly, warred for six years in the basin of the Ebro, the west and the south of the Peninsula.

The proclamation of Joseph, the brother of Napoleon, as King of Spain, had instigated the general insurrection of Catalonia, which was entirely under arms in 1808, and had organized nearly 50,000 volunteers; the insurgent Catalans, trained in "tercio" under the name of "miquelets" or "somatén", lent a powerful assistance to the national regular troops.

General Duhesme had taken advantage of the surprise at the town of Figueres (February 1808) and the forts of Barcelona, but the Chabran Division had failed on Tarragona (June) and the brigade of Schwarz on Montserrat. To ensure the preservation of Barcelona, the French army was to take possession of Hostalrich and Girona, which marked the road from Perpignan to the Catalan capital. Duhesme, on the 20th of June, failed in an attack on Girona, which he invested again in July with the assistance of General Reille; but the approach of the Spanish General El Palacio obliged him to lift the siege: Reille remained blockaded in Figueres and Duhesme in Barcelona.

General Gouvion-Saint-Cyr then took command of the troops of Catalonia, now called the 7th Corps of the Grande Armée (August 1808) and reinforced by the two Italian divisions of Souham and Pino. He had to struggle against the third Spanish army composed of the Catalan miquelet tercio of the Marquis El Palacio, against the reinforcements from the Balearic Islands, against the troops that General Reding (a Swiss in the service of Spain) brought from Valencia and from Andalusia, against those who come from Saragossa with the Marquis de Lazan: in all, against 100 battalions and 32 squadrons.

The capture of Rosas by General Reille (6 December) preceded the deliverance of the Duhesme at Barcelona; the successes at Cardedeu and Molins de Rei in the last days of 1808 were soon followed by the removal of the impregnable Montserrat by the Chabran Division on 10 January 1809. After defeating Reding at Valls on 25 February, the 7th Corps begins the memorable siege of Girona, which lasted seven months with equal fury from the assailants and defenders: the town only fell on 11 December, after General Verdier, in charge of the siege, had widely used the reinforcement troops consisting of the French brigade of Guillot, the German Amey Brigade (2 regiments from Berg, the Würzburg Regiment, the battalion of the small German princes) and the Westphalian

division of Morio sent by King Jerome; Gouvion-Saint-Cyr had been replaced by Augereau, and mobile columns reduce the principal centers of insurrection; Palamós was taken by assault, and at Hostalrich the castle alone was still occupied by the enemy.

But the Emperor imposed peace from Vienna to Austria (14 October 1809): wanted to finish with Spain and thought of using in Catalonia the four regiments of the German division of Rouyer. He wrote to the Chief of Staff on 9 November:

"My Cousin,

"The Minister of War ordered the division of Rouyer to go to Mannheim. It is necessary that you should see my Minister of Foreign Relations to take cognizance of the steps I have taken in the small courts of Germany, to have at my disposal new troops from the Confederation of the Rhine, which will form a division for Spain. Write to General Rouyer that he will let you know the troops who would be of good will for this purpose. Write to my ministers with these princes, to know what these sovereigns think of them. Make me a report which will make me know the help I can hope for in this way. On this, etc."

"Napoleon."

General Rouyer's division included the following four regiments:

1st Regiment of Nassau (3rd of the Confederation of the Rhine): Contingents of the Dukes of Nassau-Usingen and Nassau-Weilburg, of the princes of Hohenzollern, Salm, Arenberg, Isembourg, Lichtenstein and La Leyen;

4th Regiment of the Confederation: Contingents of the five duchies of Saxony;

5th Regiment of the Confederation: Contingents of the Houses of Anhalt and Lippe;

6th Regiment of the Confederation: Contingents of Schwarzburg, Waldeck and Reuss.

The Duchies Regiment, commanded by Colonel Egloffstein (of Weimar), was two battalions strong: the line battalion (Gotha, Meiningen and Coburg) under the command of Major Knauth (of Gotha) consisted of 16 officers and 828 non commissioned officers and soldiers; the light battalion (Weimar and Hildburghausen), with Major von Arnswald, had 11 officers and 333 troops: in all, the regiment had 32 officers and 1,194 men at the time when it crossed the Rhine at Mannheim on 18 January 1810; these figures were much lower than the regular numbers, but we know that the desertions had risen to more than 200 in the two nights before the departure for Spain, so the Emperor addressed urgent invitations to the sovereigns of the duchies to urge them to rapidly complete their confederation forces and to start without delay the 520 soldiers who were missing from the Houses of Saxony regiment to reach the statutory figure of 140 men per company.

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