

The Napoleon Series

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

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THE
REGIMENT OF THE SAXON DUCHIES

CHAPTER IV

IN SPAIN (1810-1811)

II. -- From Mannheim to Barcelona.

During the march of twenty-seven days executed by the regiment of the Saxon Duchies from Linz to Mannheim, the German soldiers had gradually learned of the events of Spain; they knew, by the French soldiers who had fought since 1808 in this remote region, as well as by their compatriots from Frankfurt, Baden or Nassau who had returned, the painful conditions with which this war was going on in the Peninsula, suffering from the climate, the inhospitality of the inhabitants, and the difficulty of living there; they regarded Spain as a tomb inevitably prepared for all those who were to be sent there. The false rumor that they were going to be transferred into the pay and service of France still accredited the old legend that the soldiers were "sold" to the Emperor... We have seen that this impression was so powerful that, in spite of the efforts and assurances of their officers, desertion decimated the regiment at the moment of its passage from the Rhine.

In short, the departure delayed by the ice break-up occurred on 18 January 1810. From the crossing of the Rhine, the troop ceased to be fed by the inhabitants and the balance was increased by the following daily allowances:

	fr.	c.
For a battalion commander	4	50
For a captain	3	00
For a lieutenant	2	50
For a sergeant major	0	40
For a non-commissioned officer	0	35
For the troops	0	20

Everyone had a right to lodgings, fire, candle and salt; and, apart from the officers, a pound and a half of bread a day. On entering France, an inspector at the magazines checked the regiment's strength and ordered the payments to which it was entitled; the same administrative formality took place in each place where one of these officials resided.

The route followed by the Saxons across France, from the Rhine to the Pyrenees, is faithfully recorded in the work of Major von Seebach; accompanied by interesting remarks on the country, localities and inhabitants, it deserves to be cited here as an episodic document.

Marches of the Duchies Regiment.

- 19 January. *Speyer*. -- Remarkable cathedral with the tombs of a number of emperors from Germany.
- 20 - *Landau*. -- Fortress built by the famous Vauban in 1680, according to his new system.
- 21 - *Wissembourg*. -- On the Lauter, at the foot of the Vosges, famous by the works known as the "Lignes de Wissembourg".
- 22 - Rest.
- 23 - *Haguenau*. -- On the Moder.
- 24 - *Strasbourg*. -- A formidable citadel built by Vauban in 1682 in the form of a regular pentagon, and on the gate of which is the interesting inscription: *Servat et observat*. Cathedral; Church of Saint-Thomas with the tomb of Marshal Count Maurice de Saxe, executed by Pigalle, in white marble. Arsenal and cannon foundry.
- 25 - *Erstein*.
- 26 - *Schlestadt*. -- Fortified point on the Ill.
- 27 - Rest.
- 28 - *Colmar*. -- This is where the military advisor Reichard arrived from Gotha, sent by the Ducal government to officially assure the troops that they did not pass into the pay of France, but that they remained in the service of the Duchies. The warned spirits of the soldiers were calmed by this declaration, and they cease to believe that they had been sold to France.
- 29 - *Cernay*.
- 30 - *Belfort or B fort* (sic). -- Strong place on the Savoureuse with a castle on a steep mountain.
- 31 - Rest.
- 1st February. *L'Isle-sur-Doubs*.
- 2 - *Baume-les-Dames*.
- 3 - *Besan on*. -- Citadel in an exceptional site, built by Vauban; Roman antiquities; large maneuvering ground, bordered on three sides by spacious and beautiful barracks.
- 4 - Rest.
- 5 - *Vitreous*.
- 6 - *Auxonne*.
- 7 - *Dijon-sur-l'Ouche*. -- Surrounded on all sides by laughing hills, the city contains beautiful houses, pretty open squares, churches worthy of interest. Country of the excellent and precious "wine of Burgundy", harvest on the C te d'Or which extends to the south, from Dijon to Chalon.
- 8 - *Beaune*. -- City of commerce; beautiful hospital; beautiful walks.
- 9 - *Chalon-sur-Sa ne*. -- Beautiful and rich, cited at the origin of the canal of the Center which unites the Sa ne with the Loire; wide quays, lined with beautiful buildings, palaces and elegant cafes. Beautiful stone bridge over the Sa ne. The city was then the residence of a number of Spanish officers prisoners of war. The regiment was to embark on the Sa ne, to descend to Lyons; but the intense cold and the ice which this river carried, did not permit this navigation.
- 10 - Rest.
- 11 - *Tournus*. -- With an elegant bridge over the Sa ne.
- 12 - *M con*. -- Important port on the Sa ne and large quays with the most beautiful promenade of the town: from this we perceive a part of the chain of the Alps; the commerce of the famous "M con wine" has its center in this locality; the peasant women in the neighborhood wear a sort of little round hat (chapeau bressan) which gives them a special appearance.
- 13 - *Villefranche*. -- In a rich and cheerful country; the women of this place, like those of the neighborhood, justify their reputation for beauty.
- 14 - *Lyon*. -- The second city of France, at the confluence of the Rh ne and the Sa ne; the houses are gray, the narrow streets lack clean air; the Rh ne passes quickly along a quay built of magnificent houses: it is an unforgettable prospect. All the wealthy Lyonnais have, in the graceful region which the Sa ne watered over Lyon, beautiful country houses where they will spend the evening during the hot season. The revolutionary vandalism left traces still visible in the city and notably on the famous Place Bellecour. Numerous Roman antiquities; beautiful churches; many silk factories.
- 15-10 - Rest. -- The means of transport for the descent of the Rh ne into boats, prepared in Lyon by General Cornet, commanding the place, could not be used. The Rh ne carried enormous ice and

the wind blew in a storm. The regiment thus continued its march.

- 17 February. *Vienne*. -- "On the Rhône." Dock, beautiful houses, Gothic cathedral, manufacturers, Roman antiquities. On the surrounding mountains are the famous red wines of "Côte-Rôtie".
- 18 - *Péage-de-Roussillon*. -- Many mulberry trees; despite the presence of these trees which announce the entry to the region of the Midi, the temperature was remained inclement and the soldiers still suffered cruelly from the cold.
- 19 - *Saint-Vallier*. -- Pretty country, silk spinners.
- 20 - *Valence*. -- Badly built city, on the left bank of the Rhône, with narrow and winding alleys; graceful surroundings, filled with mulberry trees; citadel and school of artillery, where Napoleon's genius was formed and developed.
- 21 - *Livron*.
- 22 - *Montélimar*. -- At the confluence of the Jabron and the Roubion; remains of an ancient citadel; several manufacturers of silk, leather, and woolens; the surroundings are planted with vines, olive-trees, and mulberry-trees; there are already some orange trees.
- 23 - *Pont-Saint-Esprit*. -- The regiment crossed the Rhône on the famous bridge built in 1265, and composed of 26 arches with semi circles (of which 19 large and 7 small); its length is 2,520 feet, its width only 20 feet.
- 24 - Rest.
- 25 - *Uzès*.
- 26 - The terrible cold which had reigned since the departure from Lyons is replaced by a Spring weather. It was by a pure blue sky that the regiment descends on *Nîmes*. Citadel; magnificent monuments of Roman antiquity: the arenas, work of giants are well preserved, where 21,000 spectators could take places; the Maison Carrée, a temple of classical harmony and beauty; the temple of Diana, in a park full of ancient remains, among others, remains of Roman baths; the Tour Magne, ruins of an ancient Roman construction. The city has narrow and dirty streets, but its suburbs are filled with beautiful buildings, walkways, promenades like the Cours and the Esplanade.
- 27 - *Lunel*. -- Country of the exquisite Muscat wine of this name.
- 28 - *Montpellier*. -- City of a delicious climate, seated between the Merdanson and the Lez; beautiful buildings, remarkable cathedral, university, famous faculty of medicine, botanical garden; pleasant walks, among which that of the Peyrou, from which you can see the Alps, the Cévennes, the Pyrenees and the majestic Mediterranean Sea. Trade of wines, silks, oils, wool.
- 1st March. Rest.
- 2 - *Mèze*.
- 3 - *Pézénas*.
- 4 - *Béziers*. -- The environs of this town are of such fertility that a French proverb says: "If the Good God wished to dwell on earth, it is at Béziers that he would descend."
- 5 - *Narbonne*. -- With an old cathedral entrusting the tomb of the Philippe-le-Hardi; joined by a canal to the Mediterranean, this city makes an important trade of wines and olive oils.
- 6 - Rest.
- 7 - *Sijean*.
- 8 - *Rivesaltes*. -- Famous for its Muscat wines; the country is covered with vines, lemons, orange trees, pomegranates, of mulberry trees and of olive trees: in spite of this, wood is lacking; it is a relative deprivation, in a region where the heat of summer is unbearable and where the inhabitants are burnt by the sun.
- 9 - *Perpignan*. -- Capital of Roussillon, in a renowned vineyard; large and beautiful cathedral; a fortress with thick walls and towers, with a citadel in the shape of an almost regular hexagon, which itself contains an old square keep flanked by eight towers and built by the Emperor Charles V. On the Esplanade, between the citadel and the city, one can maneuver easily from 8,000 to 6,000 men ...

This overview of the impressions of a Saxon officer who crossed our country nearly a hundred years ago is not lacking in flavor: if the military side first caught his attention, one could see that the winegrowing part was not neglected and seemed very appreciated also

It was at Perpignan that, after a review by the governor, the regiment of the Duchies handed over all the fusils in bad

condition to the direction of artillery, and received in exchange new French fusils; the rifles of the Weimar battalion were also replaced by French rifles; it was necessary to arrive at the standardized caliber, indispensable for the good and prompt resupply of ammunition; nevertheless, the light battalion parted with sadness from its arms, which it had so well used against the Tyroleans.

On the 11th of March, the regiment crossed the frontier between Le Boulou and Figueres, and entered Catalonia; from Linz it had just taken 81 marches. Its strength amounted to 1,106 men, of whom 929 were in the army and 177 in the hospitals.

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