

The Napoleon Series

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

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THE
REGIMENT OF THE SAXON DUCHIES

CHAPTER IV

IN SPAIN (1810-1811)

III. -- The expedition of Manresa.

The Duchies Regiment made its junction on 12 March at Girona with the three other regiments of the Rouyer Division, which at last was actually constituted:

1st Brigade. -- General SCHWARZ (French).

1st Regiment of Nassau (no. 3 of the Confederation of the Rhine), Colonel von POLLNITZ.

4th Regiment of the Rhine (Saxon Duchies), Colonel von EGLOFFSTEIN.

2nd Brigade. -- Colonel von CHAMBAUD (of Anhalt).

5th regiment of the Rhine (Anhalt-Lippe), Colonel von CHAMBAUD.

6th Regiment of the Rhine (Schwarzburg-Waldeck-Reuss), Colonel von HEERINGEN.

The numbers were as follows:

| | Present. |
|--|------------------|
| | — |
| 1 st Regiment of Nassau..... | 1,494 men. |
| 4 th Regiment of the Rhine..... | 929 -- |
| 5 th Regiment of the Rhine..... | 228 -- |
| 6 th Regiment of the Rhine..... | 876 -- |
| Total | <hr/> 4,527 men. |

(Plus, 635 soldiers to hospitals).

On the following day Marshal Augereau passed in review of the division, which formed part of the 7th Corps with the divisions of Souham and Verdier: it was a group of 18,000 to 20,000 men (not including the garrison of Barcelona) whom the Marshal was to direct on this city with a huge convoy of 1,000 wagons for food.

After having reserved five days of bread and two days of meat, which the soldiers had to carry in their pack,

Augereau departed from Girona on 14 March. He took the Rouyer and Souham Divisions, a part of the Verdier Division, four batteries and 500 cavalry; he arrived in front of Hostalrich: as we have already said, the citadel of this place was still in the hands of the Spaniards, the Italian division of Pino having been unable to capture it when it had taken the city on 8 November 1809; the bombardment, begun on the 2nd of February, still lasted, and the citadel replied vigorously holding under its cannon the road from Girona to Barcelona. It having to be passed, we passed: on the night of 14 to 15 March, the convoy avoiding the highway was connected in the north of the city with a bad road going to Battloria; the column followed. Delays, congestion, and at daybreak the tail had not yet passed: the citadel shot at once, one of its cannon balls breaks a wagon of the battalion of Weimar ... Finally, the whole column crosses this bad stage.



1810. — LE MARÉCHAL AUGEREAU
Commandant le 7^e corps en Espagne (4).
(D'après A. Tardieu.)

1810. -- MARSHAL AUGEREAU Commander of the 7th Corps in Spain.¹ (After A. Tardieu.)

But soon afterwards a patrol announced the presence of the Spanish miquelets on the heights of Sant Celoni, on both sides of the road, at a point where the convoy must stop and feed the horses. The advanced guard arrived at Sant Celoni: strongly attacked by the tercio, it survived, repulsed the enemy, and the convoy could advance; but then, at

¹AUGEREAU (Pierre-François-Charles), Duke of Castiglione, born in Paris in 1757, died at La Houssaye in 1816. -- Enlisted in the Neapolitan troops, he served there until 1787 as a private soldier; established at Naples as master of fencing, he enlisted in 1792 in the volunteers of the Republican Army of the Midi of France; General of Brigade in 1794, General of Division in 1796, was distinguished in Millesimo, Dego, Lodi, Castiglione, Bassano, Arcole. He executed for the Directorate the coup d'état of the 18th Fructidor. Marshal of the Empire and Duke of Castiglione in 1801, he was at Jena, took Berlin, and fought at Eylau; sent to Spain in 1809, and then recalled; -- took part in the campaign of 1812, illustrious at the battle of Leipzig; retreated before the Allies in 1814 at Lyons, and rallied to the Bourbons, who named him the Peer of France. He declared himself for Napoleon in the Hundred Days; but the Emperor refused his services; the Second Restoration did not accept them either, and the Marshal died on his land of Houssaye in 1816.

the tail, the baggage of the army corps was attacked in their turn; it was continued in combat support which slowed down the march and made it more tiring.

When the troops which preceded the convoy passed the bridge of the Tordera, on which only three men could march in front, at a signal given by the bell of a chapel, numerous bands of miquelets arise on both sides of the road on which it was slowly advancing the convoy and attacking it again: they had to be dislodged from the slopes of the mountains. The regiment of the Duchies was employed there; its company of grenadiers at the head, it attacked in its turn and drove back the Catalans; the light battalion remained on the conquered position until the baggage of the corps had passed the dangerous defiles; forming the rear-guard, it rejoined at midnight the bivouacs of the division at Granollers. The regiment lost seven killed and nineteen wounded. The Saxons were pleased to note that the Spaniards were less good shooters than the Tyroleans, who, under a similar circumstance, would have made them pay much more for such a combat day.

Augereau arrived on the 16th in Barcelona; he hastened to bring his convoy into it, and to distribute the troops he brought into the rich countryside of the suburbs. The Duchies Regiment settled at Sarria; since the departure from Linz on the Danube it had covered 218 German miles, and this rest of a few days was well earned; then, in execution of the Emperor's orders, the Marshal prepared to send to Valls and Reus, by Vilafranca del Penedès, the division of Souham and the Italian division of Severoli to watch Tarragona and, if possible, the troops of Suchet would operate in the basin of the Ebro, towards Lerida. These troops departed on 20 March; at the same time the Marshal organized a column led by General Schwarz, which would include the Nassau Regiment and 8 companies of the Saxon Regiment (3 from Gotha, 3 from Weimar, 1 from Coburg, 1 from Hildburghausen); its mission was to occupy Manresa, the residence of the Insurrectionary Junta and the rallying center of the insurgents; this town of 10,000 inhabitants, enclosed by four gates, with two bridges over the Cardener, was an important roadblock and its occupation must enable the 7th Corps to link the Souham Division with the troops of the 3rd Corps.



Manrésa.

Manresa.

The 8 Saxon companies went to Sans the 19th of March under the command of Major Knauth; they assembled there with the regiment of Nassau and 6 French cuirassiers, and the column thus composed departed on 20 March, without artillery, to carry out its mission: the occupation of Manresa. The remainder of the Saxon Regiment (1 company of grenadiers and the company of Meiningen), with Colonel von Egloffstein, remained at Barcelona with the Marshal, who still retained the surplus of the Rouyer Division and part of the divisions of Souham and Verdier.

General Schwarz (an Alsatian) left Sans with about 2,200 men: 1,600 soldiers from Nassau and 600 to 700 Saxons from the Duchies. He crossed the Llobregat at Molins del Rey and reached Martorell: there, a distribution of wine was made to the detachment which left in the afternoon and crossed Esparreguera, a village entirely abandoned by its inhabitants; a few isolated shots saluted the column which bivouacked a league beyond, leaving behind in the village three Saxon companies, which then rejoined the bivouac without being otherwise disturbed; 1 officer and 6 men per company, sent to Esparreguera, brought back provisions that were brought to the front of the bivouac and equitably distributed; some soldiers, taking advantage of the night, introduced themselves well into the houses from which they emerge with objects "which could not really pass for edible" ... They are severely punished and more serious excesses were thus avoided.

On 21 March, the movement continued; a company of Gotha forming the rearguard. There were still five German miles to cover to reach Manresa. But the column scarcely reached the narrow defile which extended between Bruch and La Guardia, when the fire of the Catalans begins; the tocsin rang in all the neighboring villages, calling for the miquelet and somatén to arm. The voltigeurs of Nassau, with a company from Weimar, were charged to flank the march of the column on the right; on the left, 2 companies of Weimar and that of Hildburghausen fulfilled the same mission; as they progressed, the number of insurgents increased and their fire became more deadly. General Schwarz was several times obliged to have bayonet charges; at length, after an incessant struggle and a march of ten hours, on the heights above Manresa; he settled there at bivouac: the 1st Battalion of Nassau was to the east of the city, the 2nd Battalion to the north; the Saxons were to the west, to the bridges of the Cardener; 300 men occupied the town from which all the inhabitants had disappeared; an icy rain fell throughout the night following the day of battle. Thanks to this bad weather, the guerrillas did not attempt a night attack on the bivouacs which would have been dangerous for the harassed German troops.

The day of the 22nd was employed in the resupply of food, that fatigue duty brought from the town: there was an abundance of wine, but no meat; General Schwarz endeavored to secure good distributions, and, said Lieutenant Jacobs, "the gratitude of all was gained." Meanwhile, the fire was still very lively on all fronts: the miquelets and the inhabitants in arms completely surrounded Manresa.

In view of the growing intensity of the Spanish fire, the General decided next day to concentrate his forces in the city itself; before this movement of retreat the insurgents advanced, approached, and reached the houses; but they could not cut off any detachment, and the murderous fire which left the city obliged them to fall back.

On the 24th, during the day, the Catalans renewed their attacks without success; a company of Gotha, posted on a height crowned by a chapel and from which the city was dominated, fortunately supported in time by a Weimar company, managed to maintain itself on this important point thanks to the shelter of a small shoulder built in haste. The Spaniards, however, seeing the German detachment completely surrounded, made General Schwarz a proposal of capitulation: "I do not deal with brigands," replied the General to their envoy. The position was becoming critical, however: munitions were going to be gone at the same time as the food ...

In the following day a spy came to announce to the General that a battalion with two pieces of cannon had left the day before from Barcelona, escorting resupplies which Marshal Augereau sent to the detachment: 8 companies of Nassau were immediately sent to meet this convoy: the Spaniards were dislodged from the heights to the south of the town, and three hours later, the Nassau soldiers made their junction with a battalion of the 7th Corps, which had been attacked by the miquelets and had already lost two of the five ammunition wagons that it escorted and would certainly have been forced to abandon the last without the timely arrival of the companies of Nassau; the two united troops marched together, fighting as far as Manresa, harassed by the Spaniards for the duration of their movement. The day cost 4 officers and 20 men to the Nassau Regiment.

Taking advantage of the momentary diminution of the garrison, the besiegers had attempted a furious attack against the height of the convent; but the 900 soldiers who remained with General Schwarz repulsed this assault vigorously.

The battalion from Barcelona remained until 26 March in the evening before Manresa; during the night it was to take the road back, accompanied by the Saxon battalion of Major Knauth, who was to escort it beyond the dangerous defile of Montserrat; but the departure, which was to take place at 8 o'clock in the evening, could not be effected till 11 o'clock. So it was only at 6 o'clock in the morning, on the 27th, that one reached the point of separation; the awakened Spaniards saw the two troops depart, and waiting for the Barcelona battalion, with its cannons, to be

sufficiently distant, assailed the Saxons, who were returning to Manresa, and endeavored to cut off their retreat. Major Knauth had to deploy his whole battalion, and attack the enemy with the bayonet to make way and pass; he was received, at half an hour from Manresa, by two companies of Nassau sent to meet him by General Schwarz; the Saxon battalion had lost in this case 4 killed and 18 wounded including an officer; all the wounded could be transported to the city and placed in the hospital.

The situation continued until 2 April. The want of artillery was felt terribly; every day were days of combat; the outposts could not be relieved, and the nights passed entirely under arms. The garrison had more than 200 soldiers at the two hospitals organized in the square. Again, the cartridges were running out; General Schwarz then attempted an overnight expedition on the Spanish powder-mills established at an hour's distance from Manresa; this operation succeeded at will, and many mules loaded with powder were brought back into the town; the pipes of the organs of the church, melted, furnished the metal which was necessary; bullets were poured and all the necessary cartridges were made. This happy expedition arrived at a good time, for the forces of the enemy were increasing every day around the town; the number of the Spaniards rose to more than 5,000 men; their emissaries offered the German soldiers to transfer into the pay of Spain or England, or even to embark for the British Isles in order to regain thence their country. These shameful proposals were not listened to, and the Germans remained faithful to their flags.

On the 3rd of April, a new division of Spanish miquelets arrived before the place: it was that of Rovira, a doctor of theology who had become a patriotic general, who addressed a summons to General Schwarz. The latter, who had just learned that a second convoy of ammunition has left Barcelona on 2 April, and was due to arrive on 3 or 4 at the latest, replied to the summons to give up the place with a general sortie; this sortie occupied the enemy, and two Saxon companies with two companies of Nassau took advantage to open a passage and go to meet the expected aid; these companies return after a day of combat, without having found anything of the announced supplies.

What had happened? Marshal Augereau had indeed sent the second convoy of ammunition awaited by General Schwarz on 2 April, from Barcelona to Manresa. Escorted by a battalion of 600 men from the French 67th Infantry Regiment, 250 men from the 5th Rhine Regiment, 60 soldiers from the two companies of Gotha and Meiningen who remained in Barcelona and thirty convalescents from Nassau and Saxony who joined their convoy under the command of the Lieutenant-Colonel of the 67th, had left Martorell on the morning of the 3rd, and had already passed Esparreguera when it was vigorously attacked by the regular Spanish division of General Campoverde. This division was directed on Manresa by Esparreguera when the arrival of the convoy of Barcelona was signaled to him by the inhabitants. The French colonel, considering himself too inferior in number, gave the order to return to Martorell; but as the enemy did not seem to follow him with much ardor, he changed his mind, returned to his first decision, and attacked the village of Esparreguera; a violent struggle ensued, and the colonel, recovering from anxiety, broke through to resume his movement backward; but at this moment the Spanish cavalry successfully charged a part of our troops, put the column in disorder, and jostled it on a tributary of the Llobregat, behind which the troops were rallying, but a fresh attack of the enemy's cavalry broke them again; as the bridge over the Noya, through which it was necessary to pass, was occupied by the inhabitants of Martorell in arms, the greatest disorder was placed in the detachment; a small part of the troops assembled, attacked the bridge, and made way at the bayonet, while the remainder, charged once more by the cavalry of Campoverde, after trying to form a square, was dispersed and pursued towards Noya or the Llobregat. The fugitives found on the bank of the Noya an escarpment more than thirty feet below the bottom of which flowed the river... They rush into it, and many of them found death in the waves. Of the 1,000 men of the column, only 500 returned in the evening to Barcelona, half of them unarmed. This fatal affair of Martorell cost us 500 men: 320 French, 140 soldiers of the 5th Regiment of the Rhine, 40 Saxons from the regiment of the Duchies and the majority of the 30 convalescents.

On the 4th of April, about noon, instead of the convoy which he was still waiting for against all hope, General Schwarz saw a Spanish column approaching. It was the enemy's division which had won the day before at Martorell, which brought to the besiegers the reinforcement of its exalted soldiers; a parliamentarian sent to announce the failure of the relief column, and to demand the immediate surrender of the place, was obliged to withdraw with the simple reply that "the French general, full of confidence in the intrepidity of his troops, the assault threatened "; but this time the besieged saw that they were dealing with regular troops and prepared for the most energetic resistance. General Schwarz then published the following order of the day:

I do not wish to remain longer without testifying to MM.(you gentlemen), the superior and subaltern officers, and

the non-commissioned officers, all my satisfaction for the good discipline which they observe in the soldiers under their command, and I am sure they will endeavor to continue to justify the advantageous opinion that I have made about them.

The present order will be read three days in succession before the troops, and I charge MM., the company commanders to express my utmost satisfaction to their soldiers for their intrepidity before the enemy and for their exact obedience in the last circumstances.

General of Brigade, SCHWARZ.



Pont de Martorell.

Bridge of Martorell.

The attack of the enemy was not delayed: four Spanish battalions of the line, supported by a squadron of cavalry, rushed to attack the heights defended by six companies of Nassau; at the same time the miquelets rushed against the troops of the Duchies, to the west of the town; on both points, the murderous fire of the besieged broke the impetus of the assailants and finally threw them back. But in view of the enormous numerical superiority of the Spaniards, which were now more than 10,000 in front of Manresa, General Schwarz ordered in the evening to evacuate all the outposts; he decided that he would try in the night to make his way to Barcelona, to avoid a fatal capitulation, for he had only thirty cartridges per man and provisions for only a few days.

As soon as the retreat was decided, it was necessary to prepare the execution with the utmost speed: all the wounded officers treated in different houses of Manresa were assembled in one of the improvised hospitals, with the 300 men wounded from the detachment and entrusted to the monks who remained in the city; the advanced stations are ordered to feed their lights abundantly so that they could last all night after the departure; the ammunition and luggage wagons of the Nassau regiment were broken up and burned (the Saxon battalion had not taken them from Barcelona); the gates of the city were firmly barricaded; the bridges on the Cardener were broken by the sappers of the detachment, who remove the beaters of all the bells, so that the alarm could not be given after the column had left the town. The road to Barcelona by Esparreguera and Martorell was so strongly held by the enemy that one could not think of following it: the retreat would be made by the bad paths which pass through the bridge of Villamara on the Llobregat, the Neck of David and Sabadell.

At 11 o'clock in the evening, the detachment came silently out of Manresa, through the gate opposite to the direction

of Barcelona. A Frenchman established in the town served as a guide; the two battalions of Nassau, at the head, were followed by the Saxon Duchies battalion; 40 men from Weimar were in the rear. A weak Spanish picket, surprised asleep on a bridge, was passed by arms without firing a single shot; but a little farther on, a second enemy post gave the alarm by firing a salvo of gunshots. Nevertheless, thanks to the darkness, General Schwarz won another two hours' march on very difficult roads, through mountains and rocks. In consequence of a misunderstanding, beyond the bridge of Villamara, the column whose head had taken a false direction was divided into three sections: Major Knauth with 450 men, without guide, marched adventurously into the night, followed, and shot at by the enemy. Finally, one hour after sunrise, it managed to make its junction with the main body of the Nassau regiment, which was also joined shortly after by the third fragment of the column: less happy, the latter lost half its membership.

The arrival of day increased the danger, and they were still twelve leagues from Barcelona. The Spanish division of Campoverde followed closely, the Swiss regiment forming its advanced guard was already in sight; the bells, on all sides, called the Catalan peasants to arms; one could not think of stopping for a single moment; arriving at the Neck of David, the Germans are already surrounded by a mass of insurgents, the number of which was increasing from moment to moment. Major Knauth was in charge of the rearguard, with the four companies of the light battalion of Weimar; he marched with the last platoons, exhorting the soldiers, reviving their courage, setting them the example of coolness in the most perilous moments; the seriously injured wounded had to be left at the Neck of David, for it was now impossible to transport them further; the Catalan peasants arrived on these unhappy wounded men, mistreated them, slaughtered several of them. This spectacle redoubled the energy of those of the wounded who could still walk, and the retirement continued under a burning sun, without a drop of water to quench the thirst of the harassed soldiers. A halt soon became indispensable; scarcely had the soldiers been stopped, when the arrival of the Spaniards compelled them to resume their march; then the rear guard sacrificed itself: in order to defend them for a moment, and to retard the approach of the enemy, it established itself on rapidly sloping ridges, where many exhausted soldiers, who had reached the dying, remained abandoned.

A little further on, the 40 men from Weimar, who were marching with their two officers in the extreme rear, were ordered to defend a narrow defile. This handful of brave men struggled hopelessly and allowed the column to gain a little advance; but of these forty soldiers, twenty-five with an officer could only rejoin; five are killed or wounded, the remainder were surrounded and taken with Lieutenant von Seebach, who had fallen struck by a bayonet.

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