

# The Napoleon Series

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

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THE  
REGIMENT OF THE SAXON DUCHIES

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CHAPTER VI

CAMPAIGN OF 1813

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### II. -- The Girard Division and the fight of Lübnitz.

At the rupture of the armistice, the Emperor decided to take the offensive on all the points of the strategic chessboard: while he beat the Austrians in front of Dresden, he pushed Macdonald against the Army of Silesia and Oudinot against Bernadotte's army covering Berlin; Oudinot had the 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Corps, and the Emperor had decided that his movement would be supported by the corps of Davout leaving Hamburg, and by a division drawn from Magdeburg.

It was to this division, placed under the command of General Girard, that the Duchies Regiment belonged. It had the following composition:

- 2 battalions of the French 18<sup>th</sup> Line;
- 2 battalions of the French 10<sup>th</sup> Line;
- 2 battalions of the French 72<sup>nd</sup> Line;
- 1 Illyrian battalion;
- Westphalian 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Regiments;
- 2 battalions of the 26<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Regiment;
- 2 battalions of the Saxon Duchies Regiment.

As cavalry, 6 French squadrons; as artillery, 16 pieces of cannon and 2 howitzers. In total, 15 infantry battalions and, with the other arms, a force of 10,000 men.

On 21 August, according to the instructions of the Emperor, General Girard attacked the blockading corps of Magdeburg, composed of 6 battalions and 3 squadrons: he forced them to withdraw beyond Burg and at 9 o'clock in the evening Girard reached this little town, in front of which he went to the bivouac and his soldiers pillaged "properly."<sup>1</sup> The next day the march continued in the midst of clouds of Cossacks, up to the neighborhood of Ziesar where a camp was established; the outposts extend from Loburg to Rechen; General Girard remained in this position until the 25<sup>th</sup> of August in the morning, to wait, he said, for reinforcements from Wittenberg: in fact, because he was without any news of the army of Marshal Oudinot, all the estafettes, spies and messengers were being stopped by the enemy. Finally, on the 25<sup>th</sup>, the division set out in the direction of Brandenburg when the

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<sup>1</sup>Jacobs, page 298.

presence of Prussian General Hirschfeld near that city was announced, with 15 battalions, 12 squadrons, and 1 cannon. Girard immediately took the road to Brück, where his division only arrived late at night; during this forced march, many soldiers, exhausted, stayed behind and fell into the hands of the Cossacks who followed our columns in numerous troops: the two battalions of the Duchies, alone, lost 200 stragglers.

The next day, at dawn, General Girard continued his retreat on Lübnitz where he set up camp around 9 o'clock in the morning. The outposts were placed at Belzig and Görzke; but the numerous Russian light cavalry prevented the effective reconnaissance of the movements of General Hirschfeld, who marched on Hohenzioz to attack the French division in the rear and on its left flank, and cut off his line of retreat on Magdeburg, while General Chernishev, with his Cossacks, would attack them on his front.

The day of 26 August went without incident; but on the 27<sup>th</sup>, at noon, the camp was suddenly attacked by a considerable number of Cossacks and the French cavalry was thrown back in disorder. The infantry ran to arms; by going to take a position, the Duchies Regiment was jostled by the French squadrons ... The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in particular (composed of the contingents of Cobourg and Meiningen), was put in complete disarray by this avalanche of horses, only arrived with difficulty to rally; its officers and its old non-commissioned officers succeed with great difficulty in forming them in a square. At this moment, 2 balls fell in the middle of the ranks, carrying away 5 non-commissioned officers and 9 men and put the disorder at its height. The Prussians were hotly attacking Lübnitz; the defenders were driven to Hagelsberg. General Girard, who had just come to reconnoiter for Belzig with four battalions and two cannons, could not prevent the success of the Prussians at Lübnitz. The troops thus assembled at Hagelsberg, where, united with those who had come from Belzig, they opposed to the enemy with the most obstinate resistance.

The rain which moistened the powder of the basinet prevented the infantry from firing, and the French artillery was much superior to the Prussian artillery; so General Hirschfeld, in order not to lose the benefits of his first advantage, ordered a general bayonet attack: this attack was crowned with success, and the Girard Division had to abandon Hagelsberg. Although it had been little engaged, the Saxon Duchies Regiment lost 60 killed or wounded and many fugitives who were taken prisoner during the retreat. During the retreat from Lübnitz retreat on Hagelsberg, Major von Kirchbach, commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, seeing a band of Cossacks trying to bring a French artillery carriage, fired on these enemy horsemen with a dozen volunteers, thinking to take back a cannon; he dispersed the Cossacks, saw that he had only saved a box of powder, and brought it back with him.

The next day, the division reached Wittenberg: it had only 3,500 men and had lost five of its cannons and two howitzers. General Girard, already wounded by several bullets at the battle of Lützen and quoted in the bulletin of this victory "for having wanted to remain on the battlefield and declared to want to die while commanding and directing his troops", received a new and serious injury;<sup>2</sup> General Baviile, in the brigade which included the Duchies Regiment, was also wounded. 140 officers and about 2,000 men remained prisoners in the hands of the enemy and among them the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Company of Coburg, commanded by Captain von Huttenhoffen, who at the beginning of the fight at Lübnitz had laid down his arms "more deliberately than by necessity."<sup>3</sup> The two battalions of the Saxon Duchies Regiment now number only 264 men under arms; all the drummers were missing: they fled to Lübnitz with their drum-major at the moment when they were beginning to retreat ... All the officers' baggage was lost.

The remains of the division remained for three days under Wittenberg, and were then directed by Dessau and Kalbe on Magdeburg, where they arrived on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September. What remained of the Saxon regiment found there its depot and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Company of Cobourg: the whole was organized in a battalion with five companies, counting altogether 529 soldiers. The light battalion (3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Weimar) having returned from the outposts, was assembled with the 1<sup>st</sup>, and Colonel Münch took command of the regiment, reduced to 2 battalions, which entered

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<sup>2</sup>Girard (Jean-Baptiste, Baron). Born in Aups (Var) in 1775, died in Paris in 1815. Aide-de-camp of General Monnier in Italy (1799); stood out in crossing the Tessin and at Austerlitz; Brigadier General in 1807, Major General and Baron of the Empire in 1809. Sent to Spain, fought at Ocaña; then commanded a division in Poland; He made his mark at Lützen, where he was wounded, and then at Dresden. After the abdication of Napoleon, rallied to the new government, but returned to the Emperor on his return from Elba. Struck by several bullets at Ligny, dies in Paris a few days later.

<sup>3</sup>Jacobs, page 302.

the brigade of Westphalian General Langenschwarz.

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