

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume IV The Regiment of the Saxon Duchies – Chapter Seven By Commandant Sauzey

Translated by [Greg Gorsuch](#)

THE
REGIMENT OF THE SAXON DUCHIES

CHAPTER VII

UNIFORMS OF THE REGIMENT OF THE SAXON DUCHIES FROM 1806 TO 1813.¹

I. -- Contingents of Gotha and Meiningen.

When the treaty of Posen between the Emperor Napoleon and the five ducal houses of Saxony had brought the Duchies into the Confederation of the Rhine, following an agreement between the Dukes of Saxe-Gotha and Saxe-Meiningen, the two battalions of infantry supplied together by these two princes received the same uniform: blue coat, with collar, cuffs and reverses in red; white breeches and vest, short black gaiters and tricorne hat with tassel; this hat was trimmed with a white braid and decorated with a leather, black and gold cockade. The grenadiers and the light infantry of these contingents were distinguished by a woolen plume, red for the former and yellow for the latter.

There was, however, a difference between the troops of Gotha and Meiningen: Gotha's soldiers had a uniform of French cut and white belts and accoutrements, while those of Meiningen, with the black accoutrements, wore the uniform of the old Prussian cut.

It was not until 1812 that the two Duchies arrived at the same uniform, adopting the French type uniforms; the shako replaced the hat; it was decorated on the front with a copper plate, representing the arms of the Duchies between two laurel branches surmounted by a crown; white cord with shako and flame pompon. The kit was white for the troops; but the officers wore the black patent belt on the right shoulder; they had gold epaulettes, and golden shako cord which was bordered at the top with a gold braid and bore a high red plume.

In 1812, Dr. Geissler, who campaigned with the Duchies Regiment, tells us that the soldiers of the first two battalions received in Hamburg a pair of wide dark blue trousers with a red stripe, to replace the narrow white breeches which were worn with little black gaiters.

The Thuringian Battalion, raised after the disasters of the Russian war, passed to the Prussians in April, 1813, and even fought against the French at the Katzbach; it kept in the enemy ranks the dress it had received at its formation: dark blue coat furnished with long coat tails, with a red collar and light blue patches; gray trousers, gray coat with small folded collar; the Weimar shako; and, for the officers, the cloth cap. The complete regiment which Napoleon demanded, in compensation for the loss of the defeated battalion, received the dress of 1812.

¹After Knötel, *Uniformenkunde* and *Handbuch*

LE RÉGIMENT DES DUCHES DE SAXE



CONTINGENT DE GOTHA
Grenadier (1807) — Soldat (1809)

CONTINGENT OF GOTHA Grenadier (1807) -- Soldier (1809)

II. -- Contingents of Weimar and Hildburghausen.

The battalion of the Carabineers of Weimar, which fought against us at Auerstaedt in the Prussian ranks, and accompanied to Trave the remains of the corps of Kalckreuth on its retreat to Lübeck, was recalled to Weimar by order of the Emperor Napoleon, and shortly afterwards placed at the disposal of the French generals who employed it in 1807 at the headquarters in Colberg (Bad Colberg-Heldburg). In 1806, this troop wore a green coat, with green facings and green collar with yellow flaps; reverses and buttons yellow; red cravat; green breeches in short black gaiters; hat similar to that of the Prussian grenadiers of the time, trimmed in front with a yellow metal band and to the left a green plume; black belting crossed on the chest, one of the harnesses carrying the bandolier and the other portmanteau which replaced the bag. Strangely enough, these carabineers from Weimar were at that time equipped with a high mountain cane in the style of our modern alpenstock. A hat of the Russian model was adopted in 1807: it was edged with yellow, decorated on the front with a small shield of copper and, on the left, of the same green plume as above. The equipment was then yellow leather, but became black again in 1809; from this moment on, a long gray trouser was worn over the gaiter.

The contingent of Hildburghausen was the same as that of Weimar.

In 1812, there was an adoption of the shako that Gotha and Cobourg already wore; this shako, with a copper-rimmed visor, trimmed with cords and white tassels, was decorated in front with a copper hunting horn; the gray trousers with yellow piping has completely replaced the old green pants; in summer, white linen pants were worn. The officers wore gold epaulette, the aiguillettes were of the same metal, and, on the shako, with cords and tassels of gold, the crowned initials of the Duke of Weimar, instead of the hunting horn carried by the troop; they also had white breeches, high boots, copper sword sabers and cuffed white gauntlets.

A company of riflemen was organized in 1812 in the Weimar Light Battalion: it was given the epaulets, the plume and the orange shako cord; the collar of the coat, closed at the front and no longer indented, did not allow one to see the old red tie of 1807.

III. -- Contingent of Coburg.

The contingent supplied by the house of Saxe-Coburg to the fourth regiment of the Confederation of the Rhine received a dark green coat, with facing flaps of the same color, with collar and facings in daffodil: the facings, like the collar, had buttonholes of white braid; the reverses and lining were red; white buttons, buff white leather belting crossed on the chest; the shako, trimmed with white cords and tassels, were decorated on the front with a diamond-shaped copper plate bearing a hunting horn; blue sky trousers in the Hungarian style with yellow trimmings; the officers had the Hungarian acorn boot, the hat, and took the shako only in 1812. The white trousers were also worn in the summer dress.

The two companies of Coburg soon became the elite companies of the first and second battalions of the Duchies regiment; transformed into grenadiers, the soldiers of Coburg receive the bonnet of the French model, with red plume and cord, and the red epaulettes with fringes of the French grenadiers. The reverses ceased to be red in 1812: they were green, as was the base the coat, but then garnished with a red piping.

The officers kept the shako, with silver trimmings (visor ring, cords and tassels, chinstrap, lace trims going around the top), but the diamond plate was made of copper. The high plume, in black feathers, with red at the base; the aiguillettes, the epaulets, the buttons were of silver; the Hungarian boot were lined with silver and had an acorn of the same; finally, the belt was in black patent leather and the buckles and ring were lined with rich silver ornaments.

IV. -- About the epaulettes.²

The very curious correspondence which follows shows us that the Emperor, from the beginning of 1809, was anxious to impose upon all officers of the Confederation of the Rhine the same distinguishing indices of ranks as

²Communication from Mr. J. Margerand, from the documents sent to the Army Museum following the burning of the Archives of War.

those worn by French officers.

Berthier writes to General Clarke, Count of Hunebourg, Minister of War:

Paris, 11 February 1809.

To His Excellency the Minister of War.

The Emperor, Monsieur Count, decided this morning that the officers of the corps belonging to the Princes of the Confederation of the Rhine, the contingent of which is employed with the corps of the French army, must bear the same distinguishing marks of rank, such as those worn by French officers. This provision is absolutely necessary because in most Princes regiments, in Germany, the epaulette is not a distinction of rank, second lieutenants wear that of colonel.

According to the order of his majesty, I write to the bodies of the Confederation which are with the Army of Spain so that they conform to this disposition. Your Excellency will give orders for the other corps of the Confederation of the Rhine which are in other armies of the Emperor.

It will also be necessary, Monsieur Count, that you please write to the Princes of the Confederation of the Rhine, so that they give orders accordingly to their troops.

I renew to Your Excellency the assurance of my highest consideration.

ALEXANDRE.

It had not been a week since Clarke wrote the following letter to the Count de Champagny, Minister of Foreign Relations, advising him of the Emperor's orders and instructing him to make them known to the allied princes:

MINISTRY OF WAR. 23 February 1809.

4th BUREAU.

Monsieur Count,

I have the honor to inform Your Excellency that the Emperor has decided that the officers of the Sovereigns' troops who are part of the Confederation of the Rhine should, when these troops are used with those of His Majesty, bear the same distinguishing marks as the officers French of corresponding grades. This provision seemed indispensable, because in most of the regiments of the German Princes, the shoulder is not used to distinguish the ranks, second lieutenants carry the one affected in France by the colonels, which may give rise to misconceptions which it is advisable to avoid.

The Prince Vice-Constable, Chief of Staff, has given orders for this decision of the Emperor to be executed in the regiments of the Princes of Confederation who are in Spain. I have the honor to request Your Excellency to make this decision known to all the Princes who make up the Confederation, inviting them to give orders so that it establishes in this respect a uniformity which they will undoubtedly appreciate the convenience.

Accept, Monsieur Count, the assurance of my high consideration.

The Minister of War.

On receipt of this letter, the Count de Champagne was scrupulous: he must ask Clarke if this decision of the Emperor, which he understands very well regarding simple "princes" of the Confederation, must be applied also to the troops of the Confederate "kings": cruel enigma and emotion in the protocol ...

Paris, 1st March 1809:

To His Excellency the Count of Hunebourg.

Monsieur Count,

Your Excellency did me the honor to announce to me by his letter of the 23rd of February that his Imperial Majesty had decided that the officers of the troops of the Confederation of the Rhine, when these troops would serve with those of France, would bear the same distinguishing marks as French officers of the corresponding ranks, but I do not know whether this decision is applicable to the Confederate troops, who until now have formed separate corps, and which, according to the new organization, still compose separate and detached divisions. I need to have in this regard the opinion of Your Excellency, before acting directly with the royal courts of the Confederation. But I have already instructed M. Bascher to invite the members of the College of Princes to make arrangements in conformity with the decision of His Imperial Majesty.

I have the honor to renew to you, Monsieur Count, the assurance of my highest consideration.

CHAMPAGNY.

Clarke, who did not have the same scruples of etiquette and who, moreover, referred them to Berthier, responded very militarily to the diplomat: it is the Chief of Staff's answer that the Minister of War translates as follows:

MINISTRY OF WAR. Paris, 8 March 1809.

4th BUREAU.

To the Count of Champagne, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Monsieur Count,

When the Emperor decided that the officers of the troops of the Confederation of the Rhine who serve in his armies would wear the same distinctive marks as the French officers of corresponding rank, his intention was to prevent any mistake and that each one was exactly treated as he has the right to be; I do not think, then, that there is any difference to be made between the contingents of princes and kings, even in the case where the latter form separate divisions, for the operations of war may require from one moment to the other that these divisions are with French corps; it seems to me, therefore, that the decision of His Majesty must be notified to all the Sovereigns composing the Confederation of the Rhine.

Accept, Sir, the assurance of my highest consideration.

The Minister of War.

And so the officers of the Royal Armies of Bavaria, Württemberg and Saxony, just as well as those of the little Duchies of Gotha, Coburg and Weimar, received the French epaulette from the first months of the year 1809.

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