

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume III the Saxons in Our Ranks Chapter Two Part I: Campaign of 1809

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CHAPTER II

CAMPAIGN OF 1809

Victor of Austria in 1805, of Prussia in 1806, of Russia in 1807, Napoleon had directed his peace treaties -- that of Tilsit especially -- against England: it was the worst of our enemies; secretly supporting Austria, overtly instigating Spain, she was the soul of the new coalition.

The peace of Pressburg had spared too much Austria from 1806 onwards, agitating all Germany, planting English gold, exploding the insurrections of Katt in the old Marche, from Dornburg to Kassel, from Schill to Berlin; holding the Tyrol in perpetual fermentation, even to disavow the patriot Andreas Hofer; and finally preparing in Italy, by means of secret societies, a project of extermination of the *barbarians*. The *barbarians* were the French, the first creators of Italian unity...¹

On 2 March 1809, the Austrian troops were put on war footing; two days later, the Emperor, whom events had brought back from Spain, began to organize his army of Germany; Davout received the order to carry the army of the Rhine to Bamberg; Massena went to Ulm, Oudinot to Augsburg, Lefebvre to Munich where he took command of the Bavarians; three Polish divisions met in Warsaw; finally, Bernadotte was to be returned to Dresden on the 20th of March, where he would have under his command two Saxon divisions and the French division of Dupas.

"I ask your Majesty," writes *the Chief of Staff to the Emperor*, in his report of 5 March 1809, "if it is your intention that I write to his minister near the King of Saxony, so that the army of Saxony may be formed and united. on the 20th of March, in the neighborhood of Dresden, in two divisions."

The Emperor adds with his hand on the report:

"Yes; you will say that I order the Prince of Ponte Corvo to go to Dresden to take the command; give this order. Let me know when the regiments of the Dupas Division will have returned to Hanover."

On the 7th of March, the Confederation princes invited him to assemble their troops, every initiative of hostilities remaining on the account of the court of Vienna.

The Saxon army included, in January, 15,800 men trained in two divisions of 12 battalions, 8 squadrons and 18 cannons with 8 reserve pieces. It was reunited around Dresden, with the exception of a few detached parts in the towns of northern Germany, as garrison troops at Magdeburg, Stettin, Danzig, and Glogau.

At the time of the organization of the Great Army of Germany, in 1809, the Saxons formed the 9th Corps.

¹*Das Heere von Innerostreich unter den Befehlen of the Ersherzogs Iohann, im Kriege von 1809, in Italien Tyrol und Ungarn*, Leipzig, 1817.

Here is its composition and membership, as of 1 June:

9th CORPS.

Commander in Chief ... BERNADOTTE, Prince of Ponte-Corvo.

Chief of Staff ... Brigade General GÉRARD.

Commander of the Artillery..General Brigade MOSSEL.

Commander of Engineers ... Battalion Chief GIRARDIN.



LE MARÉCHAL BERNADOTTE, PRINCE DE PONTE-CORVO
COMMANDANT LE 9^e CORPS (SAXON) EN 1809.

(D'après PAUQUET).

THE MARSHAL BERNADOTTE, PRINCE OF PONTE-CORVO
COMMANDING THE 9th CORPS (SAXON) IN 1809.

(After PAUQUET).

Division ZERSCHWITZ :

	Grenadiers des Gardes	1 bataill.	} 201 off. 6,273 h.
Brigade HARTITZSCH.	— de Bose	1 —	
	— de Hacke	1 —	
	Régiment du Roi	3 —	
— de Dyherrn			
	Bataillon de tirailleurs		
Brigade BOXBERG.	Régiment Prince-Maximilien	2 bataill.	
	— Prince-Frédéric	2 —	
	— Prince-Antoine	2 —	
Brigade GUTSCHMID.	Régiment des Gardes du Corps	2 escad.	
	— des carabiniers	2 —	
	— des cheveu-légers	5 —	
	— de hussards	3 —	77 off. 1,269 h. 1,370 ch.

Division DE POLENTZ :

Brigade LECOQ.	Régiment Prince-Clément	2 bataill.	} 180 off. 3,563 h.	
	— de Low	2 —		
	— de Cerrini	2 —		
	Tirailleurs d'Égidi	1 —		
Brigade DE ZESCHAU.	Régiment de Niesemeuschel	5 bataill.		
	— d'Obschelwitz			
	Grenadiers de Winkelmann			
	— de Rudelof			
Brigade DE FEILITZSK	Régiment des cuirassiers-gardes	4 escad.		} 70 off. 1,043 h. 1,298 ch.
	— de cheveu-légers Prince-Jean	4 —		
Artillerie saxonne			} 15 off. 923 h. 1,102 ch.	

bataill. = battalion
h. = men
escad. = squadron
ch. = horses

The garrison of the towns was as follows (as of July 1st):

<i>Place de Stettin :</i>				
Général de division LIÉBERT.	{	22 ^e de ligne français.....	1 bataill.	
		10 ^e de ligne polonais.....	1 —	
		Régiment saxon de Dyherrn.....	1 —	342 h.
		4 ^e chasseurs à cheval polonais. Artillerie française.		
<i>Place de Dantzig :</i>				
Général de brigade GRABOWSKI.	{	10 ^e régiment polonais.....	2 bataill.	
		11 ^e régiment polonais.....	3 —	
		Régiment saxon de Rechten.....	2 —	729 h.
		Artillerie française et polonaise. Artillerie saxonne.....		66 li.
<i>Place de Glogau :</i>				
Général de brigade RHEINWALD.	{	22 ^e de ligne français.....	1 bataill.	
		Régiment saxon de Burgsdorf.....	2 —	935 h.
		Grenadiers saxons du régiment Prince-Maximilien.....	2 comp.	202 h.
		4 ^e chasseurs à cheval polonais. Artillerie et génie français.		
<i>Place de Magdebourg :</i>				
Général de division MICHAUD.	{	22 ^e de ligne français. Détachements de divers régiments français.		
		Artillerie et génie français.		
		5 ^e régiment westphalien.....	3 bataill.	
		Artillerie et génie westphaliens.		
		Infanterie saxonne.....		153 h.
		Artillerie saxonne.....		256 h.
		Dépôt du 8 ^e régiment hollandais.		

Place = Town or City
 comp. = company
 génie = engineer

After the peace of Tilsit, the Saxon division of Polentz had 1,280 men at Danzig, out of a total of 4,228 men, distributed at that moment in Warsaw, Gora and Thorn.

Marshal Davout, commanding the troops already in line in Germany, received from *Major-General Prince Berthier* a letter dated March 19th from Rambouillet, where he was told that:

"If the movements of the Austrians continued to disturb the royal family of Dresden, and they wished to retire to Leipzig or the Rhine, this would be an advantageous thing... This retreat would make the Prince of Ponte-Corvo, in charge of taking the command of the Saxon army, more free of his movements. Besides, M. le Marechal, nothing is needed to be done prematurely... However, if circumstances dictate, it would be suitable for the royal family to retreat to Leipzig, since the Saxon army might be in the event of evacuating Dresden..."

These pessimistic predictions failed to be realized, thanks to the deplorable measures taken by Berthier before the arrival of the Emperor; fortunately, Napoleon saw at first glance the fault, and the way to correct it: he concentrated the dispersed army, and launched the famous *proclamation of 20 April*, where he announced to the Confederation that he would fight in the center of the army, with them.

The first combats of the campaign began without the Saxons; Lannes marched to the left, by Rohr; the right, formed by Wrede with the Bavarians, was denied: Hiller was separated from the Archduke Charles in the battles of Offenstetten, Siegenburg, and Pfaffenhausen. Massena arrived at Freising.

After the brilliant victories of Landshut and Eckmühl, and the capture of Ratisbon, the Archduke retreated to Vienna.

As early as April 19th, the Saxons had been ordered to enter Bohemia; on the 24th, the *Emperor* again wrote to *Bernadotte*.

"Advance with confidence the army will pierce the heart of Austria; the enemy will not stand before us any more than he has held in Bavaria; he is thwarted in his hopes of victory and demoralized."

But the Saxons were not ready yet; in the middle of April, they started slowly, badly organized, especially in artillery.

Bernadotte, by the circular movement commanded for his corps, had helped to retain a large part of the Austrian troops in Bohemia; from Döbeln he reached Gera on the 20th of April, and was preparing to enter Bohemia; his vanguard, at Adorf, was already threatening Egra. At that moment, he was summoned to Regensburg, to the Grand Army, by Hof and Amberg: *Berthier* writes to *Bernadotte* that:

"The Emperor, on his way to Vienna, awaits with the greatest impatience the arrival of the 9th Corps between Bohemia and Regensburg to co-ordinate the operations of this corps with those of the army. The 9th Corps would find in Regensburg the Dupas Division and the Rhine contingents of General Rouyer."

When the Marshal, executing this order, arrived on the 29th of April at Plauen, he received the mission of operating alone.

From Plauen he informed the Chief of Staff that:

"...The Saxon army has no light artillery, and the foot artillery has been extremely defective..."

and he reports one of the two light artillery companies of the Dutch division remaining in Hamburg

Arrived at Retz on the 6th of May, Bernadotte complained again of not finding the French troops and reinforcements that had been promised him: the Dupas Division which was to join him had just momentarily received another destination.

"Every day -- he writes to Berthier -- "I feel more and more how essential it would be for the Saxon army to be supported and stimulated by the example of troops a little more experienced than it; it seems to me indispensable, especially with the desire to operate alone on the flank of the Great Army. I invite Your Highness to remind your Majesty of this object, which really interests the good of serving him and to tell me whether or not to count on some reinforcements of French troops."

Bernadotte led his Saxons to Passau, where they arrive on 12 May: on the 14th, he took them to Linz, which he reached on the 16th. Vandamme and the Württembergers were then provisionally put under his orders with the mission to occupy the bridgehead of the Danube, while the Saxons held the city, the right bank and the neighboring heights.

Compans, Chief of Staff of Davout, to Vandamme.

11 May 1809.

"M. the Grand Duke of Auerstædt, Commander-in-Chief, charged me with the assurance that it was probable that the Prince of Ponte-Corvo would arrive at Linz on the 16th of May this month, and that on the arrival of His

Highness you will pass under his orders..."

"The expressions of this letter are, as your dear general, those of His Majesty, the Prince Vice-Constable Major-General, whom His Excellency would have communicated to you herself, had he not been extremely busy; he charged me to act for him."

Bernadette was one of the oldest and best friends of Vandamme; he wrote to him, on 14 May, from Passau:

"...My general,... I am most sensitive to the assurances of your old friendship, and I congratulate myself in advance for being able to renew to you the expression of my strong attachment. I'll be in Linz the day after tomorrow."

"The Austrians have no more force in front of Passau... All had to retire to Moravia to try to serve in a last battle."

"I alert you, my great general, that, since the Emperor has granted me a few days' rest, I have stopped the Saxon army at Kfferding and its environs. Our entry into Bohemia will be, I think, delayed, until news has been received of the Marshal Duke of Dantzig."

"...Accept, my dear general, the assurance of my attachment and my inviolable friendship."

"I embrace you,"

Wanting to take advantage of the presence of the Saxons at Linz, the Emperor had just sent to Vandamme the order to leave for Steyr with 6,000 to 7,000 Württembergers, in order to sweep away gatherings which were forming on this side; on the 17th of May, the Württembergers were about to set out, when the Austrian General Kollowrat attacked the bridgehead of Linz with three columns.

Battle of Linz (Linz-Urfahr 17 May 1809).

Vandamme defended himself energetically, and Bernadotte finally arrived to take direction of the fight, which ended in a very brilliant manner; the enemy, contained first, then shoved, left in our hands 6 cannons and more than 1,200 prisoners.

Here is the report of Bernadotte, sent on the 18th of May to the Emperor, where we shall see the part taken by the Saxons in this affair:

"I have the honor to report to your Majesty that the outposts of General Vandamme were attacked yesterday, at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, by two Austrian columns which debouched from two roads, with the intention to seize the bridgehead."

"I arrived at about 7 to 8 o'clock in the morning with the Saxon cavalry brigade, and the first infantry brigade arrived shortly before the attack. I had the Württemberg troops taken up in the works, and in this way, General Vandamme being able to deploy of a part of his corps, vigorously repulsing the two enemy columns, driving them out of the position they had taken, and taking six pieces of cannon and 400 men, including 3 senior officers."

"I had ordered General Gutschmid to advance with 4 squadrons of Saxon hussars and dragoons, to support the Württemberg infantry, and to be at the disposal of General Vandamme. It was in a charge as happy as it was daring, executed by order of General Vandamme, that the enemy cannon fell into our power..."

"The reports of the prisoners announced 3 columns of attack; however, nothing appeared on my left, and the enemy, pursued by General Vandamme, fled in full rout on my right. I thought it necessary to secure all the points of the line, and I deployed the Saxon infantry regiments as they arrived. Towards 7 o'clock in the evening, the 3rd enemy column appeared on the heights of the Boslingberg... I had its skirmishers attacked by a Saxon battalion; this battalion, opposed to a superior force, and struck down by the enemy's artillery, experienced at first some fluctuation. I went there at once with my officers and those of the Saxon Staff, at the same time as I advanced three other battalions and pieces of artillery to support the attack. The Saxon infantry attacked the enemy with

impetuosity, drove him from all his positions, and a battalion, rapidly reaching the steep summit of the Boslingberg, took 300 men and several caissons, together with a detachment of Württemberg troops."

"I estimate the forces the enemy had on this point at least at 29,000 men. His loss in killed, wounded, and prisoners amounted to more than 2,000 men; ours does not go beyond 400 to 500 killed or wounded..."

The Battle of Essling, fought on the 21st and 22nd of May, while the Saxons were preparing to enter Bohemia, did not change the Emperor's disposition; Bernadotte persisted in remaining motionless at Linz, holding the bridges of the Danube, exaggerating the Austrian forces placed in front of him, and accusing his troops.

The fight of 17 May did not make him appreciate the value of his Saxons, because, returning to the praises contained in a report of him to the Emperor, the *Prince of Ponte-Corvo* writes the 28th of May to *Berthier* a letter full of bitterness and discouragement.

At the camp in front of Linz.

"...Your Highness has now received my last letter by which I exposed to him the impossibility where I find myself to attack the enemy... For to emerge from here with some hope of success would require a corps more numerous than mine, and especially seasoned troops and experienced generals to direct the various columns."

"The Saxons -- I repeat it -- are unable to act in isolation, and there is none of their generals to whom I can entrust a detached operation. I beg your Highness to put my situation under the eyes of the Emperor..."

"If I had 8,000 or 10,000 Frenchmen, I could still try something; without guaranteeing great success, I should at least have the energy and experience of these troops; but, I repeat, with Saxons, I cannot do anything."

"If the enemy comes to attack me with the forces he has, much better than mine, I would consider myself very happy to be able to maintain my position. In any case, His Majesty can be certain that I will do my duty..."

On 31 May, the Austrians attacked Vandamme again, between Krems and Hollenburg: vigorously repulsed on the left bank of the Danube, they retreated before the arrival of the Saxons from Amstetten to help the Württembergers.

At the beginning of June, during the Saxon march from Linz on Sankt-Pölten, an Austrian party crossed the Danube between Enns and Ips, at Ardacker, and marched on Amstetten, where he removed several Saxon posts.

A serious disorder thus occurred on the rear of the army; fortunately, the Württemberg detachments soon drove the Austrians out, who hurriedly crossed the river.

Meanwhile, an Austrian corps commanded by the cavalry general von Riesch had entered Saxony, where the Duke of Brunswick-Oels had also burst: King Jerome, with the 10th Corps (Westphalians and Dutch) and a Saxon division under Thielmann's orders concentrated at Sonderhausen, and marched on Leipzig, which the enemy evacuated; the Saxon court had taken refuge at Frankfort. On 27 June, the Thielmann cavalry charged the enemy near the Mulde and took 400 men. Jerome entered Dresden on the 30th, while Thielmann, with his Saxons and a Westphalian regiment, followed the Austrians in the direction of Peterswald.

In Poland, Archduke Ferdinand, opposed to Prince Poniatowski, delivered the *combat of Raszyn*; some detachments of Saxon artillery and cavalry, attached to the Polish divisions, afterwards abandoned the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, and, descending the Vistula, crossed it and returned to Saxony.

For the days of Wagram, the Saxons joined the Grand Army; they were relieved at Linz by the Württembergers, and their two divisions, with the Dupas division, took part in this glorious victory; part modest and discussed, as we will see.

An order of the 28th of June had ordered Bernadotte to increase the Dupas division by 2,000 Saxons, in order to bring this division to 8,000 or 6,000 men, and thus to equalize his three divisions.

Placed on the Napoleon Series: March 2019