

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume III the Saxons in Our Ranks Chapter Three Part VII: Campaign of 1812

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CHAPTER III

CAMPAIGN OF 1812¹

5. -- MOSCOW. -- BATTLES OF WORONOW AND TARUTINO.

On the night of 7 September the Russian army withdrew on the Moscow highway. On the 9th, Murat followed it with the vanguard, composed of the greater part of the cavalry of the corps of Latour Maubourg and the Legion of the Vistula. He arrived at Mozhaysk the same evening. The march could not be quick, because of the exhaustion of the troops and the fatigue of the horses: it took six days to make the 10 miles that still separated them from Moscow.

The expectation that Kutuzov would fight a new battle at the gates of the city of the Czars was not realized. The Russian corps rapidly crossed Moscow on the 14th: the greater part of the inhabitants followed the army. On 14 September, at three o'clock in the afternoon, Murat arrived in front of the city which was occupied in the evening without a fight, following a capitulation.

The Guard alone entered Moscow; the other corps halted in the immediate vicinity of the city, covered by the vanguard, and in particular by the Thielmann Brigade, which established outposts on the Kolomna road. The first fires ignited on the night of the 14th, and the next day almost all of Moscow was in flames.

Thielmann had been able to requisition supplies in time in Moscow: his convoys brought him large quantities of coffee, tea, sugar, but no bread or flour could be found.

Prince Kutuzov had first taken the road to Kolomna, but he soon threw himself on the road to Tula and headed in the direction of Podolsk, to connect more easily by Kaluga with the southern provinces of Russia and receive reinforcements that had been gathered there. The Russians had left to the north of Kolomna strong detachments of Cossacks, who deceived Napoleon on the true direction of the retreat of the enemy. The error was not dispelled until the 22nd when it was learned that the Russian army was marching south of Moscow.

The new negotiations which Napoleon attempted to establish with the Emperor Alexander remained without result.

As a result of the threats of the Russian army on its lines of communications and of retreat, and because of the increasing difficulties of its food, the French army had to execute an offensive march against Kutuzov, or a retreat by renouncing the direction from Saint Petersburg.

¹ This chapter is based on the excellent work of M. Lieutenant-Colonel Exner: *Der Antheil der Königlich Sächsischen Armee am Feldzuge Gegen Russland 1812* (Leipzig, Dunker and Humblot, 1896). -- We have followed the same divisions in material, and we have happily followed the rich contribution made by the Saxon Archives of War in this part of our national history.

The King of Naples was charged with observing the Russian army with the cavalry corps of Latour-Maubourg, about 1,600 horses. The Saxon Brigade was, on the 29th of September, on the Pakhra, a short distance from the Russian outposts; on the 30th a sad accident occurred: a Saxon shell mortally wounded Colonel Serron, Chief of Staff of the 4th Cavalry Corps, and a staff captain. From a height where it was placed, the Hiller horse battery saw a Russian general who was riding with an escort, on the line of enemy posts; Captain Hiller received orders from Murat personally to fire a shell on this group; this shell, probably as a result of a deterioration of the cartridge, fell close to the mouth of the room, next to a campfire where it broke the thighs of the two officers mentioned above. This event caused all the more emotion as Colonel Serron was very much liked in the Saxon Brigade; Captain Hiller was not blamed for this unfortunate accident.

Murat had bivouacked until 2 October, west of Podolsk, on the Pakhra line; he seized that day the small town of Woronow, after a serious fight, began with a half-day cannonade in which the Saxon battery distinguished itself.

Woronow was taken, but the resistance extended to the heights south of the city until 4. At nightfall, that night, the enemy burst onto the left flank of Latour-Maubourg, where General Sebastiani commanded the 2nd Cavalry Corps. Latour-Maubourg resolutely led his cavalry against the enemy. After a volley of grape from the Saxon battery, Thielmann rode against the Russians and forced them to retreat. One bivouacked near a small village, on the road to Kaluga. The Saxon Brigade lost in this engagement 1 officer, 15 men and 20 horses.

The food shortage reached the highest level in the middle of October. Every day, the strong detachments sent for fodder, disturbed by the Cossacks, returned with little, often without anything, after several miles of riding. The situation of the troops was getting worse every day. The sick men -- who could nevertheless still serve -- and the dismounted horsemen (about 200 for the Thielmann Brigade) were sent back to Moscow to be armed with fusils and formed in special detachments. The two Saxon regiments then counted together only 180 horses in the rank. Napoleon, giving up winter quarters in Moscow, decided to retire on Smolensk: but to deceive the enemy and secure the movement backwards, he wanted to push a point on Kaluga. Murat, charged with this operation, went to take a position near Tarutino with the 26,000 men who still composed the vanguard.

Attacked there unexpectedly on 18 October, the French were forced to retire on Woronow. After a brilliant resistance, Latour-Maubourg covered the movement, with his still strong corps of 600 horses. The Saxon Brigade lost 60 horses and its equipment. Thanks to the devotion of a chief quartermaster and a life-guardsmen (traban), three standards and the silver trumpets of the Life Guards were saved.

On the 20th of October each of the two Saxon regiments were formed into a weak squadron: Captain von Pilsach received command of the squadron of the Life Guards.

The corps of Latour-Maubourg rallied the army and was sent to Prince Eugene, towards Maloyaroslavets; the Prince, who was marching from this point on Kaluga, was attacked on the 24th by the Russians, but retained his position. Latour-Maubourg, having arrived in the evening, was not engaged.

Napoleon decided not to follow the Russian army farther and to take the main road to Smolensk. October 23rd began the famous retreat which was to end with the complete annihilation of the Grande Armée.

Reports of General Thielmann to the King of Saxony.

I.

"After the battle of the Moskowa, the army advanced on the high road, delivering daily battles to the enemy rearguard. We arrived on the 14th of September in front of Moscow. The solidly fortified position that lay in front of the city had been abandoned by the Russians. The vanguard of the King of Naples, of which we were a part, began to march through the city about noon, and it was only in the night that we arrived at the other end of this immense city; it was abandoned by the nobility and by the rich class of the inhabitants. The enemy army had retired in disorder, and more than 20,000 prisoners were taken the next day. The fire took place that very night in several places, and in the space of a few days two-thirds of this great and superb city was in ashes, as well as innumerable magazines."

"On the 16th, the vanguard drove the enemy back on the road to Ryazan. On the 24th, leaving this road, we proceeded in the direction of Kaluga, by Borowsk and the road to Tula: we reached the enemy there, midway between Moscow and Kaluga. On the 2nd of October, the battery of Hiller rendered useful services at the battle of Woronow; on the 4th, she maintained a cannonade with the enemy, which lasted into the night. This last fight was begun badly; but the good countenance of the Saxon Brigade, though weakened, turned the advantage on our side. The King of Naples arrived in the evening in front of the brigade's front to express his satisfaction, and I received orders to immediately make proposals for the Legion of Honor."

"The vanguard occupied the same positions, in front of the enemy, until 4 October. A kind of tacit armistice and a frequent exchange of letters made us hope for negotiations for peace. After the wonderful weather we have had so far, here was the beginning of the winter days. The changes of weather, the hard service at the outposts, etc., have enormously increased the mortality of horses. Today, the Life Guards have only 79 horses in the rank and cuirassiers of Zastrow, 92. The artillery has almost no mounted gunners. The diseases in the troop are not as numerous as might have been feared after such great fatigues and so considerable privations in food. What is most impressive is the total lack of doctors and the great distance from hospitals."

II.

Near Mojaisk, 28 October 1812.

"An attack of the enemy, the 18th, on the corps of the King of Naples -- an unsuccessful attack, followed, however, by a voluntary retreat on our part -- obliges me to complete the report begun above. I eagerly avail myself of the opportunity afforded me by the return to Germany of the Chamberlain von Bodenhausen, to send Your Majesty news of his troops."

"The enemy had turned, on the 18th, the corps of the Viceroy of Italy, and had fallen en masse upon the baggage. The 4th Cavalry Corps was fortunate enough to get out of the forest and arrive in time on the height by which the retreat was to be made: the aim of the enemy was thus missed. We stayed a few days in Woronow; the Emperor leaving Moscow to go as far as Borowsk on the line of the Protwa, we joined the army there on the 23rd."

"On the 24th, the vanguard with the Viceroy of Italy advanced as far as Maloyaroslavets, where the enemy had taken a strong position: he engaged in a violent combat which lasted until 10 o'clock at night. The enemy was driven from the city to his positions, which he evacuated in the night, after having lost from 6,000 to 8,000 men."

On the 26th, the Grand Army retreated to Borowsk. We march on Smolensk, where it seems that we will take winter quarters. As I have only a short time to make my reports, -- we are indeed marching from dawn to dusk, -- Your Majesty will excuse me if I am obliged to abbreviate a little."

"The number of horses has again greatly diminished. The Life Guards now have only 24 horses in the rank and cuirassiers of Zastrow, 38. There are 60 horses in the depots at Mohilev; but, of this number, few can be used."

"As a result of the cold nights we are passing through, the fatigues of the marches, the difficulty of the service and the lack of fodder, we can foresee with certainty that in a few days I will be able to put at Your Majesty's feet no more than our honor and our lives."

"The rest of the cavalry suffers the same evils. The 4th Cavalry Reserve Corps, composed of 6 Polish Uhlan Regiments, the Saxon Brigade with the Polish Cuirassiers and the 2 regiments of Westphalian Cuirassiers, that counted 6,500 horses at the beginning of the campaign; now has only 250 at most."

"We also lost our equipment on the 18th. In one of the Life Guards carriages were three standards; the traban Jonas was in charge of them; surrounded and thrown to the ground by the Cossacks, he played dead and lay in a ditch. The Cossacks began to force the regimental box, which still contained a few hundred thalers of gold, and left the standards. Jonas quickly jumped on a carriage horse, seized the standards and some silver trumpets, and brought them back to the regiment before the end of the fight. I appoint him to the post of standard bearer and ask for him the gold medal. As a precaution, I had the standards taken down and rolled them into a package."

Your Majesty, the most humble and very faithfully obedient

Jean-Adolphe THIELMANN, Lieutenant General.

6. -- EVENTS UP TO 15 JANUARY 1813.

On the 30th of October, the brigade reached the Smolensk High Road in Moscow, after having rallied the 200 cuirassiers and trabans who had been sent to Moscow as dismounted horsemen or unable to serve in the field. In the course of retirement, this column was soon back and melted slowly. The remains of the 4th Cavalry Corps arrived at Smolensk on 10 November. From this point, the few riders of the brigade still mounted had to give up their horses to the horse battery, because Captain Hiller had declared that in no case would he give up his pieces:

"...It was a sad sight" -- says an eyewitness -- "to see the soldiers part with their horses; but the feeling of honor animated these good people. It is enough to remind them that the guns had been entrusted by the King to the brigade; they left their horses without a word, their eyes filled with tears."

From 2 December, the Saxon horsemen did not see the battery again. One has not yet fixed today on the vicissitudes of its retirement and its disappearance. It is thought, however, that the battery, whose remains were to cross the Berezina, fell into the hands of the enemy near Vilna at the beginning of December.

General Schreckenstein, lieutenant and officer of ordnance of General Thielmann in 1812, says in his work: *The Cavalry at the Battle of the Moskowa*:

"During the retreat, the artillerymen dragged their cannons to the vicinity of Krasnyy with admirable endurance, and at the price of unheard-of fatigues. All the men were on foot, and relieved the exhausted horses, of which two were still harnessed to each gun. The battery naturally remained behind during the march and rejoined the brigade, after untold efforts, only in the evening, late -- or at night. I remember having been sent back one day to gather information on the battery, and to have found them marching in the painful situation described above."

"I believe I have heard that Captain Hiller reported the next day to General Thielmann that he had been obliged to give up the hope, hitherto kept, in saving his pieces; but that the Russians would not find them easily, because, after having put them out of service, he had dropped them in a deep ditch and filled it with snow."

According to another version, but less guaranteed, the battery would have abandoned all its parts for lack of teams, and the surviving gunners would have died in the fire of a barn. It has also been said, but with still less likelihood, that the battery had been swallowed up in an icy marsh, the surface of which suddenly gave way on 18 November during a softening of the temperature. In any case, no officer and no man of the battery has returned to his country: the fact is noted in several places, in the documents of the campaign of 1812.

Thielmann wrote to the King of Saxony, 9 November, from Smolensk:

"All the sad predictions I exposed to Your Royal Majesty about a near and complete annihilation, are now realized. The regiments are now on foot; they can no longer follow the officers because of lack of food and exhaustion. They must be considered as lost; my only consolation is that all the rest of the cavalry suffered the same fate; the 4th Corps of Cavalry, 6,500 men strong at the beginning, has now only 50. In spite of this complete dissolution of the army, I must remark that we speak here of completing and reforming the regiments; it's impossible. I am anxious to save the officers' corps and the few men who remain with me, and I am resolved to deliver personally to the Prince of Neufchâtel a note on this subject. My views will probably not be successful, although my approach should be welcomed."

"Our situation is currently frightening. We camp without interruption by a temperature of -12° to -15°, and without food. The flesh of dogs and dead horses is most often our only food, and we feel very happy to find sometimes on the sides of the road a village that gives us some food."

"The artillery does not work under my orders; I consider it lost, because each piece is harnessed only by two horses and all the caissons, except one, have been burned for a long time, or have been blown up."

"The horses are now lacking to the officers as to the troops."

"I must finally point out another misfortune. The three unmounted standards of the Life Guards, like those of the Zastrow Regiment, were brought every evening to my quarter, where I had no post to keep them; they were lost by Junker Dittmar, and no doubt, between my quarters and the regiments. Despite all the research and the reward I promised, nothing was found. Regardless of what could be said for the defense of the culprit who had been frozen by the snow and the cold, as an example, I drove him out of the regiment and abandoned him to his fate."

"I am being ordered at once to form cadres with my brigade, who will remain here this winter to fill the advanced post. May your Majesty not trouble yourself with the enclosed letter, a copy of the one I am addressing to Latour-Maubourg, in which I protest against a measure which violates our rights. If I have written it, it is because I wanted to evade the execution of an order which I find contrary to the interests of your Majesty."

By a winter so severe that the cold descended to -26°, and by snowstorms, the remains of the 4th Cavalry Corps met with the Grand Army, whose complete destruction was near; the retreat continued; the food was completely lacking: the flesh of dead horses was the only food that could be had.

In the middle of November Napoleon arrived at Smolensk with 40,000 men and 2,000 horses. From there, they marched on Krasnyy, where the survivors of the cavalry capable of fighting and still mounted, -- 500 officers and sub-officers, -- were assembled and placed under the orders of General Latour-Maubourg. The Thielmann Brigade provided 9 officers and 6 non commissioned officers for this formation.

After the fighting in Krasnyy on the 14th and 15th of November, when Marshal Ney brilliantly distinguished himself with the rear guard, the retreat continued on Orsha and Kokanow. It was there that the 21st the "Sacred Legion" was formed, under the command of General Grouchy; it was to serve as bodyguard to the Emperor Napoleon. Thielmann commanded the 4th Company, made up of the survivors of the 4th Cavalry Corps.

On 24 November, one arrived on the right bank of the Berezina. The Cossacks were on the heels of the army, Kutuzov was near, Admiral Chichagov advanced to the south, and Wittgenstein's corps to the north. Napoleon received at this moment the reinforcement of the 9th Corps (Victor) and the corps of Oudinot: it was 20,000 to 25,000 men. The Saxon infantry regiments "Low" and "Rechten" and the regiment of light-horse "Prince Jean" counted in the 9th Corps.

The cold had lessened, it was thawing; the Berezina flowed, carrying ice floes. Chichagov, attacked by Oudinot, was driven from Borisow. It was now a question of giving the Russian generals the change over the points chosen for the crossing of the army between Wesselow and Studianka. On the 26th, at 1 o'clock in the afternoon, Oudinot's corps began to cross on the first bridge, rapidly built for infantry and cavalry only. A Russian division stationed at Stakov tried to repel it and cut off the Zembino road.

It was only on the morning of the 28th that General Thielmann, followed by a small number of Saxon officers, arrived at the bridges at the edge of which there was an indescribable mob. The congestion was further increased by the presence on the right bank of the convoys and the cars which had been assembled there. When the Russian batteries arrived on the heights of Studianka and began, from 11 o'clock, an uninterrupted fire, the disorder reached its apogee. All authority was unknown. Thielmann made his way with the sword drawn in his hand, and reached the left bank about three o'clock, where a few moments before had approached some Saxon officers who had swam across the river. 10,000 men perished at Berezina and 20,000 were taken prisoner. Among these was an important part of the 9th Corps, which had valiantly fought on the 28th against Wittgenstein.

The few Saxon officers and cavalrymen who had been able to escape, gathered at Zembino and continued the retreat with a cold of -20 ° to -30 °, without shelter and without food. On the 29th, the Berezina bridges were destroyed and burnt by the French.

Thielmann arrived at Vilna on the 8th of December, three days after Napoleon's departure.

Finally, on the 20th of December, the misfortunes of the campaign ended at Konigsberg. Colonel Lessing drove from there to their homeland at Guben, where they arrived on 15 January 1813, the remains of the former Thielmann Brigade and the Prince Albrecht Regiment of Light Horse.

He returned from the regiment of the Life Guards, 7 officers and 4 men; of the regiment of cuirassiers of Zastrow, 13 officers and 3 men; six months later, five more officers and 43 men returned from captivity.

These two brave regiments had been almost entirely annihilated in the campaign against Russia.

"The Saxon squadrons," says Lieutenant-Colonel Exner, "fought in the bloodiest battle of this century with the courage of the lions and the scorn of death, fulfilling a mission which seemed impossible to the cavalry, to succumb then to misery in the snowfields of Russia; the Saxon army will keep them a living and eternal memory!"

France, for her part, did not forget the Saxon cuirassiers of 1812; and she covered with a laurel-strewn the icy fields where they repose, mingled with so many of her own children.

VI. -- The Prince Albrecht Light Horse Regiment in 1812.

1. -- FORMATION OF THE 3rd CAVALRY CORPS; EVENTS UNTIL 6 SEPTEMBER.

After the arrival of the 7th Corps in the vicinity of Kalisz, the regiment of light horse "Prince Albrecht" was assigned to the 3rd Cavalry Reserve Corps and ordered to go to Posen, where the corps was assembled. Commanded by Major General Count Grouchy, the 3rd Cavalry Corps was made up of 44 squadrons, with 8,000 horses, divided into 2 divisions: the 4th Reserve Cavalry Division and the 8th Light Cavalry Division. The regiment formed, with the 1st and 2nd Bavarian Horse, the 17th Brigade of Light Cavalry, under the orders of General Dommange; General Chastel was at the head of the division.



LE GÉNÉRAL COMTE GROUCHY
GENERAL COUNT GROUCHY

Commanded during the whole campaign by Colonel Lessing, the regiment went to Posen by Karge, and from there to Kosten. After having stayed at this point until 22 May, it went for long marches of 16 to 17 hours a day -- and often without food -- by Dolzig, Ortelsburg, Lozen and Berzniki to the Niemen, which was crossed on 23 June.

The 2nd Squadron, with Major Helbig, was added in the middle of this month to the troops of the general headquarters, which formed a special brigade; this squadron remained definitively separated from the regiment.

The march forward continued, first with the vanguard commanded by the King of Naples, then with the corps of Davout. The roads were awful until Mohilev, where it arrived on 23 July. From there they went to Smolensk.

On the 16th of August, on the first day of the battle of Smolensk, the regiment found itself for the first time in the presence of the enemy, but was not fully engaged. Napoleon, who had assembled his main army on the left bank of the Dnieper between Orcha and Smolensk in the middle of August, proposed, by marching on Krasnyy, to fight the two Russian armies near Smolensk.

The Dommanget Brigade, pushed as far as the heights west of the city, towards the Krasnyy road, engaging only one Bavarian squadron and the Saxon squadron of Captain de Salza. These two squadrons jostled the Russian cavalry which opposed them. The regiment, during fourteen hours, -- from six o'clock in the morning to eight o'clock in the evening, -- remained under the fire of the artillery, and nevertheless lost only fourteen men.

In the following marches, on the main road, Grouchy's corps covered the left flank of the army. The regiment marched with its division to Vyaz'ma (29 August). The marches then became painful; the provisions were beginning to be insufficient; strong Cossack parties disturbed the columns, which advanced slowly and could hardly rest at night in the bivouacs, on which the artillery of the enemy's rearguard often directed its fire.

On the evening of 6 September, at nightfall, the division arrived at the village of Valuevo, near the Moscow highway. It bivouacked soon after at Doronino; the light horse found there, for the first time since the beginning of the campaign, the Saxon regiments of the Thielmann brigade with which they were formerly embarked in the Saxon 1st Cavalry Division:

"It was a joy," said Colonel Leyser, "in this lost country, at an infinite distance from our dear country, and in the midst of this mass of troops from all nations, to suddenly find that brave regiment which the chances of war had kept the Saxon troops entrusted to General Reynier so far away."

"At that moment, we felt less lost in these forests of the North. The light horse had to be very much affected by the lack of food; they had rarely received bread and brandy, the ordinary distributions consisting of a little meat alone."

The corps of Grouchy, placed for the next battle under the command of Prince Eugene, was established north of the village of Valuevo. The three squadrons of "Prince Albrecht" numbered 200 sabers. Half of the staff had been left behind because of the exhaustion of the horses and as a result of the diseases.

2. --BATTLE OF THE MOSKOWA.

The troops placed on the left bank of the Koloch' -- 4th Army Corps, Italian Guard and Grouchy's Cavalry Corps -- were destined, according to the provisions of Napoleon, to attack Borodino. After the capture of this village, they had to march on the Rayevsky Redoubt and on the Russian forces stationed at Gorky.

When division of Delzons had taken and occupied Borodino, the Viceroy's infantry turned against the redoubt; but she could not reach the enemy positions, in spite of the bloodiest efforts.

The corps of Grouchy had crossed onto the right bank of the Koloch' near the confluence of the brook of Semenovskiy and taken position in a fold of ground at 1,500 paces from the cavalry division of d'Ornano, on the extreme left of the line; the "Prince Albrecht" Regiment and the Bavarian Light Horse crossed first. They remained there from ten o'clock in the morning till three in the evening, under the enemy's cannon, and suffered considerable losses there.

After the capture of Rayevsky Redoubt, the regiments which had climbed the heights and crossed the lowlands of Gorika went to the west, in front of the Russian cavalry massed at this point. The latter quickly retreated behind batteries which received the Saxon and Bavarian squadrons with a volley of grape shot. The regiment "Prince Albrecht" returned to the banks of Gorika. In this engagement, the brave General Dommange was badly wounded in front of his brigade. Colonel Lessing, overthrown with his horse, was at that moment replaced at the head of the light horse by Major Ziegler.

Renewed attacks by the Russians were repulsed by the French 7th Dragoons and the "Albrecht" Regiment which found twice the opportunity to engage. At night it was ordered to take a position behind Koloch'. The losses of the regiment were considerable: of the 200 men who had fought, 1 officer and 13 men were killed; 7 officers (including Major von Glasser) and 64 wounded men; 32 men disappeared and did not join again.

3. -- MARCHING ON MOSCOW. -- RETREAT. -- BACK TO SAXONY.

General La Houssaye replaced, at the head of the 3rd Cavalry Corps, General Grouchy wounded at the Moskowa: he led his squadrons on 8 September in the direction of Moscow, after having remained that day from 6 o'clock to noon in a uncultivated heath, without the men and the horses being able to drink or eat.

The regiment still had 100 horsemen in the ranks. It arrived in Moscow on the 16th, without further combat and bivouacked until the 20th at one o'clock in the city. On the 21st, the regiment, with Chastel's division, took the road to Tula and took part in battle of Winkowo fight on 4 October. Major Ziegler had advanced with the vanguard on a height to the south of the city: the enemy cannon forced him to fall back. In the afternoon, the "Albrecht" Light Horse, reduced to one squadron, served as support for the artillery: they lost 2 killed and 7 wounded in this affair.

At Tarutino and Maloyaroslavets, the corps was in reserve, and did not suffer any sensible losses (Light Horse: 4 men).

During the retreat, the Light Horse shared the fate of the Thielmann Brigade. Only the 2nd Squadron (von Helbig) attached to the troops of the general headquarters had the opportunity, on 25 October, to cross steel with the Cossacks who had suddenly assaulted the escort of Napoleon: the Cossacks failed to seize the person of the Emperor.

In November, the tactical links of the 3rd Cavalry Corps broke up: from the 8,000 men who composed it at the beginning of the campaign, few survived the Berezina disaster. Out of 36 officers and 639 men in the Prince-Albrecht Regiment of Light Horse, only 14 officers and 12 men returned to their homeland.

VII. -- The infantry regiments "Low" and "Rechten", and the Regiment of Light Horse "Prince John" in the 9th Corps of the Grand Army, in 1812.

1. -- FORMATION AND MISSION OF THE 9th CORPS. -- SMOLENSK.

The Infantry Regiment of Rechten had belonged since 1808 to the garrison of Danzig; its 1st Battalion was included in the composition of one of the divisions of the Grand Army, and soon after the 2nd Battalion received the same destination: the complete regiment was assembled on 11 June at Königsberg under the command of Colonel von Bose. On 14 June, on its way to Vilna, Napoleon inspected the Saxon battalions, and on the 14th of August these were set out for Vilna.

Low's infantry regiment was in garrison at Glogau at the beginning of the campaign and had escorted to Kowno and Vilna the 20 vans of the Imperial Treasury. Two Prussian 3 pound cannons had been assigned to the regiment.

The two regiments -- of which the grenadier companies were part of the 7th Army Corps -- each included 8 companies, 42 officers and 1,250 men. They arrived at Vilna in the middle of September, under the command of the French Brigadier General Baron de Villiers.

The Regiment of Light Horse "Prince John" had provided two squadrons to escort Napoleon on his journey from Bautzen to the borders of Silesia: on the Emperor's wish the regiment was mobilized and, under the command of

Colonel Raysky, headed to Königsberg where it arrived on 17 June. With 36 officers and 640 horses, it entered the composition of the 30th Cavalry Brigade, with the Hussars Regiment of Baden; the uhlans of Berg and the Hessian dragoons formed the 31st Brigade; the two brigades united formed the Fournier Cavalry Division, which crossed the Niemen on the 30th of August, and reached Smolensk by Minsk on the 28th of September.

It was there that the two Saxon infantry regiments also arrived at the beginning of October and after painful marches.

Marshal Victor, Duke of Bellune, formed the 9th Army Corps at Smolensk. This corps only comprised a quarter of its strength in French troops; the 26th Division had the Baden and soldiers of the Grand Duchy of Berg; the 28th, Saxons, Poles and Westphalians. The Villiers Brigade, in addition to two Saxon regiments, also included the Polish 4th, 7th and 9th Infantry Regiments. The strength of the corps, with its 3 infantry divisions and Fournier's cavalry division, amounted to 54 battalions and 16 squadrons, making 33,000 men and 80 cannons.

The role of the corps was to operate against the Russian 1st Army Corps of General Count Wittgenstein who, after the retreat on Moscow of the Russian 1st Army of the West, had been left on the Duna, to cover the country located between this river and Novgorod, and the important trading port of Riga.

The situation of the 9th Corps was the same as that of the other corps of the Grand Army: however, the troops had had an unprecedented number of patients during the march on Smolensk. On leaving Tilsit, the commissariat service failed, food was wanting, and the regiments had to obtain it as they could, but there was little left in the country, which the Grand Army had already crossed.

Most of the corps remained in or around Smolensk until 20 October:

"The city" -- said one of the combatants of that time, Second Lieutenant v. Der Planitz, from the 2nd Squadron of Light Horse "Prince Jean" in his "Journal" -- "presented a frightful spectacle: most of it was devastated and burned; soldiers, dead horses lay on all sides. In the villages, there were no more windows in the houses, the roofs themselves were removed, and no resources could be found."



LE GÉNÉRAL FOURNIER

Commandant la cavalerie du 9^e corps en 1812.

GENERAL FOURNIER

Commander of the 9th Corps Cavalry in 1812.

The Daendels Division (the 26th) was sent on the 29th of September, in the neighborhood of Vitebsk, with the regiment of Saxon light cavalry, to liaise with the 2nd Corps established at Polotsk.

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