

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume III the Saxons in Our Ranks Chapter Four Part I: Campaign of 1813

By Commandant Sauzey

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CHAPTER IV

Campaign of 1813



UNIFORMES SAXONS — 1813

Hussard Chasseur à pied
Cuirassier de la Garde Grenadier du rég' de Rechten

SAXON UNIFORMS -- 1813

Hussar Foot Jäger
Cuirassier of the Guard Grenadier of the Regt. of Rechten

While Prince Eugene was collecting the remains of the Grand Army on the Vistula, and was putting order and cohesion into the scattered troops which were gradually coming under his command, the Emperor, having returned to Paris, was busy with a prodigious activity to create from scratch a new army, with the young conscripts of France, and those of the allied troops of the Confederation of the Rhine, who had not taken part in the Russian campaign.

The Minister of War, Clarke, was notified on 30 December 1812 that:

"...The Grande Armée is now composed of four corps; that the Allied troops will form distinct divisions, the Westphalians a division, the Bavarians a division, the Württembergers a division, and that the Saxon regiments belonging to the abolished 9th Corps will join the troops of their nation."

At the beginning of 1813, the Emperor saw the new situation of his armies in a reassuring light: one could no longer count on Prussia, but the defection of Austria still seemed improbable.

The Emperor to Prince Eugene.

Fontainebleau, 24 January 1813.

"...I have summoned the King of Saxony to assemble all the troops he can dispose of, cavalry, infantry, and artillery at Glogau, which will support your right."

"I cannot think that the Russians are advancing on Posen, except with a few light infantry battalions, a few thousand Cossacks, and some pieces of cannon. It is impossible that, before masking Danzig, Thorn, and Graudenz (now Grudziądz), having on their left flank Prince Schwarzenberg and General Reynier, and further on the army which the Emperor of Austria gathers in Galicia, in the middle of winter, tired as they are and knowing the troops that are coming to us, they are trying a serious operation ..."

"The Saxons meet in Glogau, on your right: you are in Posen in a good position."

"...Write to Saxony so that all available troops come to cover the kingdom, maneuvering on Glogau. I believe that the King of Saxony can easily muster 1,800 cavalymen and 4,000 to 5,000 infantrymen."

"Write to Prince von Schwarzenberg and General Reynier to hold Warsaw as long as possible; if they are forced to evacuate ... they should march on Kalisz, as well as Prince Poniatowski."

In another letter of 27 January, the Emperor writes to Prince Eugene that the Saxon Corps, which has been repaired, must amount to 20,000 men; it never reached that number.

We have seen in the study of the campaign of 1812 how the Emperor's forecasts were disconcerted.

Sacken, in the middle of January, had descended the Bug as far as Reynier's cantonments.

Schwarzenberg, to whom he still remained, in spite of diseases and desertions, had 24,000 Austrians and 12,000 Saxons and Frenchmen of the 7th Corps, -- supported by the 10,000 or 12,000 Poles of Poniatowski, -- wrote to Eugene that he was going to be overwhelmed by the Russians whose five columns commanded by Winzingerode, Tormasov, Miloradovich, Doctorow, and Radt converged on him and threatened his communications... the truth is that he had ceased and was still ceasing to develop a plan that would have made him the master to prevent with the 48,000 old soldiers he had on hand.

The Austrian prince had secretly negotiated with the Russians, and, at the order of his government, brought the Austrian troops into Galicia without a fight. This was the consequence of the interview which took place on the 24th of January at Wyzkof, on the Bug, between Schwarzenberg and the Russian General Anstett.

Reynier and Poniatowski retreated to Kalisz, after Commandant de Labédoyère, sent by Eugene, realized Schwarzenberg's previously inexplicable decision.

Eugene wrote to Napoleon on 5 February:

"...I have the honor to report to your Majesty that Prince Poniatowski announces to me that all the Polish troops will go to Petrikau, from where they will come to Kalisz to concentrate with the Austrians -- if they execute my orders, -- or with General Reynier if the Austrians abandon us..."

Leaving at Warsaw the sick and the untransportable wounded (1,500 Saxons, 1,000 French, 1,000 Austrians) Reynier arrived at Kalisz on the 13th of February; he had only 6,000 Saxons in his rank, 6,000 French in the Durutte Division, and about 3,000 Polish conscripts.

Attacked by Lanskoj, who took from the Saxons a general, 6 guns, 2 flags and 2,000 men, -- by throwing back 1,500 other Saxons on the corps of Poniatowski, -- and pressed by the 6,000 Russian bayonets of Prince Eugene of Wurttemberg, Reynier had abandoned Kalisz and he had retired to Glogau; he found no trace of the new Saxon army which was to meet there for more than a month (February 18th).

He then proceeded to Bautzen, where he set out in cantonments on the 1st of March, ordering the Bavarian division of Rechberg, placed under his command, to come and occupy Kalau.

A decree dated 12 March 1813, from Trianon, definitively organizing the Grande Armée, is the real starting point of the campaign of Saxony in 1813. We read:

"Art. 7. -- The 7th Corps will be composed of the two divisions of the Saxon contingent who will take the numbers 24 and 25, and the 32nd Division, currently of Durutte Division, who will keep its number."

"Art. 14. -- The 7th Corps will be commanded by General Reynier."

Having left a good Saxon garrison at Torgau, Reynier had been directed to Dresden, and had to withdraw behind the Mulde, to cover Leipzig, if he were obliged to evacuate Dresden. (Letter from the Emperor to Marshal Ney, Prince of the Moskowa, commanding the 3rd Corps of the Grand Army, Trianon, 13 March 1813.)

A very interesting letter sent by the Emperor to Prince Eugene, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army, contains the special instructions for the defense of the Elbe and assigns to the 7th Corps the task which it will have to fulfill until the moment of the arrival of the new French army.

The Emperor to Prince Eugene.

Trianon, 15 March 1813.

"My son, as you have not sent the state of your situation, that I have no state of that of General Reynier, that I do not know the situation of your artillery with the one and the other of these corps, that I do not even know where General Reynier is, that I do not know whether he covers Dresden, and not even if the enemy infantry has crossed the Oder, you can sense that it is very difficult that I give orders and that I command my army. I cannot understand what prevents your chief of staff from sending all the reports to the Prince of Neufchâtel, and why you do not make known to me all that you know."

"Place General Dombrowski in Wittenberg with a Saxon battalion, a Saxon artillery company, a French artillery company, an artillery officer, and a French engineer officer..."

"General Reynier will command along the Elbe, from Torgau to Bohemia. For this purpose, a Saxon general with two-thirds of the Torgau garrison will guard the left bank of the river, while the other third will remain in the place. General Reynier will cut off the Meissen Bridge and keep as long as possible in Dresden. The commander of Königstein will keep the Elbe above Dresden, and will remove all the boats that will be placed under the cannon of Königstein and Torgau..."

"If it does not enter the plans of the enemy to be in force on Dresden, General Reynier, with the Saxon corps which has to strengthen and which I suppose to have been completed to 12,000 men, is good enough to defend it..."

"Nothing is more dangerous than to try to defend a river bordering the bank opposite to that on which the enemy is: for once the enemy has surprised the crossing, --and it always surprises one,-- he finds the army on a very extensive defensive order and prevents it from rallying..."

"You can inform General Reynier that, probably on the 1st of April, I will send 60,000 men with 200 pieces of cannon.... Tidy up behind him we will then be in control of choosing the moment suitable for an offensive..."

NAPOLEON.

Reynier's corps, weakened by the garrison left at Torgau, was so weak that Eugene had sent Girard's division to Dresden to reinforce it.

Eugene informed the Emperor who wrote to him again:

The Emperor to Prince Eugene.

Trianon, 18 March 1813.

"General Reynier suffices to command at Dresden, and I do not see why you send him so many commanders. Since the Girard Division is already in Dresden, there are few disadvantages that it reinforces this important point. The decision to blow the bridge of Dresden and restore the old enclosure at the head of the city seems to me to be suitable; but all these preparations would disappear if the enemy makes a movement of 40,000 men on Dresden : but it is against this movement that we must guard ourselves. It is not necessary to inquire whether the enemy will make or move; what he does not do immediately, he can do in a fortnight, and in a fortnight nothing will be changed on your side. It's because you let yourself be dazzled by such illusions that you did not take a big part..."

"Since it appears that the corps of General Reynier is so weak, you will leave Girard's division with him, but it must be spread in the second line, so as not to be cut off from Magdeburg..."

"You will keep Dresden if the enemy wants it; and no doubt, as long as the enemy will not come with 25,000 or 30,000 men that he will pass for 50,000, we will not evacuate Dresden... but, if the enemy is in force, it will threaten to cross, or will actually cross, right or left, upstream or downstream. However, it is a very great point to keep Dresden until the enemy has made an army move, and as long as possible..."

NAPOLEON.

Following the orders of Eugene, Marshal Davout had just arrived at Dresden on the 13th of March. Reynier was preparing for his defense, but the King of Saxony was no longer there.

Our old ally, frightened by the exaltation of spirits in Prussia, and fearful of seeing his subjects participate in an effervescence so hostile to the French, -- terrified by the open defection of Prussia and insidiously tempted by the mediation projects of Austria that Metternich had sent him -- no longer knew what conduct to hold, and wondered which side would tip fortune...

He owed his royal crown to Napoleon; his hands were full of the remains of Prussia; but the victorious prestige of the French armies had suffered in Russia a deep attack: the Great Army was destroyed, and on all sides, Russians, Prussians, Swedes, Spaniards, Englishmen and Austrians advanced on the prey... At the announcement that the

Cossacks of Winzingerode had appeared in Lusatia, he sent to the fortress of Königstein his archives, his most precious objects, the most beautiful canvases of the magnificent museum of Dresden, and he proceeded towards Plauen, on the south-west frontier of his States, with his family, his ministers, his regiments of cuirassiers and six squadrons of light cavalry: all the Saxon cavalry which was not part of Reynier's corps.

Lieutenant-Colonel Charras, in his work on the campaign of 1813, presents the state of the morale of the King of Saxony in an less favorable light: he shows him filled with duplicity, refusing to put his cavalry at the disposal of

Reynier, ready to withdraw his troops from the 7th Corps, forbidding Thielmann, Governor of Torgau, to let any Frenchmen into the town, -- and to let not a single Saxon or cannon out... He forgets that, alone of all our allies German, the old king remained stubbornly faithful after the fatal days of Leipzig; that he stigmatized Thielmann's behavior by calling him "deserter of the Saxon service, and passed to the enemy"; that he wanted to be personally considered to be a prisoner of war of the Allies; finally, that he was the first to inform the Emperor of the overtures of Metternich, and to open his eyes to "the Austrian intrigue."

One of the piers of the Dresden bridge was mined by order of Reynier; as soon as the populace knew it, a crowd formed, quickly degenerated into a riot, and the crowd broke Reynier's windows with stones. But the Saxon General Lecoq, one of the veterans of the Imperial army, soon calmed this tumult with the help of the Saxon troops and the citizen guard; he reminded the people of the integrity and humanity of Reynier, his paternal command over the soldier, Saxon, and everything returned to calm. The interrupted mine work was resumed and completed.

Davout actively continued Reynier's defense preparations. He asked Thielmann, Governor of Torgau, for the cannon to arm Wittenberg; he refused.

Prince Eugene to the Emperor.

24 March 1813.

"It was not possible to take a piece from Torgau. The Governor General of this city has taken, in these last moments, a very extraordinary tone..."

On the 19 March, Davout blew up a piling and two arches from the Dresden Bridge, and left for Magdeburg, leaving only Durutte's division to hold the capital of Saxony.

At the departure of the marshal, the Saxon troops marched on Torgau and sided with Thielmann's command. Durutte, unable to defend the city with his 3,000 men, accepted the armistice offered by the Russians and evacuated Dresden on 22 March. He rejoined General von Rechberg's Bavarians at Wilsdruff, and reached Sondersleben.

Fight of Lüneburg (2 April).

At that moment, at the other end of the main line occupied by the French army, there arose an event which should have opened our eyes to the solidity of our Saxon allies: it is the unfortunate combat of Lüneburg, delivered on the 2nd of April by General Morand to the Russo-Prussian corps of Dornburg and Chernishev.

The Moniteur of 15 April 1813 tells the story:

"-- General Morand left Bremen on the 26th of March: he had organized his column, composed of two Saxon battalions (800 men), a battalion of the 152nd Regiment of Infantry (400 men), and a half-battalion of douaniers (200 men).), some French gendarmes, dragoons and chasseurs (about thirty riders) and 4 cannons; he pursued the enemy corps which had crossed the Elbe at Werden, and whose rear-guard, defeated on the 28th by General Montbrun, had turned towards Lüneburg.

"Arrived at Lüneburg on the 1 April, General Morand broke down the gates with cannon, crossed arms with about thirty rebels, and the city was subdued."

"On the 2nd, the enemy corps, 2,000 to 3,000 men with cavalry, infantry, and artillery appeared before Lüneburg. General Morand marched to meet him with his column. The enemy had been forced to abandon several positions when General Morand was killed by a cannonball. The command passed to a Saxon colonel. The troops, astonished at the loss of their chief, retreated into the city, and after defending themselves there for half a day, they capitulated at night; the enemy made 700 Saxons and 200 French prisoners. Some of the prisoners were taken back."

What the *Moniteur* does not say is that 400 of the Saxon prisoners immediately enlisted in the Russian-German legion, a corps newly created by the Emperor of Russia to receive the German deserters from the Confederation of

the Rhine. Colonel Charras says in this connection that these 400 Saxons "deserted the cause of their king for the great cause of Germany".

Allied pressure on the Saxons. -- Wittgenstein, leaving Bülow under observation in front of Magdeburg, had won Röslau. Dessau was occupied by Berg; on the 8th and 9th of April, Yorck crossing the Elbe, settling at Köthen. Winzingerode, since 3 May in Leipzig, held Merseburg and Halle; lastly, Blücher had crossed Dresden and gained Altenburg, while the Russians of Tormasov reached Dresden.

At this moment Wittgenstein entered into discussions with General Thielmann, Governor of Torgau, and wished to persuade him to become for Saxony what Yorck had been for Prussia: Thielmann, who had already agreed with Kleist and Winzingerode to deliver Torgau to Allies, if the King of Saxony did not decide to abandon Napoleon, did not wish to conclude anything without the order of his sovereign; by an odious betrayal, however, he sent word to Wittgenstein that the Saxon town of Wittenberg, in a bad state of defense, was easy to take; but it was for his shame, for General La Poype, an old divisionary of 1792, with his 2,000 men of garrison and 300 or 400 conscripts of artillery and engineers valiantly repulsed the Russians and Prussians; -- and Wittgenstein renounced the removal of Wittenberg.

Dresden, occupied by the Allies, had not entered into revolution, and the Saxons were not arming themselves against the French... The King of Prussia Frederick William had vainly written to the King of Saxony to conjure him to stand under the banner of the coalition: Stein had even been sent to him, guaranteeing to the old king the integrity of his German states and an equivalent for the circle of Kotbus, which Prussia was retaking, -- if he would only allow the garrison of Torgau to join the Allies and allow Saxony to declare itself for them... Our faithful ally did not want to hear anything: General Flahaut, the Emperor's aide-de-camp, came to Ratisbon to announce the opening of the campaign and to confirm Napoleon's confidence. An officer of the Saxon Guards, sent to the Emperor, met him at Mainz, and hands him a letter from his sovereign: the government of Dresden will definitely remain our ally. He cannot be held responsible for the defections that would occur in the staff and troops of Saxony.

The battle of Lützen (2 May) was fought without the participation of the Saxons still massed near Torgau.

But the victory of the Imperial eagles precipitated the return of the Saxon army under our colors. On the 4th of May, Reynier reorganized his former 7th Corps, reformed with the French division Durutte, and two Saxon divisions, each with a strength of 12,000 men.

Dresden, abandoned by the Allied sovereigns, had fallen into our hands after a slight fight. Napoleon entered on 8 May.

On the 12th, the King of Saxony made a triumphal entry, amidst the acclamations of the inhabitants, and accompanied by 500 men of the French Imperial Guard whom Napoleon had sent him to serve as an escort.

The Emperor to Marshal Ney.

Dresden, on the evening of 13 May.

"The King of Saxony made a triumphant entry yesterday into Dresden; he dines today with me..."

"The head of the Saxon cavalry has arrived today. These are 3,000 good horses that I gather with General Latour-Maubourg, and which do us a great good..."

These were the two cuirassier regiments that the King of Saxony moved "graciously" at their war strength. The next day the two other regiments (Uhlans and Hussars) arrived in their turn and, on 15 May,

"...His Majesty the Emperor and His Majesty the King of Saxony passed in review of Saxon cavalry regiments (1 of hussars, 1 of lancers, and 2 regiments of cuirassiers forming part of General Latour-Maubourg's corps). Then Their Majesties visited the battlefield and the bridgehead of Pläswitz." -- (*Moniteur of Saturday, 22 May.*)

"On the 24th of May, the Emperor dined with the King of Saxony. The Comedie-Française gave a performance of a play by Molière to the court theater, which was attended by their Majesties." -- (*Moniteur of 27 May*)

Bautzen, Wurschen, Reichenbach.

The Great Army had crossed the Elbe.

While Macdonald, Marmont and Oudinot detain and defeated the Allies at Bautzen on 20 May, Ney with Lauriston and Reynier arrive on the left, and the two French masses won at Wurschen a victory; the Saxons, placed in the 3rd line, were little engaged.

The next day, the 21st of May, the victorious army pursued the enemy; they stopped at Reichenbach (now Dzierżoniów), where it wished to resist. General Lefebvre-Desnouettes, with 1,300 horses, Polish lancers and red lancers of the Guard, charged the enemy cavalry and overthrew them.

The enemy had not yet seen our new cavalry, and we thought it utterly lacking. It launched all its squadrons on the vanguard of Lefebvre-Desnouettes, who was immediately supported by the four magnificent divisions of the corps of Latour-Maubourg (14,000 horses); the French cuirassiers and Saxons rushed into battle: the Allies withdrew in disorder.

Reynier, charged with the pursuit, went with his Saxons on the height beyond Reichenbach and pursued the enemy to the village of Hottendorf.

The Emperor had run the greatest dangers that day.

"...At daybreak he was in the vanguard. He had returned thanks to his lucky star: several cannon balls came to bury himself near him; one of these balls landed on the ground, ten paces ahead, (among?) several men of the Saxon light infantry." (*Extracted from the report of Major Saxon Odeleben, eyewitness, I.99*).

On 27 May, the Saxons were with Napoleon, the Guard and the 5th Corps (Lauriston) at Leignitz; the 28th, with Ney (3rd Corps), and Lauriston at Neumark; the 31st in Lissa. Breslau was occupied on the 1st of June at 6 o'clock in the morning, and on the 4th of June the *Armistice of Pläswitz* was signed.

"...All Saxony was delivered from the presence of the enemy: the city of Dresden and the Saxon Ministry had put the greatest activity to supply the army, which has never been in greater abundance." (*Moniteur of 30 May 1813*.)

The order fixing the location of the troops during the armistice, dated from Neumark the 5 June 1813, bears that:

"The 7th Corps (21,283 men) will be able to march tomorrow to go to in a few days to Goerlitz, and to camp on the heights of the city..."

"General Latour-Maubourg (16,875 horses, including the Saxon brigade Lessing, Cuirassiers of the Guard and Cuirassiers of Zastrow) will set in motion for Sagan, where he will keep his corps in the most favorable places for his cavalry."

The duration of the armistice was employed on both sides to completing their troops and to rally all the reserves.

The allies bring together 520,000 combatants, not counting the 80,000 men brought by Bennigsen who are still in Poland. The Imperial army arrives at a figure of about 300,000 men, of whom 250,000 French, 15,000 Italians, 15,000 Poles, and 20,000 Germans.

ORDER OF BATTLE OF THE SAXON TROOPS.
7th CORPS.

Commander-in-Chief: REYNIER.
Chief of Staff: GRESSOT, Brigadier General.
Commander of the artillery: VERPEAU, colonel.

24th Division (Saxon): LECOQ (*brigades of Brause and Mellentin*).

Grenadiers of the Guard	.....1	battalion.
1 st Light Infantry Regiment	.....2	--
Prince Maximilian Regiment	.....1	--
Regiment of Rechten	.....1	--
Foot Chasseur	.....1	company.
United Grenadiers	.....1	battalion.
Prince Frederick Regiment	.....2	--
Regiment of Steindel	.....2	--
Artillery:	2 foot batteries, 8 pieces per battery.	

25th Division (Saxon): VON SAHR (*brigades of Bosch and Rissel*).

United Grenadiers	.....1	battalion.
2 nd Light Infantry Regiment	.....2	--
Regiment of the King	.....1	--
-- of Nisemeuschel	.....1	--
-- of Low	.....2	--
-- Prince Anthony	.....2	--
Artillery:	2 foot batteries, 8 pieces per battery.	

26th Light Cavalry Brigade (Saxon): VON GABLENIZ.

Hussars: Colonel VON FALITSCH	.....8	squadrons.
Uhlans: Colonel THUMEL	.....5	--
Artillery:	2 horse batteries, 6 pieces per battery.	

Artillery Reserve:

One battery of 12, having 8 pieces.

The 7th Corps, composed at the origin of the only two Saxon divisions, soon received after the division of Durutte, then, by order of 17 September, the Guilleminot Division. On the same date, the two Saxon divisions were united in into one single one under the 24th.

32nd Division (French): DURUTTE (35th Light, 132nd, 36th Light, 131st, 133rd, Würzburg Regiment).

14th Division (French): GUILLEMINOT (18th Light, 156th, Illyrian Regiment, 52nd, 137th).

CAVALRY RESERVE.

Commander-in-Chief: MURAT.

Aide-Chief of Staff of the Cavalry: BELLIARD, Major General.

1st Corps of Cavalry: LATOUR-MAUBOURG.

1st Division of Light Cavalry: CORBINEAU.
 3rd -- -- : CHASTEL.
 1st -- of Cuirassiers : BORDESOUILLE.
 Brigade BERKHEIM : 2nd, 3rd, 6th Cuirassiers, 6 squadrons
 Brigade BESSIÈRES : 9th, 11th, 12th cuirassiers, 8 squadrons.
 Brigade (*Saxon*) LESSING { Cuirassiers of the Guard, 4 squadrons.
 Cuirassiers of Zastrow, 4 squadrons.
 3rd Division of Cuirassiers : DOUMERC.

IMPERIAL GUARD.

1 battalion of Saxon *grenadiers* of the Guard, to the 2nd Division (Curial) of Old Guard.

The Saxon troops of the 7th Corps had the following numbers:

The battalions were at 600 men,
 The squadrons -- at 123 --
 The batteries -- at 100 --

which gave, in total,

19	infantry battalions.....	11,400	men.
1	company of chasseurs.....	120	--
1	company of sappers.....	80	--
13	squadrons (brigade of Gablentz).....	1,600	--
7	batteries (52 pieces).....	1,100	--
		<hr/> 14,300	combatants.

To this figure we must add the 1,300 Saxon cuirassiers of the 1st Cavalry Corps, and 1,800 wounded men, and those in hospitals.

Including the Durutte division, the 7th Corps had 23,000 men and 68 pieces of cannon.

The city of Dresden has been fortified with great care, and was now able to resist a real siege.

The Emperor paid his full attention to the construction of the defense works; the note of the 28th of June, the orders of the 8th of July, the instructions of the 7th and of the 12th of August contain for this purpose minute details for the fortifications to be built, and prescribed to the Chief of Staff the greatest celerity and the most constant care to the performance of work and the monitoring of its completion.

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