1812 Campaign Preparations and Logisitics

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Abstract.

The story of the Russian campaign has ably been told elsewhere. Suffice to say that between June and December 1812, Napoleon lost perhaps half a million men and horses. Little has been said though of the 1812 campaign before the battle of Borodino and the fire of Moscow in September 1812. Little too has been written about how Napoleon assembled the *Grande Armée* to invade Russia. Even less has been written using primary archive sources as opposed to memoires of those who experienced the campaign. This paper sets out to show how Napoleon expanded his mounted troops in 1812 using archive sources that so far have not been used to tell the story of the campaign.

In total between 1st January 1811 and 5th June 1812 some 169,117 horses were purchased for service with the *Grande Armée*, They were to be with the army in three stages. April to October 1811, October 1811 to January 1812, and February 1812 to June 1812, shown in the table below:

Date	Horse Purchased France	Horse Purchased German	Horse Purchased Italy	Horse Purchased Poland	Total
January to October 1811	16,000	10,000	10,000		36,000
October 1811 to January 1812	22,653	18,000		14,400	55,053
February to June 1812	37,726	40,338			78,064
Total	76,379	68,338	10,000	14,400	169,117

Table 1: Horses Purchased January 1811 to June 1812.

Of these 169,117 horses purchased 157,353 horses would serve in the *Grande Armée*. 11,764 horses were directed as remounts and replacements for the troops in Spain and remaining in France as well as replacements for those hoses which died at the depots from illness or on the march to Germany. In November to December 1812 a further 9,772 horses were obtained, which come under the purchases for the 1813 campaign, which raise the total number of horses purchased in 1812 to 88,376. In October 1811 the French army as a whole had some 119,832 horses, rising to 145,262 in February 1812 and 217,706 by 5th June 1812. 77% of all the horses with the *Grande Armée* had been replaced by 5th June 1812. The remaining 23% had been with the army since November 1810. In addition to these were hundreds of horses with regimental *vivandiers* and sutlers, which no doubt swelled the numbers to 180,000 or so horses, mules and donkeys. In total 55,053 horses were added to the *Grande Armée* October 1811 to February 1812. Of these 42,000 were riding horses, 12,574 draught horses and 9,000 officers mounts. February 1812 to June 1812 saw the remount department purchase a further 78,604 horses, making a total purchase in nine months of 133,657 horses all of which were equipped and the riders trained. Thus 34% of the armies horses had been with the army for at most four

¹ Archives Nationales { hereafter AN] AFIV 1183

² AN AFIV 1183

months, 17% had been with the army for more than a year. Even then, the majority had been in the army since April 1811.

1812 preparations.

Planning for the 1812 campaign had begun in the last months of 1810. In November 1810 Napoleon planned to have a cavalry force of 78,000 cavalry based in France, Germany and Spain. Of this number, however, only 58,000 mounts were of the correct age, height and conformation for the army. To make up this shortfall, 3,000 hussar horses, 6,000 chasseur a cheval, 7,000 Dragoon and 3,000 Cuirassiers mounts were needed to recruit the cavalry up to strength. In addition, a remount pool of 8,000 horses was to be established, making a total purchase up to 21st January 1811 of 28,000 horses.³

On the 2nd April 1811 Napoleon authorised the purchase of 15,00 draught horses to move the armies equipment.⁴ The Imperial Guard was to have an addition 2,000 draught horses to move regimental baggage, some 350 vehicles moved by 3,600 horses.⁵ It was Napoleon's intentions that five regiments of light cavalry would be increased to five squadrons, giving 12,000 men, 10,000 *Cuirassiers*, 4,000 Dragoons and 4,000 Guard cavalry a force of 34,000 men.⁶ To do so, later the same month on the 15th April 1811 Napoleon sanctioned the purchase of 1,200 *Cuirassier* mounts, and 1,600 light cavalry mounts. The horses were to be aged five to eight years of age. Napoleon noted it was increasingly difficult to obtain good horses in the Kingdom of Italy for the cavalry, noting that five regiments of Dragoons and six regiments of light cavalry could only field three squadrons of 600 horses. In the report, it was noted, that the fourth squadrons were all dismounted. Horses as a result had to come from France and Germany.⁷

More draught horses were purchased at the end of April 1811. For the 11 Battalions of artillery train in France, Germany and Italy, 16,000 draughts horses were authorised to be purchased. Furthermore 4,000 to 5,000 draught horses were to be sent as remounts for the artillery train serving in Spain along with 3,000 to 4,000 cavalry mounts the horses to be assembled at Bayonne and Bordeaux.⁸

Equine supply.

For the ten cavalry regiments based in Germany for the build-up to the Russian Campaign, they were to be remounted where possible on German horses out of a measure for economy, saddles were to be inspected and where needed replaced. The 23rd *Chasseurs à Cheval* regiment, with its dépôt in Holland was to purchase German horses. Each dépôt was to have a veterinarian to inspect saddles equipment and horses. Up to 1,600 horses were to be purchased in Germany to act as remounts, of which 848 were needed to complete the service squadrons, only 138 being immediately available as remounts. The 9th Bis Hussars were raised in 10th January 1812. They became the 12th Hussars in February 1813. Elements of the 13th, 14th, 22nd, 26th, and 28th *Chasseurs à Cheval* and the 3rd Hussars remained in Spain whilst the bulk of the *Chasseurs à Cheval* regiments were withdrawn from Spain. In 1813, the *Chasseurs à Cheval* regiments in Spain comprised the 5th, 10th, 13th, 21st, 24th, 26th, 27th and 29th regiments.

The twelve regiments of cavalry with service squadrons in Italy were to purchase mounts from the

³ Napoleon 1er, Emperor, *Correspondence de Napoléon 1er* (Paris 1858-1870) Napoleon to Cessac, 21 January 1811, Nos. 17288.(Hereafter Napoleon).

⁴ Napoleon to Clarke, 2 April 1811, Nos. 17548.

⁵ Napoleon to Clarke, 2 April 1811, Nos. 17548.

⁶ Napoleon to Clarke, 4 April 1811, Nos. 17558.

⁷ Napoleon to Clarke, 15 February 1811, Nos. 17361.

⁸ Napoleon to Clark, 29 April 1811, Nos. 17668.

⁹ Napoleon to Cessac, 19 April 1811, Nos. 17631.

sixth Military Division. Old horses and those not fit for service were to be sold at Besançon. 200 horses were needed immediately to act as remounts. Of the regiments based in France, 480 horses were needed to complete the service squadrons. 900 conscripts had been raised to fill gaps. In total the army in Germany needed 1,100 men and 1,000 men to complete its organisation, 1,100 horses were needed for the heavy cavalry based in France. For the Dragoon regiments in Italy, 900 horses were needed, of which 500 were available, the *Cuirassiers* needed 800 horses, the 11th ,12th , and 24th *Chasseurs à Cheval* along with the 5th hussars required 900 horses. In addition, the 7th , 13th and 20th *Chasseurs à Cheval* along with the 9th Hussars, needed 600 horses.

In total in the first half of 1811, 36,000 horses were authorised for purchase, 10,000 in Germany, 16,000 in France and 10,000 in Italy for the service squadrons. Remount pools of 1,6000 horses were to be established in Germany, 1,300 in Italy and 1,100 in France, a total of 40,000 horses.¹³

At the close of May 1811 Napoleon authorised that the dépôts of four *Cuirassier* regiments and six of light cavalry based in France were to be moved to Germany, and based around Hamburg. ¹⁴ By August, Napoleon had the following draught horses available to him:

Location	Artillery Draught Horse	Equipment Train Draught Horse	Regimental Draught Horses	Total
Germany	5,000	1,200	2,000	8,200
France	5,000	1,200		6,200
Italy	3,000	1,200		4,200
Total	13,000	3,600	2,000	18,600

Table 2: Remounts held 28th August 1811¹⁵

In order to maintain these horses, cavalry dépôts were established in and around Hamburg. The dépôts for ten Cuirassier regiments held 986 men, 496 men were expected to arrive from the conscription of 1811. A further 400 men were required to fill the ranks of the cuirassiers. It was Napoleon's intentions that by 1st January 1812 each regiment of cavalry around Hamburg would have 1,050 men in Germany and 50 in France. The cavalry based around Erfurt comprised some 2,289 men, with 1,500 men at the dépôt with 600 conscripts on the way to join the dépôts, a1,100 men were needed to complete the regiments. The following horses were with the army in Germany:

Location	Under arms	In Remount dépôt	On route to Remount dépôt	To be Purchased	Total
Hamburg	9,160	240	83	500	9,983
Munster	2,260	480	457		3,197
Total	11,420	720	540	500	13,180

Table 3: Cavalry in Germany 26th October 1811¹⁷

¹⁰ Napoleon to Cessac, 19 April 1811, Nos. 17631.

¹¹ Napoleon to Cessac, 19 April 1811, Nos. 17631.

¹² Napoleon to Cessac, 19 April 1811, Nos 17631.

¹³ Napoleon to Cessac 19 April 1811 17631

¹⁴ Napoleon to Clarke 24 May 1811 17747

¹⁵ Service Historiqye du Armee de Terre [Hereafter SHDDT] 2C 400 fol 352.

¹⁶ Napoleon to Davout 26 October 1811 18208

¹⁷ Napoleon to Davout 26 October 1811 18208

To provide troopers to complete the service squadrons, the cavalry dépôts at Strasbourg and Wesel were to supply 600 men and horses to Hamburg. ¹⁸ Of the horses stationed around Hamburg, 400 died of illness during October to November. ¹⁹ Napoleon reckoned that during 1811, 25,000 horses were purchased in France, 14,400 from Poland and 18,000 from Germany. Of these German horses 8,300 came from the Confederation of the Rhine, 6,000 from Holstein for the heavy cavalry and 12,000 from Prussia. 800 horses were to be sent to Marshall Soult's troops in Spain, accompanied by 6,000 to 8,000 mules.

Of the horses purchased in 1812, the decree of 19th January 1812 authorised the purchases of a number of remounts to be based at Hanover and Munster. Under the terms of the decree 1,350 horses for cuirassiers, 800 dragoons horses, 6,635 light cavalry horses and 2,000 train horses were to be purchased. The purchasers were increased in February by 100 cuirassiers horses and 3,900 light cavalry horses.²⁰ The time table of purchase were as follows:

	Cuirassier	Dragoon	Light Cavalry	Train	Total
In dépôt	1,054	70	1,083	74	2,281
Purchase for 8 hussars, 23 and 24 Chasseurs			624		624
Purchased end of March	446	530	3,417	806	5,199
Purchased 1 – 30 April	350	100	1,211	420	2,081
Purchased 1 – 31 May	300	100	1,533	233	2,166
Purchased 1 – 30 June	100		1,333	233	1,666
Purchased 1 – 31 July	100		1,334	234	1,668
Total	2,350	800	10,535	2,000	15,685

Table 4: Number of purchases authorised to Hanover January to July 1812²¹

Table 4 shows the rate of purchase of horses and of which type were required. The largest number being light cavalry mounts ranging from 13.3hh to 14.2hh. The next largest category were the Cuirassier mounts, ranging from 15.1hh to 15. 3 hh. In almost equal numbers were the draught horses for the artillery and equipment trains. Of these the 15,685 horses, 3,000 were to come from Hesse, 6,000 from horse dealer Brandes, 3,000 from Mecklenburg, 3,000 from 32 Military Division which was around Hamburg.

March 1812, Napoleon authorised General Bourcier to obtain from Prussia 15,000 Prussian horses, 3,000 suitable for cuirassiers, 6,000 for light cavalry, the remainder to be draught horses. The horses were to be assembled at Hanover, where dismounted men from France would be marched to be equipped.²²

A further purchase of 12,000 horses was ordered by General Daumnesil, and 6,000 were to come from Holstein and Jutland. These 27,685 horses cost 828,720 francs. In total just over 40,000 horses were purchased in Germany in 1812 and sent to the remount depots at Munster and Hanover. ²³

¹⁸ Napoleon to Davout 26 October 1811 18208

¹⁹ Napoleon to Davout 1 November 1811 18226

²⁰ SHDDT 2C 400 fol 402 Lauriston to Napoleon 7 March 1812

²¹ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 402 Lauriston to Napoleon 7 March 1812

²² Instructions 16 March 1812 18589

²³ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 402 Lauriston to Napoleon 7 March 1812

Of key important to understanding the huge horse losses in 1812, of the 157,353 horses with the *Grande Armée* on 5th June 1812, 84% had been with the army for a year, of that number, 49% had only been with the army since January 1812. These horses going from the rich grass land paddocks around Hanover and at the breeder's stud farm, to suddenly plunge into army life, with sparse and infrequent rations, would not doubt have quickly lost condition and succumbed to illness, sores or malnutrition. Some horses would also have been infected with colds and other infectious diseases at the remount depot at Hanover. In total, 46% of the horses obtained in 1812 for the *Grande Armée*, were from Germany some 40,338 horses. These mounts were all processed at the remount depot at Hanover. Analysis of the bi-monthly situation reports that sickness levels were running at 10.9% for troop horses and 1% for officers mounts. Between 19th January and 15th April 1812, some 4,033 troop horses died as a result of illness. No doubt other horses were infected, and would later infect other horses they came into contact. Illness was a major horse killer in the Napoleonic cavalry.

Clearly, under the guidance of General Bourcier, the system of procuring mounts, equipment and men, and processing them through various dépôts was a highly polished machine, which would become crucial in regenerating the army come the close of the year 1812. this processing of men was only possible through the re-establishment of forward remount dépôts, a concept originating in 1806. However a cursory look at inspection returns for the cavalry, show that not all was as at it would seem.

On 24th November 1811 General Nansouty reviewed several Cuirassier regiments in Cologne. He noted the 5th regiment of cuirassiers had a lot of old horses, a lot of them were of poor confirmation, some in bad health. The regiment had only received 32 remounts during 1811, and required 266 horses to bring the regiment up to a full strength of 900. Of the 266 horses, 128 had been negotiated from horse dealers, but Nansouty opined that the horses would not arrive quickly enough and a number would have to be refused. At the regiments depot in Paris, 200 good horses were held. The 8th Cuirassiers lacked 183 horses.

An inspection of the 23rd and 24th *Chasseurs à Cheval* by General Castex at Munster,it revealed that the 23rd were riding old warn out, Swiss horses of the wrong conformation for the light cavalry, and the 24th had eight horses totally unfit for service. New horses were purchased for these regiments in January 1812.

Remounts and Replacements.

Obviously with the corps purchase system over seen by the inspector generals of cavalry, many regiments did not receive the full allocation of mounts they required nor it seems was their a process of on-going renewal of horseflesh. Horses were retained by the army over the maximum service period of 5 and ½ years as it seems colonels did not want to replace horses they already had if they were still able to mount a cavalry trooper. Remounts were only purchased for those horses who had died or were sold as unfit for further service, rather than the rolling process of replacing mounts once they reached the maximal age for service, or were intermittently lame or ill as outlined in the recommendations of the 1810 committee. The failings of the improved corps purchase system saw General Bourcier once more become solely the main agent of horse procurement in the French army. The *department remonte* and its officers appointed by Bourcier would oversee all future horse purchases.

To do so, on 19th January 1812 the Emperor authorised the re-establishment of the forward remount dépôts at Hanover to supplement those at Hamburg and Munster.²⁴. In general terms, the

²⁴ Created on 19 January 1812, the remount dépôt at Hanover was administered by 2 Generals, 5 colonels or majors, and 2 commissioners for war. On 15 June 1812 it held 141 officers, 6497 troopers and 2785 horses (SHDDT 2C 545 fol. 700)

dépôts at Hanover, Hamburg and Munster acted as forward remount and supply dépôt. Once a conscript had entered the army, he was assigned to a cavalry regiment. He would be trained to ride at the dépôt of the cavalry or train regiment in which he been admitted. Once trained to ride and carry out basic drill movements, a process which took 3 months based on current British army practice compared to the French regulation 6 months, was equipped with his uniform.²⁵

Each regimental colonel sent to General Bourcier the number of mounts needed. The horses would be purchased and assembled at Hanover, the dismounted men making their way to Hanover to collect their mounts. The harness and equipment being forwarded from their regiments dépôt. In the new year of 1812 the following detachments of men were mounted, clothed and equipped at Hanover and Munster²⁶:

²⁵ Lavender J pers comm 10/01/10. Mr Lavender served with the Queens Royal Lancers during the 1980's and early 1990's and was involved with the regiments riding troop, and has first hand experience of British Army training methods of new recruits.

²⁶ SHDDT 2C 400 fol 400 Lauriston to Napoleon 6 March 1812. See also Lauriston to Napoleon 13 April 1812

Regiment	Officers Mounts	Troop Horses	Died of disease
Grenadiers Cheval Garde Impériale	8	51	0
Dragoons Garde Impériale	10	100	2
Chasseurs a Cheval Garde Impériale	15	100	2
Lancers Garde Impériale	5	51	0
4 Cuirassier	2	121	0
6 Cuirassier	1	61	0
7 Cuirassier	1	99	0
8 Cuirassier	0	69	0
10 Cuirassier	9	130	7
12 Cuirassier	1	47	2
14 Cuirassier	2	122	0
1 Chevau-Légers	25	182	0
2 Chevau_Légers	19	73	0
3 Chevau-Légers	21	95	0
4 Chevau-Légers	9	119	2
5 Chevau-Légers	23	231	8
6 Chevau-Légers	9	119	2
8 Chevau-Légers	14	247	19
4 Chasseurs	5	5	27
6 Chasseurs	2	20	0
7 Chasseurs	21	140	6
8 Chasseurs	0	56	3
9 Chasseurs	0	54	2
10 Chasseurs	9	130	7
11 Chasseurs	11	141	11
12 Chasseurs	6	199	0
16 Chasseurs	0	64	2
20 Chasseurs	2	174	0
25 Chasseurs	3	51	0
28 Chasseurs	9	63	13
4 Hussars	7	0	0
5 Hussars	12	99	59
6 Hussars	2	38	0
7 Hussars	9	161	
9 Hussars	2	100	0
11 Hussars	15	270	15

8 Comp Train d'artillerie	2	66	0
6 Comp Train d'équipage	11	467	14
Reserve	0	760	19
Reserve Carabiniers	0	46	0

Table 5: Remounts allocated by regiment 8th January to 11th April 1812.²⁷

From table 5 we see that between 8th January and 11th April 1812, some 293 officers and 5,121 troopers were remounted as their horses were considered unfit for future service due to illness or were over the maximum age for a cavalry mount. Of the remounts 222 died from disease a little under 0.5%. As we can see from table 10 only small numbers of men were remounted in the beginning of 1812, primarily due to a back log of getting equipment and uniforms to Hanover for issue. The equipping of men was spasmodic and relied on the dépôt receiving the men's arms and equipment from their parent dépôt in France. In his correspondence to Napoleon, General Lauriston notes that some men arrived at the remount depots with only the most basic items of equipment, notably canvas stable trousers, a shirt, stock, fatigue cap, a cloak and a pair of shoes. They had no arms or equipment or indeed their full complement of uniform items. This resulted in large numbers of men congregating in Hanover to be mounted and crucially to be issued with clothing that they should in theory already have had. To try and solve the equipment shortages at Hanover and Munster, General Bourcier was authorised to obtain uniform and harness and saddles locally to speed up the equipping process. Arms were forwarded from France.²⁸

The rate of remounting from 5th March 1812 is shown in table 6 below:

Date	Officer	Men
5 March to 20 March		660
20 March to 25 March	7	67
1 April to 7 April		15
7 April to 11 April	66	2,260
Total	73	3,002

Table 6: Number of officers and men remounted 5th March to 11th April 1812.²⁹

From table 6 we see that from 5th March 11th April 3,002 men were remounted in six weeks. In the period 8th January to 5th March 1812 some 2,119 men were remounted. To provide additional mounts for the army, Bourcier sent his officers out 'en mission' to buy mounts. General de Brigade Baron Guiton was sent to Stuttgart to purchase horses in Wurttemberg and Major Blancard was sent to Posen to oversee the mounting of the Polish cavalry. Captain Adjutant Major Gerard was sent to the arsenal of Mainz to oversee saddle production. Bourcier lamented that this slow rate was due, to a chronic lack of clothing items and saddles.³⁰ This created a bottle neck of dismounted men in Hanover and Munster. To mount the 229 personnel of the Imperial Guard at Hanover, the Train d'equipage of the Guard received 10 troop horses, 1 officers horse, 41 horses for NCO's and 73 draught horses. Initially these 41 troop horses, 1 officers mount and 73 draught horses were allocated for the transport of regimental baggage wagons. In terms of horse flesh, the Dragoons,

²⁷ SHDDT 2C 400 fols 400 to 406.

²⁸ SHDDT 2C 402 Lauriston to Napoleon 7 March 1812. See also Lauriston to Napoleon 20 March 1812

²⁹ SHDDT 2C 400 fols. 400 to 412.

³⁰ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 401 Bourcier to Napoleon 6 March 1812. See also SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 7 March 1812; SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 20 March 1812

and Chasseurs were mounted on bay and chestnut horses. Horses not matching the regimental colour were to be exchanged the depot. The 51 troop horses for the Grenadiers a Cheval were chestnut, standing 14.3 to 15.2 hh. ³¹

148 NCOs and men from the 7th Chasseurs a Cheval had arrived at Munster on 25th February, when they were expected at Hamburg where their 150 horses were waiting which had all been equipped and the men's clothing had arrived. A further 64 men had arrived at Hanover and not Hamburg. However General Bourcier authorised these men mounted and dispatched to Hamburg on 7th March 1812 and the horses from Hanover be allocated to other regiments on arrival. For the 137 men from the 11th Chasseurs at Hanover, the regimental depot had only supplied 12 saddles. Bourcier had written to the regiments depot to send the saddles at their soonest convenience as he could only mount 12 men of the 137. He strongly advised that this situation should not have existed in the first place. General Preval was authorised to obtain replacement saddles for the detachment of men on 4th March 1812. ³²

The same story was also true of the 12th Chasseurs, which had arrived at Hanover on 14th February 1812 totally lacking their uniform and equipment as the saddles and bridles had been forwarded by the parent regiment to the depot at Osnabruck, where the men were to be sent to on 4th March 1812 but instead had been directed to Hanover. ³³

However some regiments had more saddles than there was immediate need for. The 20th Chasseurs, had sent for the detachment of 100 men at Hanover, some 74 saddles and sets of harness, of which only 26 were needed, leaving a large surplus owned by the regiment which could not be handed over to other regiments. ³⁴

In the period 6th to 20th March 1812, 224 remounts had been taken into the dépôt at Hanover, which held 2,100 remounts, in addition to 1,092 remounts in 302 separate detachments already allocated to regiments.³⁵ In addition some 520 train horses were also in the dépôt, for which 48 NCO's riding saddles had been obtained, 252 drivers saddles, collars and traces. In addition, the dépôt held 102 officers and 3,825 men awaiting their mounts and clothing.³⁶ The flow of men and horses to the dépôt is shown in the table below:

³¹ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 401 Bourcier to Napoleon 6 March 1812. See also SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 7 March 1812; SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 20 March 1812

³² SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 401 Bourcier to Napoleon 6 March 1812. See also SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 7 March 1812; SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 20 March 1812

³³ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 401 Bourcier to Napoleon 6 March 1812. See also SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 7 March 1812; SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 20 March 1812

³⁴ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 401 Bourcier to Napoleon 6 March 1812. See also SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 7 March 1812; SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 20 March 1812

³⁵ SHDDT 2C 400fol. 405 Bourcier to Napoleon 19 March 1812.

³⁶ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 405 Lauriston to Napoleon 20 March 1812.

Date	Officer	Trooper	Officer mount	Trooper remount
20 March ³⁷	102	3,825	200	2,620
25 March ³⁸	95	3,758	200	3,131
1 April ³⁹	101	4,080	211	3,496
7 April ⁴⁰	101	4,065	210	4,341
11 April ⁴¹	35	1,805	65	2,066
15 April ⁴²	49	2,239	100	2,275

Table 7: Table showing number of men and horses held at Hanover 20 March to 15 April 1812.

Table 7 shows the flow of mounts into Hanover compared to the number of men. Clearly the number of men arriving at Hanover was far quicker than the supply of horses. Of interest it seems in 1812 and in 1813 the state supplied mounted officers with their mounts, as opposed to the officer providing the mounts at their expense. Between 11th and 15th April, some 2,275 men were mounted and some 145 officers mounts were allocated to 66 officers. Bourcier noted that this was wasteful for horse flesh, as the spare officer mounts he argued should be held back to be issue to troopers or as a reserve, rather than fritted away on officers luxury's. General Lauriston noted that prior to 1812 officers had supplied their own mounts and castigated Napoleon and Daru for what he thought was a waste of resources. ⁴³

This system was highly effective in providing mounts for the cavalry. However, of the French cavalry force that marched into Russia in 1812, perhaps 49% were in experienced conscripts with little training and had to undergo on the job training and learn the tricks of their trade to care for themselves and their horses on active service, which was impossibility. This reason may well explain the high ratio of horse losses to allied cavalry units in the 1812 campaign. Most allied cavalry units were already formed, and had some combat experience and knew some tricks of the trade and had a distinctive advantage over the French in being able to care for their horses and keep them alive.

At the close of April, 39 Guides of the General Staff were mounted on 60 Dragoon Horses. ⁴⁴ The guides formation originated in 1803. They were formed as part of the build-up to the invasion of England, and to act is interpreters. They became the Guide Interpreters of the Army of the Grande Armée from 8th May 1807 when they were assigned to Marshall Berthier, Major General of the Army. After the Polish campaign of 1807, the unit served in Spain until 1811, when they returned to France. Re-christened the Guides of the General Staff on the 15th June 1812, the unit was reformed in March 1813. The guides typically guided troop columns along the route of march, other duties included operating as interpretors as well as escorts cum bodyguards for important officers. Napoleon formed a guide unit during his Italian campaign in 1796 which became the Chasseurs a Cheval of the Imperial Guard. Guides from 1799 were to be drawn from Dragoon regiments. Napoleon forbade his Marshals to employ cavalry companies as guides.

³⁷ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 405 Lauriston to Napoleon 20 March 1812.

³⁸ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 405 Lauriston to Napoleon 25 March 1812.

³⁹ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 406 Lauriston to Napoleon 1 April 1813.

⁴⁰ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 414 Lauriston to Napoleon 7 April 1812.

⁴¹ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 416 Lauriston to Napoleon 11 April 1812.

⁴² SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 417 Lauriston to Napoleon 15 April 1812.

⁴³ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 417 Lauriston to Napoleon 15 April 1812.

⁴⁴ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 420 Lauriston to Napoleon 20 April 1812

By 15th July 1812 the forward remount dépôt at Hanover held 67 officers and 3,664 men, with 1,317 remounts, this would increase to some 4,276 remounts by the 2nd October 1812. ⁴⁵ By the 1st January 1813, the number of horses at Hanover was reduced to 1,890 horses, with some 2,386 horses being used to remount reinforcements for the army in November and December 1812. The cavalry in the field on 1st January 1813 mustered some 4,721 men and horses. Some 2,335 of these men and horses being survivors of the 1812 campaign. ⁴⁶ This dépôt remained in operation into 1813, and it would to be Hanover on 12th November 1812 that Napoleon authorised the depositing of 2,000 horses to act as additional remounts for the army, as well as ordering General Bourcier to purchase in Warsaw at least 5,000 horses of which a minimum of 1,000 were to be draught horses. This purchase was later increased to 6,000. In January 1813 three more remount dépôts were established at Magdeburg, Hamburg and Hanau. ⁴⁷

In November1812 Napoleon estimated that he needed 10 to 12,000 horses to act as a nucleus for his mounted arm, in addition to the horses held in the remount dépôts by the Army, theoretically some 11,700 horses. The dépôts at Lepel and d'Orcha were to supply the harness and saddles. This figure was later revised to 30,000 horses. It would to be Hanover on 12 November 1812 that Napoleon authorised the depositing of 2000 horses to act as additional remounts for the army, as well as ordering General Bourcier to purchase in Warsaw at least 5000 horses of which a minimum of 1000 were to be draught horses. This purchase was later increased to 6000. The horse markets of Poland, Prussia and on the Elbe were ordered produced some 21,000 horses, 600 from Warsaw, 3000 from Glogau, 2,700 from Posen, 3,500 from Berlin, 3,200 from Hamburg and 3,200 from Hanover. The supplementary of the supple

On 1 February 1813, the Confederation of the Rhine dépôts held 4,600horses. The Hanau dépôt, part of the Kingdom of Westphalia, by this date had accepted 764 mounts for Cuirassiers s, 550 for Dragoons, 277 train horses out of a purchase of 700, and 5128 light cavalry horses. ⁵¹

In the nine months up to June 1812, 133,657 horses had been purchased.⁵² This equates to 14,850 horses obtained a month. From November 1812 to December 1813, Napoléon authorised the purchase of some 280,000 horses. Of the horses authorised to be purchased, the army obtained some 212,671 horses. In 1813, on average 15,190 horses were obtained a month. This makes a total purchase of 346,328 horses from a total equine population of some 3,500011 horses in the 130 departments. Of these some 1,268,909 stallions or geldings 1,393521 mares and 837,581 young stock aged under 4yrs.⁵³ France had the largest equine population in Europe.

To ride these horses some 219,600 men were taken into the regenerated mounted arm of the Grande Armée. Of these men and horses, just over 30,000 men and horses would still be serving in the Army at the end of the March 1814.

Clearly, the mechanisms that were in place in 1812 to mount the army, clothe and equip were still in operation throughout 1813, and were actually working at a higher level. This implies that the 1812 campaign did not deliver a terminal blow to the Napoleonic state.

⁴⁵ SHDDTT 2C 400 fol. 440 see also C2 452.

SHDDT, 2C 545 fol. 301 Bourcier to Clarke, 1 January 1813.

⁴⁷ On 15 August 1813 the three establishments were administered by 15 staff officers, and held awaiting for remounts 178 officers, 5975 troopers, to which the dépôts could provide 515 officers horses, 1080 troop horses and 148 draught horses (SHDDT 2C 545 fol. 708)

⁴⁸ SHDDT C2, Napoleon to Berthier, 12 November 1812.

⁴⁹ SHDDT C2, Napoleon to Comte Cessac 29 December 1812.

⁵⁰ SHDDT C2 Napoleon to Comte Cessac 23 January 1813.

⁵¹ SHDDT 2C2 545 fol. 371 Bourcier to Clarke 1 February 1813.

⁵² AN, AF^{IV} fol.1183.

⁵³ AN AF ^{IV} 1702.

Clothing and Equipment.

The chaos surrounding saddles and horses, and men arriving at the wrong depot as noted above was also reflected in the chaos surrounding clothing the men.

After under-going basic training, once equipped, detachments of dismounted men, then marched or travelled by post to Hanover to be mounted and receive the rest of their equipment. However, some detachments were dispatched only with their stable clothing.⁵⁴ Others arrived at the dépôt before their harness and saddle.⁵⁵

A detachment of 13 men from the 10th Cuirassiers had arrived at the depot on 22 February 1812 wearing nothing but their canvas stable trousers and coats, a bonnet de police and shoes. The rest of their uniform, arms and equipment had not arrived at the depot. The same was true with a detachment of men from 12th Cuirassiers had nothing but their regimental boots and were still wearing civilian clothes. ⁵⁶

For 105 dismounted men from the 1st regiment of French line lancers, the regimental depot held 67 habit vestes, 121 pairs of boots, 61 porte-carbines and 104 sabres. The men had no other arms, equipment of uniform when dispatched to Hanover. These 105 men had neither allocated mounts, saddles or any other item of clothing or equipment and languished in the depot at Hanover until 1813 when they joined their parent regiments. ⁵⁷

This lack of clothing was widespread.

On 19th March 1812, Bourcier noted that of 120 men destined for the 6th Lancers, only 109 saddles had been sent to the depot, and the men only had their stable clothing, the rest of the uniform and equipment, less 125 gibernes, were still needed to arrive at the depot.⁵⁸ The same date, of 362 draught horses for the 6th Company of Train d'equipage, 324 men were in the depot but nothing else. For the horses 48 saddles for NCOs were ordered to be produced along with 252 saddles for the drivers and the full complement of driving harness. Bourcier wrote to the officers in charge of the Train d'equipage in Paris, complaining of their lack of foresight in providing the men with uniforms and equipment for the horses, and stated that the situation should never have arisen if the officers had known there duty.⁵⁹

For 121 men of the 4th Lancers dispatched to hanover, they only had their stable clothing.⁶⁰ These men only received their equipment by the 11th April 1812, and still lacked their uniforms and did not join the parent regiment till spring 1813.⁶¹ It seems all the Line Lancer regiments lacked uniform and equipment as 117 men of the 6th regiment had their riding trousers and stable coats, 125 gibernes, 123 porte-carbines for 117 carbines, 131 pistols. The rest of the equipment was badly

⁵⁴ SHDDT 2C 400 fol 404 Lauriston to Napoleon 19 March 1812

⁵⁵ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 401 Lauriston to Napoleon 6 March 1812

⁵⁶ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 401 Bourcier to Napoleon 6 March 1812. See also SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 7 March 1812; SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 20 March 1812

⁵⁷ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 401 Bourcier to Napoleon 6 March 1812. See also SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 7 March 1812; SHDDT 2C 400 fol 401. Lauriston to Napoleon 20 March 1812

⁵⁸ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 405 Bourcier to Napoleon 19 March 1812

⁵⁹ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 405 Bourcier to Napoleon 19 March 1812

⁶⁰ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 405 Bourcier to Napoleon 19 March 1812

⁶¹ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 406 Bourcier to Napoleon 10 April 1812. See also SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 406 Lauriston to Napoleon 11 April 1812.

made. So poor was the clothing, it was impossible for Bourcier to give any indication of how bad the clothing, saddles and harness was in terms of quality, other than noting it all had to be replaced. He further harangued Napoleon and Inspector Daru that the situation was in tolerable and should not happen.⁶² General Lauriston noted these men would be able to take the field on 10th April if new clothing arrived from France. 63 The same story was true for the equipment and clothing of the 8th Lancers which was condemned by Bourcier as being entirely bad despite being newly issued. The only equipment of use was 104 porte-carbines, 113 waistbelts, 180 carbines and bayonets, 190 lancers, 263 pistols and 250 saddles and bridles. All the clothing and remaining equipment had to be remade.64

Clearly the forward remount depot system was not operating as well as it should, and suppliers of uniforms and equipment were not helping by charging high prices for low quality items. 65 In 1813 these problems still effected the remounting of the cavalry, would only be overcome in the summer months of the year. However the supply of horses appears to have gone far smoother as this was directly controlled by General Bourcier and his agents.

To overcome the delay in transporting these items from France to Hanover, General Bourcier was instructed from 20th April 1812 to have saddles, harness and necessary clothing made in the immediate vicinity of Hanover. Not only would this speed up the time to get troopers and drivers equipped, it also reduced the cost of transporting items from France to Germany. 66 To speed up the process of making saddles and harness, 17 Company of the Artillery Workers Battalion was sent to Hanover. ⁶⁷ The supply of clothing to the mounted troops in 1812 was shambolic. 1,000s of men were left in remount depots or regimental depots for lack of clothing or the clothing that was made was substandard. From November 1812 all clothing was to be manufactured by the government and not at regimental level, and men were not to be clothed at the remount depot, but to be dispatched fully clothed and equipped. This shortened the supply line from manufacturers in France and the Confederation of the Rhine to the remount depots. However, it also placed the strain of supplying clothing and equipment solely on the French economy for the first time since the Revolution., Napoleon's habit of only paying half of bills shattered many manufacturers at the time of greatest need. For example, the saddle industry of France on 30 December 1812 had some 700 workshops which employed 13,000 workers.⁶⁸ By the 1st January 1814 this had dropped to 400 workshops employing just 800 people. 69 Clearly, as demand for saddles increased the means of production decreased. In addition due to the lack of credit available to the Army, the means to pay for saddles also hampered Army obtaining saddles, as much as it hampered obtaining horses.

Equine Losses

Losses before the retreat began for the French cavalry amounted to some 86,800 horses. Of these 46% had been killed at the start of July, some 40,000 horses, with a further 30,000 or 34% killed by the 5th of September from illness or malnutrition. Losses for the French are shown below: In the 1812 campaign between 1st June and 5th September, the following horses were lost by cavalry type:

⁶² SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 405 Bourcier to Napoleon 19 March 1812

⁶³ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 406 Bourcier to Napoleon 10 April 1812. See also SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 406 Lauriston to Napoleon 11 April 1812.

⁶⁴ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 401 Bourcier to Napoleon 6 March 1812

⁶⁵ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 401 Bourcier to Napoleon 6 March 1812.

⁶⁶ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 405 Lauriston to Napoleon 20 March 1812

⁶⁷ SHDDT 2C 400 fol. 412 Lauriston to Napoleon 8 April 1812

⁶⁸ AN, AF^{IV} fol. 1120. 69 AN, AF^{IV} fol. 1120.

Regiment	Total Losses	Average Month Loss	% regiment lost
6 th Lancers	72	24	86
7 th Chasseurs	91	30	67
1 st Chasseurs	129	43	84
2 nd Chasseurs	145	48	82
11 th Hussars	163	54	72
8 th Hussars	221	73	75
30 th Dragoons	226	75	62
23 rd Dragoons	248	82	76
7 th Dragoons	266	88	73
9 th Hussars	270	90	58
4 th Cuirassiers	279	93	65
5 th Hussars	290	96	73
5 th Lancers	290	97	32
28 th Dragoons	291	97	70
4 th Lancers	293	98	40
9 th Cuirassiers	295	98	62
7 th Hussars	303	101	67
24 th Chasseurs	321	107	59
3 rd Chasseurs	340	113	58
3 rd Lancers	365	122	23
2 nd Lancers	375	125	35
2 nd Cuirassiers	389	129	47
23 rd Chasseurs	407	135	49
7 th Cuirassiers	424	141	43
20 th Chasseurs	426	142	48
3 rd Cuirassiers	475	158	42

Table 8: French horse losses by cavalry type 1st June to 5th September 1812.⁷⁰

Of interest the average horses lost per month does not tally with the % of a regiments horses killed, wounded, missing or sold in any one period. The 3rd Lancers lost 23% of their horses, at a rate of 125 a month, whilst the 6th Lancers 24 horses a month, equating to 86% of the regiment. The dragoons occupy the first half of the table, and the cuirassiers the second half, with the light cavalry spread throughout. The French cavalry was decimated long before the retreat. 150,000 horses would be lost in 1812. This was mainly due to:

- 1) Starvation
- 2) Ignorance of the rider

70 Compiled from AN C2 detailed bi-monthly returns for the various French armies serving in Spain and Germany.

An idea of the amount of fodder and other items a cavalry regiment needed can be gleaned from the following. To maintain 423 horses of the *Grenadiers à Cheval* at the regiments depot in Paris on 3 April 1813 required 185 kg of bread or biscuit and the same amount of meat a day to feed the 323 troopers and 33 officers. For the horses 1,922 kg of oats were needed along with 2,230 kg of hay. For the stables, 4,000 kg of straw was needed a day. As three days rations were normally carried, 1,110 kg of bread and meat, 5,766kg of oats and 6,690 kg of hay had to be transported. The regiment as a whole on 11th April 1813 had 1,177 horses and 1,248 men and 75 officers. To feed these men and horses required 650 kg bread, the same of meat as live cattle, 318kg of wine and spirits, 7,536 kg of oats and 9,043 kg of hay every 3 days. This made a total weight of 52,644 kg to be moved on the regimental wagons. When one applies this to the army as a whole, the quantities of food stuffs required became immense and totally impractical Napoleon's armies could never have been fed. James MacQueen estimated that to feed the Grande Armée from the 22nd June, the date of the 2nd bulletin, till the 2nd September 1812, a week after the army entered Moscow, (in all 13 weeks) and which, the army would require 14,000 bullocks, and 220,000 sheep. For these 13 weeks alone to give the army a basic ration would require 32,000,000 kg. of bread, 12,000,000 kg. of corn, and 20,000,000 kg. wine and groceries, for the troops: 60,000,000 kg. oats and 93,000,000 kg. hay, for the horses and cattle. To this add artillery, carriages, powder, musket and cannon balls, (60,000 of the latter were spent in one day, by one army, at Borodino alone,) all of which were brought by the French from the rear, as the Russians destroyed everything they could not carry away. MacOueen estimates in 1815 that the 1812 campaign cost £50 million at 1815 prices. 71

Generals Bourcier, Cancloux, Preval, Pully and Grouchy felt that the situation concerning the treatment of horses on campaign, had deteriorated over the years leading up to 1810 due to the influx of poorly trained conscripts and promotion of troopers to positions of responsibility who had little understanding of their duties, and were not supervised efficiently by their officers. Generals Bourcier and Pully noted noted that many horses were injured by riders, and had wounds to their backs, caused by placing a nail or stones under the saddle blanket. The problem of lack of equine knowledge amongst the new conscripts is exemplified in a letter from General Bourcier to General Clarke the Minister of War:

Most of the animals are being returned to the depot from the army and are no longer serviceable to the army due to ignorance and neglect of our young cavalrymen, who simply do not know how to properly care for their mounts.⁷³

Bourcier was a little more succinct in his complaints in a report of 6 April 1813, criticising the system whereby train drivers with no horse care knowledge had to be able to care for two horses, which was totally impossible.⁷⁴

From these letters, Bourcier complained that horses were being killed or injured through their bad handling by inexperienced new riders. In addition to being taught how to ride and to care for their horses, cavalrymen had to know when to feed and water their horses and learn which plants were harmful to them.⁷⁵ This lack of equine know how was not just limited to the French, and was a concern for other states at the time when german states provided contingents to the French armies. Saxon troopers were regarded as the most educated, Bavarian, Wurtemberg, and Westphalian troopers according to the French cavalry committee, knew little due to the lack of good NCO's. ⁷⁶ The maintenance of a horse in good condition in a field environment without access to constant and

⁷¹ MacQueen, I p.179.

⁷² SHDDT, E31 fol. 6.

⁷³ SHDDT, 2C 545 fol. 371 Bourcier to Clarke, 28 May 1813.

⁷⁴ SHDDT, 2C 545 fol. 371 Report General Bourcier, 6 April 1813.

⁷⁵ SHDDT, E31 fol. 6.

⁷⁶ SHDDT, E31 fol. 6.

consistent water and feed, and being cared for by ill trained conscripts with little or no equine knowledge would be virtually impossible, and had been a major cause for concern amongst senior cavalry officers from June 1809. General Bourcier noted in 1805 that 'ignorance of the horse was more damaging to the cavalry than the enemy'. ⁷⁷ Profound words indeed.

Summary.

The achievements of General Bourcier and his staff in 1812 and 1813 were truly remarkable. In 1813 the French state obtained more men and horses for the Army than at any point in France's History. Lessons were learned from the 1812 campaign for the supply and logistics of the army which had failed in 1812. So successful was the logistical support to the mounted troops, less than 8,000 of the 164,000 horses obtained for the Army between November 1812 and August 1813 would die whilst in army depots , compared to 20,000 in 1812, and no reports were made of men arriving at depots lacking clothing and equipment. ⁷⁸ This was a tremendous achievement. From this we can see that the 1812 campaign was not the terminal knockout blow to the Napoleonic state that it has often been seen to be.

References.

The crux of this work was written by consulting hundreds of files of original archive material held at the Archives Nationale in Paris, primarily cartons AD, AF II, AF III Armements et Munitions Series AF IV Maison de l'Emperor Box 1183 Cavalerie-Generalities-Remontes; Series C2 Box 470 Situations 1806; Series C2 Box 471 Situations 1807; Series C2 Box 523 Situations 1812; Series C2 Box 537 Situations 1813 and Series C2 Box 555 Situations 1814.

In addition *Service Historique Defence Armée du Terre* (SHDDT), Series 2C Box 545 Depot General de la Cavalerie et des Remontes 1813; Series AG Box 1M Concernant les Remontes; Series C2 Correspondence Militaire 1813; C8 Correspondence Militaire Espagne; Series E31 Veterinary General Preval; Series Xab Box 56 Garde Imperiale- Artillerie- Batteries. These thousands of sheets of original archival material have been invaluable in unlocking the story of the horses and riders of Napoleon's military machine.

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⁷⁷ SHDDT, E31 fol. 6.

⁷⁸ AN, AF^{IV} 1180 fols. 842 to 883, see also AN, AF^{IV} 1180 fols. 1550-1580.