

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume II

The Baden Contingent – Chapter 6 Part IV

By Commandant Sauzey

Translated by [Greg Gorsuch](#)

THE BADEN CONTINGENT IN SPAIN.¹

§5. -- 1813. -- Fighting of Estépar. -- Battle of Vitoria. -- Fights on the Bidasoa.

The almost complete destruction of the Grand Army during the Russian retreat forced the Emperor to recall more than 50,000 men from Spain. Soult himself went to Paris on 2 March 1813. However, French troops would never have been more necessary in the Peninsula, for the Spaniards were gathering another army under the command of Castaños, and the English were receiving new and considerable reinforcements.

Joseph, renouncing to defend himself on the Tagus, resolved to abandon his capital again and to retire to the northern provinces. The regiment of Baden left Aranjuez and arrived at Madrid on the 7th of March. The Baden officers were happy to meet the former commander of the German Division, the brave General Leval, for whom they had all preserved the most sincere attachment. The following day, the Baden left again: General D'Armagnac went to Alcobendas with the artillery, the two companies of Baden grenadiers and the chasseurs à cheval of Nassau. Neuenstein marched with the 1st Battalion on El-Molar and the 2nd Battalion went to San Sebastian. On 16 March, the whole division was assembled at Guadarama. After crossing, on March 30th, Olmedo and Valdestillas, the Baden reached Valdefuentes on May 10th. It was there that the regiment, attached to the Army of Portugal, passed under the command of General Mermet; the latter distributes them into different posts: General Neuenstein. with three companies, at Valderas; one senior officer and three companies, at Mayorga; a senior officer and three companies at Villalpando; a captain and three companies, at Valdelillas. A detachment composed of a certain number of officers and non-commissioned officers set out for Germany, in order to serve to supervise the new formations demanded by the Emperor to the Grand Duke of Baden.

At the beginning of June, Joseph began his retreat on Burgos and Vitoria, by Palencia (4 June), Villa-Ximena (6 June), Astudillo (7 June), Celada (9 June) and Estépar (11 June).

Fighting of Estépar (12 June).

The English attacked Estépar; the divisions of D'Armagnac and Moquin (the latter belonging to the Army of Portugal), with the light cavalry of this army, supported the shock of General Hill; but they were soon taken back by another English column which had out flanked their right; we had to retreat quickly: "Go! go quickly!" shouted the aides-de-camp... and the cans and bags danced on the backs of the breathless soldiers who are brought back in the

¹The well-documented German work of Baden Major W. Krieg von Hochfelden (*Geschichte der Badischen Truppen in Spanien*) served as a canvas for the last part of this study.

The quotations from Bernays' book (*Schicksale des Grossherzogthums Frankfurt and Seiner Truppen*) are themselves taken from the written telling of this war by Captain Rigel, who made the whole campaign in the ranks of the Baden contingent (*Der siebenjährige Kampf auf der Pyrendischen Halbinsel*).

Finally, the numbers of this contingent at different periods of operation in the peninsula were extracted from the work of Costa de Serda on "*Les Troupes sociales sous le Premier Empire*."

direction of Burgos, while Captain Schuhknecht, with the Baden mounted artillery, covered the retreat movement protected by Nassau's chasseurs à cheval and the 28th Infantry Regiment. The Baden lost in this combat a piece of cannon which hung up on a tree and whose horses broke their traces; Major Lassolaye, commander of the artillery of Baden, had previously organized into horse artillery part of his battery. The affair of Estépar could have ended rather sadly if an unforeseen circumstance had not stopped the English: a French artillery captain, at the head of a small park of three guns, suddenly opened fire on the enemy when they, pursuing our divisions, approached the spot where his weak troop was bivouacked...

The division of D'Armagnac crossed Burgos, whose French jumped into the citadel, -- then Castañares (16 June); it crossed the Ebro and came to bivouac near Vitoria on 19 June.

Wellington's forces also crossed the river; the check of the corps of General Graham, who was being beaten at Osama, put the adversaries in contact with Vitoria: Joseph did not believe in a serious offensive of the English, whose united forces would attack him and make him lose Spain.

Battle of Vitoria (21 June).

Clauzel was to arrive from Saragossa the same day with the 15,000 soldiers of the Army of the North; relying on this important reinforcement, King Joseph decided to accept the battle. He rode on horseback and passed in front of the front of the troops... 6,000 men had just been sent to the town of Vitoria to bring back provisions when the cannonade began at about eleven o'clock in the morning; this detachment, taking advantage of the tumult of the battle, remained in the city and dispersed without fulfilling its mission, so that the army had to fight on an empty stomach and diminished by 6,000 bayonets...

General Hill attacked in three columns the extreme right of the French line. As the fire of the English artillery was very violent on our center, this movement of Hill was at first mistaken for a feint; but as his columns still were progressing, we soon saw that it was necessary to oppose their march and reinforcements were sent to our right: it was too late: all this part of the line was already jostled.

Wellington then moved his center forward and Graham moved to our left: the battle became general. The French cavalry, placed behind Vitoria, could not be used because of the numerous cuts of the ground.

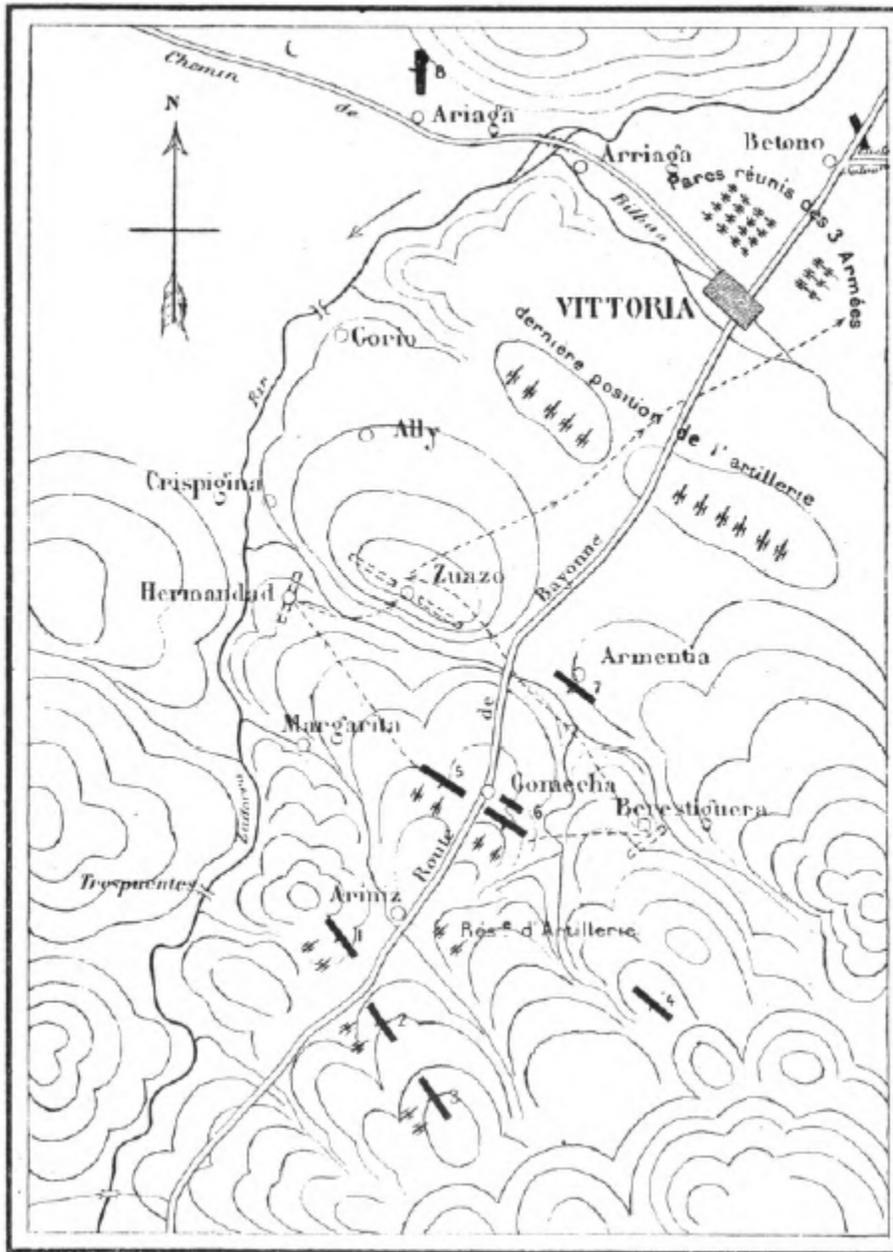
The English masses advanced along the whole line, arm to arm, protected by the fire of artillery and light troops; they reached the positions of the French artillery, in spite of the enormous breaches which our fire produce in their ranks; they overwhelmed them and fended off Joseph's army under the walls of Vitoria. British light cavalry fell on the middle of the big artillery park... The disorder became extreme and all the troops, confused, flocked to the city; there, the clutter was awful, the looting was general and any link with discipline seemed lost.

Joseph had been, during the day, in urgent danger; he was almost taken prisoner by English hussars: his horse fell down, jumping a ditch when the enemy horsemen still hugged him close... Fortunately a French chasseur à cheval gave his horse to the King, while Colonel Rapatel, commanding the light horse of the Guard, came up with about a hundred horsemen and relieved his prince by charging and repulsing the English hussars. The army lost all its baggage, a large part of the royal treasury, several thousand carriages, 150 guns, all the stores of ammunition; we had 3,000 killed and many prisoners: all the looters remained in Vitoria. Wellington's victory was dearly paid for by more than 6,000 killed or wounded English.

The division of D'Armagnac numbered 5,000 men on the morning of the battle. Placed on the French right, it had suffered the shock of the columns of General Hill and suffered considerable losses: this attack of the English cost Nassau 15 officers and more than 200 soldiers, and Baden 5 officers and 100 men hors de combat. The D'Armagnac Division, first placed near Gomecha, was soon sent to the Hermandad, where the artillery of Baden was distinguished; then, threatened with being turned by its left, it had to fall back on Zuazo, where the Cassagne Division came to join it. The efforts of the English had failed to carry this position, when the order to retreat reached the two divisions: they withdrew by the road of Salvatierra, the road to Bayonne being cut by the enemy. During the execution of this movement General Neuenstein had a horse killed under him; the Baden artillery, after six years of glorious service, lost all its guns on this unhappy day.

Bataille de Vitoria.

(D'après le croquis joint au rapport du général comte d'Erlon, commandant l'armée du Centre.)



Battle of Vitoria.

(After the sketch attached to the report of General Count d'Erlon, Commander of the Army of the Center.)

Legend:

- 1, 2, 3, 4. -- Divisions of the Army of the South (General Gazan).
- 5, 6. -- Divisions D'Armagnac and Cassagne, of the Army of the Center,
- 7, 8. -- Divisions of the Army of Portugal (General Reille).

Clauzel did not arrive until the day after the battle; he retreated immediately to Zaragoza, while Joseph continued his retreat by Roncesvalles on Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port; the German Division, in charge of the rear guard, had a strong engagement on the 24th of June in front of Pamplona. The Germans left Sara on the 6th of July, crossed the Spanish frontier, and went to bivouac on the 9th at Espelette; they settled on the 22nd at the camp of La Croix-de-Bouquet, beside the unfortunate Spanish brigade of Joseph.

Recalled by the Emperor after this disastrous campaign, Joseph was replaced by Marshal Soult who took the command of the army on 12 July and immediately began the reorganization.



1813. — LE MARÉCHAL SOULT (1)

(D'après une gravure de l'époque.)

1813. -- MARSHAL SOULT²
(After an engraving of the time.)

²Soult (Nicolas Jean-de-Dieu), Duke of Dalmatia, Marshal of France. Born in Saint-Thomas-la-Bastide (Tarn) in 1769, died in 1851. Enlisted at 16 years old; captain in 1793; brigade chief and brigadier general in 1794; general of division in 1799. Campaigns of Switzerland, Italy; siege of Genoa, with Massena in 1805, Austerlitz; 1806, Jena, Eylau, taking of Königsberg; 1808, Spain (Burgos, Ocaña, siege of Cadiz). 1813, Bautzen. Battle of Toulouse. Minister of War at the Restoration; Major General of the Army during the Hundred Days. Minister of War after 1830, then in 1840. Made Marshal-General by Louis-Philippe.

It was divided into three corps with three divisions, and a strong "reserve" division was formed. All the generals without command took the headed to Germany, to be employed with the Grande Armée, as well as cadres of infantry and almost all the cavalry. The number of commissariats was strictly limited; the baggage and service horses were reduced to a minimum; measures of this nature soon rendered the army more supple and more mobile; it seemed that it was animated by a new life.

Each division numbered about 5,000 men; the reserve division had 10,000. The total force of the army amounted to 55,000 combatants, not counting the 8,000 recruits of General Thouvenot who formed the garrison of Bayonne.

The reserve division, commanded by General Villatte, had the following composition:

Infantry. -- 2 regiments of French gendarmes on foot.
The former Spanish Guard (grenadiers, voltigeurs and fusiliers).
The German regiments of Baden and Nassau.
The battalion of Frankfurt.
2 Italian regiments.
The Spanish regiment "Royal-Foreigners".
The debris of the Spanish "Jurados".
2 regiments of French conscripts.

Cavalry. -- The Spanish light horse of the Guard.
Italian dragoons.
A detachment of gendarmes.
Debris of Spanish cavalry regiments.

Artillery. -- 12 pieces of cannon.

It was at Croix-de-Bouquet that the General von Neuenstein was ordered to form the regiment of Baden in a single battalion and to return to Germany, taking with him the cadre of the 2nd Battalion and Major von Lassolaye, commander of the Baden Artillery; he was replaced at the head of the German brigade by Colonel von Kruse, of Nassau. The battalion of Baden had 564 men present; artillery, 79; the train, 78; the number of soldiers in hospitals was, for each of these units, 69 infantry, 15 gunners and 8 men of the train.³

After Marshal Soult's vain attempt to assemble with Suchet in the kingdom of Valencia, an operation which ended in the unhappy battle of Pamplona, the French army resumed its former positions on the Bidasoa. The reserve division had not cooperated with this expedition and had remained under observation in front of Irun. On 7 August, it went to Serres and Ascain to occupy the Nivelle line, reinforced by the construction of numerous redoubts.

Fights on the Bidasoa.

To obey the orders of the Emperor, Soult made a general movement on 31 August to unblock San Sebastian, where General Rey, with 1,700 brave men, still held the English army in check. The advance of the divisions began on the night of the 30th to the 31st of August, and on the 31st in the morning the action was engaged all along the line. The reserve division, accompanied by a pontoon bridge equipment, took up position on Mount Louis XIV; the Baden voltigeurs crossed the Bidasoa in small boats, while the bridges were thrown over with the help of 200 German workers. The Marshal, on the most dangerous points, gave his orders in person and launched his columns. Covered by two deployed Baden companies, the Nassau regiment, the Baden Battalion, the Frankfurt Battalion and the Spanish infantry regiments crossed the river under the most violent fire and formed a line of battle on the opposite bank, the brigade Spanish on the right, Frankfurt and Nassau in the center, and Baden on the left. The fight lasted several hours, at the end of the day, the Spanish brigade was overwhelmed by the enemy; it retreated to the bridges and drew the whole line into its retrograde movement. The tide had raised the waters of the Bidasoa, and the bridges were partly submerged; the battalion of Baden forded the river and several soldiers drowned... The two companies of voltigeurs, cut off from the rest of the division, owed their safety only to a heavy rain, thanks to which they could

³Costa de Serda, page 124.

retire without being seen by the enemy. The Baden Captain Schendal was killed in this affair.

The division, first brought back to Croix-de-Bouquet, returned on the 2nd of September to the Ascain and Serres camps.

Wellington took the position of Croix-Bouquet on 7 October: the Bidasoa line was crossed and Soult fell back on the Nivelle line.

On the 31st of October, the Marshal, aware of the events, and knowing that the princes of the Confederation of the Rhine were won over to the cause of the coalition, had the French men placed in the front line relieved by French troops, and sent them to Ciboure, a suburb, from Saint-Jean-de-Luz; he never ceased, however, to treat the German officers with the greatest consideration; meeting one day with Colonel von Kruse, of Nassau, he said to him: "It is you, colonel, who was at the head of my sacred battalion!... And it was that same Kruse, who was already preparing for the defection of his regiment and was waiting for an opportunity to lead them to the English ranks...

On the 10 November, Wellington forced the line of Nivelle, and the French army withdrew to the Nive between Bidart and Cambo; the reserve division would camp on the glacis of Bayonne; the German brigade was not engaged on this day.

Fight of 10 December.

On the night of December 9th, Soult concentrated his army at Bayonne, and marched the next morning on the road to Saint-Pé, to pierce the enemy's center; the fight lasted all day; at 3 o'clock in the evening, the German Brigade commanded by Colonel von Kruse, of Nassau, was sent into the line of battle to relieve a French brigade which was very hard hit. Hardly engaged and from the first shots, Colonel Hennig, commanding the battalion of Baden, was wounded in the foot; many of his soldiers falling around him, killed or wounded. At this moment, a strong downpour stopped the fire on both sides: this was the moment that von Kruse chose to put his project into execution... He marched to the enemy in spaced columns, with the regiment of Nassau and the battalion of Frankfurt; arriving within range of the voice, he was recognized and passed in the English lines...⁴

As soon as this betrayal was known, the battalion of Baden and the Spanish regiment "Royal-Foreigners" (composed largely of Germans) were brought back and bivouacked in full view under the surveillance of French troops. Marshal Soult had, since the 25th of November, been ordered to disarm the Germans; he thought, however, that he could wait and use the troops of this nation; this defection obliged him not to postpone a measure which had become indispensable.

"The officers of Baden," writes Soult in his report on the events of the 10th of December, "assured us that nothing has been said to them, and that they have not the slightest suspicion of the betrayal of the soldiers of Nassau..."⁵

The Baden did not have proof of the passage of their Prince to the alliance formed against France.⁶ The following order of the Grand Duke had not reached them:

Order of Grand Duke Charles of Baden to the Baden contingent in Spain.

Karlsruhe, 1 November 1813.

"Having embraced the cause of Germany and the Allied Powers against France, I order the officer who commands

⁴See, for the details of Colonel von Kruse's defection, the first volume of this work, *The Regiment of Frankfurt*, pp. 71-73.

⁵Bernays, page 310.

⁶Rigel, III, page 633.

my 4th Infantry Regiment in Spain, wherever he may be, to seize the first opportunity to rejoin with his troops the high allied powers and then return to the homeland. - Charles."⁷

The army returned to Bayonne on the morning of 11 December. The battalion of Baden was at once commanded to form on the glacis of the place, in front of its old barracks; three French regiments were placed, one on the right, the second on the left, and the third behind the German battalion; in front of the head, on the ramparts of the city, the gunners were at their pieces, wicks lit.

General Villatte, commander of the reserve division, sent for the officers of Baden, and after a few words full of affectionate gratitude for the distinguished service rendered by the battalion, he confessed to them his deep grief over the sad news that he had to communicate to them: "His Highness the Duke of Baden," he said, "has begun hostilities against France, and, according to the law of nations, you must from that moment be considered as prisoners of war. Nevertheless, the Marshal is keen for this measure to be, for you, accompanied by all possible precautions; the battalion of Baden will keep all its baggage, the officers will keep their swords, but the troop must deposit in barracks, fusils, sabers and cartridge-cases; they will keep their cloaks and their bags and will stay in the city until they are sent to the interior of France."

Disarmament took place during the officers' meeting at General Villatte's. Many soldiers broke their fusils and threw them with their swords at the feet of the French... several shed tears and all were filled with anger, unable to explain the treatment they were subjected to. A gendarme, placed at the door of the house occupied by Colonel Hennig, had been instructed to let no one in, and to let no one leave until the end of this sad operation.

On December 14th, the battalion of Baden (as well as the depots of the Nassau regiment and the battalion of Frankfort) was set out for Dax, escorted by 200 gendarmes on foot and 30 on horseback.

At Bordeaux, the Baden officers left their troop; it continued its march to Bourg, in the department of Ain, while the officers went, freely, by Angouleme, Poitiers, Tours and Le Mans, on Mortagne, in Normandy; a cavalry non-commissioned officer was appointed to prepare their quarters.

Finally, the entrance of the Allies into Paris soon ended for the Baden, this short captivity, and our old allies returned to their homeland.⁸

The 10,000 soldiers of the "Division of the Confederation of the Rhine" had almost all disappeared during this cruel Spanish war, which lasted from 1808 to 1813. On its own, and without counting its artillery, the Baden regiment had lost more than 3,000 non-commissioned officers and soldiers, killed, dead at hospitals, murdered or taken prisoner; 24 officers were dead and the others, for the most part, had some injuries.

We owe, as Frenchmen, a fair tribute of gratitude to the Baden contingent employed in Spain. It generously shed its blood for six years of deadly fighting, on the battlefields of Meza-de-Ibor, Medellin, Talavera, Almonacid, Ocaña and Vitoria; it gained an imperishable glory by fighting in our ranks, and, happier than Nassau and Frankfort, it left them without dishonoring his flags.

⁷*Denkwürdigkeiten*, page 247.

⁸Situation of effectives of the Baden contingent as of 10 December 1813:

	Present.	In hospitals.	Total.
4 th Regiment of Baden (Colonel Hennig), 1 Battalion.	483	26	514
Artillery of Baden (Captain Schuhknecht)	79	12	91
Baden train (Lieutenant Fulling)	76	8	85

(Costa de Serda, page 131).

((note of translator...these numbers do not add up correctly))

§6. -- List of dead Baden officers in Spain.⁹

4th INFANTRY REGIMENT.

Colonel...	Von PORBECK...	Killed at the Battle of Talavera.
Major...	Von FRANK....	Death from illness in Talavera.
Captain...	LANGEN...	Died in Madrid.
--	BRUCKNER...	Died as a result of his injuries at Toledo.
--	SCHACH...	Died as a result of torture in Mora.
--	Von STOCKHOLM...	Killed at the Battle of Talavera.
--	Von HAMMERER...	Murdered by guerrillas in Consuegra.
--	SCHENDAL...	Killed in front of Irun.
--	SEITZ...	Killed at the Battle of Vitoria.
1 st Lieutenant...	BECHER...	Killed in Zornosa.
--	VIRTOR...	Assassinated in Bilbao.
--	MAIER...	Killed at the Battle of Ocaña.
Lieutenant...	BARTH...	Killed at the Battle of Talavera.
--	ZEITLER...	Killed in Santa Maria.
--	OBERMAIER...	Death from the consequences of his injuries at Arroyo del Puerto.
--	CONRADI...	Death at Olmedo.
--	DORNBLUTH...	Killed at the battle of Talavera.
--	EICHHARD...	Death in Miranda.
--	BRAKENHEIMER...	Murdered at El Escurial.
--	HERES...	Assassinated in Puerto-Lápice.
--	HÖFLE...	Death in Saint-Jean-de-Luz.

ARTILLERY.

Lieutenant...	SCHUTZ...	Killed at the Battle of Talavera.
--	KLAIBER...	Killed in Toledo.
--	BENDIR...	Killed in Santa Maria.

Officers maimed.

Captain...	MESSBACH...
Lieutenant...	SCHREIBER...
--	JAUDAS...
--	BOMATSCH...

Officers taken prisoner.

Captain...	Von FROBEN...
Lieutenant...	Von HOLZING...
--	KNAPP...

Placed on the Napoleon Series: October 2018

⁹According to Hochfelden.