

# The Napoleon Series

## The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume II

### The Baden Contingent – Preface

By Commandant Sauzey

Translated by [Greg Gorsuch](#)

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#### PREFACE

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Continuing the series of his very documented and very interesting studies on the German troops of the Confederation of the Rhine in the service of France during the Imperial period, Commander Sauzey gives us today the history of the troops provided by the Grand Duchy of Baden.

The history of the Baden contingent presents a striking example of how good troops are formed: through training, the environment, example and command. Mediocre soldiers at their entry into our ranks, the Baden acquired in a few years the qualities that make troops strong: they managed to fight just like the French, and the enemy would not be able to find a difference between them and our grenadiers.

Recruited among the peaceful populations of the Grand Duchy, the young soldiers of Baden showed in principle little military spirit. They campaigned in 1805 and 1806 on the rear of the army, providing transport and convoy service for the wounded and prisoners; then, the Emperor sends them to make their debut in arms at the siege of Danzig, where they reveal themselves to be big eaters and insatiable drinkers, exasperating Marshal Lefebvre whose supplies they devour. The work of the undermining did not tempt them: it was impossible to get them to move a cubic meter of earth... But at Holm they showed, beside our Guards of Paris, that they were good for danger and conducted themselves bravely. From then on, they received their baptism of fire and they would henceforth appear in our ranks in the first line: in 1808, in Spain, where a regiment remained until the end of the war and where it left more than 3,000 men killed, dead, in hospitals, murdered or prisoners; --in 1809, in the army corps of Massena, which was not spared during the campaign, and gave so vigorously at Essling and Wagram. In 1812, out of 4,881 Baden who left under the command of General von Hochberg in the army of the Duke of Bellune, only 145 soldiers returned from the disastrous retreat of Russia: all the rest of this fine brigade had been annihilated by iron, by fire and cold, we cannot read without emotion the story of the struggle which began on 28 November 1812 on the banks of the Berezina, where the Baden valiantly defended the bridges against the attacks of the Russians and assured the salvation of the army by their sacrifice: a (more) superb sacrifice, in truth, than that of those troops who, having already made their own passage, crossed the bridges of the Berezina to come and be decimated by containing the enemy, in order to allow the latecomers to pass! And despite the greatness of the cataclysm, they remained faithful to the end and fought with us until the last moment: in Leipzig, the 12 officers of the Baden Light Battalion -- all except the chief of the battalion -- are wounded; on the night of the battle, the Baden did not fraternize with the Allies, like other German contingents: they were prisoners of war and did not take up arms against us until the day when their sovereign informed them that he was abandoning the alliance of France for that of Russia, Prussia, and

Austria. This elevated sentiment of military honor is worthy of mention, and it alone shows how good the Baden regiments had become.

The Emperor had known, with his knowledge of men, to train them, to make them skillfully pass from the services of the rear to the first rank of the combatants by means of a siege where they had been hardened imperceptibly. The conduct of our marvelous soldiers of 1809, among whom they were supervised, contributed to complete this first training. Finally and above all they had the good fortune to have leaders who knew how to give them, with the example that supports, the impulse that directs. The hereditary prince of Baden held to the honor of commanding his contingent in the trenches of Danzig in 1807, and the Emperor wrote to Marshal Lefebvre about it: "The Prince of Baden, whom you have with you, wished to leave the sweets of the court to lead his troops to the fire. Treat him with respect, and take him into account with a zeal that his fellow-men do not imitate." Another son of the Grand Duke, the Count of Hochberg, almost a child, campaigned in 1809 on the staff of Masséna and commanded in 1812 the Baden contingent where he shared all the fatigues, all the miseries and all the dangers. We cannot help but admire princes who have understood and fulfilled their social role so well.

Captain Sauzey's studies were necessary to make known to us better allies who mingled their blood with ours in the period of the great Napoleonic struggles. Until now, their organization and role had been left completely in the shadows. The reason came from the difficulty of finding documents on all these bodies of the Rhine Confederation. Our French archives contain almost nothing about them, and we must search in the archives of foreign countries, in the manuscripts, the German memoirs and books, the documents which are entirely lacking. We hope that Captain Sauzey will continue to be unimpeded by any difficulty, and that with his irresistible cavalry impetus, he will overcome all obstacles for us to give soon the history of our Saxon, Bavarian, and Württemberg allies, as he has done with so much happiness so far with the history of the *Regiment of Frankfurt* and that of the *Contingent of Baden*.

J. MARGERAND.

Paris, 18 May 1904.

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