

# The Napoleon Series

## The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume I

### The Regiment of Frankfurt – Preface

By Commandant Sauzey

Translated by [Greg Gorsuch](#)

#### PREFACE

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If we read some of the tables of organization of the French armies from 1807 to 1813, we find enumerations like these: "2<sup>nd</sup> Division: 13<sup>th</sup> Light, 17<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, *Baden*. -- 5<sup>th</sup> Division: *Württemberg*. -- 13<sup>th</sup> Division: *Bavaria, Hesse, Confederation of Rhine*. -- 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division: 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> chasseurs, *Saxon*."

These German troops who fought in the French armies found their historian. What Fieffé did in a general and summary manner for all the foreign troops in the service of France, what Commander Boppe did for the Portuguese Legion, what others did for the Swiss regiments, M. Captain Sauzey has undertaken for the troops of the Confederation of the Rhine. The present volume, the *Regiment of Frankfurt*, will be followed by the *Baden Contingent*, the *Saxon Army*, the *Bavarians*, the *Württembergers*, the *Hesse and Nassau Troops*, the *Duchy of Saxony Regiment*, and the *Contingents of the Small German States*. Already Captain Sauzey, who spares neither time nor trouble, has made an ample harvest of documents, both at the depot of war and in the German monographs and archives of Dresden, Stuttgart, Munich and Karlsruhe. In a few years, we can hope that the work will be completed. The author will not only have made an important contribution to the military history of the First Empire, he will have also performed an act of justice and reparation.

These Hessians, these Badois, these Saxons were the companions in arms of our soldiers, the auxiliaries of our generals, the collaborators of the Imperial epic. They had traveled Europe in our armies from the Spanish mountain ranges to the Russian steppe, they had fought under our Eagles, they had mixed their blood with the blood of our soldiers on the battlefields. It is only right that history mentions their devotion and valor.

So I did not know, I admit, that the recruits from Frankfurt, a peaceful city, were there. As the bourgeoisie had been, at all times, exempt from military service, yet had provided a battalion to the Grand Army of 1806, two battalions to the armies of Spain, two battalions to the Grand Army of 1812, two battalions to the Grand Army of 1813 and that, finally, two hundred of them would have been part of that intrepid garrison of Danzig which, according to Rapp's words, "ate Russian thighs" when the provisions were exhausted.

Let us follow in Spain the soldiers of the Prince Primate. From the first year of the war (1808), here they are with the Leval Division. In 1809, they took part in the battles of Medellin, Talavera, Almonacid, Ocaña. "They showed the greatest bravery," reports Marshal Victor. "They are worthy of being the Allies of France." "The German regiments," writes Mortier, "have all competed with ardor and devotion." As a reward, the Frankfurt Regiment was in charge of escorting the wounded evacuated to Madrid. From 1810 to 1812, the Frankfurters were employed to guard the roads and the villages, to protect the convoys, to ensure the passage of the estafettes. Every day, in some

post or mobile column, they had engagements against guerrillas. This was the toughest, most deadly period of their campaign. "We would prefer," writes Major Fritsch, "to be in battle, under the fire of enemy batteries, than to have to fight every day against such madmen." In 1813, the Frankfurters were decimated at Vitoria; and in the battle of the Bidasoa, reduced to 280 men (from 1068 they were on their arrival in Spain), they bayonet charged and routed a whole Spanish regiment.

The two battalions of Frankfort, raised in 1812, did not enter Russia with Napoleon, but these soldiers arrived there in time to fight and to die. They rejoined the remains of the army at Vilnius on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December, with a cold of twenty-seven degrees. They formed part of that Loison Division which, from Vilnius to the frontier, formed the extreme rear-guard, marching incessantly surrounded by Cossacks, and which, under the orders of Ney, delivered the heroic combat of Kowno. On their return to Prussian territory, the survivors of the two Frankfurt battalions were sent to Danzig. When this place capitulated, for want of all food, in December 1813, the Frankfurters who, at the beginning of the Russian campaign, numbered seventeen hundred fusils in the rank, were only seventy-seven.

The soldiers of Frankfurt fought side by side with the French, fought like the French, thought and felt like the French. When they returned to France at the end of the Spanish Civil War, it seemed, reports a witness, that they were returning to their native soil; soldiers cried with joy, fell on their knees, and kissed the earth. "Napoleonicism," notes the Frankfurt historian Bernays, "not without regret, had penetrated the soul of German soldiers; their hearts were as chained in his magic circle." At the beginning for Russia, an officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion wrote in his diary: "We all have in our heads great hopes and the most prodigious plans. Russia conquered, we will march to Turkey and go to Greece, this homeland of the heroes of antiquity. We are going to plant the Napoleonic eagle, at the limits of the world."

At Osmiana on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, 1812, it was necessary to prevent the troops from giving an ovation to the Emperor, who on that day wished not to be recognized. At a review given at Königsberg on 28 December, the soldiers, forgetting all the horrors of the funereal retreat, the cold, the hunger, their dead comrades frozen, the torments of snow, the whirlwinds of the Cossacks, this endless white plain where the corpses marked the road traveled, marched past Murat, shouting, "Long live the Emperor!"

Let Captain Sauzey write his next books according to the same method, let him tell us the numbers, the marches, the battles of the troops of Saxony, Württemberg, Baden, Bavaria, but at the same time tell us their thoughts and their feelings. If for some years History has become more exact, more scientific and, perhaps, of more forbidding aspect because of the multiple notes and countless quotations, it has also been renewed and brought to life by psychology of the communities, the peoples and the armies.

Henry Houssaye.

Paris, 14 October 1901.

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