

The Napoleon Series

The German and Dutch Troops in Spain

Chapter 3 Part 1: Events of 1811 - 1813

By: [Richard Tennant](#)



2nd Nassau Infantry Regiment in 1810 in Spain
by Richard Knötel
(Courtesy of the Antony Broughton Collection)

In December 1811, the Emperor Napoleon decided to support the invasion of Valencia by his Army of Aragon under Suchet by taking troops from the Army of the Centre and even the Army of Portugal in order to occupy Cuenca and take Blake in the rear. Marmont was ordered to provide 9000 men for this operation since the Army of the Centre could only deploy about 3000 men comprised of the German Brigade with some Dragoons under General D'Armagnac. Whilst the larger force under Montbrun was slow off the mark, the Germans swiftly re-occupied Cuenca but finding the roads in the mountains were impracticable at that time of the year, swung south through La Mancha. In his circuitous march D'Armagnac did not come up against any substantial forces but before he halted at Requena he had achieved the objective of preventing Freire at a critical moment from reinforcing Valencia, whilst the Murcian supports were not able to reach Blake and for a time at least some troops were detached from the main Spanish Army.

On July 22 Marshal Marmont was beaten at Salamanca by Wellington before King Joseph could bring his 14000 men of the Army of the Centre into action. In the ensuing weeks King Joseph was chased out of Segovia and then gave up his capital as he was pursued by the aggressive Duke. The infantry were not engaged but the Westphalians were part of Treillard's cavalry force which clashed with D'Urban at Majalahonda on 11 August.

At this time they were armed with lances but since they were in the reserve line with the Italian "Dragons de Napoleon" and were not engaged, they were not given an opportunity to test their effectiveness against the strong opponents, including the Heavy Dragoons of the Kings German Legion. After Wellington's retreat from Burgos back into Portugal to winter quarters, King Joseph with his guard and D'Armagnac's Division returned to spend the winter of 1812 - 13 at Madrid. However the start of the campaigning season brought the Duke roaring north by the flank march which was not really opposed until:

Battle of Vittoria 21 June 1813

The north end of the main position was held by Leval's Division (1st Division, A of S) on the prominent height in front of the village of Arinez. Between Leval and the River Zadorra there was only Avy's few squadrons of light horse watching the bridge of Mendoza. Three-quarters of a mile behind the reserves of the main position (in total about two miles back from the front) the whole of the Army of the Centre was deployed on each side of the high road, D'Armagnac's Division north of it in front of Zuazo, Casbagne's Division south of it, level with Gomecha.

General Avy was sent on reconnaissance beyond the Zadorra on the side of Mendoza. Between 2 and 3 in the afternoon General Picton made his well recorded impetuous attack across the Bridge of Mendoza and the nearby ford 300 yards upstream. Only Avy's 500 cavalry and three horse artillery guns commanded the bridge. No sooner had the latter come into action than they came under biting fire from their left flank from some companies of 1/95th of Andrew Barnard from General Kempt's division. They limbered up and galloped off whilst the cavalry were powerless by their numbers and position to contest the attack.

After the main position had been forced, the French fell back to the second line of heights. Close to the Zadorra, Coleville (2nd Brigade, 3rd Division) with the left-hand brigade of the 3rd Division was pushing up towards Margarita, while D'Armagnac, advancing from the heights of Zuazo, was making for it from the other side. It had taken sometime to file Coleville's battalions across the ford and deploy them for the advance. The French brigade of D'Armagnac's division got into the village first and made a strong defence there while the German Brigade occupied La Hermandad in its rear. After half an hour 's fighting D'Erlon drew back Chasse's much thinned brigade half a mile to the better defensive ground formed by the village of La Hermandad and the height above it where his German Brigade were already in position.

During this engagement Chasse took most of the 40% losses in his brigade. Colville's brigade, like its adversaries, had been much maltreated (2/87 lost 244 out of 600) and was needed to be replaced by Grant's brigade of the (late arriving) 7th Division in the front line, while Vandeleur's brigade of the Light Division followed in support.

Lord Dalhousie pushed forward against the five German Battalions of Neuenstein's Brigade with Chasse's dilapidated regiments in reserve behind. There was a very bitter struggle at this point, rendered costly to the advancing British by the superiority of the French Artillery - D'Erlon had now at least two batteries in action - Dalhousie only his own six divisional guns, those of Cairnes. Grant's brigade, after advancing some 300 yards under very heavy fire, came to a stand and took cover in a deep broad ditch only 200 yards from the French front. According to the famous Harry Smith, Dalhousie hesitated as to whether a further advance was possible. By taking a remark about taking the village made in the discussion as an order and then dashing back to his brigade before it could be changed, Harry Smith informed General Vandeleur that the 52nd and 95th were to take the village. They came up at full speed, carried the 7th Division battalions in the ditch along with them in their impetus and stormed La Hermandad in ten minutes; the German defenders reeled back in disorder and retreated to the crest of the heights behind. In this brief action the brunt of the losses were sustained by the two battalions of the 4th Baden Regiment.

The division of General D'Armagnac had, by far, the highest losses during the battle; the next highest of 1087 suffered by Conroux only amounted to some 17%.

	Killed & Wounded	Prisoners	Total	Percent
1st Brigade, Chasse	182	544	726	40%
2nd Brigade, Neuenstein	370	250	620	23%
Total	552	794	1346	30%
Avy's Chasseurs	6	51	57	

After the battle the British were not able to effect an immediate pursuit and it was not until the afternoon of the 24th that the leading troops had brought the rear-guard of D'Erlon to action at the passage of the Araquil in front of the crossroads at Yrurzun. D'Armagnac's Division lost about 100 casu-alties, including 76 alone in the Regiment of Nassau, as well as one of the only two guns which he had brought off from Vittoria, in this combat against the 1st German Hussars, the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 95th, and Ross's Horse Artillery.

Orders of Battle Army of the Centre

October 1812, D'Armagnac's Division	5238
1st Brigade, General Chasse (previously Holland, from July 1810 part of France)	
28th and 75th Line	3 battalions each
2nd Brigade, Oberst Neuenstein (Baden)	
2nd Nassau Regiment, Oberstleutnant von Kruse	2 Battalions
4th Baden Regiment, Oberstleutnant Henning	2 Battalions
Infantry Regiment of Frankfurt	1 Battalion
Baden Foot Artillery	1 Company
Treillard's Cavalry Division included: 1st Westphalian Chevaux-Legers, Nassau Chasseurs a Cheval	

February 1813

All but one squadron of the 1st Westphalian Chevaux-Légers returned home

May 1813

1st Brigade, General Chasse	1794
2nd Brigade, Oberst Neuenstein Cavalry	2678
Treillard's Division of 4 Regiments of Dragoons	1038
Avy's Light Cavalry: 27th Chasseurs, Nassau Chasseurs	474

Sources:

Dr. Lienhart and R. Humbert

J.M. Bueno and H. Achard who have used Nassau Infantry – Knötel "Souvenirs de Regiment", Document in collection De Ridder Bibliotheque Nationale, Cabinet Estampes.
Nassau Chasseurs -- Knötel
Westphalian Chasseurs - Documents Hewig.

Martin Woodrow and Gerry Embleton, Military Dress of the Peninsular War. The Illustration of the Westphalian Chasseur is, I believe, incorrect as being of a Guard Chasseur rather than the Line Regiment.

Otto von Pivka & Michael Roffe, *Napoleon's German Allies (1), Westphalia and Kleve-Berg.*

Otto von Pivka & Gerry Embleton, *Napoleon's German Allies (2), Nassau and Oldenburg.*

Philip Haythornthwaite, *Uniforms of the Peninsular War 1807-1814.*

J. Tranie and J.C. Carmigniani, *Napoleon's War in Spain.*

Liliane and Fred Funken, *The Napoleonic Wars Part 2.*

Keith Over, *Flags and Standards of the Napoleonic Wars.*

Terence Wise, *Flags of the Napoleonic Wars (3).*

Placed on the Napoleon Series: August 2018