

# The Napoleon Series

## The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume IV The Regiment of the Saxon Duchies – Chapter Four Part IVa

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THE  
REGIMENT OF THE SAXON DUCHIES

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CHAPTER IV

IN SPAIN (1810-1811)

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**IV. -- The garrisons of Hostalrich and Girona. The return. (Continued)**

We shall now witness the gradual annihilation of the Saxon regiment: during its stay at Girona from August 1810 to the end of January 1811, the fatigue, the illness, the misery would gradually melt away its effective strength already well diminished: and the evils with which it would suffer would be shared in common with all the other German corps; the three regiments of Westphalia would be reduced to three skeletal battalions, forming no more than 200 men, of whom 60 are not fit to serve; -- the brigade of Berg would have only one regiment left; -- finally, an unforeseen catastrophe would bring the majority of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Regiments of the Rhine into the hands of the Spaniards.

General Schwarz, with these two regiments and a few French cuirassiers, occupied the coast from Palamós to the mouth of the Ter, from the first days of August: its posts were distributed at La Bisbal, Tornella, Begur, Calonge, Palamós and Sant Feliu de Guíxols. Attacked abruptly by O'Donnel on 13 September by land and sea, these small detachments (except that of Begur, who could retire in time) were forced to capitulate after a glorious resistance: General Schwarz, 1 colonel, 50 officers, and nearly 900 men were made prisoners of war; some twenty soldiers of the Duchies regiment, sent on 11 September to La Bisbal to escort cattle, shared the unfortunate fate of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Regiments.

Marshal Macdonald had restored to the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps an exemplary discipline: the march of the convoys was assured in the most regular manner, the communications were well supervised, the service of the town was punctually executed; the regiment of the Duchies provided daily three officers and 120 men for the guard service, independently of very frequent detachments of 20 to 30 men to escort the outside chores or keep the flocks.

The general service in the town of Girona was thus followed:

*2 o'clock in the morning.* -- Sortie of night pickets and patrols who criss-crossed the neighborhoods of the town in an hour's march, and returned at 4 o'clock in the morning. The wood, water, straw or hay duties were done under the protection of the pickets.

*4 o'clock in the morning.* -- All men who were not on duty in the the garrison took up arms, ready to support the pickets. Exercise until 8 o'clock in the morning.



Attaque d'un convoi.

Attack of a convoy.

*8 o'clock in the morning.* -- Cleaning of weapons and effects, preparation of the meal. Rest until 3 o'clock in the evening.

*3 o'clock in the evening.* -- General turn-over. Inspection of the cantonment. Ordering the service for the next day. Distributions and meals.

*5 o'clock in the evening.* -- Sortie of the oncoming guard. At the first signal, the whole garrison must run to arms.

This signal was often given, for the regular or light divisions of O'Donnel pressed close to the town and were alert on all sides.

Seebach reminds us that it was at Girona that Macdonald applied for the first time the regulation of the French exercise to the regiment of the Duchies.

The hospital of the city soon became inadequate; another hospital was installed in a convent for the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment, but only the critically ill soldiers were transported to it -- the ordinary patients remaining in their companies.

An official report of Dr. Hasskarl, Chief of the Medical Service to the Duchies Regiment, dated 21 August 1810, from Girona, enumerates the causes of the excessive mortality and morbidity which befell the German troops in Spain; according to him these causes were the following:

1. Excessive temperature rise, which the Germans were not were not accustomed.
2. Poor quality of water consumed in the markets.
3. Insufficient and poor quality food; the soldiers ate the fruits of which were too green, and abused the melons; finally, ate bread too old to be manufactured, or too hot and out of the ovens.
4. Lack of stimulating drinks (beer, brandy) that the Germans were used to.
5. Insalubrity of cantonments, particularly at Ponte-Mayor and Hostalrich.
6. Tough service of escorts, during which the soldiers in full sweating are often forced to ford streams icy.
7. Repeated bivouacs without resting quarters; forced marches during extreme heat.
8. Finally, the nostalgia, or the evil of the country: Dr. Hasskarl says that almost all the men who contracted it died from it.
9. The main diseases were: in May and the beginning of June diarrhea; from the end of June to the end of July, bilious fever, intermittent fever, jaundice.



Girone.

Girona.

Mortality was soon considerable, and the congestion of the hospitals became such that the Marshal sent on 26 August for Perpignan 80 carriages laden with sick and wounded under the escort of 100 men of French infantry. This convoy was attacked five hours' march from Girona, near the redoubt of Falinas or the Croix Blanche, by the band of Colonel Louis de Creest, 600 men strong, supported by numerous guerrillas; the escort was scattered and the wounded were almost all massacred. Captain Donop (of Meiningen) and Major Schumann (of the 5<sup>th</sup> Rhine Regiment) were among the sick evacuated and only survived because of their horses, that they had happily with them: they succeeded in taking refuge in the fort. Despite a sortie from the garrison, the total loss in this cruel case was about 400 men, most of whom belonged to the Rouyer Division.

All these difficulties of remanning and evacuations caused Macdonald to write:

... I am really affected by these details which paralyze everything and leave us as a body without soul. What a job it is to escort carts!

But the situation was further complicated by the incessant appeals to desertion which O'Donnel addressed to the German and Italian troops. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of July, the Marshal, the Duke of Tarente, wrote to the Minister of War:

Last month we had 400 Italian, Neapolitan and German deserters. I have been obliged to send back the Westphalians to the rear; they no longer stand before the miquelets; they allowed themselves to be captured some 52 days ago from Bagnoles. The Germans are defeated; the discouragement is in their troops and probably comes from the head of these troops. The Italians and the Neapolitans are the most difficult to bring to a good and severe discipline.

By their emissaries, the Spaniards spread in great numbers the following manuscript proclamation among the troops of the Confederation of the Rhine:

German soldiers and comrades,

I summon you, if you wish to live better, to come and take service with the Spaniards. You will lead the best life

there; you will receive ten sols a day, bread, wine and meat in abundance. The Germans are very well regarded by our commander and the whole nation.

Come here, my brothers; leave the French flags which have made you into traitors and kept you in chains. If you want to come, you will be provided with all the means. The one who finds this letter is invited to tell the contents in secret to his comrades. Come fight for the great King Ferdinand VII who will reward you one day.

CHARLES, Baron von Hohenstein,  
Commander of the German Volunteers.<sup>1</sup>

These incitements generally found little resonance in the Saxon troops; nevertheless, there were some desertions, and it was a further weakening of the regiment, which had already been so thoroughly tested.

As of 20 September, the situation of the Duchies regiment was:

	Officers	Men.
	----	----
Under arms.....	17	113
Detached.....	1	15
At the hospital of the regiment.....	17	28
At other hospitals.....	16	1,205

In October the state of the unfortunate regiment was still worse: when a Saxon officer died on the 5<sup>th</sup> of this month, the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment did not have enough men under arms to render him the funeral honors, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment owed it to provide complementary men for this purpose. On the 18<sup>th</sup>, an inspector of magazines who had arrived from Paris, saw the regiment, who had an officer and 12 guards on that day, could only present 6 officers, 2 sergeants-majors, 3 quartermasters (fourriers), 1 corporal, 1 sapper and 1 soldier: a total of 27 men, including officers.

General Rouyer, fallen ill himself, returned to France on 29 October.

On 8 November the regiment had lost over three months 5 officers and 504 soldiers.

The Marshal having stripped the town of Girona as much as possible to escort a new convoy to Barcelona on 23 November, the troops who remain there - and of which the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment belonged - had to take extreme precautions not to be taken by the enemy who had become more and more enterprising: the sick and the wounded received weapons; the supernumerary officers and non-commissioned officers were assembled, so as to be more secure against the enemy outside and those on the inside, for a massacre is to be feared on the part of the inhabitants. Finally, a battalion of light French infantry arrived from Perpignan and the garrison ceased to be at the mercy of a coup de main.

On the rumor that the division was about to return to France, the effect was immediate: the patients went out in large numbers from the hospitals, as is shown by the comparison of the two following situations:

Under arms on the 4th of December ...	18 officers	41 men.
" " on January 1st ...	18 "	93 "

This rumor was justified: a report from General Baraguey d'Hilliers had struck the Emperor:

The three regiments of the Confederation (4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup>), wrote the general, were reduced to 19 officers and 278 soldiers by death and sickness. I think that as soon as the first reinforcements arrive, it would be useful to send these moribund bodies back to France, to recover. The same is true of the Westphalian Division.

The Minister of War, therefore, ordered General Baraguey d'Hilliers to return the Westphalian and Rouyer divisions on 21 November. This decision reached the general in the middle of January, and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> the three German

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<sup>1</sup>Costa de Serda, page 166.

regiments of the Rhine left for Perpignan, where they arrived on the 25<sup>th</sup>. The regiment of the Duchies left 2 officers and 18 men at Girona to guard the equipment and sick people who live in the town. The regiment of Nassau remained in Spain.

The situation of the effectives in the Rouyer Division, 25 January 1811, at Perpignan:

	Present.	Detached.	In hospital.	Prisoners.	Total.
4 <sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Rhine.	166	23	162	80	431
5 <sup>th</sup> Regiment ----	168	24	32	528	752
6 <sup>th</sup> Regiment ----	119	19	22	500	660
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Total.....	453	66	216	1,108	1,843



**1810. — LE GÉNÉRAL BARAGUEY D'HILLIERS**  
Gouverneur de la Haute-Catalogne (1).

1810. -- GENERAL BARAGUEY D'HILLIERS Governor of Upper Catalonia.<sup>2</sup>

"This debris of a division of 6,000 men," says Costa de Serda, "was expected to continue directly on their way to Germany, but such was not the intention of Napoleon; he fearing the effect produced on public opinion in Germany by the sight of these exhausted soldiers. He had, therefore, decided that these troops should occupy the coasts of Roussillon, under pretense of guarding them against the attempts of English cruises, but, in reality, to give them time to recover a little before beginning a long march which was to bring them back to their native country."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> BARAGUEY D'HILLIERS (Louis), born in Paris in 1764, entered the service early and was only a lieutenant in the regiment of Alsace at the time of the Revolution; captain in 1790, Aide-de-camp to Custine and brigadier-general in 1793; the civil and military commander of Lombardy, took Bergamo and distinguished himself at Rivoli; general of division, commanding officer at Venice. Participated in the taking of Malta, and was taken prisoner by an English vessel, going to take to the Directorate the trophies of the taking of that island. Restored to liberty, he fought at Engen, at Biberach; colonel-general of the dragoons in 1801, he distinguished himself in 1803 in Austria, in 1809 in Raab, then in Spain before Figueres, and finally during the campaign of 1812, after which he died in Berlin.

<sup>3</sup>Costa de Serda, page 177.

After a three days rest in Perpignan, the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment was directed on Agde, the 5<sup>th</sup> on Collioure and the 6<sup>th</sup> on Port-Vendres.

The regiment of the Duchies arrived at Agde on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January; he passed through Salses, Sigean, Narbonne, and Beziers; it numbered 21 officers and 189 men and remained in this city until 13 April.

On 10 February, to bring back the detachment left at Girona, the arms of the dead men at the hospitals of Girona and Figueres were deposited, against reuse, into the arsenal at Perpignan; the regiment lost 900 men to diseases: only 525 fusils were deposited in Perpignan, the others were stolen or disappeared. The next day, the regiment provided a guard of 1 officer, 2 non-commissioned officers, 1 drummer and 20 men at Fort Brescou. At the end of the month, there were 26 officers and 224 men under arms, 11 officers and 16 sick men in Agde, and 3 officers with 81 soldiers in the hospital.

At the announcement of the birth of the King of Rome, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, the commander-in-arms and the mayor of Agde reviewed the regiment of the Duchies; this feast preceded a real financial catastrophe: 21,000 francs in Spanish double pistoles were stolen from the body... Finally, on 13 April, the three regiments of the former Rouyer Division left, in one column, for their homeland. They went by way of Mèze, Montpellier, Lunel, Nimes, Pont-Saint-Esprit, Livron, Valence, Saint-Vallier, Vienna, Lyon (Vaise). The Saxon regiment had 39 officers and 234 soldiers under arms; 2 officers and 73 men stayed behind in hospitals. Then the march was resumed: our Saxons pass by Villefranche, Mâcon, Beaune, Dijon; they were then directed to Langres and Neufchâteau. Before they entered the town on 12 May, they saw General Rouyer, their former chief, still ill and convalescing in his own country, who met with them. Let us now turn to Lieutenant Jacobs :

"Such attention on the part of a French general of division for a German regiment was flattering, and made us forget many of the painful moments by which the officers and soldiers had passed. The name of Rouyer remained for a long time alive in the hearts and lips of the soldiers who had returned from Spain, and was always quoted by them as that of a beloved and paternal chief."

The steps led the column to Toul, Pont-a-Mousson, Metz, Mainz (15 June); and between the 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of June the contingents of the Duchies returned respectively to their garrisons in time of peace.

At that time the regiment of the Duchies of Saxony had 37 officers and 249 non-commissioned officers and soldiers, distributed as follows:

	Officers.	Men.
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From Weimar	11	89
From Gotha	18	95
From Meiningen	4	24
From Hildburghausen	1	17
From Cobourg	3	24

That was all that remained of the 70 officers and 2,423 soldiers who had gone to the Peninsula; 1 officer and about 70 men were still in the hospitals of France or Spain; the total losses of the regiment amounted to 32 officers and about 2,100 non-commissioned officers and soldiers. In these last figures the prisoners were in fact those left in the hands of the Spaniards; but these unfortunates, with rare exceptions, succumbed on the barges, or else, to escape the horrors of captivity, took service in the enemy's ranks, and almost all died there; very feeble was the number of those who, after so many dangers and dangers, could one day see the sky of their country again.

This ten-month campaign in Catalonia had thus almost annihilated the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Rhine, without, however, having had to take part in any of the great battles fought during that period: but the Manresa expedition sufficed to illustrate the troops who executed it.

We shall now find the contingents of the Duchies in another theater of operations, in a very opposite climate, facing

opponents of a very different race: the Russian campaign will bring about a new slaughter of our Saxon allies, again generously communicate with us in sacrifice and death.

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Placed on the Napoleon Series: December 2017