

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume III the Saxons in Our Ranks Chapter One Part III: Campaign of 1806 – 1807

By Commandant Sauzey

Translated by [Greg Gorsuch](#)

This opportunity was not long in coming; Hohenlohe's corps capitulated with 17,000 men to Prenzlau; and the 23rd *Bulletin of the Grande Armée* (Berlin, 30 October 1806) said:

"...Marshal Soult, on his arrival at Rathenow, met 5 squadrons of Saxon cavalry who asked to surrender. He made them sign the capitulation attached, under the letter B., which gives another 500 horses for the army..."

Here is the text of this capitulation:

B. -- *Grand Army. 4th Corps.*

At Rathenow Headquarters, 26 October 1806.

"His Excellency the Marshal of Empire Soult, commander-in-chief of the 4th Corps of the Grand Army, taking into consideration the confidence with which the Saxon troops hereinafter referred have surrendered, and the declaration made to him by the leaders of these troops that a similar conduct was motivated by the intimate persuasion in which they are, that between His Majesty the Emperor of the French and King of Italy and His Highness the Elector of Saxony exists a convention which makes it impossible to doubt that peace is already concluded between these two powers:"

"Authorize the Saxon troops to withdraw to Dessau, provided they maintain the promise they have made on their word of honor not to bear arms during the present war or until full exchange against the armies of His Majesty the Emperor and King nor against those of his allies, in case the convention referred to above does not really exist."

"His Excellency the Marshal invites the military authorities of the Grand Army to allow these bodies of Saxon troops to pass freely and to assist them."

"These troop corps will take the following route:"

Starting on the 29th from Rathenow, they will go to Bamme the same day; the 30th to Brandenburg, the 31th to Belzig, the 1st of November to Dessau, the provisional destination."

"The commander of these corps will have the attention of being preceded in the places of passage by an officer who will announce their arrival."

"These bodies are composed as follows:"

Detachments of Regiment:

	Officers.	Non-commissioned officers and soldiers.	Horses.
	--	--	--
Of "Prince-John"...	15	124	117
Of "Prince Albert"...	14	134	128
Of "Prince Clement"...	18	173	168
Cuirassiers of "Kochuhki"...	3	60	54
Of "Polentz"...	"	1	2
Of carabineers...	"	4	4
Of hussars...	"	14	9
Engineer Corps...	1	3	4
Detachment of light artillery...	"	2	2
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TOTAL...	51	515	486

"At Rathenow, day and year as above."

"By order of the Marshal: Signed: *The Brigadier General, Chief of the General Staff.*"

These 500 horses gave rise to the following correspondence:

*The Emperor to General Bourcier, commanding the
horse depots of Potsdam.*

Berlin, 4 November 1806.

"...At Dessau there are still 500 horses of a Saxon regiment; send them a post aide-de-camp to bring them with sabers and saddles. The Prince of Dessau will take charge of giving men to lead them..."

General Le Marois to the Emperor.

Wittenberg, 5 November 1806.

"...General Oudinot sent to Potsdam all Saxon horses from Dessau; the number was nearly 1,800; but there were many wounded and missing their equipment..."

On the other hand, General Clarke, governor of the country of Erfurt, took the surrender at *Sömmerda* of a Saxon battalion wandering without direction:

General Clarke to the Emperor.

Erfurt, 27 October 1806, 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

"...At the moment, a Saxon piece of 8, as well as 4 caissons and the carriage horses passed under my windows to go to the citadel, where everything will be handed over to the artillery. It is the piece and caissons of the Saxon battalion which capitulated to M. Shée, my aide-de-camp, at *Sömmerda*."

Here is the text of this capitulation that followed the 22nd *Bulletin of the Grande Armée*:

"It was agreed between M. Shée, Captain Aide-de-Camp of General Clarke and delegated by him, and Baron von Hund, commander of the 2nd Battalion of Saxon grenadiers, the following surrender:"

"Art. 1. -- The battalion will lay down their arms at Sömmerda at noon tomorrow on wagons which will take them to the citadel of Erfurt; Messrs. the officers will keep their swords, their horses and their baggage, and the soldiers their knapsacks."

"Art. 2. -- The fusils, cartridge pouches and knapsacks of the soldiers will be deposited at the citadel of Erfurt and then returned, if permitted by the orders of His Majesty the Emperor and King, as well as the caissons, the munitions and the cannons."

"Art. 3. -- MM. the officers will give their word of honor in writing for themselves and their soldiers, of which will be addressed a statement signed by the commander, not to serve against His Majesty the Emperor and King and against his allies during the present war and until perfect exchange."

"Art. 4. -- 1 captain, 2 lieutenants and 2 sub-lieutenants will escort the battalion to Saxony by a route of which General Clarke, governor of Erfurt will give the route. Messrs. the officers will receive passports to go individually."

"Art. 5. -- This surrender will only be valid after the ratification of General Clarke."

Duplicate made at Klein Sömmerda, 25 October 1806.

Signed: SHÉE, aide-de-camp to Major General Clarke, and Baron VON HUND, Lieutenant-Colonel, commanding the Grenadier Battalions in the service of His Highness the Elector of Saxony

Here is the ratification of General Clarke:

"At the request of Baron von Hund and his officers of the battalion of grenadiers and in the name of H.M. the Emperor of the French, King of Italy, and for the sake of H.H.H the Elector of Saxony, I agree, by ratifying this surrender, that the weapons deposited on the wagons at Klein-Sömmerda under Article 1, that is to say: fusils, cartridges and swords (only those of the soldiers) which were to be deposited at the citadel of Erfurt, will remain in the custody of an officer and ten Saxon grenadiers, and that these arms will follow the battalion of Saxons 24 hours after his departure, by the same road, and to be returned to this battalion at Rochlitz."

"The battalion will leave tomorrow Klein-Sömmerda and will move a league beyond Buttelstedt:"

"The 27th at Camburg.

The 28th at Zeitz.

The 29th at Altenburg.

On the 30th at Rochlitz, where it will remain on the 31st to receive his arms.

On November 1st, it will go to Elsdorf.

The 2nd at Wildsruff.

The 3rd in Dresden."

At Erfurt, 25 October 1806.

The General of Division, Governor of Erfurt, Signed: CLARKE.

The instructions of the Emperor were followed to the letter, and nothing was neglected of what could be of use to the French army; equipment, or Saxon personnel. On 27 October 1806, General Macon, governor of Leipzig, reported to the Chief of Staff that he had sent that day for Wittenberg 55 horses from a detachment of hussars and light Saxon horses, with saddles, bridles and sabers.

On the 28th of October, the Chief of Staff informed M. de Thiard, commandant of the town of Dresden, that he could not send him French gendarmes, and that he had to have the Saxons make up the police.

Colonel Guyardet, commanding the 13th Light Infantry Regiment and commanding the town of Leipzig since the

death of General Macon carried away by a putrid fever, wrote on 31 October to the Chief of Staff that the day before "A Saxon battalion returned to the city to keep garrison and lodge in the suburbs as it was before the war." This battalion was 250 strong.

Finally, the Emperor, on hearing of the capitulation of Magdeburg, sent from Berlin, on the 10th of November, his congratulations to Marshal Ney; he adds this policy recommendation:

"I think you have to keep the artillery of Dresden and Wittenberg (this was the siege material that had been used to reduce the space). As it is Saxon artillery, it is more at my disposal in Magdeburg than in Dresden itself..."

The Elector of Saxony philosophically made up his mind. He kept no grudge against the French generals; and, not wanting to remain behind with politeness, he sent his portrait to General Le Marois, governor of Wittenberg, who, being at Torgau, had put the order in a house of correction among 600 brigands who had armed themselves and threatened to loot the city. (33rd *Bulletin*.)

The Saxons enter the Confederation of the Rhine.

The military details did not make the Emperor forget political affairs:

The Emperor to the Elector of Saxony.

Berlin, 5 November 1806.

"I receive the letter from your Serene Electoral Highness, presented to me this morning by his grand chamberlain Count von Bose. I have invested with my powers the Prince of Benevento, and I will gladly end the misfortunes which have weighed on Saxony, and have given so much anxiety to your Highness. If events have altered our political relations, nothing has changed the esteem and perfect consideration I have given you for a long time."

Negotiations for his accession to the Rheinbund not proceeding quickly enough, the old Elector himself wanted to go to Berlin. He arrived there on the 28th of November; but for two days already the indefatigable Napoleon had gone to Poland. It was not until 11 December that the Treaty of Posen was signed. The Elector entered the Confederation of the Rhine, took the title of King, yielded to the kingdom of Westphalia some small territories, against which he received in return the succession of Kottbus removed from Prussia. His federal contingent was 20,000 men; but for the present campaign, by special favor, in view of the momentary distress of the Saxon army, it only gave 6,000 men, of whom 4,200 were infantry, 1,500 were horsemen, and 300 were artillerymen.

The distribution of these troops is provided by a situation of the Grande Armée on 1 April 1807:

8th Corps: Mortier.

	Men.
Dupas Division (French).	
Loison Division: (employed at Colberg Headquarters, Italian, Württemberg, Polish Regiments).	
1 Saxon battalion...	880
Freesia Division (Dutch).	

10th Corps: Lefebvre.

Michaud Division: (French and Polish regiments).	
1 battalion of Saxon grenadiers...	432
1 st Battalion of the "Prince-Antoine" Regiment...	416
2 battalions of the "Saenger" Regiment...	937

1 battalion of the "Bevilaqua" Regiment...	415
Hessian Division.	
Geilgutt Division: (French and Polish regiments).	
Gardanne Division: (French and Polish regiments).	
1 battalion of Saxon grenadiers...	333
1 fusilier battalion of the "Prince Maximilien" Regiment...	444
2 nd Battalion of the "Prince-Antoine" Regiment...	482

	4,359
Polentz Cavalry Division: (French regiments, Baden, Polish).	
Saxon Cuirassiers, 3 squadrons.	
Saxon Light Horse, 1 squadron.	

To be reported	4,359
Reported	4,359 men

9th Corps: Prince Jerome.

Deroy Division (Bavarian).	
Vandamme Division (Württemberg).	
Lefebvre-Desnouettes Division (Bavarian regiments).	
2 Saxon battalions of "Niesemeuschel"...	929

	3,288 men

The 10th Corps ceased to exist after the capture of Danzig on 24 May 1807. The troops which composed it entered the 8th Corps, the reserve corps commanded by Lannes, or formed the garrison of the place.

Towards the end of December, 1806, the Emperor had bestowed on Oudinot a division composed of companies of grenadiers and voltigeurs taken from the battalions of the army. The cavalry attached to this division consisted of the 9th Hussars and 4 Saxon squadrons (3 cuirassiers and 1 light horses) who later entered the division of Polentz. This division arrived at Posen on the 1st of January.

This is where the Saxon troops met.

At *Ostrolenka* (Ostrołęka), on the 15th of February, 1807, Oudinot, at the head of his cavalry, charged the enemy, whom he put in complete rout.

Campaign of Silesia.

The Saxon regiment of Niesemeuschel had come to join the Bavarians of General Deroy and the Württembergers of Vandamme occupied at the *siege of Breslau*. On the 13th of May, the Prussian General Count von Goertchen attempted a new effort to break the lines of investment and throw relief into the town.

A violent fight ensued under the walls of Breslau. The Saxons, whom the beginnings of the campaign in the Prussian ranks had scarcely encouraged, were reluctantly advancing. 100 men had already deserted, out of the 1,000 men who composed the two battalions of the regiment. The vigorous attack of the Prussians threw them into panicked terror; they threw down their arms or surrendered... only five or six soldiers remained under the flag, of three companies that were engaged... Fortunately the Bavarians fought with courage; the unexpected arrival of 200 or 300 Polish lancers saved the situation; the Prussians, repulsed, departed from Breslau and retired under Glatz (Kłodzko).

The 75th *Bulletin* recounts the unfortunate affair of the Saxons in the following particularly benevolent terms:

"...General Lefebvre departed with the 1st Bavarian Line Regiment, an excellent regiment, 100 horses and 300 Saxons."

"...The 300 Saxons took to their heels; an extraordinary conduct, which must to be the result of some malevolence; for the Saxon troops, since they have been united with the French troops, have always behaved bravely."

Battle of Glatz (24 June 1806).

Jerome resolved to attack and destroy the last rallied Prussians in Silesia: 10,000 to 12,000 men tremendously entrenched under the cannon of Glatz. After a skilful reconnaissance, the Prince sent all his troops on the enemy's entrenchments. While the Bavarian infantry, in a fine night fight, was removing the first Prussian line by bayonet, without burning a primer, the Bavarian cavalry drove in the Prussian cavalry, and, at dawn, the Bavarians of Lefebvre, the Saxons, and the Württembergers of Vandamme at the same time approached the central redoubt and carried it off by storm. This nocturnal surprise ended the war in Silesia.

King Jerome, satisfied with his success, wrote to the Emperor that the Saxons, who had begun so badly in the battle of Breslau, had recovered a little in his esteem:

"...The Saxons have behaved very well; one of their skirmishers, very advanced, wounded or killed the Prussian commanding officer..."

During the seven years that the Saxons would fight in our ranks, we would often find among them, beside honorable feats of arms, failures similar to that which they showed at the beginning of this campaign; of all our German allies, it is they who would do less good, until the day when, on the battlefield of Leipzig, they would turn their arms against us, in the most abominable defection of which the military history has kept the memory.



(D'après une gravure de l'époque.)

JEROME NAPOLEON.
Brother of H. M. Prince of France. King of Westphalia.
(According to an engraving of the time.)

Siege of Danzig.

Marshal Lefebvre, with 18,000 men, of whom only 3,000 were French, had received from the Emperor the task of taking Danzig, defended by the old Prussian Field-Marshal von Kalckreuth and 18,000 Russians and Prussians.

He began the siege with 6,000 Poles from a new levy, 2,500 men of the North Legion (Polish or German and Russian deserters), 2,200 Baden and 5,000 Saxons, good soldiers, but who, with the Prussians so far, had not have taken a lot of affection for us.

The latter manifested at first such a tendency to desertion that, on the repeated complaints of Marshal Lefebvre, Napoleon had to intervene:

"Write to my minister at Dresden, --he summoned to Talleyrand,-- so that he may make known that the Saxon contingent having suffered a great diminution by the deserters, the losses, and the ordinary events of the war, I desire that it is completed without delay by recruits, both infantry and cavalry..."

On March 12th, Marshal Lefebvre distributed his troops nearer the town, the troops of the garrison having fallen back before him. A Saxon battalion was placed at Saint-Albrecht, two at Borkfeld, and two others at Tiefensee and Kemlade. The Saxon cuirassiers were at Guirsehens and the light horse at Saint-Albrecht.

After the fight of the 16th, when the Prussians again lost the suburb of Schidlitz, the Saxon light infantry occupied the heights of Jebrustelberg, the suburb of Oliva, and the dykes which, from Saint-Albrecht, proceeded on the Motlau.

On 3 April a Prussian detachment disembarked at Pillait and was repulsed by Captain Margainaud and two companies, supported by a Saxon battalion.

The first attempt at investment was to cross the Vistula below Danzig; this operation, entrusted to General Schramm with 3,000 men, a battalion of the French 2nd Light, a few hundred Saxon grenadiers, and Polish infantry and cavalry, took place on the morning of the 19th of March. Transported into the Nehrung, the little French corps pushed through all the Prussian detachments that wanted to stop it, even on the glacis of the Weichselmunde fort, from which the troops defending the Nehrung had emerged.

The 67th *Bulletin* of the Grande Armée tells the story:

"...Marshal Lefebvre ordered Brigadier-General Schramm to march from Nogat Island to Frisch-Hoff on 19 March to cut off Danzig's communication with the sea. The crossing was at 3 o'clock in the morning; the Prussians were overthrown and left 300 prisoners in our hands."

"At 6 o'clock in the evening, the garrison made a detachment of 4,000 men to take this post; it was repulsed with the loss of a few hundred prisoners and a piece of cannon."

"General Schramm had under his command the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Regiment of light infantry and several Saxon battalions which distinguished themselves. The Emperor granted three decorations of the Legion of Honor to the Saxon officers and three to the non-commissioned officers, soldiers and the major who commanded them."

68th Bulletin.

"...On 26 March, at 5 o'clock in the morning, the garrison of Danzig made a general sortie that was disastrous."

"...The Polish Legion of the North has behaved well; 2 battalions Saxons distinguished themselves..."

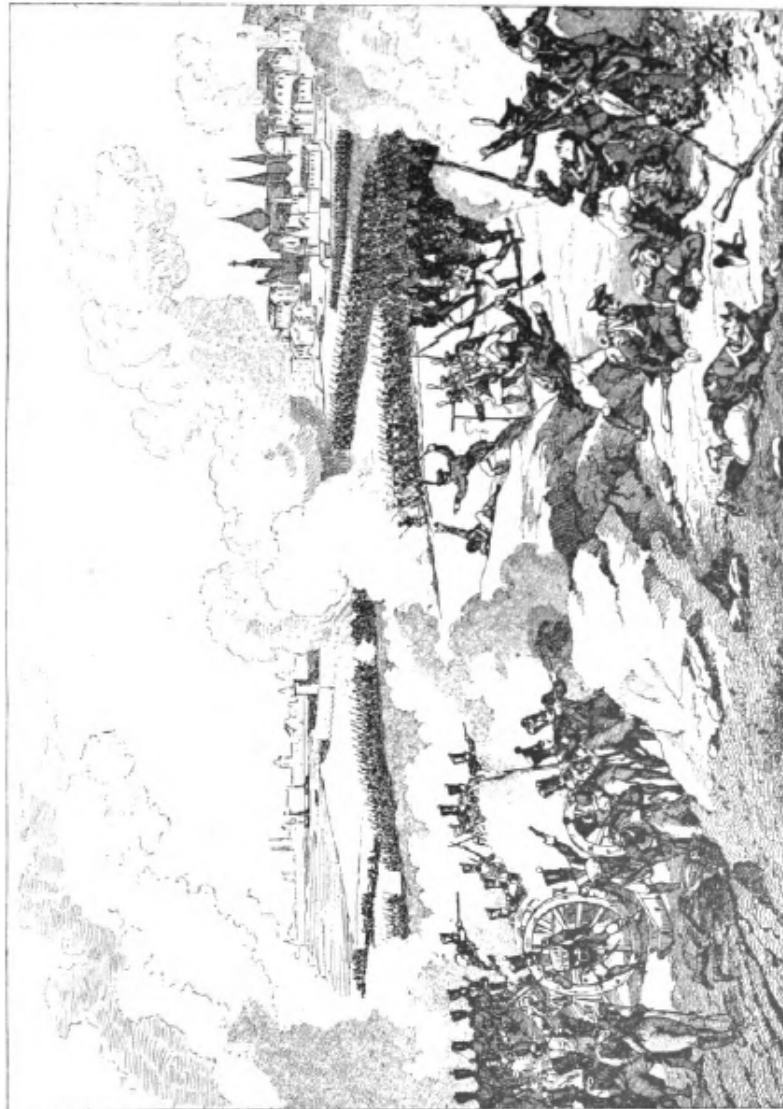
71st Bulletin.

"...The Saxons, the Poles, and the Baden, which had the Crown Prince of Baden is at their head, vied with each other with ardor and courage."

The Emperor was anxious not to discourage his allies...

During the construction of the approach trenches, on the night of the 10th to the 11th of April, a violent combat took place for the possession of a mamelon which dominated the trenches: 120 men of the Northern Legion employed to fill the Prussian trenches had to fall back, and the Prussians reoccupied the work. At 1 o'clock in the morning, General Chasseloup had this post taken up by 100 men from the 44th Line; a company of Saxons remained till daylight to fill the trenches of the besieged with shovel; but, although assisted by the fire of our skirmishers, it could not hold and was obliged to retire.

A third fight was fought on the night of 12 to 13 April to retake this position. The battalion commander of the engineers Rogniat and General Puthod, with 300 Saxon grenadiers of the Bevilaqua Regiment, a company of French grenadiers of the 44th, and a company of riflemen of the Northern Legion, assaulted this post, which the Prussians had solidly hoarded. The Prussians defended themselves with resolution:



Siège de Dantzig.
(D'après la *France militaire*.)

Siege of Danzig.
(After *Military France*.)

"...Already even the attackers began to slow down their attack, when a Saxon drummer, named Zwon, without having received the order, began to beat the charge by rushing towards the redoubt and shouting: "To me, Saxons!" This example electrified his comrades; they set off on his trail, overturning the chevaux de frise, and penetrated into the redoubt of which they remain masters, in spite of three repeated attacks; the Saxons, proud of their conquest, would not allow it to be taken away."

On the following day, the 13th, at 8 o'clock in the morning, supported by the artillery of the town, the Prussians advanced in number, invaded the redoubt despite the good defense of the Saxons, and drove them away; pursuing their movement, they even reached the heads of the French trenches; but Lefebvre, with a battalion of the 44th, soon repulsed them, and pursued them to the glacis of the Hagelsberg. This affair cost us 15 officers and a hundred men, both Saxon and French. The slowness of the siege exasperated Marshal Lefebvre, who shrugged his shoulders at the wise observations of General Chasseloup on the difficulties of a well-ordered attack, and who wished to enter the town "by driving all with the breasts of his grenadiers." He wrote to the Emperor himself, little praising the German allies:

"The Saxons fight well but show little good will, especially at work... The Baden are good neither at work nor under fire... Poles have no habitude of war..."

The Emperor disagreed with him, approving the progression of a formal siege, telling him that "his glory would be to have taken Danzig" and sent him reinforcements.

The Island of Holm was occupied in the night of 6th to 7th May. This success was used to remove the Kalke-Schanze Redoubt: under the command of Battalion Commander Roumette, a detachment of Saxons and Northern Legion soldiers entered the ditches with water up to the armpits. He threw himself on the palisades, crossed them in spite of a fierce fusillade, and remained master of the work, in which 180 Prussians, 4 officers, and several pieces of cannon were taken.

On 16 April, the enemy had left Weichselmünde and fought five hours against General Gardanne. General Schramm, Colonel Saxon Vogel, and Captain Halstoffer distinguished themselves in this affair, which the enemy had engaged to attempt to retake the line of the Laake Canal.



LE MARÉCHAL LEFEBVRE.
(D'après une lithographie de l'époque.)
MARSHAL LEFEBVRE.
(After a lithograph of the time.)

In the meantime, 10,000 reinforcements had arrived as aid of the besieged: they were landing at Weichselmünde, and on the 13th of May, at 3 o'clock in the morning, were marching against our positions in the Nehrung. General Schramm defended this line with 1 battalion of the 2nd Light, 1 detachment of the regiment of the Guard of Paris, 1 battalion Saxon, part of the 19th Chasseurs and some Poles on horseback under the command of Captain Sokolniki: this weak force was fortunately soon supported by a battalion of the 12th Light and 4 battalions of Oudinot grenadiers, led by Lannes himself.

General Kaminski, in four columns, led nine Russian regiments, with a strength of about 11,000 combatants. Schramm had on his left the Polish battalions, in the center the Saxons, on his right the 2nd Light; in reserve, the regiment of the Paris Guard. The attack of the Russians on the left of our line seemed to succeed at first; but Lefebvre quickly restored the order by going there with 1 battalion of the 12th Light and 200 Saxons. The obstinacy of the Russians could not tire our soldiers. The enemy abandoned the field of battle, leaving behind 2,000 men, most of them dead or wounded, some prisoners.

This was last attempt for the deliverance of Danzig. The approach work was completed, the descent of the ditch was prepared; the engineer's troops had opened a 90-foot passage in the row of palisades, and the assault was resolved for 21 May, when Marshal Kalckreuth asked for a capitulation.

Marshal Lefebvre was made Duke of Dantzic, and the Emperor granted him an endowment of 100,000 francs a year.

Following the dissolution of the 10th Corps, which followed the capture of the city, the Emperor decided that "the Saxons, who were good soldiers, but who needed to serve in our ranks to cling to us" would join the corps of Lannes already returned to the Vistula, and that they would form the 3rd Division. The other two divisions of this corps were commanded by Oudinot (grenadiers and voltigeurs) and by Verdier; the 2nd and 12th Light, which had been distinguished before Danzig, were part of this last division, and the Saxons would again have their example before their eyes.

Placed on the Napoleon Series: February 2019