

# The Napoleon Series

## The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume III the Saxons in Our Ranks Chapter Three Part I: Campaign of 1812

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### CHAPTER III

#### CAMPAIGN OF 1812<sup>1</sup>

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##### I. -- The Saxon Army ahead of the 1812 Campaign.

Some time after the end of the 1809 campaign against Austria, the Saxon Army underwent an important reorganization. The plan, submitted to the King of Saxony by the Generals von Gersdorf, von Thielmann, von Funck and by Colonel von Langenau, officers of great military courage and great expertise in war, was adopted by order of cabinet by 20 February 1810, after examination of a commission presented by the Minister of War, General Cerrini.

The Saxon Army was formed in 3 divisions: two infantry and one cavalry. The infantry divisions comprising 5 total brigades. The cavalry division having 3.

The Guards (Life Guards and Grenadiers of the Guard) and the artillery were not included in the brigading; the Life Guard was attached to the division of cavalry, the grenadiers and the artillery were placed under the direct orders of the chief of the staff.

The two regiments of the Guards were taken to the strength of the other regiments.

The regiment of carabineers disappeared; the elements were added into the Life Guards and the Cuirassiers of the Guard.

The 4 infantry regiments of Obschelwitz, Cerrini, Burgsdorf and Dyherrn were split up and distributed, on the one hand in the other regiments of infantry, on the other hand in the light infantry so as to complete a regiment with the two battalions of these arms which already existed, and to form in addition a second regiment of light infantry.

A staff corps was formed, with 1 chief, 1 sub-chief, 3 chiefs of divisional staff, 2 senior officers and 10 captains and lieutenants as deputies.

The practice of owning companies was suppressed; the present proprietors were disassociated from the war treasury.

Each brigade of infantry formed, with the companies of grenadiers of its regiments, into a battalion of grenadiers under the command of a superior officer.

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<sup>1</sup>This chapter is based on the excellent work of M. Lieutenant-Colonel Exner: *Der Antheil der Königlich Sächsischen Armee am Feldzuge Gegen Russland 1812* (Leipzig, Dunker and Humblot, 1896). -- We have followed the same divisions in material, and we have happily followed the rich contribution made by the Saxon Archives of War in this part of our national history.

ORDER OF BATTLE AND STAFF OF THE SAXON ARMY.

*Cavalry.* -- Each regiment had 4 squadrons or 8 companies. The hussar regiment had 8 squadrons. The regiment's war strength was 38 officers, 736 men and 718 horses (1,016 men and 1,002 horses for hussars).

In each squadron, there were as officers: 2 captains, 2 first lieutenants and 4 sub-lieutenants.

*Cavalry Division.* -- General VON GUTSCHMID.

Life Guards	(not brigaded).	
1 <sup>st</sup> Brigade.....		{ Regiment of hussars. Light Horse Regiment "Prince-Clement." Light Horse Regiment of Polentz.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade.....		{ Cuirassiers Regiment of the Guard. Cuirassier Regiment of Zastrow.
3 <sup>rd</sup> Brigade.....		{ Light Horse Regiment "Prince-John." Light Horse Regiment " Prince-Albrecht."

*Infantry.* -- The infantry (apart from the Swiss Life Guards, a troop specially assigned to the service of the King), consisted of 11 regiments and 1 corps of chasseurs:

- 1 regiment of Guard Grenadiers;
- 8 line regiments;
- 2 light infantry regiments.

*1<sup>st</sup> Division.* -- Lieutenant General VON ZESCHAU.

Regiment of Guard Grenadiers	(not brigaded)	
1 <sup>st</sup> Brigade.....		{ Regiment of the King. Regiment of Niesemeuschel.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade.....		{ Regiment "Prince Anthony." Regiment of Low.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Division.* -- Lieutenant General LECOQ.

1 <sup>st</sup> Brigade.....		{ Regiment "Prince Maximilian." Regiment of Rechten.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade.....		{ Regiment "Prince Frederick Augustus." Regiment "Prince Clement."
Light Brigade.....		{ 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> Light Infantry Regiments. Corps of chasseurs.

Effectives of the regiments: line, 10 companies, 46 officers, 1,989 men;  
grenadier and light infantry, 8 companies, 38 officers, 1,590 men.

Each infantry regiment had 8 fusilier companies and 2 grenadier companies; the latter, united in four, formed, after each brigade, a special battalion under the name of the officer who commanded it.

The infantry included:

6 battalions of grenadiers;  
16 fusilier battalions;  
4 battalions of light infantry;

that is 21,804 men.

The corps of engineers (with the company of the pontoons and the sappers), the corps of the artillery, the battalion of the train (newly created), the companies of garrisons and the half-company of the invalids were under the authority of the chief of the staff.

*The artillery* included: a staff and 16 companies (each of which, in case of war, formed a battery or a park) with 78 officers and 1,771 men; a brigade of 2 horse batteries (including a new formation) with 8 officers, 236 men, 226 horses; and the arsenals with the workers' company and the artillery academy.

#### THE CORPS OF OFFICERS.

An order of 28 February 1809, had prescribed the retirement of aged or tired officers. In 1810, the reorganization of the army made it possible to execute this order: in the space of eighteen months, 85 senior officers and captains were pensioned and retired; young officers replaced them. At the beginning of 1812, the average age of the colonels was 46 years, that of the senior officers of 38 to 40 years, that of the captains of 35 years.

There were a large number of majors in the staff and cavalry who were only 25 to 28 years old.

General von Gersdorf, Chief of the Staff, took all his care in recruiting the officer corps; these all came from the highest classes of the population; the whole nobility embraced the career of arms.

The young chiefs of the army had all his confidence; they had distinguished themselves already in 1806 and in 1809.

At the beginning of the 1812 campaign, Lecoq was 45 years old; Zeschau, 52 1/2 years old; Thielmann, 47 years old; Nostitz, 43 years old; Major von Hausen of the Rechten Regiment (formerly in the staff) was a senior officer at 25 years of age.

#### INSTRUCTION, TACTICS AND ARMING.

In March 1812, a commission revised the regulations for the infantry of 1804, and made a special instruction for light infantry; the new prescriptions were immediately put into practice.

The infantry adopted the combat formations of the French army, the advantages of which could be observed during the last two campaigns; but the new tactics (the use of small columns preceded by skirmishers) only slowly entered into force. The long forms of linear tactics were still lovingly held for a long time, and the bayonet attack of whole battalions at close ranks still passed for the criteria of victory.

The infantry was formed in three ranks; two companies dividing together. Only the "Low" and "Rechten" regiments, which since 1808 had been in Danzig and Glogau, formed their battalions like the French, in six companies in three divisions.

The new fusil had a range of 300 paces; in combat, the rule was not to shoot within 200 steps of the enemy.

For the cavalry there was almost no change in training, tactics and armament. The condition of this arm was excellent, because of the wonderful resources of the country in horses, the seniority of service of the non-commissioned officers and men, and the cavalier spirit of the officers. Napoleon held in high esteem the Saxon cavalry. At the end of 1812, the regiment of light horse "Prince Clement" was armed with the lance and transformed into a uhlán regiment. In his "Memoirs" on the campaign of 1812, General Lecoq mentions the good results obtained with this weapon against the Russians,

The artillery received many improvements; General von Gersdorf, in his report on the reorganization, insisted on the

progress which it had to make to put its self at the level of the artillery of the other powers; each artillery company charged with forming a battery in mobilization had to learn how to serve the guns and "get out of the woods", which was necessary because of the dispersion of the weapon in the small garrisons during the peace time. The creation of a battalion of the artillery train was to provide the batteries with more experienced drivers in the field.

The regiment of foot artillery had its 16 companies divided into 3 brigades; the 2 mounted batteries formed 1 brigade on horseback.

The material was singularly simplified: instead of the ten models of pieces hitherto in service in the field artillery, only guns of 12, 6 and 4 pounds, and a light howitzer of 8 pounds were left. The batteries mobilized in 1812 left with 4 guns of 6 pounds and 2 howitzers of 8 pounds. Each regiment of infantry received, in order to "strengthen its fire," four 4-pound guns commanded by a lieutenant and served by artillerymen: it was the regimental artillery. The maximum range of the gun of 6 was 2,000 paces, that of the howitzer of 1,500 paces; the shooting was good at 800 paces; that of the pieces of 4 was a little less extensive.

In March 1810, the artillery received its first exercise regulation, which contained the principles of training and use of batteries in combat. Until then, one had been inspired by traditions of the past. The elements of the Saxon artillery which participated in the campaign of 1812 distinguished themselves; the batteries, commanded by excellent officers, fought regularly, marched with the infantry into the grape-shot of the enemy, and distinguished themselves on every occasion.

#### ADMINISTRATION OF THE ARMY.

The administration was put on a completely new footing. The "Army Administration Company" ceased to exist, as was the system of "company owners". The latter, often of the rank of colonel or superior officer, had their company commanded by a captain of staff; the captains received from the "Administration Company" bribes, for the pay, the food, the clothing of their men... The State was henceforth responsible for administering the army by means of inspectors of review: 1 general and 3 senior officers (1 for each division). These inspectors had to visit the regiments, watch them in terms of numbers, the quality of the bread, the fodder, the equipment, the barracks, the hospitals, and assure the progress of the marches.

To compensate for the loss occasioned to the owners of companies and to the captains by the new state of things (an infantry company paid 2,000 thalers a year, and up to 4,000 thalers in the cavalry), the salaries of the officers were increased. The monthly pay was increased to 250 thalers for a colonel; from 125 to 150 thalers, according to the arms, for a lieutenant-colonel; from 100 to 125 thalers for a major; from 83 1/3 to 100 thalers for a captain of the 1<sup>st</sup> class; from 42 to 50 thalers for a captain of 2<sup>nd</sup> class; from 22 to 25 thalers for a lieutenant, and from 15 to 20 thalers for a second lieutenant.

#### UNIFORM.

Various modifications and improvements were made to the uniform. The regiments of cuirassiers abandoned the hat for the helmet; the other regiments took the shako of the French model; the uniform received a more practical cut; the line regiments were distinguished by a distinctive color, with the collar, the lapels, the facings:

red, for the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade;  
blue, for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade;  
yellow, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade;  
green, for the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

In each brigade, the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment had the yellow buttons, the 2<sup>nd</sup> the white buttons. The coat was white, as well as the breeches worn with black leggings up to the calf. The two light infantry regiments had dark green tunics, with black collar and cuffs, and yellow buttons.

The regiment of the Life Guards alone preserved its straw-yellow tunic; the other regiments of cuirassiers had the

white tunic. The Life Guards were no longer armored: they wanted to send back cuirasses to them at the beginning



### UNIFORMES SAXONS — 1812

Garde du Corps  
Fusilier du régiment du Roi

Cuirassier de Zastrow  
Fusilier du rég' du Prince Antoine

of the campaign of 1812: these cuirasses arrived as far as Warsaw and stayed there. The hussars had the blue-sky dolman, with white trimmings. The battalion of the train wore a light blue uniform with black lapels.

The rank insignia of the officers were those worn in the French army.

Lastly, solicitation was regularly replaced by recruitment; replacement was allowed.

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