

The French Cavalry in Austria 1809

By [Paul Dawson](#)

After the peace of Tilsit the Grand Army was gradually withdrawn behind the Rhine, leaving only three commands, totalling 63,000 men, under Davout in Prussia, Oudinot in west central Germany, and Lefebvre in Bavaria, to assist the princes of the Confederation of the Rhine in the maintenance of order and the enforcement of the French law of conscription, which was rigorously insisted on in all the States comprised in this new federation. In exchange for the subsistence of the French troops of occupation, a corresponding number of these new levies were moved to the south of France, where they were marched into Spain. For a brief period Napoleon directed operations in Spain in person with large elements of Grande Armée. The Austrians took advantage of the dissemination and weakness of the French forces in Germany' to push forward their own preparations with renewed energy.

However, the Austrian high command reckoned without the resourcefulness of Napoleon. The moment news of Austrian military activity reached Napoleon, whilst still in pursuit of Sir John Moore in Spain, he dispatched letters to all the members of the Confederation of the Rhine warning them that their contingents might soon be required, and at the same time issued a series of decrees to General Clarke, the Minister for War, authorizing him to call up the contingent of 1810 in advance, and directing him in detail to proceed with the formation of 4th and 5th battalions for all the regiments across the Rhine. By these means Davout's, Oudinot's and Lefebvre's commands were augmented, whilst in February and March new corps were formed and rapidly pushed towards the front. To equip the French troops in Germany, 15,000 pairs of shoes were to be supplied by Kustrin and 13,000 from Magdeburg, and a further 40,000 at Mayence to be ready by 6 and 15 April to be issued to French troops marching back to Germany from Spain. With the movement of vast number of men and horses to Germany from Spain to face the Archduke Charles, Napoleon believed it was useless to send horses in Spain and Spain was already consuming too many horses.¹

On his return from Spain, seeing war imminent, he issued a series of march orders (which deserve the closest study in detail) by which on the 15th of April his whole army was to be concentrated for manoeuvres between Regensburg, Landshut, Augsburg and Donauworth. In addition the Imperial Guard was sent in wagons to Strasburg. Marshall Berthier acted as commander-in-chief until his own arrival.

13 January 1809, Napoleon sensing that English money was stirring Austria against France, advised Prince Eugene to start gathering supplies around Palmanova, and that he would return to France with his army.² Prince Eugene was urged to 'create an extraordinary supply' of biscuit for the army as well as to speed the production of clothing for his troops to speed their processing by the infantry dépôts.³ The divisions of Boudet and Molitor, which would take the brunt of the fighting at the coming battle of Aspern-Essling, were to move out of Lyon and unite with the troops in Italy, providing reinforcements of 7 infantry regiments and

1 Napoleon to Dejean 9 March 1809 520

2 Napoleon to Prince Eugene 13 January 1809 14698

3 Napoleon to Prince Eugene 13 January 1809 14698

4 of cavalry. 2,000 members of the Imperial Guard infantry were to be at the Princes disposal, 16,000 line infantry and 2,000 good cavalry, a force of 20,000men.⁴ General Marmont was to write to the Austrian foreign minister to protest at Austrian military movements, and if Austria did not back down, hostilities would commence.⁵

Later the same month, the Division of General Broussier with 18,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry were to be sent to the border with Austria as was the Division of General Barbou, who was to take into his command of 5 regiments of dragoons then based in Rome.⁶

In addition 1,100 horses and 1,200 men were to be raised in 27 and 28 Military Division [Piedmont] to bolster the cavalry force.⁷ The men were to come from 4th squadron of Chasseurs of the Royal Guard, 200 men and horses, 3rd and 4th squadrons of the Chasseurs of the Prince-Royal, 400 men and horses, and 200 men and horses from the Dragoons-Napoleon, bolstered with 200 good horses from the French 24th Dragoon regiment. To this force, 200 horses and riders were attached from the French cavalry regiments stationed in Italy, namely, 4th squadron of the 4th Chasseurs a Cheval, 4th squadron of the 9th chasseurs a cheval.⁸ The 7, 29 and 30 dragoons also had dépôts in Italy, which combined provided a *marche* dragoon squadron of 200 horses and men. In theory this gave Prince Eugene 9,000 cavalry and an infantry force of 58,564 men.⁹

The middle of February 1809, Marshall Bessieres was ordered to organise the movement of the Imperial Guard out of Spain.¹⁰ Each of the three regiments in Spain, namely the Grenadiers a Cheval, Dragoons and Chasseurs a Cheval, was to send a squadron as quickly as possible to France Each squadron was to have two companies and comprise 250 men. The three squadrons were to form a provisional regiment of guard cavalry of 750 men. The horses were to be all of the best sort, with good saddles, birdle and the men to have their full issue of equipment. Major Chastel of the Grenadiers a Cheval was placed in nominal command.¹¹ The regiment, along with the surgeons of the corps, regimental staff, and baggage wagons, accompanied by 12 field pieced manned by the Guard Horse Artillery were to march to Toloas, where they would join the Chasseurs a Pied of the Guard. The Elite Gendarmes of the Guard were to send 50 men to join the provisional regiment, which were to be augmented by the addition of the Berg Lancers, Polish Light Horse and Mamelukes of the guard.¹² By order of 26 February, the Polish Light horses were transformed into Lancers.¹³

Provisional regiments of guard infantry were also formed hurriedly in Spain. 200 Grenadiers of the Old Guard and 400 Fusilier Grenadiers were formed into a composite battalion, a second battalion being formed the by the Chasseurs and Fusilier-Chassuers. Each regiment was to be commanded by a Major, each battalion by a Battalion Commander, each battalion to have three captains, three lieutenants, and six sub-lieutenants a ratio of two officers per platoon. In addition each battalion was to have 12 sergeants, 48 corporals and 12 drummers. Attached to the regiment were eight field guns from the guard foot artillery. In addition the

4 Napoleon to Prince Eugene 13 January 1809 14698

5 Napoleon to Prince Eugene 13 January 1809 14698

6 Napoleon to Prince Eugene 15 January 1809 14715

7 Napoleon to Prince Eugene 13 February 1809 14773

8 Napoleon to Prince Eugene 13 February 1809 14773

9 Napoleon to Prince Eugene 13 February 1809 14773

10 Napoleon to Bessieres 15 February 1809 14780

11 Napoleon to Bessieres 15 February 1809 14780

12 Napoleon to Bessieres 15 February 1809 14780

13 Napoleon to Walther 26 February 1809 14819

guard equipment train would transport the necessary rations of biscuit, bread and shoes for the men for the march back to France.¹⁴

At the same time as withdrawing troops from Spain, Napoleon began re-organising his cavalry force. He wanted to form three cavalry brigades, and each cavalry regiment expanded to four squadrons. A list of officer vacancies was to be made, and sent to the Minister for War who would make appointments by the end of March.¹⁵ The 6th regiment of Hussar was to field 700 horses, the 6th Chasseurs 730, the 8th Chasseurs 800 and the 25th Chasseurs 700 horses. The dépôts of the 12 regiments of French cavalry in Italy were authorised to furnish 3,000 men and 2,000 horses.¹⁶ 600 men were to be sent to the light cavalry from the dépôts in Piedmont and 800 Cuirassiers were ordered to join the army from Verone.¹⁷

As part of the troop build-up, in March, Napoleon planned to have 17 regiments of light cavalry on the Rhine, each regiment to field 900 to 1,000 horses.¹⁸ The cavalry dépôts of the 5th, 7th, 8th and 9th Hussars and the 1st, 2nd, 7th, 11th, 13th, 16th, and 20th Chasseurs a Cheval were to be emptied of men and horses and sent to Strasburg, where the detachments would be organised into *marche* squadrons. To these men were to be added the men and horses held in the dépôts of the cavalry regiments remaining in Spain.¹⁹ The organisation was as follows:

Squadron	Chasseur Cheval	Hussars
1	1,2 and 12 regiments	
2	11 regiment	5 and 7 regiment
3	16 regiment	8 regiment
4	13 regiment	
5	7 and 20 regiment	9 regiment

Table 1: Marche cavalry regiments formed 1809

The 10, 22 and 26 regiments of chasseurs a cheval serving in Spain were not included in this measure, but would provide one or two squadrons which would not be formed into *marche* organisations.²⁰ The five regiments with dépôts in Piedmont would send the available [I.e those who were fully trained and equipped] men and horses to Plaisance. The 100 men available for service in the of dépôt the 15th Chasseurs a Cheval, which was serving in Spain, would be taken into the 14th Chasseurs a Cheval regiment.²¹ Through these measures Napoleon planned to not only have 17 regiments of light cavalry a force of some 14,000 men in Germany, but also 13,000 cuirassiers, and 3,000 dragoons, making a cavalry force of some 30,000 men.²² General Beaumont was charged with the formation of the provisional squadrons.²³

14 Napoleon to Bessieres 21 February 1809 14796

15 Napoleon to Prince Eugene 16 February 1809 14784

16 Napoleon to Prince Eugene 16 February 1809 14784

17 Napoleon to Prince Eugene 27 February 1809 14820

18 Napoleon to Clarke 8 March 1809 14868

19 Napoleon to Clarke 8 March 1809 14868

20 Napoleon to Clarke 8 March 1809 14868

21 Napoleon to Clarke 8 March 1809 14868

22 Napoleon to Clarke 8 March 1809 14868

23 Napoleon to Clarke 8 March 1809 14868

The 26th Chasseurs a Cheval, based at Saumur were to form a squadron of 200 volunteers, with men of his choice, with good officers and NCO's to form eight platoons of 25 men, each commanded by an officer. The squadron was to be placed under the commander of the local Gendarmerie and was to keep at bay local brigands.²⁴

To bolster this small force, a provisional dragoon regiment was to be formed at Tours commanded by Colonel Henry of the Elite Gendarmes of the Imperial Guard. The regiment was to comprise a single squadron commanded by a squadron commander and a captain and to have 250 dragoons, 50 and an officer coming from the dépôts of the 3, 8, 10, 14 and 25 regiments of dragoons. Attached were 80 troopers from the Elite Gendarmes of the Imperial Guard, making a force of 330 men. These men were to act alongside the 200 chasseurs of the 26 regiment.²⁵ 12,000 francs was made available to fund the expedition and a further 6,000 for espionage.²⁶

12 March 1809, Napoleon instructed General Clarke, the Minister for War, to take the cadre from the 3rd and 4th squadrons of the 24 Dragoon regiments then serving in Spain, and march them back to France by way of the cavalry dépôt at d'Auch and thence Versailles. These men were to be joined by the dismounted men from the cavalry in Spain which had been assembled at Bayonne to be remounted. The dismounted and mounted men were to be sent to the cavalry dépôt at Niort. The mounted men would be sent in detachments to Strasburg. The dismounted men would be sent to their parent regiments dépôts to be mounted and then sent on to Strasburg.²⁷ Napoleon estimated he would have 4-5,000 dragoons ready by 1 April 1809.²⁸ The dépôts in France would furnish 1,500 men, d'Auch 200 a month, 1,000 from Tours, 200 from Niort.²⁹

Napoleon estimated that he currently had in France 48 squadrons of dragoons, making a force of 9,600 men. To this number he would add the four provisional squadrons formed out of the 3 and 4 squadrons of each regiment.³⁰ The organisation of these provisional regiments were as follows³¹:

24 Napoleon to Clarke 8 March 1809 14871

25 Napoleon to Clarke 8 March 1809 14871

26 Napoleon to Fouche 8 March 1809 14872 see also Napoleon to Savary 8 March 1809 14873

27 Napoleon to Clarke 12 March 1809 14889

28 Napoleon to Clarke 12 March 1809 14889

29 Napoleon to Clarke 12 March 1809 14889

30 Napoleon to Clarke 12 March 1809 14889

31 Napoleon to Clarke 12 March 1809 14889

Provisional Regiment	Detachment	Number men Versailles	Number men Niort	Number men at dépôt	Number men at Tours	Totals
1 regiment, 1 squadron	4 squadron 1 dragoons	120	13			133
	3 dragoons	110	16			126
2 squadron	4 dragoons		20	30	110	160
	5 dragoons	83		65		148
3 squadron	9 dragoons		40	90		130
	15 dragoons		80	78		158
2 regiment, 1 squadron	2 dragoons			140	78	218
2 squadron	25 dragoons			100	120	220

Table 2: Provisional Dragoon regiments raised for service in Germany 1809.

Napoleon also wished that a list be made of the horses then existing in France, and those at the dépôts at d'Auch and tours as well as with the provisional regiments at Tours, the number of horses being purchased and the number of those arrived with the army.³²

In addition he wanted to know the number of dragoons sent from Spain without horses, the number of conscripts of the class of 1810 that he would take into the cavalry. Napoleon planned to take 10,000 conscripts immediately in the cavalry. To equip these men, he authorised Minister Dejean to release 6 million francs from the budget of 1809 to purchase 9 to 10,000 horses, saddles and sets of uniform and equipment.³³

19 March, the first detachment of the Guard had reached Paris, leaving their on the 21 for Strasbourg, to arrive their no later than the 15 April. The first detachment commanded by General Arrighi consisted of 35 officers with 79 horses, 738 NCO's and troopers of which 654 were mounted, in addition to over 100 vehicles moved by 203 draught horses. 8 officers and 203 troopers from the Grenadiers a Cheval were at Verdun by 1 April. On the 23 March, Marshall Berthier reported that 560 dragoons were at Bordeaux, 598 Grenadier a Cheval were at Barras, and 250 Elite Gendarmes, along with 250 gunners manning 12 guns and 390 horses were at Bazas. These men had been ordered out of Spain on 9 March.³⁴

To feed the large numbers of troops advancing to Germany to face Austria, Marshall Davout was ordered to procure huge quantities of rations and equipment.³⁵ The Kingdom of Bavaria would supply a million rations of biscuit, 200,000 lots of rations to be placed at Ulm, Inglostadt, Passau, Augsburg and Munich. In addition, Magdeburg was to prepare 400,000 biscuit rations, Forchheim 200,000, Kronach 160,000, Bamberg 130,000 and Wursburg 220,000, a total of 1.1 million rations, which were to be sent to Donauwoerth.³⁶

32 Napoleon to Clarke 12 March 1809 14889

33 Napoleon to Clarke 12 March 1809 14889

34 Napoleon to Berthier 9 March 1809 14882

35 Napoleon to Davout 6 March 1809 14860

36 Napoleon to Davout 6 March 1809 14860

Magdeburg and Hanover were also to provide shoes, and the magazines at Stettin, Kustrin and Glogau were to send these items to Ulm as was the dépôt at Mayence. Magdeburg held 5,000 infantry coats, 1,200 waistcoats, 1,600 greatcoats and 40,000 shirts which were to be sent to Ulm and Donauwoerth.³⁷

50,000 barrels of barley or oats were to be prepared from Magdeburg to feed the cavalry, to supplement what could be obtained locally. Colonel J R Elting, notes that, the French cavalry horses could not charge at the canter at the battle of Aspern-Essling due to being fed barley due to the lack of oats.³⁸ However, barley in actual fact has a higher energy value per kg than oats, but has less fibre. Ideally, barley should only form half of a horse's concentrate feed ration. Barley was used alongside oats, to bulk out the available oats, to make the oats go further. A hard or concentrate feed comprising of oats and barley with ad lib grazing and hay, is a well-balanced horse diet, and would not have 'disagreed with' the horses, as Elting states. We must therefore look elsewhere to find reasons for the cavalry horses' lack of performance. Between 22 April and 13 May the French army moved towards Vienna, entering there on 13 May. They then followed a period of two weeks rest for the horses. The cavalry horses, went from gruelling hard work with sparse rations, to being turned out onto rich Spring grass with an increase in hard feed. The British Horse Society recommends that changes to a horse's diet and being turned out to grass is a slow process, over a period of two weeks or so, so that the digestive microbes in the horse's stomach can adjust themselves to the change in diet gradually.³⁹ The sudden change to local grasses when on campaign could cause immense suffering as the horse's gut could not digest the grass as the microbes in the gut had not had chance to adapt to the new grasses.⁴⁰ With sudden access to grazing, horses tend to over eat, causing a build-up of gasses in the stomach, which can cause colic, a potentially fatal condition if not identified and or treated by a veterinarian. In addition with sudden influx of hard feed such as crimped oats and barley, and a huge reduction in the work asked for the horses they got a kind of cramp in their loins, tying up, (azoturia). But if, working hard and being well fed, the horses were then suddenly given just grass or hay, the horses would quickly lose condition and would not have enough energy for a day of battle or marching. Thus we can see that the cavalry horses in the main were likely to be over fed and under worked for a period of at least two weeks, the horses would have either lost condition, likely to get compacted colic, overall the condition of the horses would deteriorate, not through unkindness, but through misjudgement and lack of facilities and time to slowly introduce the horses to grass and hard feed. Barley and oats are excellent horse feeds, but their sudden introduction to the horse's diet along with rich spring grass, would cause the horses to lose working condition, being hidden by a sudden laying down of fat in place of muscle tone, particularly along the top of the rib cage, and would not be able to work as well as they had done prior to the rest period. Thus the cavalry at Aspern-Essling, contrary to Colonel Elting was not able to charge at the canter due to the way in which the feeds were introduced rather than the feeds themselves as he argues. French cavalry horses were bred by necessity to be 'good doers'.

Unknown grasses could be poisonous, so horses could not graze in any new field until the cavalry troopers had removed the harmful plants, assuming therefore that the troopers could identify these plants. Most of the cavalry men in 1809 were unaware of which plants were

37 Napoleon to Davout 6 March 1809 14860

38 Elting p317

39 Auty pp322-327

40 Auty p141

harmful to horses, so large numbers would likely to have died due to poisoning or have become sick due to low level poisoning.⁴¹ Water for the horses was a problem that demanded an adequate solution every day. While in camp, a squadron would discover the nearest stream or pond and routinely water the horses there. On the march, water had to be found at the end of each day. If the water was any distance, as it often was, the timing of the watering was critical. The guns, equipment train vehicles and cavalry squadron were immobile if the horses were absent.

Usually, only half the horses would be sent to water at any one time. This meant that in an emergency some movement might be achieved, but with only half the horses present, the unit was at a distinct disadvantage. In spite of the care given to artillery and cavalry horses, the animals still perished at an astounding rate. Many died of disease or were put to death because of exhaustion. Horses were also lost due to illness and wounds. Glanders, was a major horse killer. Glanders in the eighteenth and nineteenth century cavalry was, as it still is, a highly contagious disease and its spread is promoted by the mass gatherings of horses. It is characterized by a high fever and skin lesions such as ulcers or tumours, or lung damage. Glanders, as well as Farcy, is a disease of the lymphatic system.⁴² Such was the prevalence of the disease, that in 1837 the majority of deaths of army horses was caused by glanders, on a ratio of 15:1000. French army practice was that any horse with glanders or suspected of having glanders was destroyed within 6 weeks of infection unless cured.⁴³

Other diseases which affected the horses were Scabies, Periodic Ophthalmia as well as Flue. Strangles and Flue were major horse killers in the early nineteenth century. Strangles progressed rapidly in run down and already malnourished horses, and was highly infectious. The primary method of control was shooting infected horses. In 1796, a strangles outbreak in the horses of the Army of Italy killed 2,000 draught horses in two weeks.⁴⁴ Scartopic mange, termed Scabies by the French army was also dangerous to horses. Failing to be treated, it could progress to more serious injuries such as abscesses, which can cause death if they become infected through blood poisoning.

Other factors also resulted in the loss of horses, other than through malnutrition, or illness, through infection or poisoning. As horses lost weight, their saddles would increasingly no longer fit the horse as well. An ill fitted saddle, if the situation is not arrested, will cause sores to develop on a horses back, which will result in a horse being unable to be ridden. Dirt and gravel between horses back and its blanket would also cause sores to open. The ill-educated conscripts of 1809 and later were unaware of these issues.⁴⁵ An over tightened girth, results in galls, making a horse unable to be ridden, in expert use of spurs, would wound a horses flanks, making it not able to be ridden. This would be further compounded by the loss of shoes. The lack of regularly farrier care for horses feet would quickly result in the horse being lame. A horse with a loose or lost shoe could not be ridden. Depending on how the horse lost the shoe, also depended on the fate of the horse. If the shoe was lost and the soft part of the foot was damaged, without a poultice and washing, the wound would quickly become infected. A horse treading on nail, tripping, spraining a tendon or ligament also resulted in a lame horse unable to be ridden.

41 SHDDT E31 6

42 SHDDT E31 6

43 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2339000?seq=3> Balfour On Vital statistics of cavalry horses 1880 accessed 12/12/09 @ 20:59

44 SHDDT E31 6

45 SHDDT E31 6

The maintenance of a horse in a field environment, without the back up support of a veterinarian or farrier, and lack of access to constant and consistent water and feed, by ill trained conscripts with little or no equine knowledge would be virtually impossible, and had been a major cause for concern amongst senior cavalry officers from June 1809. General Bourcier noted in 1805 that ignorance of the horse was more damaging to the cavalry than the enemy.⁴⁶ Profound words indeed. Many more were killed alongside their mates in battle.

With the bulk of the Grande Armée being deployed against Austria in Germany and the Confederation of the Rhine, Napoleon established the rations the local population were to give to the army under a decree of 6 April 1809.⁴⁷ 900 draught horses were authorised to be purchased on 1 April to provide horses for the guard artillery.⁴⁸ Four squadrons of the Grenadiers à Cheval returned with Napoleon to Germany to face Archduke Charles of Austria, leaving Poitiers on 4 April. The Grenadiers were still on the road to Paris when the Grenadiers à pied reached their on the 12th having been conveyed in wagons. Major Chastel and the 1st Grenadiers à Cheval quite Spain on 24 March, and reached Paris on 30 April. Austria had invaded Bavaria, and Napoleons response was swift and furious. The 3,160 strong horse guard were approaching Vienna on 10 May, the Dragoons marching past the Abbey of Melk above the Danube on 22 May, having complete the 1,400mile journey from Spain in sixty six days without losing a horse.

On 26 April 1809 General Bourcier was placed in command of the remount system for the army in Germany.⁴⁹ The dépôt was established at Landshut and was to house 8,000 horses. The dépôt was to replace the smaller *marche* dépôts at Ratisbonne, Dilingen and Noerdlingen. Separate stables for light cavalry and heavy cavalry were to be established and placed at Moosburg where there was Napoleon assured Bourcier, plenty of available and good quality fodder.⁵⁰ Further dépôts were established on the banks of the Inn and Danube Rivers at Passau which was designated the dépôt General for the army.⁵¹ Artillery artisans would be responsible for the production of saddles and harness. 4 May, Napoleon recommended that each regiment of cuirassiers and carabiniers were to dispose of 100 mounts that had been identified as lame, worn out, malnourished or elderly. Napoleon stressed that young horses were of more use to him than old incapable horses.⁵²

Forward remount dépôts were established Passau , Penzig and Klosterneuburg from 14May 1809. The dépôt at Passau was the primary for the organisation of temporary *marche* squadrons. The men were train in France, equipped and sent forward to Germany to be mounted. On 18 May 1809, Passau held 3,000 troopers and 2,600 troop horses and 4,000 draught horses.⁵³ By the 28 May, the dépôt held 21 officers, 1,038 troopers and 516 horses.⁵⁴ Klosterneuburg dépôt was closed in favour of Penzig on 28 May.

By The end of May 1809, large numbers of dismounted cavalry troopers were clogging roads and rear areas of the army. Napoleon authorised on 29 May that each of the 14 cuirassier

46 SHDDT E31 6

47 Order 14 May 1809 15207

48 SHDDT Xab 56 Lauriston to Napoleon 1 April 1809

49 Napoleon to Clarke 26 April 1809 14126

50 Napoleon to Clarke 26 April 1809 14126

51 Napoleon to Berthier 1 May 1809 15148

52 Napoleon to Clarke 4 May 1809 15152

53 SHDDT C2 Bourcier to Mashall Berthier 20 May 1809

54 SHDDT C2 Bourcier to Clarke 28 May 1809

regiments in Austria was to purchase 100 horses, in addition 1,400 cuirassier mounts and saddles were to be sent to the remount dépôt at Passau.⁵⁵ Napoleon reckoned that for every man killed, two horses were lost.⁵⁶ In this build up, the area surrounding Vienna was full of various regiments in cantonments:⁵⁷

The cantonments of the regiment occupied a considerable extent, I had three villages for my company. We were authorised to make requisition for cloth, leather, and everything necessary to replace the expenditure and losses of war. Without making any abuse of this power, I had the good luck to find a good-will in my three villages, that enabled me to make all the repairs; and I took great interest in watching my artisans at work, and the advance in my men's appearance. Great pains was also taken with their drill ; a great many draughts had been had been sent up from the dépôt; horses had been purchased in the province we occupied ; and the Vienna dealers had furnished others coming from the Danubian provinces and Transylvania. In a very short time we were completely mounted and equipped, and in force. We usually mustered six squadrons on parade. I always was very fond of drill, and as peace was signed, some employment was necessary.

Troop mobilisation

After the Battle of Aspern-Essling, Napoleon began drawing more troops into Vienna and began to remount his cavalry force. General Bourcier was placed in command of the remount dépôt at Passau, as well as the horse markets of Bavaria and the Palatinate. He was also to oversee the formation of provisional regiments of dragoons, under the command of general Beaumont. Bourcier was warned to be wary of attacks from the mountains by the Austrian Militia.⁵⁸

Immediate orders were dispatched to summon every available body of troops to concentrate for the decisive stroke. Practically the lines of communication along the Danube were denuded of combatants, even Bernadotte being called up from Passau, and the viceroy of Italy, who driving the archduke Johann before him (action of Raab) had brought up 56,000 men through Tirol, was disposed towards Pressburg within easy call. The arsenal of Vienna was ransacked for guns, stores and appliances, and preparations in the island pushed on as fast as possible. Between 23 May and 4 July 1809 the cavalry of the Army and Germany increased by over 10,000 men. The ranks of the cavalry emptied by the battle of Aspern Essling were filled with conscripts, and new squadrons filled out with conscripts. The 1 provisional chasseurs a cheval mustered on 27 May 750 mounted and equipped men, and 6 provisional regiments of dragoons had been equipped, and placed under the command of General Beaumont. The men were drawn from cavalry dépôts in the Kingdom of Italy. General Bourcier's remount system, had mounted 2000 dismounted men, leaving a large number of men dismounted by the battle of Wagram. In the 3 months 1 May to 30 July, the dépôt at Passau had mounted 30 officers and 3,407 newly raised conscripts.⁵⁹ In addition, regiments had arrived from Spain, along with the majority of the cavalry of the Imperial Guard a force of 3,160 troopers and 3,651 mounts.

55 Napoleon to Dejean 29 May 1809 15274

56 Napoleon to Dejean 29 May 1809 15274

57 De Gonneville pp289-300

58 Napoleon to Berthier 17 June 1809 15364

59 SHDDT C2 Bourcier to Berthier 30 July 1809

Due to a lack of mounts in the immediate locality of Vienna, an order of 20 May authorised officers, who had horses that they had no direct need of to be offered for sale to General Bron⁶⁰, commander of the dépôt at Penzig for use as cavalry remounts.⁶¹ Captain de Gonneville of the 6th Cuirassiers had more than his quota of horses:

*I was particularly well off in horses, having four ; my Ukraine horse ; the mare that was given me by the 18th Dragoons, an unbroken mare that I had taken in exchange when I was appointed aide-de-camp, and lastly the mare that was left me by General d'Avenay. She is worthy of a special description that I could dwell upon with pleasure, but I will only say that she was the best charger I ever saw, and had not a single fault.*⁶²

The flow of men and mounts into Passau and Penzig are shown below:

Dépôt	Date	Officers	Troopers	Remounts
Passau	18 May		3,000	2,600
	20 June	58	3,827	2,276
	30 July	58	3,690	1,555
Penzig	28 May	21	1,038	516
	10 June	37	2,049	766

Table 3: Number of horses process at Passau and Penizg renmount dépôts 1809

From table 24 we can see that the flow of dismounted men was outstripping the supply of horses to the remount depots. 28 May General Bron was authorised to purchase 1000 cuirassier horses and 1000 light cavalry horses, and to be sent to Penzig. An analogous order was issued to General Beaupre at Passau dépôt.⁶³ Both men were under the supervision of General Bourcier.⁶⁴ After the battle of Aspern-Essling, the cavalry was short of mounts. For example the Heavy Cavalry divisions of Marshall Bessieres were under strength:⁶⁵

60 **Bron de Bailly** (Andre Francois) Born: 30 November 1757; Chef de Brigade: 22 September 1797 General de Brigade: 23 September 1800; Commander of the Legion d'Honneur: 14 June 1804; Baron of the Empire: 1 January 1813; Died: 18 May 1847

61 SHDDT C2 Order du Jour 29 Mai 1809

62 De Gonneville p288

63 SHDDT C2 order du jour 28 Mai 1809

64 SHDDT C2 order du Jour 2 June 1809

65 SHDDT Situations cavalerie 5 July 1809

	1st Heavy Cavalry Division	2nd Heavy Cavalry Division	3rd Heavy Cavalry Division
	1 and 2 Regiments Carabiniere. 2,9,3,12 regiments of Cuirassier	1,5,10,11 regiments of Cuirassier	4,6,7,8 regiments of Cuirassier
Horses lost to 20 May	237	25 horses	480 horses
Horses present 20 May	3,518 horses	2,289	2,579
Horses lost 20 May to 5 June	440	580	785
Total horses lost to 5 June 1809	677	605	1,265
Remounts obtained up to 5 July.	1,198	310	533
Number dismounted men.	46	295	436
Number remounts required.	46	173	385
Horses Present 5 July	4,039	1,994	2,202
Total remounts available	0	122	51

Table 4: Horses taken into the heavy cavalry divisions 1809

As we can see from table 25 above, 30% of the horses in the three heavy cavalry divisions were killed by 5 June 1809. Napoleon commented to General Clarke on 25 June that the recent marches and battles had been wasteful of a large number of horses for the cuirassiers, estimating the dismounted number at 1,000 men [as we can see from the above table his calculation was nearly 1000 men short]. He authorised each regiment of heavy cavalry to obtain 100 remounts [1,400 horses in total] and the dépôt at Passau to procure 1,400 horses and saddles. By this method Napoleon hoped to obtain 2,800 horses in addition to the 2,000 already actioned to be purchased.

The three heavy cavalry divisions required 2,075 mounts for replacements and were still 726 troopers mounts short by the eve of the battle of Wagram. The 7th Cuirassiers part of the 3rd Division, had lost 8 officers, 104 men and 168 horses during the battle of Aspern Essling and received the more than half the remounts for the division, some 357 horses and men. Not only the heavy cavalry suffered, the 14th Chasseurs a Ccheval were 200 horses short.⁶⁶

25 June 1809, Prince Eugene, Napoleon's step son and Viceroy of Italy was authorised

66 SHDDT Situations cavalerie 5 June 1809

to provide 40,000 francs credit to colonels of light cavalry regiments to procure remounts. However, according to General Bron it proved impossible to obtain horses in sufficient numbers required in the local vicinity, and only 500 cuirassier mounts were obtained out of an authorised purchase of 1,000 by 2 July. General Bron protested that General Bourcier was limiting the horses available to be purchased because he refused to sanction any horse not meeting the age and height requirements for cavalry mounts.⁶⁷ Bourcier responded saying that he was merely ensuring regulations were adhered to for the good of the service, and from 6 June 1809 he superseded Generals Bron and Beuapre, and was henceforth responsible for the purchase of all mounts. He sanctioned the purchase of 2,000 horses from Strasburg, which were to arrive at Passau by 27 June. Clearly more than 500 cuirassier horses were obtained as the three divisions accepted nearly 2,000 horses as remounts, but one can suppose not all were suitable as heavy cavalry mounts.

The battle of Wagram cost the cavalry thousands of men and horses. The 1st Carabiniers lost 200 horses, the 2nd Carabiniers 250 horses. The heavy cavalry at Wagram suffered similar casualties to the action at Aspern-Essling, losing over 1000 horses. Many regiments were already short of men and horses. 1000 injured cavalrymen were still in hospital in Vienna on 3 August 1809. Many reports about the performance of the cavalry at Wagram, say that the horses were not able to charge.

With the campaign over, General Bourcier immediately set about the rebuilding of the cavalry. 1500 light cavalry horses were obtained, 200 to be delivered by 10 July, 550 by 10 August, and 750 by 20 September. Between 4 and 28 July, Bourcier accepted 385 horses into Passau, 85 were aged 5, 134 aged 6, 104 7 and 60 aged 8, the latter two ages being draught horse types.⁶⁸ In addition to the two remount dépôts obtaining horses, cavalry colonels were obtaining their own mounts from the locality. There was no single clear and coherent remount policy for the army in the first half of 1809. Regimental colonels were buying horses ad lib with little control as to the quality of horse purchased, out of need to quickly mount their regiments. Meanwhile Bourcier and his staff were buying horses based on their confirmation, age and size at a much slower rate.

Bourcier was also singularly un-impressed with the quality of harness and saddles Generals Bron and Beuapre had purchased. He lamented to General Clarke, the Minister for War, that he had to cancel all orders of saddles on 15 July as the saddles he had received so far were of rushed and shoddy manufacture and likely to ruin a great many horses. Henceforth all saddles and bridles would be made by trusted manufacturers in France.⁶⁹ 21 July General Bron was removed from his command at the cavalry dépôt and given a field command, he was replaced by General Reynaud.⁷⁰ The failings of the remount system saw Bourcier head up a commission in 1810 to overhaul the system.

6 August, Napoleon wrote to General Clarke, the Minister for War, ordering him to reprimand the officers of the 5 Hussars who were purchasing horses under the age of 4. A number of colonels who had been buying mounts were it seems duped, as Napoleon lamented he had spent a lot of money on horses that were worthless, some with one eye others being blind. Henceforth all direct purchase of mounts by colonels was to be stopped. All horses were to be

67 SHDDT C8 Bron to Berthier 20 June 1809

68 SHDDT C2 Bourcier to Clarke 28 July 1809

69 SHDDT C2 Bourcier to Clarke 28 July 1809

70 Napoleon to Clarke 21 July 1809

purchased by the *department remonte*. Horses were to be assembled at Strasburg for inspection, and then forwarded to the army in Germany, the convoys to be commanded by officers of cavalry to ensure the horses arrived in good health, and not Napoleon noted, with loose or missing shoes and were to be properly fed.⁷¹ Bourcier notes of the 40,000 horses obtained in 1809, nearly all were unsuitable for the cavalry.⁷²

To provide remounts and replacements, during September 1809 horses were purchased from the locality of the army. Krems provided 800 horses for the cuirassiers and artillery train, Kornneuburg 450 light cavalry mounts. These horses went some way to mounting the estimated 5,000 dismounted cavalry and 4,000 horses to be sold. To remedy this, 6,000 horses were to be levied, out of a total requisition of 20,000 horses.⁷³ De Tascher of the 12th Chasseurs à Cheval was dispatched to locate remounts for the regiment which was not an easy or pleasant job, made worse by bad weather:⁷⁴

I must leave tomorrow, travel 14 leagues, visit forty villages, one after another, in order to find and seize all the horses.

28 September: I set off on my task, accompanied by an army of 110 men: fifty from the cavalry, fifty from the infantry and ten from the artillery. I finally reach the little village of Obrowitz, a suburb of Brno, wet, muddy and hungry, having had nothing in my stomach while travelling 14 leagues in the mud and heartily cursing the weather, the horses, and the duty I am engaged upon.

29 September: Having 'declared war'- that is when I had informed the bailiff of my less than noble proposal to take all his horses, either by agreement or by force, I went away to organise my plan of campaign. Having seventeen strongholds or villages to overcome, I made my dispositions like a great general. I ordered my combined forces to different places, and tomorrow at dawn, I shall myself ride to deliver the decisive blows.

30 September: It is hard to believe to what extent the entire race of horses has been exhausted by this war and its endless requisitions: of the 400 horses I have just seen, not one of them is worth a florin.

The requisitioning of horses did nothing to foster good will between the French and the Austrians. The army also needed large quantities of draught horses. 2,000 draught horses were needed for the forces in Spain in addition to the replacements required for the army in Germany. 9,000 draught horses were to be purchased from Alsace, Lorraine, the Franche Comte and 26th Military Division. The harness was to be supplied by the artillery arsenals at Metz, Strasburg, and Mayence.⁷⁵

As part of the build-up of sending troops back to Spain after the German Campaign, the 5th, 10th, 22nd, 27th Chasseurs à Cheval in dépôts at Versailles were to be formed into a marche regiment of light cavalry of 600 horses. Elements of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 10th Hussars

71 Napoleon to Clarke 6 August 1809

72 SHDDT E31 6

73 Napoleon to Daru 8 September 1809 15774

⁷⁴ Brindle (2006), p. 139.

75 Napoleon to Clarke 7 October 1809 15910

were to form a second marche regiment. Any surplus men and horses at Versailles, were to be sent into Spain. 1000 horses were to be sent from Versailles to Spain to act as remounts for 400 or so dismounted cavalry troopers. Six provisional regiments of dragoons totalling 1,000 men were to be formed as well.

The Chasseur a Cheval regiments ordered to serve in Spain from October 1809 were the 5th , 10th ,15th ,21st ,22nd ,26th and 27th regiments. The 15th Chasseurs a Cheval formed part of VI corps of Marshall Ney. The 10th and 26th Chasseurs a Cheval were part of IV corps under the orders of King Joseph. The 28th and 29th Chasseur a Cheval regiments were ordered to Spain in the new year of 1810, and sent to III corps of General Suchet in Catalonia. Cuirassiers were also sent into Spain. Lieutenant de Gonneville of the 6th Cuirassiers recounts his transfer from Vienna to Spain:

A few weeks afterwards we received our appointment; and we spent the time we were waiting in getting our fresh outfit, but it cost three times as much as it would have in Paris.

When our commissions arrived, we joined the 6th Cuirassiers six leagues from Vienna on the road to Znaim; every person in it had been changed since I was among them. The old captains and the greatest part of the officers had been killed, or invalided, in consequence of wounds. The NCO's, I knew before, had come in for a good deal of promotion, and I made the acquaintance of officers from the military school, and transferred from other regiments. Saint-Victor and I were excellently received, and a month had hardly passed since I joined, when Colonel d'Haugeranville told me that the first captain he should recommend for promotion to be major was myself, and that after M. Eauffer, the lieutenant of my troop and the senior in the regiment, Saint-Victor would be the next he should recommend for captain.

As well as light cavalry, Dragoon regiments were ordered to Spain . On 1 August 1809, the 14th Dragoons mustered some 473men and 373 horses. This rose to 28 officers, 468 men and 477 horses in October, reducing to 14 officers, 419 men and 326 horses by 23 November. This equates to again of 104 horses, and loss of 151 horses in four months. The 3rd squadron was still based in Meastricht some 3 officers, 173 men and 167 horses and 4 squadron was at the dépôt in France, some 220 men and 218 horses. These two squadrons were ordered to march to Strasburg, where on 1 May 1809 they had been formed into the 4th Provisional Dragoon regiment. The new regiment was based at Tettlenang and mustered 840 men and 717 horses, On 15 July the 4th Provisional Dragoons took part in operations with the King of Bavaria. The regiment was placed under the command of General Beaumont and would serve in the Aspern-Essling campaign. A new 3rd squadron was raised in Meastricht which on 1 September comprised 72 men and 59 horses.

November 1809 the 4th Provisional Dragoons were ordered to leave Germany and move to Spain, arriving at Mayence by the middle of the month.

The newly raised 3rd and 4th squadron of the 14th dragoons, some 15 officers, 30 men and 333 horses, were merged with the 3rd and 4th squadrons of the 26th dragoons to form a new 3rd Provisional Dragoon regiment.

In addition, to sending men and horses to Spain, 600 mules were purchased at Niort for the 11th Battalion of Equipment Train, as well as 600 draught horses from Commercy in place of 650 mules which were passed to the 10th Battalion prior to their entry into Spain. 2,000 draught horses for Spain were to be purchased, and were to be augmented by 2,000 mules. The mules were to be used as pack horses and draught horses, accompanied by 600 dismounted men. The men were to be the dismounted men housed in the various train battalion dépôts in France. Of the 2,000 horses, 1,000 were to be purchased from France and 1,000 transferred from Germany. These mules were to transport 180,000 pairs of shoes into Spain. 27,000 greatcoats were to be reclaimed from the five Belgian departments.

Summary

In 1809 the French state purchased 71,000 horses from in France and from German horse dealers. France was now fighting on two fronts which was sucking in resources. 1809 witnessed Napoleon endeavouring to fight on two fronts with limited resources. The troop movement from Spain to Germany at the start of 1809 had halted any real progress in Spain until remounts and replacements were sent back to Spain at the end of 1809- Spain became a side show for the French. From 1810 to the first half of 1811, the commanders in Spain could monopolise resources. However with the build-up the invasion of Russia in 1812, Spain was once more relegated to a side-show, which had a terminal effect on the French occupation of Spain and the ability of the French armies in Spain to fight. However, this was all in the future. The main impact or lesson learned from the Austrian campaign of 1809, was that the system of remounts introduced in 1807 by the requests of regimental colonels against the advice of General Bourcier, demonstrated that the system did not work, was ponderous and slow and very costly. Bourcier set up on 1 January 1810 a commission to overhaul the mounted arm of France. In the winter of 1809 Napoleon embarked on a cost cutting measure for the army. Napoleon noted that the men, horses and harness of the cavalry were divided between the army and the cavalry dépôts. Napoleon noted:

My expenditure is enormous, and I must think seriously of reforms. My army in its present state would devour three times the revenue of France. I want therefore, in the first place, to know the number of men, horses, and saddles in all my cavalry regiments on the 1st of December; and secondly, what are the reductions which must be made as to men and as to horses to bring the cost of these regiments within reasonable limits. A further advantage of such a reduction will be that I shall be able to withdraw from the cavalry depots many conscripts, and put them at your disposal to form battalions of artillery-drivers for the army of Spain. All the budgets must be made on the footing of peace as regards Germany, and of war in respect of Spain.

The men, horses, and harness of my cavalry are divided into two parts, one with the army, and the other in the depots. Fourteen of my cuirassier and a great many of my chasseur and hussar regiments are in Germany. Whatever may be my peace establishment, my squadrons on service in Germany may be immediately reduced by getting rid of the dismounted invalid men and the unserviceable horses; but the important thing is to reform my depots, that I may not leave in France a useless horse, and that next year I may save much on forage. I intend, therefore, that there shall not be more than 50 horses on an average for each regiment in

the depots of my regiments in Germany. Supposing there to be 30 depots, this will make only 1500 horses to be fed in France for my army of Germany. At most, there ought to be in the depots twice as many men as horses.

After the cavalry of Germany, comes that of Italy. I have regiments of horse in my army of Illyria, and likewise in my army of Italy. I wish my cavalry depots in the Alps to be, generally speaking, on a higher footing than those in the interior, and my squadrons to be more numerous in Italy on account of the difficulty of obtaining remounts; but I do not choose to pay dearer for forage in Italy and Piedmont than elsewhere. There is abundant forage in Italy ; it can therefore be only an abuse to charge so highly for it. I shall authorize the prefects to procure it at the rate of 18 sous or a franc at most, and even to levy it by requisition, if necessary.

I am inclined to place in Normandy the four depots of my cuirassiers in Piedmont; they will be nearer their remounts, and, besides, I am always in want of cavalry and other resources on the coast.

I have 25 dragoon regiments in Spain; I do not intend them to have more than from 25 to 50 horses apiece in their depots in France. The same with respect to the 12 regiments of chasseurs and hussars which are in Spain; and as in that army the horse's keep is not at my expense, it ought in general to be proposed to me to send thither all the available horses in the depots; in Spain they will be of use, yet cost me nothing, and my finances will, in consequence, be much relieved.

I have 80 cavalry regiments, therefore 80 depots, which, at the rate of 40 horses, one with the other, will not make more than between 3000 and 4000 horses to feed; the whole amount of forage will thus be reduced from 15 millions to less than 4 millions for the year 1810, a great and important saving.

I believe that I have added a 9th company to all my regiments of dragoons and of light horse. I think that next year these 9th companies had better be suppressed, for four squadrons will be sufficient for my cavalry regiments in Germany, as they will be upon a peace establishment, and the regiments in the army of Spain are so full that three squadrons apiece will be quite enough. I think that the 5th squadron in the cuirassiers should also be reduced, which will bring us back entirely to a peace establishment.

From this letter, clearly, the cost of maintaining cavalry squadrons on a war footing was beyond the economic resources of the state, and Napoleon ordered that dismounted invalid men and unserviceable horses were to be discharged from the army. The dépôts in France were also to be emptied of useless horses, each dépôt henceforth was to hold no more than 50 horses for the dépôt of each regiment then serving in Germany a total of 30 dépôts, and some 1,500 horses. Due to the lack of horses in Italy, the four cuirassier dépôts in Piedmont were moved to Normandy.

For the dragoon regiments serving in Spain, the dépôts in France were to hold between 25 to 50 horses. The same rule was to be applied to the chasseur cheval regiments surviving in Spain, as Napoleon believed the horses held in France served no purpose, and by reducing the number of horses in France to 4,500, the cost of fodder could be cut from 15 million francs a year to 4 million francs.

Born out of the failings of the remount system for the campaign of 1809 in Germany, in 1810 General Bourcier headed a committee comprising of Generals Grouchy, Preval and Pully to oversee changes to the way in which horses for the army were obtained and looked after. 76

The committee reported back on 11 March 1810 and made a number of important changes to the way in which horses were purchased for the army as well as their welfare.

Bourcier in his report noted that as well as being open to fraud, the direct purchase of horses by the corps, was all fine and good when experienced officers were selecting the horses. One reason, General Bourcier noted, for the poor quality of remounts purchased in 1809. Of the 40,000 purchased, all but 4,000 were sold at the end of the campaign as they were unsuitable for the cavalry, primarily because: 77

1. the formation of provisional regiments, manned by young officers with no experience of horses, most of the recruits never having ridden before, the officers could not select suitable horses for the army. What they chose were good for hunting or riding around town but little else, as this was the main way most cavalry officers had come into contact with horses. What one would ride in civilian life bemoaned Bourcier, was not necessarily what one would ride in the army.⁷⁸

2. The more inexperienced officers in charge the dépôts and purchase of horses, did not allow sufficient time to train the horse to accept the bridle and saddle, or would purchase horses that were already broken to ride, but too old for the use of the army upon closer inspection. Bourcier noted that in general the remounts purchased in 1809 were badly treated, often being castrated, and broken to ride within 6 weeks.

3. the provisional regiments, and march squadrons with few or no experienced officers and NCO's filled with conscripts who had only 6 months training time, had the highest rate of horse wastage than the established regiments. When the detachment set off for Spain, the attrition rate of horses before the remounts and replacements arrived was 62%. Time and time again the same men would be dismounted moving from Bayonne or Niort to Spain, become dismounted, be sent back to the depot to be remounted and then become dismounted. Further the once in Spain the officers and NCO's did not have the experience to be able to make the conscript formations strong cohesive fighting units.

4. Clothing, equipment and harness were not 'workman like' and many horses were overloaded with too much spare clothing, equipment and arms.

Overall Bourcier totally condemned the corps remount system as it was staffed by ignorant young officers, or those who were corrupt and sold the horses fodder, or skimmed on its purchase to line their own pockets. He also condemned the mode of sending remounts and replacements into Spain and the whole concept of provisional regiments and march squadrons.

However, Napoleon and General Clarke were not too impressed with Bourcier's scathing attack on how the cavalry operated. Only one of Bourcier's recommendations was acted upon. Based on General Bourcier's complaint that the direct Corps purchase system was open to abuse and produced substandard remounts, from 1 July 1810 the purchases of mounts had to be overseen by an Inspector General of Cavalry, with the Army Remount Depot taking back

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⁷⁸ For more on the 1810 Committee and General Bourcier's views on what was a good cavalry horse, see 'Paul L Dawson (2013) Au Galop! Horses and Riders of Napoleon's Army Black Tent Publications, Stockton on Tees.

full control of. Henceforth, each corps commander would furnish a list of horses with their regiments every week, and identify the number of remounts needed, which would then be purchased by the Inspector Generals. The horses were taken to each army corps rear area for distribution to the regiments.⁷⁹ From 19 January 1812, the horses were sent directly to forward remount dépôts, where each regiment would send their dismounted men to be equipped. Men who were newly conscripted to the army would be equipped and trained in France, and then dispatched on foot to the forward remount dépôts to be mounted. By having these forward remount dépôts, horses could be purchased both in France and Germany and concentrated behind the army. In addition it meant the horses were where they were needed, a failing of the remount system of 1793-1799.

Placed on the Napoleon Series: May 2013

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