

Organisation of the Savoy/Piedmont Sardinian Armies 1792-1815

By Ludovic Isnard

Years 1799-1802: The Austrian-Piedmont army and the French annexation

Suvarov's victory over the French troops in Piedmont led to the restoration of the authority of the King of Sardinia on the eastern part of the Alps. Being supported by the Tzar in his claims, King Charles Emmanuel IV denounced the previous treaties that stripped him from his continental possessions, and he sent his brother to Torino with the title of lieutenant general for the kingdom. Nevertheless, his Austrian allies were only moderately supporting his claims as they preferred to use for their own benefits the resources of the newly liberated Piedmont.

March 3rd, 1799, saw the creation of a mixed Austrian-Piedmont commission whose goal was to reform the units of the national army.

Initial objectives, as set by the commission, were the following :

- 15 infantry battalions, of whom:
 - 4 Nationals (Guards, Savoie, Montferrat and Piedmonte)
 - 1 Light battalion
 - 10 Provincial battalions

they were all to be set with 6 fusiliers and a grenadier companies.

- 2 Battalions of cavalry on foot
- 2 Foreign corps (German and Swiss-Grisson)
- 10 Reserve provincial companies
- 18 Artillery companies
- 17 Invalid/Veteran companies
- 2 Half squadron of mounted cavalry

for a grand total of roughly 20.000 men.

In April 1800, the strength of this force effectively reached 18000 men :

- 714 for the light battalion
- 2200 men for the 3 other national battalions
- 8450 in total for the 10 provincial battalions
- 3000 for the reserve companies
- 2400 men in total for cavalry and artillery
- 1820 men in the depots and detachment parties.

A third of these men (roughly 5.500 out of 18.000) were previously former soldiers of the old regiments of the Savoy-Piedmont dynasty. They were pardoned prisoners captured by the Austrians, as troops of the former 1798 half brigades that fought alongside the French. Their reintegration in the national army required the firm pressure of the Piedmontese provisional government on their Austrian counterpart. Indeed, the Austrian were in the meantime trying to recruit 5 Italian light infantry battalions (Leichte Infanterie Bataillon) to complement their troops in Northern Italy and they looked unfavorably on the loss of these potential recruits.

The cavalry (on foot) could be replenished with a two third rate by the ranks of the former cavalry regiments as the French didn't have much use of them during the previous campaign.

These troops, incorporated in the Austrian corps, took part on the operations on the Levanto riviera (Genoa Siege) and the Po campaign (battles of Casteggio, Montebello and Marengo) in 1800 and also maintained garrisons in Piemonte still under the allied control.

Finally Marengo and Hohenlinden victories brought the conclusion of an armistice with Austria and led to the transfer of Savoy and Piemonte territories under French domination for the next 14 years.

The French government organized Piemonte and Genoa to form respectively the 27th and 28th military divisions.

Between June and July 1800, Bonaparte ordered the formation of Piedmontese troops as follow:

- 4 battalions of 800 men (8 companies of 90 fusiliers and 1 company of 70 grenadier) Thus, the former regiments of Piemonte and Savoy formed the 1st battalion, the Montferrat, Oneglia and part of Alexandria formed the 2nd battalion; Saluzzo, Cuneo, Regina and the rest of Montferrat formed the 3rd Battalion and finally Aosta and the light troops formed the 4th Battalion. The men of the Guard regiment were split into the 4 battalions.
- Artillery: 2 battalions forming 14 companies (8 of gunners, 4 specialists, 2 veterans) for a total of 1200 men of whom 600 serving in field batteries.
- a Gendarmerie Corps with 6 foot companies (80 men) and 6 horse companies (50 men).
- 6 cavalry squadrons: 2 of hussars and 4 of dragoons, all drawn from the men in the depots in Torino, but none of them were effectively mounted.

Later, in August 1800, General Brune commanding in Piemonte ordered a complete reorganization of the troops with still Piemonte leadership :

- 4 Piedmontese Battalions (1000 men) organized as 2 French half brigades
- 2 Light Piedmontese battalions (1000 men)
- 1 Piedmontese hussar regiment of 4 squadrons (150 men each)
- 1 Piedmontese dragoon regiment of 4 squadrons (150 men each)
- 1 Piedmontese Gendarmerie corps (300 on foot and 300 mounted)
- an artillery regiment of 12 companies and 1200 men

Despite the forced requisition of 1200 horses in the country, the cavalry regiment stayed in the depot unmounted.

But in June 1801 with the conclusion of a general peace, the mainland territories of the former kingdom became French, and the national conscription took over this small Piedmontese army.

The two half brigades were transferred under French authority and became the 111th and 112th Half brigade (and later regiment), the light battalions became the 31st light half brigade. But a high desertion rate couldn't allow to keep the 112th half brigade that was disbanded and the remaining men were transferred into the 111th and 31st light. Cavalry was organized in the 21st Dragoon regiment and the 13th Chasseurs à cheval regiment (later becoming the 17th and 26th chasseur à cheval regiment).

Finally, the artillery formed a new battalion of the existing French 1st artillery regiment with 10 companies and one worker company.

In the following 12 years of Napoleonic war, the conscription in Piedmont territories contributed 72.000 troops to imperial France, and this is not counting former Savoy Duchy and Nice County.