

The Napoleon Series

The Germans under the French Eagles: Volume V Our Allies the Bavarians Chapter V Part I

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CHAPTER V

CAMPAIGN OF 1812

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1. -- The political situation. -- State of the Bavarian army in 1812. -- Organization of the 6th Corps.

Russia had changed its political system since 1811; skillfully circumvented by England, whom the extension of the continental blockade threatened to its very existence, the Emperor Alexander considered himself charged by Providence to restore peace to Europe, by putting an end to the gigantic increases of France and of its vassal states.

Had not the power of Napoleon, his ambition, become intolerable? Since the last war, the kingdom had been annexed to the Empire; Germany was little more than a vast French province where the tricolors floated on the fortresses of Stettin, Custring, Glogau, Danzig, Stralsund, Magdeburg, occupied by formidable garrisons...

The English spirit soon regained all its influence in Saint Petersburg and, on 13 December 1811, Russia opened its ports to the goods of England. It was war with France: Alexander prepared for it without delay and first sought the alliance of Sweden, which was acquired by the treaty of 5 April 1812. Bernadotte, the former Jacobin general, the former Marshal of Napoleon, now Crown Prince of Sweden, became the confidant, the adviser to the Emperor of Russia; he did not hesitate to line up among the enemies on his part, to command in person an army of foreigners launched at the French prey, thus hoping, at the cost of his sacrificed honor, to make the sovereigns of the Holy Alliance forget its origin, its first weapons, and consolidate his own crown...

The French occupation of Swedish Pomerania had been the cause of the break between the governments of Stockholm and Paris; exploited by Russia, this event brought the intimate rapprochement of the two northern powers. Bernadotte never ceased to supply the most precious directives for the war against France to the Emperor

Alexander. It was he who advised to avoid big battles, to especially make war with partisans on the communications of the enemy, to draw out the war in length since Russia could do it and since Napoleon could not. Bernadotte's military experience was good to use: so Alexander did not fail to draw inspiration from his advice and recommendations in drawing up his campaign plans and the instructions addressed to his generals.

It was Bernadotte who advised the Emperor of Russia to "bring in the post" the Army of Moldova on the right flank of the French army to force Napoleon to either cross the Niemen, or to detach a large corps to go meet this army;¹ it was Bernadotte who signed on 24 August, in Abo, a convention by which Russia guaranteed to Sweden the possession of Norway and promised him a corps of 35,000 men intended to disembark with the Swedes, in a diversion planned against Denmark one on the coasts of Germany; it was Bernadotte who writes: "It is possible that the Emperor Napoleon wins the first, the second, even the third battle; the fourth will be undecided, and if your majesty perseveres, there is no doubt that he will win the fifth."²

Nothing moved Bernadotte:

"... In vain we sent him the letters of his former comrades in which were depicted the misery of this French army to which he owes his crown: never a word from him suggested that he was French, that he had concern. His only wish was that not a man escapes from it, and that these legions which for twenty years relentlessly held the head up to Europe undergo in their turn the shame of capitulation"³

This overview of the role of Bernadotte is necessary to show the influence he exerted on the operations of 1812, before participating directly in those of 1813.

Denmark, requested to join the coalition against France, remained faithfully our ally; it was soon punished by the unjustifiable bombardment of Copenhagen by the English fleet.

Napoleon would lead against Russia the most colossal mass of soldiers that one had seen united, since the invasions of antiquity. The French army was reinforced, more than doubled by those of its allies; the Confederation of the Rhine add 80,000 bayonets, with the Bavarian, Saxon, Westphalian, Baden, Wurtemberg contingents, and those of small princes of the Confederation; the Italians and the Poles formed entire army corps; the Swiss, the Neapolitans, the Croats, the Portuguese, the Spanish constitute many regiments distributed in our divisions. Austria, our enemy of yesterday and tomorrow, supplied an auxiliary cops of 30,000 men and 60 pieces of cannon; finally, Prussia itself, before rising against us and by an nameless disloyalty to allow passage to the enemy, in full campaign, its troops which have just fought at our sides, Prussia gives us a contingent of 20,000 soldiers, not counting the garrisons it would maintain in the towns on the Russian border.

What was the military situation in Bavaria at the time of the confederation requisition of its contingent? On 29 April 1811, the Conscription Ordinance of 1807 was changed, and the Bavarian forces now included an active army of 46,000 men and a National Guard of 45,000, which supplemented the troops in the campaign in the event of mobilization.

The active infantry had to amount to 36,572 men; the cavalry with 6,400 men and 5,250 horses; artillery and the train with 3,357 men and 720 horses.

The 11th Line Regiment and the 2nd Light Battalion were disbanded and distributed among the other corps; the 13th Regiment took number 11 accordingly, the 14th number 13; the number 12 continued to remain vacant in the continuation of the infantry corps. The two regiments of dragoons became 1st and 2nd Light Horse and thus brought to six the number of these last regiments.

The infantry included 12 line regiments, each with 2 war battalions and a reserve battalion; the war battalion was made up of 6 companies: 1 of grenadiers, 1 of tirailleurs and 4 of fusiliers; the total force of the line regiment

¹ *Unpublished correspondence*, Bernadotte to the Emperor Alexander, 11 August 1812.

² *Unpublished correspondence*, same letter.

³ *Unpublished correspondence*, Preface, page xxx.

amounted to 2,436 men. The 6 light battalions were in 6 companies, including 1 of riflemen, 1 of skirmishers and 4 of fusiliers (including 2 of reserve); each battalion is at 1,224 men. There were also garrison companies in the infantry at Donauwörth, Nymphenburg, Oberhaus, Rosenberg, Rothenberg, Wurzburg.

The light horse regiments each include 3 divisions of 2 squadrons, and 1 reserve squadron; the total force of a regiment amounted to 1,068 men and 875 horses.

As for the artillery, divided into 4 battalions of 5 companies, it included 2,055 men; one must add 1 company of workers of 100 men employed in the arsenals.

Finally, the 4 train divisions, with 2 companies each, formed a group of 1,222 men, 210 saddle horses and 694 draft horses.

This was the military organization of Bavaria, when an order of 25 January 1812 put the army on the brink of war. 2,000 horses were immediately bought to complete the workforce, and two divisions prepared to be made available to France, as a quota provided for by the act of the Confederation of the Rhine.

ORGANIZATION OF THE 6th CORPS OF THE GRANDE ARMÉE.

The Emperor to the Chief of Staff.

Paris, 3 March 1812.

"... The 6th Corps of the Grande Armée will be made up of Bavarians. The 1st Division will bear the number 19 and the 2nd Division the number 20. This corps will be commanded by General Gouvion Saint-Cyr..."

In execution of this order, Marshal Berthier wrote to Saint-Cry:

*To General Count Gouvion Saint-Cyr, Commander
of the Bavarian Army Corps.*

"The Emperor has definitively settled, General Gouvion Saint-Cyr, the denomination and classification of the different corps and divisions composing the Grande Armée, and according to the provisions prescribed in this regard, the corps will take the name of 6th Corps of the Grand Army; the 1st Division will bear the no. 19, and the 2nd Division will bear the no. 20."

The Prince of Wagram and Neuchâtel, Major General.

ALEXANDRE.⁴

The two Bavarian divisions which had already been concentrated respectively in Bayreuth (General Deroy) and Bamberg (General von Wrede) presented, at the beginning of March, the order of battle and the following manpower:

6th CORPS OF THE GRANDE ARMÉE.

Commander-in-Chief: General GOUVION SAINT-CYR.

Chief of Staff: Adjutant-Commander D'ALBIGNAC.

Artillery commander: Colonel COLONGE (Bavarian).

Bavarian 1st Division (19th of the Grand Army).

⁴ *Papers of General d'Albignac.*

Commander: General of Infantry DEROY.
Chief of staff: Major Baron GRAVENREUTH.

1st *Brigade*, General von SIBEIN.



1812. — LE MARÉCHAL GOUVION SAINT-CYR
Commandant le 6^e corps de la Grande Armée (2).
(D'après une lithographie de Delpech.)

1812. -- MARSHAL GOUVION SAINT-CYR.
Commander of the 6th Corps of the Grande Armée.⁵
(From a lithograph by Delpech.)

1st Light Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel von GÉDONI.
1st Infantry Regiment, Colonel Baron STROEHL.
9th Infantry Regiment, Colonel von LA MOTTE.

104 officers, 3,564 men, 37 horses.

2nd *Brigade*, General RAGLOVICH.

3rd Light Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel von BERNCLAU.
4th Infantry Regiment, Colonel von ZOLLER.
10th Infantry Regiment, Colonel Count PREYSING.

102 officers, 3,568 men, 39 horses.

3rd *Brigade*, General Count RECHBERG.

6th Light Battalion, Major PALM.

⁵ GOUVION SAINT-CYR (Lauren). --Born in Toul in 1784, volunteered in 1792 in the 1st Battalion of Chasseurs Républicains, captain two months later, brigadier general the following year, general of division in 1794. Was distinguished at the siege of Mainz (1795) and commanded the Army of Rome in 1798. He fought at Hohenlinden (1800), then was ambassador to Madrid (1801) and appointed colonel general of the cuirassiers in 1804. After the Prussian Campaign, he commanded the Army of Catalonia and took Rosas. In 1812, he was head of the Bavarian Corps, won the victory of Polotsk (18 August) and received the marshal's staff. Charged in 1813 with the defense of Dresden, he signed an honorable capitulation that Schwarzenberg violated, and the troops of Gouvion Saint-Cyr remained prisoners. Minister of War under the Restoration, he died in Hyères in 1830.

8th Infantry Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel HAUSSMANN.
13th Infantry Regiment, Colonel SCHLOSSBERG (detached to Danzig with the 2nd Foot Battery.)

62 officers, 2,130 men, 22 horses.

1st Cavalry Brigade, General Count SEYDEWITZ.

1st Light Horse, Colonel Count von WITTGENSTEIN.

3rd Light Horse, Colonel von ELBRACHT.

6th Light Horse, Colonel DIETZ.

60 officers, 1,296 riders, 1,499 horses.

Artillery and train, Lieutenant-Colonel LAMEY.

1st Light Battery, Captain VAN DOUVE.

3rd Light Battery, Captain HALDER.

11th Foot Battery (of 6), Captain BRACH.

6th Battery (of 12), Captain ROYS.

23 officers, 429 gunners, 14 horses, 24 guns.

Train: 6 officers, 291 men, 776 horses.

Bavarian 2nd Division (20th of the Grand Army).

Commander: General of the Cavalry Count von WREDE.

Chief of Staff: Colonel Baron von COMEAU.

1st Brigade, General von VINCENTI.

2nd Light Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel von WREDEN.

2nd Infantry Regiment, Colonel Count SPAUER.

6th Infantry Regiment: Colonel DEROY.

103 officers, 3,557 men, 42 horses.

2nd Brigade, General BECKERS.

4th Light Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel THÉOBALD.

3rd Infantry Regiment, Colonel Count WALDKIRCH.

7th Infantry Regiment, Colonel Baron MAILLOT.

101 officers, 3,569 men, 31 horses.

3rd Brigade, General MINUCCI.

5th Light Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Count BUTTLER.

5th Infantry Regiment, Colonel Baron HABERMANN.

11th Infantry Regiment, Colonel Baron DALWIG.

103 officers, 3,569 men, 37 horses.

2nd Cavalry Brigade, General Count PREYSING.

2nd Light Horse, Colonel von BOURSCHEIDT.
4th Light Horse, Colonel Count SEYSSEL.
5th Light Horse, Major GADDUM.

60 officers, 1,286 riders, 1,499 horses.

Artillery and train, Colonel von ZOLLER.

2nd Light Battery, Captain GOTTHARD.
4th Light Battery, captain GRAFENREUTH.
4th Foot Battery, Captain BERCHEM.
5th Foot Battery, Captain HOFSTETTEN.
8th Battery (of 12), Captain ULMER.

25 officers, 420 gunners, 35 horses, 30 guns.

Train: 7 officers, 414 men, 848 horses.

The 13th Line Regiment (Colonel Schlossberg), detached to Danzig with 2 pieces of 6 from the 2nd Foot Battery and included in the confederation effectives, was attached to the 10th Corps of the Grand Army commanded by Marshal Macdonald; it entered the Ricard Brigade of the Grandjean Division.

There were a total of 12 infantry regiments, 6 light battalions, 6 cavalry regiments and 10 batteries that Bavaria kept under our flags. The line regiments were with 2 battalions, those of cavalry with 4 squadrons; the batteries consisted of 6 pieces (4 guns of 6 or 12, and 2 howitzers of 7). The 20 battalions, 23 squadrons and 60 pieces of artillery of the Bavarian Army entered the field with 863 officers, under the command of generals already distinguished in previous wars; we shall soon see with what frightening rapidity the fatigue and the fighting made the 30,000 Bavarians of the 6th Corps melt away and disappear almost entirely in Russia.

Let us recall for the ease of this story, the summary composition of the Grande Armée, at the start of operations in 1812:

Imperial Guard, under the orders of LEFEBVRE and of MORTIER.

1 st	Corps,	DAVOUT (5 divisions): French, Baden, Spanish.
2 nd	-	LOUDON (3 divisions): French, Portuguese, Swiss, Croats.
3 rd	-	NEE (3 divisions): French, Portuguese, Württembergers, Croats.
4 th	-	PRINCE EUGÈNE (3 divisions): Italians.
5 th	-	PONIATOWSKI (3 divisions): Polish.
6 th	-	GOUVION SAINT-CYR: Bavarian.
7 th	-	REYNIER: Saxons.
8 th	-	KING JEROME, then JUNOT (2 divisions): Westphalians.
9 th	-	VICTOR (3 divisions): French, Baden, Hessian, Polish, Berg.
10 th	-	MACDONALD (2 divisions): Poles, Prussians, Westphalians, Bavarians (13 th Regiment).
11 th	-	AUGEREAU (4 divisions): French.

Austrian auxiliary corps, SCHWARZENBERG (3 divisions).

1st cavalry reserve corps, NASOUTY (3 divisions): French, Prussians, Poles.
2nd cavalry reserve corps, MONTBRUN (3 divisions): French, Prussians, Poles.
3rd cavalry reserve corps, GROUCHY (3 divisions): French, Saxons, Bavarians (1st and 2nd light horses).
4th cavalry reserve corps, LATOUR-MAUBOURG (2 divisions): Poles, Saxons, Westphalians.

The Russian forces who were to oppose this formidable invasion included:

1st *Army of the West*, under BARCLAY DE TOLLY.

1 st	Corps,	EITGENSTEIN.
2 nd	-	BAGAWOUT.
3 rd	-	TUTSCHKOW.
4 th	-	SCHOUWALOW, then OSTERMANN and TOLSTOI.
5 th	-	DOCTOROW.
6 th	-	PAHLEN.

2nd Army of the West, under BAGRATION.

7 th	Corps,	RAJEWSKI.
8 th	-	BARASDIN.
9 th	-	GORTSCHAKOFF.

Cavalry corps from KNÖRING, SIEWERS, WASILTCHIKOW and PLATOW.

Reserve Army, under the orders of TORMAZOW (3 divisions).

Army of Moldova, with TCHITCHAKOW (4 divisions).

Corps of Riga, under LEWIS (2 divisions).

Finnish Division, commissioned by STEINGELL.

In this study, we first follow the two divisions of Gouvion Saint-Cyr from their departure from Bavaria to their arrival on the Niemen and the Duna; we will see their operations around Polotsk, on the left of the main French mass, until the moment when they joined the retreating Great Army; then, we will resume the history of the 6 light horse regiments, detached to the 6th Corps to march with the Emperor on Moscow, and taking part in all the great battles of the campaign.

Finally, we will accompany the debris of the Bavarians during the dismal stages which brought them back to the Vistula, and, from there, to Germany, after glorious tests for their military honor: they fought with courage, fell almost to the last, deserved the praises of Napoleon and communed faithfully with us during this unforgettable campaign, in victory -- at Polotsk, at Smolensk, at Moskowa, -- and in death under the immense icy shroud of Russia.

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