

Troops From Baden Fighting in the Confederation of the Rhine Forces in the Peninsular War, 1808-1809

Ernst-Heinrich Schmidt*

TOTAL NATIONAL WAR IN SPAIN AND ITS GERMAN VICTIMS

The age of the French Revolution and Napoleon is characterized by a rapid succession of campaigns which was to fill a quarter of a century with the clamour of war and the consequent lament for untold suffering in terms of life and limb, material and moral goods.

One of these campaigns was Napoleon's war against Spain, the most useless of his violent undertakings; for it resulted in the flareup of a popular uprising which, in conjunction with the British expeditionary force commanded by Wellington, inflicted an «incessantly bleeding wound» on the Napoleonic Empire. Indeed, for the military emperor, «the whole Spanish affair (had) started with a false move».¹ Thus, according to Napoleon's extremely vivid double admission at the finis et initium of his strategy of subjugation and pacification on the Iberian Peninsula and the unanimous judgement of a historiography that has tended to be macroscopic on the bloodiest of his theatres of war, it was a tremendous political and

(*) Museumbeauftragter, Rastatt, Alemania.

¹In Anlehnung an Unter dem Greifen. Altbadisches Militär von der Vereinigung der Markgrafschaften bis zur Reichsgründung 1771-1871, hrsg. u.a.v. WGM Rastatt, Karlsruhe 1984, S. 57 (Siegfried Fiedler). Napoleon zugeschriebene Aussprüche auf St. Helena am 6.5.1816, vgl. Denkwürdigkeiten des Grafen von Las Cases, Stuttgart (Cotta) 1823; zit. nach Karl Lang: «Die Badischen Truppen in Spanien in den Jahren 1808 bis 1814», in: Beihefte zum Militär-Wochenblatt 1911, hrsg. v. von Frobel, Berlin 1911, S. 128 f.; Erich Blankenhorn: 1808-1814. Badische Truppen in Spanien. Amtliche Veröffentlichung des Armeemuseums Karlsruhe/Baden, Karlsruhe 1939, S. 13; Christopher Herold: Der korsische Degen. Napoleon und seine Zeit, Darmstadt 1968, S. 197.

military failure - and after microscopic contemplation of the soldiers from Baden who were forced to participate in this debacle, it was for them an exceedingly great disaster *ex initio et ad infinitum*.

In the indescribable degenerations of this war, the five-year campaign in, against and for Spain was not just a drama for the Spanish people but also a further drama in the centuries-old history of German civil wars. On the one side, Napoleon's Confederation of the Rhine forces comprised troops from Baden, Nassau, Frankfurt and Hesse in the «German Division» (Rhenish Confederate Division). Opposing them on the other side were the Hanoverian and Brunswick elements of the «King's German Legion» in Wellington's British Army in Spain. In addition, units from the Thuringian Duchies of Saxe-Weimar and Saxe-Anhalt, the Kingdom of Westphalia (contingent with troops from Westphalia, Berg and Hesse) and the Bishopric, now Grand Duchy of Würzburg also fought in the Iberian theatre: the sons of German tribes serving foreign masters on foreign soil.

BADEN AS A «NATURAL ALLY» OF FRANCE

At the end of the 18th/beginning of the 19th Century, the state government of Baden, a margravate situated in the extreme southwest of Germany which had not been reunited until 1771, had realized, with realistic farsightedness, that their dwarf-like border state within the «monstrous» system of German states (Pufendorf)² which had been growing looser and increasingly eroding since 1648 —i.e. the Holy Roman Empire, which was shaken to its very foundations during the Wars of the French Revolution— would be wiped off the map if Baden were to become a hindrance blocking revolutionary France's way.

The events following the peace treaties of Basel (1795), Campo Formio (1797) and Luneville (1801) demonstrated that Baden could no longer expect any support from the Emperor in Vienna, and that he could not pursue a seesaw policy under the cannons of Strasbourg.³ Given the prospect of compensation for all territories on the left bank of the Rhine lost to France, by means of secularization and mediatisation, i.e. drastic measures based solely on the power of absolute princes and French arms, made sacrosanct by the *Reichsdeputationshauptschluß* (1803) and sealed by the collapse of the First German Empire (1806), Baden too had purposefully

²Nach Samuel Pufendorf: *De statu imperii Germanici*, 1667; vgl. Ernst-Heinrich Schmidt: «Militärische Partikularität und Kontingentsherrlichkeit. Strukturgeschichte des deutschen Heerwesens vom Ende des Alten Reiches bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg», in: IAMAM-Report 1987, S. 5.

³Siegfried Fiedler: «Revolution-Krieg-Friede», in: Carl Friedrich und seine Zeit, hrsg. v. Markgräfl. Badische Museen, Karlsruhe 1981, S. 38.

pursued the creation of a centrally administered, modern state with an integral territory out of the remains of the expropriation of a few hundred of the small and tiny temporal and spiritual dominions surrounding it.⁴ Baden, hitherto a small state, was enlarged enormously by the acquisitions of 1803, 1805, 1806 and 1810; its population grew five-fold to somewhat more than one million. Elevations to a higher rank by the grace of Napoleon—to an electorate (1803) and grand duchy (1806)—were the exterior reward⁵.

In reality, however, the young grand duchy was a satellite state of Napoleon in the fetters of the Confederation of the Rhine (1806), obliged to continually provide soldiers (involving immense armaments expenditure) for the increasingly snowballing wars of the Military Emperor. The increase in the size of the territory and population of Baden produced an army that was ultimately 10,000 men larger. This army, modelled on that of France⁶, was incorporated as the «Corps de Baden» into the brotherhood-in-arms of the «Grande Armee»⁷. Troops from Baden were forced to participate, with a numerically larger contingent each time, in Napoleon's campaigns against Austria and Russia (1805), Prussia and Sweden (1806/1807), Austria (1809), Russia (1812) and, until they were physically wiped out⁸, in the Battle of the Nations at Leipzig (16-19 October 1813). In the following, this paper will give an account of the fortunes of the contingent from Baden that fought in the formation of the Confederation of the Rhine forces in the Peninsular War between 1808 and 1813. It will do so with the help of contemporary sources and witnesses, in other words from the point of view and based on the experiences of the soldiers who were directly involved.

COMPULSORY MOBILIZATION AND DEPARTURE OF THE CONTINGENT FROM BADEN TO SPAIN

After the attempt by a French army of occupation to seize the Iberian Peninsula in a coup de main, as it were, had failed between the end of 1807

⁴Zur Rolle v. Reitzensteins siehe Peter Eberhard, in: ebd., S. 168; Hermann Schmid: «Die Säkularisation und Mediatisierung in Baden», in: ebd., S. 75 ff.; «Vom Alten Reich zum Deutschen Bund», in: Baden und Württemberg im Zeitalter Napoleons, Ausstellungskatalog, Band 1.1, Stuttgart 1987, S. 85 ff.

⁵Vgl. Anm. 4; Siegfried Fiedler: «Der Rurfürst und Großherzog», in: Carl Friedrich, S. 39, insbes. S. 47.

⁶26.10.1808: Annahme der französischen Truppenformation für badische Truppen; 8.2.1809: Einführung der franz. Reglements, vgl. Greifen, S. 199 (Rentschler).

⁷1811; 11 800 Mann, dann mehr als 8000 ständig als Rheinbund-Kontingent zur Verfügung, vgl. Fiedler, in: Carl Friedrich, S. 172 (3.8.6.).

⁸Am 30.12.1812 erreichten 140 bad. Soldaten, 40 noch kampffähig, die Weichsel: der Rest von 7166 Rußlandkriegern; vgl. Carl Friedrich, S. 239.

and mid-1808, Emperor Napoleon decided to assume personal command over the deployment and intervention of a newly formed army of overwhelming superiority, the Armée d'Espagne.

To this end, he demanded on 15 July/23 August 1808 that the Grand Duke of Baden place a reinforced infantry regiment on a war footing. The Duke dared to contradict Napoleon in no uncertain terms, in order not to allow himself to be degraded to a mere supplier of soldiers and to avoid the ruinous burdens of the war economy and constantly increasing arms production demanded of him:

«I must entreat Your Majesty not to employ the contingents against the insurrection in Spain; as the soldiers would march there with reluctance, they could not inspire any confidence. [...] Sire, during their last passage your armies maltreated all provinces and collected more than they would have done if they had been marching as enemies [...] The confederate states will not be able to endure these military preparations for very long.»⁹

The «usurper of Europe» (Fichte) responded to such opposition with scorn and derision by reminding the envoy of Baden «from whom [the Grand Duke] had got everything, and that he ruled by the grace of Napoleon. He thus had to do everything that pleased the Emperor and refrain from doing everything that displeased him».¹⁰

All similar endeavours by the state government of Baden over the following five years to induce the despotic French warlord to release Baden from its obligation to provide a contingent in this most hideous of all theatres for the soldiers from Baden, or at least to improve their conditions of employment and supply, failed. In the territories of Baden, the intensified levies due to the introduction of compulsory recruitment by Napoleon had caused numerous desertions since 1805, which in turn resulted in harsh countermeasures. The increased requirements for recruits permitted fewer and fewer exemptions from the previous obligation to serve in the militia, so that universal conscription in Baden was administered considerably more rigidly than its model, the French Conscription Law ¹¹. Aversion to the «military obligation of the subjects», in particular to service in the French Army, was so widespread that in some of the territories recently acquired by Baden there was open revolt among the rural population against the

⁹ Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 6, 74 f. (auszugsweise Zit. ebd. nach Anneliese Woller: Baden und Frankreich in der Rheinbundzeit 1805/1813, Diss. phil. Freiburg 1935.)

¹⁰ Sigismund Carl Frhr. v. Reitzenstein gegenüber Napoleon I.; zit. nach Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 74.

¹¹ Zu den Edikten von 1804-1808 vgl. Greifen, S. 33 ff. (Fiedler); ders. in: Carl Friedrich, S. 172 (3.8.5. a I b).

removal of recruits, which could only be crushed by the employment of cavalry¹². The negative news about the rise of resistance by the Spanish people and the reprisals by the French army of occupation which reached Baden up to the summer of 1808 «left such an impression» that the courageous Grand Duke warned the Emperor of the demotivating and demoralizing effects, but without success, as we have already seen¹³.

Just under four weeks after the imperial call-up order of 23 July 1808, the two infantry battalions from Freiburg and Rastatt and the company-size foot artillery with train from Karlsruhe marched out of their garrisons. It is quite probable that, to raise their spirits, they were given musical accompaniment in the form of the universally known march of the Old Baden County Regiment, Durlach.

(1st musical example:

**AM I, 104 «March of the Swabian County Regiment, Durlach-Baden»
(c. 1700, old version)**

However, the displeasure at the forthcoming operations in Spain was to arise at a very early stage in the reinforced combined Baden Infantry Regiment. The depressed morale of the troops could only be raised in a patriarchal way —and then only to a limited degree— by an officer who enjoyed the trust of his men (and who was to prove very reliable later on). He appealed to the community of fate:

«As we approached the Rhine», recounts an artillery soldier, «my fellow soldiers expressed reluctance to cross it. Thereupon, our commander, Captain von Lasollaye, told some gunners and train soldiers to form a circle and said the following: My dear children, our sovereign has entrusted you to my care. Today, we are going to cross the Rhine, and I am firmly convinced that you will all follow me as upright soldiers and that none of you will commit perjury. Look, I also have parents and property at home and I like being in our fatherland just as much as you do. And I hope that I shall return with you to our native country. Where we are now going together, I shall be with you and look after you. After such a good exhortation, we followed our captain across the Rhine.»¹⁴)

¹² Greifen, S. 32 (Fiedler); *Badischer Militär-Almanach*, 10. Jg., Karlsruhe 1863, S. 17 f.

¹³ Zit. nach Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 74; Rainer Wohlfeil: *Spanien und die deutsche Erhebung 1808-1814*, Wiesbaden 1965, S. 102 ff.

¹⁴ Nacherzählt (aus Nachlaß Lasollaye od. *Handschriften-Sammlung*, GLA Nr. 1283) von Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 14 - Abschiedsparade unter Musik vor dem Großherzog wsr bei Rastatt gewesen, vgl. Karl Franz von Holzinger: *Unter Napoleon in Spanien. Denkwürdigkeiten eines badischen Rheinbundoffiziers (1787-1839)*, hrsg. v. Max Dufner-Greif, Berlin 1937, S. 12-15.

The troops from Baden covered the distance between the Rhine and the Pyrenees via Strasbourg, Metz, Orleans and Bayonne in remarkably quick time, marching over 1000 km in 48 days. In the military camp at Orleans they were inspected by Marshal Lefebvre, one of those prominent soldier figures from Alsace who had risen to the top on the back of the Revolution. He was able to address the troops from Baden in Alemannic dialect and fill them with enthusiasm:

«Quickly, but with a keen eye, he rode along the front of our regiment. He told us to fire our weapons in ranks, something which our drill book had not previously provided for. This grey, fiery hero himself took a rifle out of the hands of one of our NCOs and practically showed us how to fire it. We mounted several charges, formed up in attack columns, stormed the high-lying road where we put to flight everyone who had come here out of curiosity [...] We were satisfied with the marshal, for he was a competent man who held his fire until he saw the whites of the enemy's eyes and loved us!»¹⁵

It was very often the case with Napoleon's rapidly recruited and assembled foreign troops that they had to learn their warcraft on the move as they had mostly received very little prior training. This also applied to the troops from Baden, using the French drill book and accompanied by French military music.

(2nd musical example: «Pas de Redouble»)

In mid-October 1808, at the end of their advance through France, a soldier from Baden noted:

«In front of us towered Iberia's mighty giants, the Pyrenees. Their heads enveloped by deep snow. [...] We waded through a sea of sand, through shadowless scattered firs. Exhausted, we reached Bayonne on 12 October, the city that gave the points of our rifles their name.»¹⁶

Only one day later,

«on 13 October, early in the morning, the drum summoned us to march. Our deployment in Spain had to be speeded up, [...] we scaled the

¹⁵ Zwei Jahre zuvor hatten Badener bereits unter Lefebvre, Herzog von Danzig, ebenda gedient, jetzt führte er sie in seinem IV. AK; vgl. Ludwig v. Grolmann: Tagebuch über den Feldzug des Erbgroßherzogs von Baden 1806 - 1807, bearb. u. hrsg. v. Fr. von der Wengen, Freiburg 1887, S. 70 ff. u. 111 f. - Nacherzählt von Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 15; siehe auch Dufner-Greif (Holzing), S. 19 f.

¹⁶ Nacherzählt von Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 15.

foothills of the Pyrenees. Dripping with sweat, we reached the summit, frozen rain scourged our faces so that they burned. Then we headed vertically downwards to the Bidassoa in the depths. It was not yet dark as we crossed the red wooden bridge. Two six-pounders as guards on the French border! We were on Spanish soil. The mightily bulwark of nature had been crossed, which separated two nations with the same goal of killing themselves. We were here to do this in the service of France. Our soldierly duty commanded us to do so. Thinking such thoughts, we dragged ourselves in the darkness to Irun. The Spanish reception consisted of empty monastery walls, wet straw and vermin. The monks were no longer there. We very soon learnt that they had exchanged the rosary for the sword.»¹⁷

Shortly after Irun, in Durango, during the second half of October 1808, the «German Division» was formed under the command of the French General Leval: the 1st Brigade was made up of the «Regiment Baden» and the «Regiment Nassau»; the 2nd Brigade consisted of Dutchmen, and the 3rd Brigade comprised units from Hesse, Frankfurt and France¹⁸.

Order of Battle

- «German Division» (French General Leval) approx. 10,000 men
 - 1st Brigade (Baden Colonel von Porbeck)
 - Infantry Regiment Baden No. 4 (1,700 men)
 - Infantry Regiment Nassau No. 2
 - Foot Battery Baden with 8 guns and train (200 men)
 - 2nd Brigade (Dutch General Chasse)
 - Infantry Regiment Holland
 - Hussar Regiment Holland
 - Horse Artillery Holland
 - 3rd Brigade (French General Grandjean)
 - Parisian Guards Battalion
 - Frankfurt Battalion
 - Infantry Regiment Hesse (-Darmstadt)
 - Half Foot Battery Hesse (-Darmstadt)

¹⁷Ebd. S. 16; siehe auch Dufner-Greif (Holzing), S. 33; P.J. Rehfuës: Tagebuch eines deutschen Officiers (i.e. Ludwig von Grolmann) über seinen Feldzug in Spanien i. J. 1808, Nürnberg 1814.

¹⁸Gliederungsbild nach Wilhelm Krieg von Hochfelden: Geschichtliche Darstellung sammtlicher Begebenheiten und Kriegsvorfälle der Grossherzgl. Badischen Truppen in Spanien von 1808 bis Ende 1813 in Verbindung der allgemeinen bedeutenden Ereignisse der Rheinischen Bundes-Division in der Französischen Gesamt-Armee, Freiburg 1822, S. 5 f. Exakte Kopfstärken bei Lang, S. 129; Badischer Militär-Almanach, Karlsruhe 1854, S. 43; I.D. Häffner: Geschichtliche Darstellung des Großherzoglich Badischen Armee-Corps pp., Karlsruhe 1840, S. 49, 89.

THE YEAR OF BATTLES, 1808/1809

Marches, Engagements, Guerrilla Warfare

In late October 1808, Napoleon launched his offensive and, with 200,000 soldiers, forced his way across the Ebro into the interior of Spain. The German Division fought on his western wing: Zornoza (24 October), Durango (31 October), Valmaseda (8 November):

«On 27 October, facing the village of Zornoza lying in the deeply incised valley, we received our baptism of fire. In a race with the enemy for a steep mountain dominating the region, the Spanish were defeated by the rapidity of our voltigeurs and the force of the bayonets of our companies. As soon as we had become masters of the heights, the martial sounds of our music resounded down into the valley to announce our success to our [...] fellow soldiers. [...] Marshal Lefebvre visited us in our cyries. He was full of praise. The soldiers understood everything the marshal said, as it was his custom to speak German. Proud of the praise, we looked back to the battle from which we had emerged victorious. Our longing for the hut in the valley to protect us against wind and rain had vanished entirely from our souls. [...] During the three days we spent here, the soldiers rested on rocky earth, but their exhaustion and the sparsely scattered brushwood turned it into a soft bed for them. How happy the soldier is when his courage receives the honour which is due to it. The French generals knew this and were able to exploit it.»¹⁹

This initial account of fighting from the first-hand experiences of a soldier from Baden illustrates features which are essentially typical of troops successful at the first attempt: rapidly aroused enthusiasm, freshly founded esprit de corps and pride following a military achievement accomplished at the cost of extraordinary privations under the inspiring charisma of a competent commander. The latter's absolute offensive spirit, shaped by Napoleon, in combination with his mastery of the tactical elements of surprise, mobility and cooperation, executed by troops that were overtaxed but nonetheless willing to fight, was also apparent a few days later:

«On 31 October, along the Durango, we fought our first battle. On the day before, the marshal could hardly wait for the moment. Just like a youth, filled with martial fire, he shook hands with every officer he met.

¹⁹Nacherzählt von Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 16; auszugsweise zit. nach Franz Xaver Rigel: Der siebenjährige Kampf auf der Pyrenäischen Halbinsel vom Jahre 1807 bis 1814 besonders meine eigenen Erfahrungen in diesem Kriege nebst Bemerkungen über das Spanische Volk und Land, Erster Theil, Rastatt 1819, S. 350 f.; siehe auch Dufner-Greif (Holzing), S. 35-37. Krieg v. Hochfelden, S. 7.

Ten regiments were on our side in the battlefront. We and the troops from Nassau on the right wing, our artillery in the centre and way ahead of it our voltigeurs. Two of our howitzers had been towed by oxen (with much exertion) onto the high mountain on which we were situated. [...] When the fog had fallen, the left wing of our army was already engaged in battle. A magnificent sight, the battlefront clearly spread out from our steep heights. Then our guns, too, detached themselves. We saw their shells create confusion among the Spanish, who had apparently not expected them from such an impassable point. With loud shouts of joy, the centre and right wing now launched their attack. All the bands struck up, the drummers beat the assault march, songs of victory were to be heard out of the mouths of the bearded warriors. Heavy small arms fire, delivered by the enemy from an advantageous position, was unable to check our forward assault. It had little impact because it was too high. Leaping over deep precipices and chasms, wading through brooks, we scaled the steep heights occupied by the enemy - unstoppable, calm, our rifles on our arms. The battle lasted until the afternoon; the commanders of our three battlegroups manoeuvred towards one another masterfully. Thirty thousand Spaniards were defeated in eight hours. The marshal heaped praise upon the Germans [...]»²⁰ - «[...] in the tone peculiar to him and speaking German: «You fought magnificently today. You competed with the French, and a few times you were ahead of them, —[...] now you are brave people!»—²¹

The first French bulletin of the *armee d'Espagne* from Vitoria dated 9 November 1808 announced, among other things: —«*Les troupes de la Confédération du Rhin se sont distingués, principalement le corps de Bade.*»²²

Highest praise and external recognition —a tried-and-tested psychological means of command and control employed by Napoleon Buonaparte— was to be bestowed upon the troops from Baden by the imperial warlord himself before the gates of the Spanish capital:

«On 9 December we approached Madrid. We were looking forward to getting there [...] after the untold privations of the preceding days. Our people were terribly worn out as a result of the forced mountain marches. Most of them were without shoes. Owing to a lack of any means of transportation, many of us had to be left behind on the way, made ill by the march. After a night in a bivouac facing Madrid, the

²⁰ Nacherzählung von Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 17; auszugsweise zitiert nach Rigel I, S. 352 f.; Dufner-Greif (Holzing), S. 35-37; Krieg v. Hochfelden, S. 8 f.,

²¹ Blankenhorn, a.a.O., S. 18; zitiert aus *Relation des Oberst v. Porbeck v. 5.11.1808 an Großherzog von Baden*, gegeben zu Bilbao. Siehe auch Rigel I 352, 357 f.

²² Auszugsweise zitiert nach Camille Sauzey: *Les Allies Allemands de Napoleon*, Baden-Baden 1953, p. 63.

Emperor reviewed us. He ordered the companies to be drawn up in one rank, inspected details and addressed every officer. He applauded the subsequent regimental manoeuvres, for which he himself gave the orders (translated by the regiment commander). Pleased with the accomplishments of the troops from Baden so far, Napoleon awarded them 22 crosses of the legion d'honneur instead of the 8 suggested by the marshal. French officers described this as a unique case. [...] Happy, admired and envied because of our good display before the great man, we and the Regiment Nassau entered Madrid that evening.»²³

For the troops from Baden and the other units participating in the Peninsular War, the legion d'honneur was to become a medal with two sides in the true significance of its value - an obverse and a reverse side. Among Napoleon's troops, its possession was deemed to be a token of bravery and triumph; on the Spanish side, it was used to deride the country's enemy. The troops from Baden later reported: «The guerrillas used to pin the legion d'honneur on themselves after they had torn it from the slain men.»²⁴ After the bloody decisive Battle of Vitoria (20 June 1813), «Spanish donkey boys could not get hold of enough crosses at any price to pin them onto the tails of their donkeys.»

The troops from Baden did not have to wait until their constantly threatened marches through Spain and their time spent in quarters to realise that they were involved in a popular war which had already, *before their arrival* in the Spanish theatre, assumed the character of a campaign of annihilation with all the atrocious excesses of reprisals, revenge and physical extermination²⁵. The totally extraordinary nature of this national war, lying way beyond any previous experience of war, soon became apparent to them on the battlefield itself where, in the past, a certain degree of chivalry and individual mercy had traditionally been respected among soldiers from the opposing sides. Thus, for instance, Colonel von Porbeck, who had been thrown into an internal soldierly conflict by his French superiors, reported to the Grand Duke after the first battle in which his regiment was involved (Durango, 31 October 1808): «Prisoners [...] we let go, contrary to the French orders to shoot them».²⁶

This proper behaviour on the part of the soldiers from Baden, of which there were many more examples worthy of mention in the subsequent course of the Peninsular War, was to be of no use to them in their dealings

²³ Nscherzählt von Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 18; auszugsweise zit. nach Rehtues (Grolmann), S. 146 ff.; Porbecks Relation; Rigel I 438 ff. Siehe auch Lang, S. 130 f.; Krieg, S. 10 f.

²⁴ Beide Zit. nach Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 63; siehe auch Karl Franz von Holzing: Meine Gefangennehmung in Spanien pp., Freiburg 1824, S. 7.

²⁵ Rigel I, S. 306, 322 f.; Krieg, S. 13 f.; Schaeffer, S. 54 f., 68, 116 f.; 136 f.

²⁶ Blankenhorn: 1808-1814, S. 18 nach Relation v. Porbecks u. Rigel I, S. 357 f.

with the Spanish populace. The troops from Baden were also subject to the collective hatred shown by the Spanish towards the foreign army of occupation. This was particularly true of the indiscriminating wrath of the inhabitants of the Spanish capital, who, with their insurrection on 2 May 1808 (Dos de Mayo), had given the signal for a general popular uprising. On the face of it, «peace» appeared to have been restored there to a limited extent after French troops had used their guns and sabres to crush the resistance and had started to carry out mass executions. In his painting «The Third of May», Francisco Goya captured immortally this national protest.²⁷

Soldiers from Baden became victims of the compulsory recruitment imposed upon their grand duke by Napoleon, especially in Madrid, which they had entered as part of the German Division on the order of the Emperor on 10 December 1808:

«In Madrid we were billeted in monasteries. Duty was hard, life was dear. [i.e. both economically, in terms of the cost of living; and physically, in other words it was dear to purchase = to stay alive; author's note] [...] The inhabitants made no secret of the hatred they felt for us. There were Spaniards who, upon seeing a Frenchman, were so overcome with rage that they plunged their dagger into his heart on the street without any provocation. Many of them were caught on the spot and were usually hanged without taking the look of silent contempt off their faces. Frenchmen who watched such executions — which were almost everyday occurrences — without adequate protection could at any second fall victim to the Spaniard's steel.

Like the other regiments, we lost NCOs and rank and file every day through assassination. For the whole of the forces occupying Madrid, casualties resulting from such attacks amounted to 30 to 40 men per day.»²⁸

Right at the start of the two-month period during which his troops were garrisoned in the Spanish capital, Colonel von Porbeck reported to his Grand Duke:

«Since leaving Karlsruhe, the regiment has actually lost at least 300 men, not in the face of the enemy, but stabbed secretly in the back.»²⁹

The regiment commander requested not only personnel replacements but also the provision of «[...] eight to ten drummers, [...] for the small boys from Rastatt have all been killed.»

²⁷ Herold, S. 207 f.

²⁸ Krieg S. 16 f.; Rigel I, S. 441 f., 463 (II, S 123); Lang, S. 131; Rehfuës Grolman), in: Friedrich Max Kircheisen: *Memoiren aus dem spanischen Freiheitskampfe 1808-1811*. Ludwig von Grolmann, Albert Jean, Michael Rocca, Hamburg 1908, S. 85 f., 150. Nacherzählung von Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 19 auszugsw. zit.

²⁹ Bericht Oberst v. Porbeck v. 15.12.1808 an Großherzog von Baden; dieses u. nachf. Zit. nach Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 19.

Here, the colonel was referring to the 12- to 16-year-old casualties from the II Battalion of his combined infantry regiment alone!

While the Baden infantry was, in late 1808/early 1809, still being called upon to perform guard duty in Madrid for King Joseph (Buonaparte) (10 December 1808 to 13 January 1809), the Baden, Hessian and Dutch artillery of the German Division had been consolidated - in a typically Napoleonic fashion - to form an artillery equipment park to cover the reconnaissance in force of the French I Corps under Marshal Lefebvre towards the Tagus.

To the south of the town of Almaraz, this torrential river, swollen by rainfall in late December 1808, cuts its course over a width of a few hundred meters through a range of rocks, at that time still spanned by two mighty stone arches of a medieval bridge. On 27 December 1808, Captain Lassolaye from Baden and his gunners stormed forwards across the bridge, which was blocked by obstacles, and, taking Spanish guns as trophies, formed a bridgehead on the enemy bank, thereby capturing this important key point on the military road from Madrid to the south: «With our sabres in our hands we rushed up the hill. Every one of us received from the Marshal [Lefebvre] two 6-lira pieces»³⁰, the much sought-after *douceur* money.

Just over two weeks later (13 January 1809), Napoleon had the bulk of his German division on the march to close off the other bridges across the Tagus and prevent them falling into enemy hands, thereby eliminating a potential threat to Madrid and creating favourable conditions for his planned offensive into the interior of the country which was designed to bring about a decision.

The situation in early 1809:

This was Napoleon's last operational general order issued directly in the Spanish theatre. Like in Egypt before (1799) and Russia later (1812), Napoleon had received intelligence that his position was threatened by a faction of his domestic opponents and by a politico-military strengthening of the powers in Central Europe, and had precipitately decided to depart for Paris (Astorga, 1 January 1809).

By leaving Spain for ever from Valladolid on 17 January 1809, Napoleon threw the *armee d'Espagne* which he left behind off its previously victorious course. During his personal control of all operations on the Iberian peninsula, between late October and early December 1808, he had inflicted upon the Spanish armies mobilized against him a series of annihilating defeats, because the Spanish had earlier not exploited their initial successes against the French army of occupation under Napoleon's brother Joseph, had not created a supreme military command despite the formation of a

³⁰Nach Rigel I, S. 488 f. u. Nl. Lasollaye (vgl. Anm. 14). Nacherzählt von Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 55 (Zit.), Lt. Rigel I, S. 492 fiel Lefebvre noch im Januar 1809 unter Napoleons Verdikt u. das Corps de Bade unter das Kommando von Marschall Victor.

central defence committee and had continued to leave control of the operations to the individual commanders of the provinces.

In addition to this disastrous regionalism on the Spanish side, there was the inadequate provision of assistance by the British, caused by the British parliament only making troops available in dribs and drabs and resulting from the lack of uniformity and rapidity of the operations, and finally due to the willingness in the British High Command to reach agreements. British historiographers have laid the blame at the door of the Spanish commanders, whom they accuse of being involved in rivalries and disputes and of losing time³¹. However, this should not obscure the fact that the French operations were directed uniformly and personally by a military genius³² such as Napoleon who was invincible for a long time, and that the Spanish army commanders were by no means the first nor the last to be routed by the military emperor. The British were to be the next.

While Napoleon, in the autumn of 1808, was still conducting his offensive across the Ebro towards the Spanish capital, a British expeditionary force commanded by Sir John Moore, followed by another force commanded by Sir David Baird, had marched into Spain from the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula in order to attack the open western flank of Napoleon, who was advancing south³³. Moore circumvented the difficult-to-pass mountainous terrain on a correspondingly long route, involving considerable loss of time, heading towards Salamanca, from where he intended to strike.

However, he encountered Napoleon, once again reacting as quick as a flash with a surprise parry by marching in a straight line with strike forces he had hastily gathered together and crossing the Guadarrama Pass in a howling snowstorm, so that Moore could only save himself from his doom by beating a hasty retreat. Moore won the race to Corunna —the port by which the British Expeditionary Force had only recently entered Spain, and which now unexpectedly became the port by which it left the country— although he had to leave behind 6,000 men of his force, who were eventually totally exhausted.

Moore's force and the remainder of the Spanish Army in Galicia were possibly saved by Napoleon's restlessness. He left the pursuit —which soon

³¹ Wohlfeil, S. 112; auch Herold, S. 210 ff. folgt Napier, Long, Oman.

³² Zum schließlich fruchtenden einzigen operativen Gegenmittel zur Bezwingung Napoleons vgl. Ernst-Heinrich Schmidt: «Zur Genesis des konzentrischen Operierens mit getrennten Heeresteilen im Zeitalter des ausgehenden Ancien Regime, der Französischen Revolution und Napoleons», in: *Ausgewählte Operationen und ihre militärhistorischen Grundlagen (=Operatives Denken und Handeln in deutschen Streitkräften; 4)*, hrsg. v. MGFA, Herford - Bonn 1993, S. 80 ff.

³³ Zu Moores Feldzug und den Folgen siehe Rigel I, S. 463 ff.; John F. Jones: *Geschichte des Krieges in Spanien, Portugal und dem südlichen Frankreich in den Jahren 1808 bis 1814*, Braunschweig 1844, S. 40 ff.

became less merciless and more circumspect—to his Marshal Soult because he deemed it more important that he should leave for Paris. The bold advance by the British, their arduous and bloody retreat and not least Moore's death in the face of the enemy provided British public opinion with a patriotic stimulus though no victory. The British Expeditionary Force had ended in a Dunkirk; but it was to return under Wellesley Wellington, and would eventually be victorious on the peninsula. Looked at superficially or in isolation, Moore's daring though unexpectedly short operation produces predominantly negative results. *Ex eventu*, however, this British intermezzo had a great effect. It marks the peripeteia of the Peninsular War: At a crucial moment for the Spanish/Portuguese/British cause, Moore's campaign had created an operational diversion with far-reaching consequences, a non-preplanned subsequent triumph of indirect strategy. If this diversion had not taken place, Napoleon the commander could have used this time to conquer the southern half of Spain and subjugate Portugal. As it was, Napoleon terminated his personal high command on the Iberian Peninsula halfway; the «god of battles» (Clausewitz) left the Spanish theatre on the periphery of his sphere of influence for ever, because his reputation as emperor called him back to Paris, and his reputation as the «usurper of Europe» called him back to the geographic centre of that continent, where there was once again unrest. By seeking to assert his position in both theatres in early 1809, he had to delegate to his subordinate commanders in Spain. In military terms, this meant an inexorable decline, and for the contingent of troops from Baden it spelt the prolongation of their self-sacrifice in the French *armee d'Espagne*.

**Between Tagus and Guadiana:
Almaraz - Mesas de Ibor/Val de Cañas - Medellin**

The geostrategic location of the Tagus valley —important for friend and foe alike— and possession of the few crossing sites leading over the wide river also determined the combat activities of the Baden Regiment in early 1809. In an approx. 100 km long section to the west of Talavera up to the confluence with the Tietar, the river, raging in a deeply incised bed of rocks, separated the armies of Victor and Cuesta. Here, the French marshal had several times committed his divisions, especially the already heavily decimated German Division, to mount futile and bloody thrusts³⁴. While Victor's uncoordinated offensive operations slackened, a British demolition party fighting with the Spanish troops had succeeded, in February 1809, in rendering the bridge at Almaraz useless—the only bridge whose width and

³⁴Über die wechsellvollen Kämpfe der Division Leval um die Tajo-Übergänge ab 10.2.1809 siehe Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 76-79, 83 ff.

load— bearing capacity permitted a river crossing with artillery, train columns and cavalry³⁵.

Deprived of his tactical capabilities for a direct offensive southwards to the Guadiana, Victor also found himself under pressure to succeed after receiving news from Portugal and Saragossa of French victories achieved by Marshals Soult and Lannes, who were competing with him for Napoleon's favour. Victor's decision to mount a 70 km wide river-crossing operation with a subsequent outflanking manoeuvre on the enemy-occupied southern bank of the Tagus in order to gain a bridgehead at Almaraz out of which the large-scale offensive towards La Cuesta was to be launched has rightly been called «foolhardy» and extremely «reckless», because it showed no pity towards the German vanguard³⁶. While the Divisions Lasalle, Vilatte and Ruffin would have to cross the Tagus upstream from Talavera *behind* the German Division Leval, the Cavalry Division Latour-Maubourg with all the mounted and travelling units of the corps were to stand by north of the bridge at Almaraz. The infantry of the German Division, which had dwindled to 3,400 riflemen, was to force a crossing of the river at Arzobispo *without* artillery or train, merely with four days' supply of ammunition and rusk, and, by means of a rapid thrust from the side in the spectacular labyrinth of rocks of the Sierra Guadalupe, turn the enemy's position, thereby opening a passage to Almaraz for the following divisions and enabling Latour-Maubourg to cross the bridge (which was to be restored in a makeshift fashion) without fighting.

Early on the morning of 15 March 1809, troops from Baden and Nassau crossed the only available, narrow bridge across the Tagus at Arzobispo - a bottleneck which, a few months later (3 August 1809), was to be the scene of a chaotic channelling of the combined troops of Wellington on his hasty retreat from Talavera³⁷. The Spanish forces in the mountain ranges south of the Tagus towards Almaraz were mopped up, leading to the engagement of the troops from Baden and Nassau at Mesas de Ibor and Val de Canas on 17/18 March 1809.

Although the French cavalry general Lasalle had warned only a few days earlier: «We must go easy on the brave Germans —when it comes to the crunch, it will hit them hardest»³⁸, the division commander, Leval, justified to the Commanding General, Marshal Victor, the choice of his vanguard for the two days of heavy mountain combat (17 and 18 March 1809) with the priority of convincing boldness:

³⁵ 15.02.1809; siehe ebd., S. 83; Sauzey, S. 68; Roeßler, S. 7 f.

³⁶ Zit. nach Lang, S. 131 u. Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 106; Darstellung nach dens.; siehe auch Roeßler, S. 7-9.

³⁷ Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 57; Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 107.

³⁸ Zit. nach Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 20.

“Hier vous avez vue Nassau, aujourd’hui je vous montrerai Baden.”³⁹

Colonel von Porbeck wrote the following description of the daring flank attack of the troops from Baden through swampy ravines, over crags or up to their belts through mountain torrents, through thorny scrub half as tall as a man, and finally the daredevil ascent between precipitous rocky beds towards the eyries developed by the Spanish on “summits like gigantic bastions”⁴⁰:

“The hail of bullets that lashed over our heads was not able to prevent us from storming up the mountain. The soldiers gave each other their hands in order to scale the steep rocky faces. The drummers beat their drums which they held above their heads, the music inspired us until the bullets distorted its notes;”

(3rd musical example: “Charge”, from the Napoleonic era)

“high ahead of us our colours waved in the wind. The Spanish fled in droves. They did not appear to have any desire to receive us breathless soldiers with vigour.”⁴¹

The rugged mountains echoed with the report and ricochets of small arms fire, the howling hail of grapeshot, impacting shells, the drumrolls of the drummers, cries of “vivat” by the attackers and the “usual Homeric heroic cries” of the Spanish, as well as the commands given by the officers who had to form their team time and again in the dispersed fighting⁴², such as when Colonel von Porbeck committed his regiment adjutant with two companies against the flank and rear of the Spanish entrenchment on the southern bank of the bridge at Almaraz:

“While our men were advancing with their bayonets and [...] during the hand-to-hand fighting, which scarcely lasted the length of a lord’s prayer, the French sappers on the other side of the river shouted their roaring vivat across to us; we ran onto the bridge, set about demolishing the barricade from two sides, and the brothers-in-arms embraced one another jubilantly.”⁴³

³⁹Zit. nach Wilhelm Isenbart: Geschichte des 2. Nassauischen Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 88, Berlin 1903, S. 43; Sauzey, p. 70; Lang, S. 132.

⁴⁰Nach dem äußerst plastischen Erlebnisbericht bei Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 108-118.

⁴¹Blankenhorn: 1808 - 1813, S. 20.

⁴²Georg Muhl: Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem Leben des Freiherrn C.R. von Schaeffer, Pforzheim 1840, S. 163 ff.; F. HerBenhahn: Antheil der Herzoglich Nassauischen Truppen am spanischen Kriege von 1808 bis 1814, Wiesbaden 1840, S. 43 ff.; Isenbart, S. 38 ff.; Rigel II, S. 163 ff.

⁴³Gefechtsbericht des Rgt.-Adj., Hptm. Krieg v. Hochfelden, verwertet bei Lang, S. 132. Zit. nach Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 115 f.; Rigel II, S. 180.

Marshal Victor's coup had thus come off - he had succeeded in routing without artillery the Spanish troops on the left bank of the Tagus, freeing a difficult route which could be used as a bypass and opening the crucial crossing site over the Tagus at Almaraz for the following French army corps.

This external success coincided with a barely concealed internal crisis in the so-called Franco-German brotherhood-in-arms. Already at an earlier stage, the "simple, brave man" (Holzing) and many of his commanders in the contingents from Nassau and Baden had, in serious cases, manifested their disgust at excesses committed by the adjacent units in the so-called German Division and, above all, by the other French divisions of their army corps⁴⁴. Since the initial engagements in the Basque Provinces, there had repeatedly been cases of unrestrained atrocities against the lives and property of non-combatants and merciless treatment of combatants⁴⁵, against which even the responsible division commanders and commanding generals were powerless⁴⁶ after they had all too often allowed acts of indiscipline and "the most incredible atrocities and excesses" to happen⁴⁷. The incidents during the "revenge march to Arenas" on the Tietar, led by the Chief of Staff of the Division Leval in the spring of 1809⁴⁸, which the Regiments Baden and Nassau had witnessed with horror until they protested against the punitive expedition, made it quite clear to every man just what fate awaited him should he fall into Spanish hands: cling together, swing together. The Spanish, fervent and unscrupulous in their patriotic fury, soon no longer made any distinction between Frenchmen and their Allies, who were mostly of German origin; they regarded them all as invaders and usurpers, and now also as cruel enemies of the nation. They could all bear witness to the massacre of a patrol of troops of Nassau, of

⁴⁴ Als deren Schandtaten den deutschen Rheinbundtruppen in die Schuhe geschoben wurden, galt - abermals - Marschall Victor persönlich als der Urheber, wogegen König Joseph einschritt; vgl. Rigel I, S. 272, danach Schaeffer, S. 199; Franz Joseph Adolf Schneidawind: Geschichte des Krieges auf der pyrenäischen Halbinsel unter Napoleon I pp., 16. Bändchen Darmstadt 1843, S. 55; Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 145.

⁴⁵ Namentlich seitens der 3. Brigade = Pariser Garde («wüster Pöbel», «Räuberbande»), 14. Dragoner-Rgt («wutende Racheengel», «grüne Teufel»), Divisionen Vilatte, Ruffin, Latour-Maubourg, Lasalle, Sebستاني; vgl. Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 38 ff.; 43, 47, 79 ff.; nachf. Zit. ebd., S.43. Rehfuës (Grolman), S. 236; Rigel I u. II passim; Schaeffer, S. 62, 81-83, 86, 140.

⁴⁶ Leval, Lefebvre, Soult, Victor, Sebastiani. Beispiele bei Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 44, 95; Rigel II, S. 151; Schneidawind XIV, S. 71 f.; Rehfuës (Grolman), S. 88 f.; Schaeffer, S. 62, 81 ff., 15c f.

⁴⁷ Scharfe Ordres Napoleons zur Wahrung der Manneszucht fruchteten nichts (vgl. Rigel I, S. 300; Rehfuës (Grolmanh), S. 107) - im Gegenteil erpreßten französische Soldaten ihre plünderungssüchtigen Generale (vgl. Schaeffer, S. 98, 177).

⁴⁸ Col. Allemand. Zu Arenas vgl. Anm. 46; Rigel II, S. 149 ff. u. 156 ff.; Krieg, S. 27 f.; Schneidawind XIV, S. 66 ff.; Rehfuës (Grolman~), S. 252 ff. - Zur Statuierung des schaurigen Exempels Arenas lakonisch Souzay, p. 68: «Un exemple etait necessaire, il fut terrible».

soldiers from Baden left behind wounded or sick, or excesses going as far as collective bloodlust, and they now grew indignant at any escalation of human violence if this was committed by the so-called sister divisions and, moreover, was brought about by the French commanders. The caustic reply by General von Schaeffer (Nassau, later Baden), who, even in the midst of the unleashed war, demanded strict discipline like von Porbeck and von Grolmann⁴⁹ and, only a few weeks before Victor's offensive across the Tagus, stated to a French superior that his bold soldiers were not suited to the duties of an executioner as they had been ordered⁵⁰, sheds a significant light on the compulsion to obey orders in the Corps Victor.

Another factor which placed a psychological burden on the morale of the troops was the constant overstraining of their physical strength as a result of being entrusted with the combat missions which were tactically most difficult and likely to involve heavy losses. As could be heard from the utterances of the French Generals Lasalle and Leval, the 1st Brigade (Regiments Baden and Nassau) had been the main contributor to the successful battles at Mesa de Ibor and Val de Canas. This is also evident from the corresponding report sent by Colonel von Porbeck to his sovereign:

“I am proud to command such a brave regiment. Not one man wavered. The French had left all the difficult work to us Germans alone.”⁵¹

Already during the two days of mountain combat, Marshal Victor had, in genuine Napoleonic fashion, several times expressed his gratitude to the attack groups from Nassau and Baden for their “bravour” and had promised them that he would submit a commendatory report to the Emperor and that they would be rewarded with the legion of Honour⁵². Whether this time such praise and promises still had the desired effect of rousing the struggling troops cannot be ascertained for certain. A few days later, Marshal Victor, Duke of Bellano, inspected the troops in the same style, which he had copied from Napoleon. One soldier participating in the campaign recalled with striking disparagement that during Victor's victory parade “orders of the day were read out with a genuine Gallic rapture”⁵³.

This contemptuous reminiscence of Victor's review of the troops was merely a mild form of expression for the serious and —as it was to turn

⁴⁹Schneidewind XIV, S. 69; R. Kolb: Unter Nassaus Fahnen. Geschichte des Herzoglich Nassauischen Officiercorps 1803-66, Wiesbaden 1904, S. 25.

⁵⁰Schaeffer, S. 189; Rehfuß (Grolmann), S. 233; Schneidewind XIV, S. 286 f.; Holzinger, S. 80. ihm «Befehlsnotstand» bei den «Vernichtungsaktionen» siehe auch Hans Leopold Zollner: Grenadiere gegen Guerillas. Badener unter Napoleon in Spanien, ms Man Ettligen für SDR 2 (1989), Zit. S. 5.

⁵¹Bericht Porbecks nach 17./18.3.1809, zit. nach Blankenhorn: 1808/18J4, S. 20.

⁵²Lang, S. 132; Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 111.

⁵³Zit. nach Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 121.

out— no longer healable downturn in the mood of the German fighters in Spain vis-a-vis their French commanders. Immediately before, during the capture of Trujillo (20 March 1809), French formations and the commanders of the Corps Victor had added further excesses to their series of war atrocities, which their German ally had already disapproved of most strongly. During this operation, they had employed the Regiments Baden and Nassau as a security cordon on the approaches to the town, so that they could assault the inhabitants and their property all the more unrestrainedly behind this screen⁵⁴.

When, a few days later, the parade ground south of Trujillo echoed with the cries of “vive l’empereur” from the Corps Victor, the Regiment Baden responded with three cheers for their sovereign, Grand Duke Charles Frederick. The marshal not only countered this demonstrative affront directly with a visible expression of annoyance; at the next opportunities, he refused the infantry from Baden fixed billets and directed them to towns and villages which they first had to capture from the enemy.⁵⁵ In the opinion of the troops from Baden, who considered themselves along with the troops from Nassau to be the true victors of Mesa de Ibor and Val de Canas and did not wish to be compared to the French Army, some of the phrases used by Victor and Leval in their orders of the day⁵⁶ gave grounds for further alienation:

“[...] Son Excellence se fera un devoir de faire connaitre a Sa Majeste l’Empereur et Roi que les troupes de la confederation du Rhin rivalisent de gloire avec celles de la Grande Armee.”

The judgment expressed herein, to the effect that the German soldiers could now be considered the equals of the French and were praised as their worthy emulators, led to an open éclat at the divisional HQ in the encampment at Trujillo. There, Colonel von Porbeck dared —against the background of the most recent “abominable acts” committed by the French— to disassociate himself mentally from the “French ruling power”:

“[...] he would be ashamed if the worst German soldier were not full of eagerness to excel the best French soldier!”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Rigel II, S. 188 f.; Rehfuës (Grolmann), S. 252 ff.; Schaeffer, S. 176 ff.; Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 118 f. - Heute Trujillo, ca. 40 Marschkilometer südl. Almaraz/Tajo.

⁵⁵ Dufner - Greif (Holzin), S. 123 f. Rigel II, S. 196 begründet mit weiterer Mißstimmung. Über die zeitgleichen «fortwährenden Zurücksetzungen» durch die Franzosen und die «nach und nach wachsende Entfremdung» bei den Rheinbundtruppen siehe auch Guillaume Bernays: Schicksale des Großherzogthums Frankfurt und seiner Truppen. Eine kulturhistorische Studie aus der Zeit des Rheinbundes. Berlin 1882, S. 96.

⁵⁶ Gegeben am 21.3.1809 im Hauptquartier zu Truxillo, abgedr. bei Rigel II, S. 192 f., Schneidawind XIV, S. 302 f. Hergenhausen, S. 55; Souzay, p. 71; Zit. nach Lang, S. 132.

⁵⁷ Zit. nach Dufner-Greif (Holzing), S. 122.

However, such stirrings of inner rebellion in the Corps de Bade against their French allies were to have no effect, as was illustrated by the mass shootings of Spanish prisoners ordered by Marshal Victor⁵⁸ and the harassment of the population of Medellin.

With the seizure of the bridge at Almaraz and the formation of a large bridgehead on the southern bank of the Tagus extending to Trujillo, the gate to the Guadiana was wide open. Behind the enemy, who was not putting up vigorous resistance anywhere, the Corps Victor penetrated into the plains of the Estremadura, where it was awaited near the town of Medellin on 28 March 1809 by the Spanish General Cuesta with 33,000 infantrymen, 7,000 cavalrymen and 30 artillery pieces. This was yet another of the hastily raised regional Spanish armies, the bulk of which consisted of an inadequately trained and equipped body of recruits, and which comprised only a very small number of battle-tested units, including foreign troops (Swiss, Walloons). The following account of the Battle of Medellin, which was won after a few hours by the numerically only half as strong Corps Victor (17,000 men), was written by a combatant from Baden, based on his personal experience:

“In the Battle of Medellin, the Spanish wore yellow-and-red ribbons on their hats on which was written: ‘We triumph or die for King Ferdinand.’ Over an immeasurable width, at a slow pace and in an imposing posture they climbed down the hills, many many thousands of them, mostly militiamen, but including a few active Spanish and Swiss regiments, led by 7,000 cavalrymen, who were supposed to send the French to their graves in the vast plains of the Guadiana. When, after a brief engagement, the scales appeared to be tilting in our favour, the mass of numerically far superior enemies, who had been thrown against us haphazardly, lost all their powers of resistance. In a bloody pursuit we wreaked terrible vengeance on the cruelty of this nation. With bayonets, sabres, marking pins and cleaning rods we also killed fleeing wounded men and prisoners. When the rainy night gave way to the light of day, the battlefield strewn with corpses was a gruesome sight. Eight days later, we Germans were given the task of clearing the battlefield. It was a awful job to have to clean the earth covered with piles of bodies: the air was heavy with plague and there was a terrible stench. Hordes of vultures joined in our work of obliterating the traces of that bloody 28th March. [...] The lot of the wounded was dreadful. There was no medical care on either side. We saw a Walloon who had had both hands cut off and one foot shattered. [...] We met many more unfortunate beings who were put to death by a barbaric compassion.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Rigel II, S. 209 f.; Schaeffer, S. 189; Schneidawind XIV, S. 288; Dufner-Greif (Holzing), S. 131.

⁵⁹ Auszugsweise zit. aus Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 21; siehe auch Rigel II, 195 ff., 209 f.,-216; Rrieg, S. 48 ff.; Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 89, 123 ff.; Lang, S. 113; Hergenahhn, S. 58 ff.-Isenbart, S. 46 ff.; Kolb, ~.28 f.; Schaeffer, S. 184 ff.; Schneidawind XIV, S.266 ff.; Bernays, S. 88 f.

In essence, the combat experience of the troops from Baden in the French *armee d'Espagne* was similar to the events on the other battlefields in Spain: "The god of war" (Napoleon), the Napoleonic artillery, with its massed and mobile employment, had, by means of fire concentration, badly shaken the Spanish units—attacking without a main effort and thrown into the battle one after the other—every time before the direct clash of the opposing armies. Thereupon, the inexperienced Spanish regional units, hit by the force of Victor's French attack columns had streamed back in panic without seeking support from the active and foreign units that were offering resistance and withdrawing with them in an orderly fashion, with the result that they also dragged these "towers" and "islands" in the battle into ruin with them. This scene is remarkable in the history of war: the German infantry battalions attacked the Spanish cavalry—which had been terrified by the wild cries of victory and by all the drummers of the division beating their drums—with their weapons of cold steel and routed it along with the infantry.

The outcome of the 28th of March 1809 at Medellin:

Marshal Claude Victor, with his 17,000 battle-tested soldiers, facing an enemy that was numerically twice as strong, had won a victory within a few hours. 20,000 Spanish soldiers had been killed, around 4,000, most of them seriously wounded, had been taken prisoner. The French corps had lost barely 1,000 men, and the Regiment Baden had only a few men wounded. But here, too, the successes were not exploited⁶⁰. In none of the regions in which they had achieved tactical successes did the subordinate French commanders manage to mount an operational pursuit in the style of Napoleon with the aim of totally annihilating the enemy forces neither Victor on the Tagus in the province of Estre, nor, at roughly the same time 180 km further east, General Sebastiani after his victory at Ciudad Real in La Mancha, nor Soult in Galicia and on the lower reaches of the Duero in northern Portugal.

As a result, the Spanish, and with them the Portuguese, were able, despite their heavy defeats and losses, to replenish the remnants of their beaten army with freshly levied conscripts, who were quickly recruited in the unoccupied southwest and south of the peninsula. And once again, their unflagging national resistance received British support.

On 22 April 1809, Sir Arthur Wellesley had landed at Lisbon for the second time, thereby launching for that year a further, very turbulent campaign on the Iberian Peninsula, which, for the troops from Baden, was to lead to a series of brilliant battles without a final victory and, for the

⁶⁰Rigel II, S. 220 f.; Schneidawind XV, S. 16; Sauzay, p. 73; Hergenhausen, S. 66; v. Roßler: Studien über den Spanischen Unabhängigkeitskrieg, Berlin 1888, S. 9; Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 134 f., 138.

British-Portuguese-Spanish coalition, ended in a temporary collapse of their high strategic expectations in this theatre. For while it is true that the thrifty British Secretary of War, Castlereagh, had dispatched in Wellesley a general who was familiar with the locality and acknowledged to be circumspect, the expeditionary force numbered a mere 25,000 men. Compared with the French army of occupation of 200,000 men, this figure was still too low even if we go along with Castlereagh's view that "every British infantryman was worth two Frenchmen" and "the remaining Portuguese and Spanish troops were available as additional cannon fodder". Indeed the power-political ideas in the anti-Napoleonic coalition as to who should actually assist whom in this theatre were very different and selfish. The Portuguese, recently defeated by Soult at Oporto, still numbered 16,000 regulars and militiamen. The Spanish refused to participate in uniform coalition warfare under Wellesley's high command and stuck to their previous uncoordinated operations with individual detachments or armies left to their own devices⁶¹.

Locally, Wellesley was initially successful. He surprised Soult who, after capturing and sacking Oporto, and although his powerful operational army faced a Portuguese field army that was hardly worthy of the name, had not ventured any further into the interior of Portugal, because Spanish insurgents had cut off his lines of communication to the rear. Since Marshal Ney, who was in Galicia, had not helped him in mopping up the hinterland, Soult felt compelled to abandon northern Portugal under the pressure of Wellesley, first seeking to link up with the Corps Ney and then, with this corps, carrying out retaliation in Galicia and Asturias. Wellesley thus knew that Portugal was safely in his possession and —for the time being— that two French corps were tied down by guerrilla warfare in northwestern Spain when, in late May 1809, he advanced eastwards across the Portuguese border and entered the Spanish province of Estremadura. Given the dithering, wait-and-see attitude of the French Commander-in-Chief, King Joseph, who did not manage to achieve operational interaction between the units of his army corps and gave free rein to the rivalries among his marshals, it was now the turn of Marshal Victor who, left to his own devices, withdrew in the face of Wellesley and sought to link up with the main body of the *armee d'Espagne* to the west of Madrid.

Thus, the German Division, and with it the contingent of troops from Baden, was drawn into this game of dominoes —i.e. the troop movements of the major formations in the western part of the Iberian square— when Victor led his corps out of the mountain ranges south of the Tagus (which had been captured only a short time before after heavy fighting) back across

⁶¹ Zit., Darstellung u. Zahlenangaben nach Herold, S. 218 f., der die wesentlich aus Hannoveranern u. Braunschweigern bestehende Kerntuppe der Deutschen Legion des Königs von England (King's German Legion) nicht erwähnt.

the river heading northwards. After exceedingly strenuous mountain marches and the crossing of the bridge of ships which had in the meantime been constructed at Almaraz, however, the time gained was not to be used for rest and preparation for the decisive battle against the approaching Wellesley. Rather, the troops were ordered by the French to collect taxes for King Joseph, using their bayonets as threatening instruments, and to take retaliatory measures against the local Spanish population who, only a short time before, had "brutally slaughtered" a detachment of Westphalian dragoons after pretending to be hospitable and providing them with billets⁶².

Digression:

In the rugged mountainous terrain of La Vera and the Sierra de Gredos lying north of the Rio Tietar which runs parallel to the Tagus (roughly on the level of Almaraz-Arzobispo-Talavera), the Regiments Baden, Nassau and Holland, which had been selected for special operations and were commanded by Leval, were involved in the kind of total national war that was characterized by atrocities on the part of the Spanish guerrillas that were so heinous as to be almost unrepeatable as well as by ruthless reprisals and retaliatory measures on the part of the French army of occupation. As described above, troops from Baden, understandably enraged by the fact that their fellow soldiers had been killed behind their backs, had, on the battlefield at Medellin (28 March 1809), dashed forward "in bloody pursuit and wreaking terrible vengeance on the atrocities committed by the Spanish people"⁶³.

When the Corps de Bade was detached on the Tietar and sent towards Arenas and other towns and villages to mount an indiscriminate campaign of extermination, its commanders largely placed the dictates of humanity above the categorical imperative of discipline, i.e. unconditional subordination to the French high command. This is borne out by the final notes made in his diary by the sensitive and idealistically minded commander of the 1st Battalion, Major Ludwig von Grolman—who had been recalled home immediately after this pacification mission to assume a higher position:

"[...] ill-fated blood-stained country! I too helped to augment thy misery, but I did not mock thee. I too helped to shed the blood of thy sons, but *in honourable combat, in the open feud of men* who spare the defenceless and the weak! *My eyes* did not remain innocent of murder

⁶² Über den Meuchelmord an den hessischen Chevaulegers vgl. Rigel II, S. 154; Schaeffer, S. 146; Rehfuës (Grolmann), S. 247 ff.; Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 89 u. 97 f.; Lang, S. 132. Zit. nach Blankenhorn: 1808 1813, S. 42 f.

⁶³ Das Meucheln Zurückgebliebener hatte den Spanienfeldzug von Anfang an bestimmt, siehe u.a. Rehfuës (Grolmann), S. 87 f.). - Von Cuestas Armee war vorher ruchbar geworden, daß sie sich darauf eingeschworen hatte, kein Pardon zu geben - was sie auch bei der erfolgverheißenden ersten Schlachtphase tat. Vgl. Kolb, S. 29; Isenbart, S. 48 u. 5c; Schaeffer, S. 187 f.; Krieg, S. 59; Schneidawind XIV, S. 282; Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 126; Bernays, S. 93.

and fire, but my conscience did. I once again extend my *innocent* hand for reconciliation, and forgive even thy assassins, who more than once tried to put an end to my life”⁶⁴.

Grolman’s successor as commander of the 1st Battalion, “Captain [Leopold] von Holzinger, who was always doing us credit”, as his regiment commander reported⁶⁵, disobeyed orders in a little town on the Tagus and spared “inhabitants and their dwellings from bloody, blazing retaliation”⁶⁶, for which the prior of a nearby monastery presented him with his pectoral cross and spoke the following words of thanks: “Blessed be the warrior who continues to be a human being”⁶⁷. After all, since the French invasion, monks, clergymen and bishops had shown themselves to be leaders in the Spanish popular uprising, reading out the most martial of junta directives from the pulpit and even taking up arms themselves.

A Hanoverian serving with the British, who was to clash with the troops from Baden at Talavera immediately after they had carried out their pacification mission, noted in his diary:

“He who would conquer Spain must have the clergy as his friends, otherwise he will never manage it! The French have realized this. Although they have strung up or shot several thousand of the caste and burned down their monasteries and hideouts, they have not accomplished anything. We British have only found mercy in their eyes to the extent that they have forbidden the peasants to cut our throats like they do to the French —[...] Even we British faced such harm”⁶⁸.

Guerrilla warfare and the imposed compulsion to mount revenge campaigns were so abhorrent to the soldiers from Baden who were directly affected that they regarded the pitched battle as the lesser evil of their obligation to perform military service⁶⁹.

The next clash of the opposing armies designed to bring about a decision was to take place as early as July 1809 immediately following Marshal Victor’s pacification action and withdrawal in the face of Wellesley.

⁶⁴ Andere Beispiele für die schonende Behandlung durch Grolmann vgl. Rehfuß, S. 299; Dufner - Greif (Holzinger), S. 80, 99. - Hervorhebungen durch Verf.

⁶⁵ Zit. nach Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 45 aus Berichten des Oberst v. Porbeck.

⁶⁶ So Blankenhorn a.a.O., S. 46. Ungenannt «in einem Städtchen an den Ufern des Tajo» nach C.V. Sommerlatt (Hrsg.): Züge deutschen Muthes und Hochsinns pp., Erster Teil, Basel 1820, S. 134 ff.

⁶⁷ Sommerlatt S. 135, 138. - Siehe auch Lesebuch für Unteroffiziere und Soldaten des Großherzoglich Badischen Armeekorps, Karlsruhe 1824, S. 241-282; Dufner - Greif (Holzinger), S. 99 -102.

⁶⁸ Hannöverscher Kriegskommissar Schaumann, zit. bei Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 71 u. 26.

⁶⁹ Bericht Porbecks v. 14.4.1808 an Großherzog von Baden, abgedr. bei Blankenhorn: 1808-1813, S. 21 - Daß die «braven Badener der teuflischen Henkereie müde» waren und sich im Befehlsnotstand befanden, schildert Dufner - Greif (Holzinger), S. 89 - 102 beispielhaft.

Talavera: Brilliant Military Feats but no Decision

In order to avoid the risk of being intercepted and held at bay by Wellesley, or at the very least so as not to have to fight alone, Marshal Victor had first abandoned the Estremadura and, by July 1809, had already almost fallen back on the main French army which was assembling 100 km southwest of Madrid when he turned about with his corps and launched a surprise counterstroke against La Cuesta's newly created army. La Cuesta, with over 30,000 Spanish troops most of whom had only recently been recruited, had joined up - geographically at least - with Wellesley's 20,000 men at Oropesa on 25 July 1809. However, he had not been willing to agree to Wellesley's operational idea of a double-sided envelopment of Victor before the French main body had approached⁷⁰ thereby allowing Victor to get away yet again (to Torrijas), while he himself had ventured forward too far frontally and in an uncoordinated manner. However, Victor's stroke had only sufficed to push Cuesta back frontally and not to achieve total victory over the Spanish detachment, which had got into a considerable panic and fled but had been covered tolerably well in its hasty retreat by a British reserve division dispatched by Wellesley⁷¹. Cuesta had paid for his proud refusal, between 22 and 26 July 1809, to keep an eye on Wellington's superior dispositions for an enveloping attack on Victor and ultimately for the latter's repulse out of a favourable position with a humiliating setback at Torijos and had forfeited a sweeping operational success which the Allies could in the meantime have achieved.

And the inordinately ambitious Victor had, without agreement with King Joseph, mounted an advance attack in order to win the victor's laurels alone - "not a good omen for the next day [27/28 May], as the advancing marshal seemed yet again to want to act on his own authority."⁷² With his desire to gain status and his fiery aggressiveness, Marshal Victor, like most of Napoleon's commanders, was "an advocate of the most dashing, most ruthless offensive and totally indifferent to any losses he suffered in the process"⁷³.

On the day before and the day of Talavera, too, the marshal had only his tactical success of the moment in mind; he did not show any far-

⁷⁰Kritik an Cuestas Fähigkeiten zum Feldherrn währten seit Anbeginn seines Kommandos, vgl. Rigel I, S. 306. Spannungen Cuesta - Wellington vor u. nach Talavera siehe Westmorland: *Erinnerungen aus den ersten Feldzügen des Herzogs von Wellington in Portugal und Spanien*, Berlin - London 1843, S. 50 f., D.S. Daniell: *Fourth Hussars. The History of a British Cavalry Regiment*, London 1959, p. 80; Jones, S. 82; S...: «Die Schlacht bei Talavera am 27. und 28. Juli 1809», in: *Militär-Wochenblatt*, 94. Jg. 1909, N° 94, Sp. 2126; Roeßler, S. 10; Rigel II, S. 293; Schneidawind XVI, S 136 ff., 150 f.

⁷¹Rigel II, 293 f.; Schneidawind XVI, S. 246 ff.

⁷²Zit. Rigel II, S. 294.

⁷³So Roeßler, S. 7. Beispiele für die taktisch-operativen Führungsschwächen von Victor u. Leval «mehr Bravour als Einsicht», siehe Schaeffer, S. 119 f., 141 ff., 148 (Zit.)

sightedness for a higher operational idea and was certainly not prepared to interact for the “concert of arms” in King Joseph’s armée du midi. Marshal Victor had neither had the pursuit taken up, nor had he given chase with the forces at his disposal to the incoherent Allied disposition, which was already in a state of disorder on the right, i.e. Spanish wing; nor had he reported the favourable situation to the nearby high command and the closely following French main body⁷⁴.

The latter had also included, since the previous day (25 May 1809), the IV Corps commanded by General Sebastiani with the Confederation of the Rhine Division⁷⁵, which had been rushed to Toledo in energy-sapping forced marches in the heat⁷⁶, from where, echeloned on the left, it had followed Victor’s attack on Torrijos on 26 May. Since, therefore, neither King Joseph and his Chief of the General Staff Jourdan nor the IV Corps under Sebastiani received information and details to enable them to get a picture of the enemy situation, they judged the Spanish cavalry units appearing sporadically ahead of the left-hand French army columns to be the organized enemy rear guard. Under such erroneous assumptions, the commanders several times ordered their troops to change direction and to assume their battle order; in an area march through cornfields, over ditches and hedges, the Corps Sebastiani lost not only “the best time to put the sword between the ribs of Cuesta’s armies”⁷⁷, but also lost combat power. In blazing sunshine “up to forty degrees”⁷⁸, the natural consequences were numerous men dropping out of the march and a general state of exhaustion, as the sources from Baden unanimously complain.

On the eve of the Battle of Talavera, the Corps de Bade —which had once again not been provided with rations or medical support by the French intendance— was not very encouraged as it reviewed the events of the past few days, although it had “been burning with impatience for the clash” when it had set out on the morning of this 26 July. Only the voltigeurs had been involved in skirmishes with a few Spanish cavalymen; the infantry of the German Division, which had deployed in vain on the order of Leval, had “not seen any sign of the [enemy]”, but they had heard with satisfaction of

⁷⁴ Lt. Schaeffer, S. 198 war Victor bereits am 24.6. von König Joseph gerügt worden, da er diesen ohne Meldung ließ.

⁷⁵ Schon am 22.5.1809 war die Deutsche Division (Leval) aus dem I. Korps (Victor) ausgeschieden und am 21.6. unter das Kommando von General Sebastiani’s IV. Korps (ehem. Lefebvre) getreten; vgl. Rigel II 253; Sauzey, p. 74 note 16.

⁷⁶ Zu den tagelangen «Hin- und Contre-Märschen» unter Gepäck vgl. Rigel II, S. 294; Schaeffer, S. 199 f., Schneidawind XVI, S. 152 Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 147 ff.

⁷⁷ Zit. nach Schneidawind XVI, S. 152. Zum zeit- u. kräftezehrenden Anmarsch durch ständiges Deployieren unter Sonnenglut, siehe Rigel II, S. 294 ff., Krieg 72 f., 75; Schaeffer, S. 201 f.

⁷⁸ Dieses u. nachf. Zit. nach Dufner-Greif (Holzing), S. 149, 148 u. Anm. 76).

the combat success of the Westphalian chevaulegers over Spanish cavalry on the very terrain 15 km before Talavera⁷⁹ which had been assigned as night camp to the troops from Baden as well as the entire army of King Joseph.

On the other side⁸⁰, Wellington was prompted by Cuesta's obstinacy and defeat and compelled by the approach of the French main body to assume a defensive posture. With his eye for favourable terrain, the selection and occupation of dominating positions, with his dispositions for the artillery, for the positioning of reserves to hold crucial terrain areas, Wellesley once more proved to be a master of tried-and tested patterns of the 18th century war of art.⁸¹ To this end, Wellesley first pushed Victor's rear guard—which was withdrawing eastwards anyway—out of the elevated terrain sectors extending from the right bank of the Tagus north of Talavera de la Reina over a distance of approx. 6 km to the mighty mountain ranges which bound the Tagus Valley in the north.

Wellesley then assumed his *ordre de bataille* along these slopes north of Talavera and along the dominating foothills on the edge of the mountains of the Tagus Valley. From this elevated perimeter position, Wellesley had a perfect overview both of his own linear and echeloned-in-depth disposition and towards the enemy in an easterly direction towards the gently undulating terrain affording poor cover⁸² through which—parallel to Wellesley's dispositions—the Alberche flowed at a distance of just under 5 km. The prudent Wellesley had entrusted the Spanish, who lacked battle practice, with the task of covering the right wing at Talavera up to the Tagus⁸³ and, with his numerically weaker but battle-tested British troops, had taken up the central position, which was favourable for defensive operations and from which the *glacis* could be controlled by sight and fire.

Within 24 hours, Wellesley had, with circumspection, done all that was necessary in the main position. With methodical foresight, he had achieved quite a bit more, namely by pushing the infantry-heavy British rear guard under General Mackenzie across the Alberche.

The first acquaintance that the troops from Baden made with British troops involved the Baden light infantry, which had fanned out and was

⁷⁹Die hessischen Dragoner vom I. Korps (Victor) am 26.7.1809 mittags bei Santa Olalla; siehe Rigel II. S. 294; Schneidawind XVI, S. 147, 152; Dufner-Greif (Holzing), S. 148 f.

⁸⁰Bei Waterloo sollte Wellington formulieren: «beyond the hill»; Schneidawind XVI, S. 149.

⁸¹Michael Howard: *Der Krieg in der europäischen Geschichte. Vom Ritterheer zur Atomstreitmacht*, München 1981, S. 120; Hans Delbrück: *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte*, 4. Teil, Berlin 1962, S. 514. - Dank «Lord Wellesley [...] befand sich die Armee der Alliierten in der glücklichen Lage, sich gleich wirksam in der Defensive schlagen zu können, als, gegebenenfalls zum Angriff überzugehen». Zit. Kolb, S. 31.

⁸²Prägnante Geländebeschreibung bei Jones, S. 83 f.; Hergenbahn, S. 80 f.; Schneidawind XVI, S. 153 ff.

⁸³Schneidawind, ebd.; Frobenius, S. 652; *Militär-Wochenblatt* 1909, Sp. 2127.

advancing ahead of the left wing of the *armée du midi*⁸⁴. However, this did not happen until a few hours after I Corps on the right wing of the French Army had already engaged the British in several fierce encounters. The fact that the Corps de Bade—which was after all at the front of IV French Corps—was not to experience real contact with Wellesley's troops until the second day of the battle (28 July 1809), but then all the more severely, was one of the salient features of the incoherent way in which King Joseph commanded his army. Commenting on this, a member of Wellington's entourage said that there had seldom been such a strange battle⁸⁵.

After the exceedingly strenuous and, moreover, slow march in the heat on 26 July and the night camp near Santa Olalla, King Joseph had, as early as 5 o'clock on the following morning, advanced his army further towards the Alberche and Talavera⁸⁶. This movement of troops once again took place, as "everything was prepared for battle, [...] strictly with closed-up columns"⁸⁷; from noon onwards, under the blazing heat of the sun, conditions became unbearably sultry for the infantrymen marching with their rifles, 60 cartridges and heavy kit bags⁸⁸, and they "often halted, to get more intelligence on the enemy, as a result of which they did not make very fast progress"⁸⁹. Thus, the arduousness and all the tactical *malaise of the area march on the previous day were initially to be continued*: "They said we were looking for the enemy; but it seemed as though we were looking for the way", were the subsequent, ironic words of a combatant from Baden⁹⁰. The observer of warfare in a Napoleonic army is amazed at such premature and thoroughly unnecessary wastage of combat power in the face of an imminent battle which was to bring about a decision. But it was no longer the *armée d'Espagne* under the personal command of the Military Emperor Napoleon Buonaparte, with its constantly maintained tactical reconnaissance and long-range operational reconnaissance to obtain an early and serviceable picture of the enemy situation, but rather the army commanded deficiently by King Joseph Bonaparte and his undynamic Chief of the General Staff, Jourdan. Thus, the Army High Command kept its mighty cavalry on a tight rein and divided it up for deployment between the two infantry corps—Victor on the right and Sebastiani on the left—as well as on the flanks, closely

⁸⁴ Hierbei handelt es sich um die beiden badischen Voltigeur-Kompanien im kombinierten - aus den nationalen Kontingenten der Deutschen Division gebildeten - Voltigeur-Btl. (Plänkler).

⁸⁵ Westmorland, S. 61.

⁸⁶ Schaeffer, S. 202; Schneidawind XVI, S. 157; Dufner - Greif (Holzing), S. 149.

⁸⁷ Zit. Schaeffer, S. 202.

⁸⁸ Schilderung nach Dufner-Greif (Holzing), S. 147.

⁸⁹ Ebd., S. 149; Zit. nach Schaeffer, S. 202.

⁹⁰ Zit. Rigel II, S. 295 über den 26.7.1809.

followed by the foot-soldiers. It is possible that the French generals did not want to employ the bulk of their cavalry until the infantry had cleared the way⁹¹.

Right from the beginning, things were not to work out this way, because, although a few inroads were achieved in the steadfast British infantry, it was never possible to achieve a breakthrough, and because whenever a crisis appeared to be looming in the battle, the British commander skilfully directed cavalry to the focal points in a timely fashion and launched counterattacks with local superiority. Here, Wellesley employed his artillery—which, compared with the French artillery, was inferior in terms of numbers and calibre—in a manner that was so agile and suited to the situation that it was possible to achieve extremely effective massing of fire every time⁹².

When, around noon on 27 July, the French cavalry, ahead of the far-advanced right wing of the army, for the first time started to show themselves to the British, who had pushed forward their rear guard on the plain beyond the west bank of the Alberche, the British commander, Mackenzie, ordered the correct sequence for withdrawal, but in doing so underestimated the time factor. While the French cavalry, conscious of their numerical superiority, immediately dashed forward, Hanoverian cavalry elements of the King's German Legion, who had anyway been checked by a mishap, found themselves compelled to come to blows with the French vanguard while they were still in the riverbed, in order to cover the reassumption of the combat formation, for which elements of the British infantry had arrived late following their river crossing. Remarkably, the French cavalry did not dare to cross the Alberche with the bulk of their forces, but waited for their foot-soldiers to move up. The voltigeurs were quickly in place, closely followed and immediately incorporated by the vanguard of the Corps Victor. For the marshal had immediately ordered the Division Lapisse, at the spearhead of his troops advancing in division columns, to launch an attack on the move against the withdrawing British covering forces.

This tactical offensive method, practised many times on the French side and so far always successful against Spanish formations, initially proceeded in its customary flowing movements. Its assault columns waded swiftly through the shallow Alberche and, despite precisely placed defensive fire, fell upon Mackenzie's rear guard with such vehemence that they almost bowled over a brigade, and even separated it from its adjacent brigade. It was only possible to reestablish a coherent conduct of operations—which had been lost at times—by means of “speed and precision, with [...] the old regiments of the division forming up [...] and

⁹¹ So Rigel II, S. 296 f. u. Schneidawind XVI, S. 158.

⁹² B.P. Hughes: *Feuerwaffen. Einsatz und Wirkung 1630-1850*, Thun 1980, S. 138.

re-establishing order”⁹³. Wellesley, who was located at an exposed position (Casa de Salinas) to observe the enemy when the bulk of the French infantry unexpectedly broke forth, and who only just escaped capture during this raid⁹⁴, was all the more able to master this surprise because he checked the rapid advance of the French vanguard with the help of his cavalry reserve (General Payne). Under the cover of four cavalry regiments, the rearguard now withdrew, “in best order, although with difficulty”⁹⁵, and having lost among many others their division commander, via the plain to their designated disposition behind the foremost battlefront of the British.

During the afternoon of 27 July, Marshal Victor extended his right wing northwards for the first time, in order to exploit his initial success more effectively. The terrain, on which he was impatiently striving for a decisive outcome to the battle and for his victory, was familiar to him from earlier⁹⁶. When Victor espied British troops —initially only— on the plain between the earthworks on the Alberche —a redoubt that was still being fortified at the junction between the Spanish and British battlefronts— and the southeastern slopes of the hilltops of the Cerro de Medellin rising here to the west of the Alberche, he immediately saw this hill as the commanding height, the possession of which would decide the outcome of the battle: for Wellesley as the key to the entire Anglo-Spanish line of defence; for the French as an outstanding terrain position and at the same time a pivot from which it would be possible to roll up the Allied position and bring about its collapse. What the French marshal could not have known when he decided to seize the Medellin hill that was inadequately occupied by the British was that there, at roughly the same time, following Wellesley’s dispositions, elements of the rear guard (Mackenzie Division) that had since been incorporated and of the King’s German Legion, among others, were starting to occupy this elevated position.

Before the afternoon of 27 July was over, Victor had established two important prerequisites for unhinging the British battle formation on its northern wing by attacking from a northeasterly direction. First, he secured for himself the Cerro de Cascajal, a hill directly opposite the Cerro de Medellin, but not as high or steep as that on the British side, and separated from the latter by a distance of at least 500 m and the valley of the Alberche. *On this commanding height (for the French side) of the Cerro de Cascajal,*

⁹³ Vorherige Darstellung u. Zit. nach Schneidawind, XVI, S. 160 f. (unter Berufung auf englische Quellen); Bernhard Schwertfeger: Geschichte der Königlich Deutschen Legion 1803-1816, I. Bd., Hannover u. Leipzig 1907; Adolf Pfannkuche: Die-Königlich deutsche Legion 1803-1816, Hannover 1926.

⁹⁴ Schneidawind XVI, S. 160 unter Berufung auf Moyle Sherer: Military Memoirs, vol I, p. 223.

⁹⁵ Schneidawind XVI, S. 161.

⁹⁶ Schneidawind XVI, S. 158.

Victor concentrated his 30 heavy guns to form a “grand battery” in keeping with the traditional method of employment of French artillery at that time—but only following the pattern, and benefiting at best the entire attack frontage of his I Corps, but with a significantly decreasing effective range for the left wing of the French army, as was to become apparent in a very detrimental manner on the second day of the battle⁹⁷.

Marshal Victor sought to achieve the second prerequisite for his hastily ordered attack on Wellesley's northern positional forces by marching off and wheeling to the right. To judge by the result, however, the marshal did not launch his offensive manoeuvre in a wide arc against the British wing tip and flank, but, under pressure of time and with inadequate enemy intelligence, as a frontal attack directed obliquely against one wing.

Immediately after the hasty frontal attack by the Division Lapisse against the British rear guard, Victor had continued moving forward the two infantry divisions Vilatte and Rufin. They had waded through the Alberche in division columns with fifes and drums, had then deployed to the right in two lines with their 10 battalions each and echeloned their voltigeurs on the right, before advancing towards the left wing of the British and gaining a foothold with some elements on a hill lying opposite the commanding height of Medellin, which was only “at this moment occupied by the British Donkin Brigade”⁹⁸. The impetuous forward urge of the Corps Victor and the relative slowness of the British troops in occupying their positions on the northern wing of their battlefront⁹⁹ presented the French with good opportunities for a meeting engagement with an adversary who was not yet fully ready to conduct defensive operations. But instead they stopped to organize, to arrange the formation of I Corps and, on its left, to wait for the three cavalry divisions (Milhaud, Latour-Maubourg, Merlin) to move up on the plain. Meanwhile, the French kept up a bombardment of the Donkin Brigade on the Cerro de Medellin¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁷Zur Artillerietaktik siehe Hughes, S. 129, 132, 137.

⁹⁸Schneidawind XVI, S. 161 f.

⁹⁹Begründung für den britischen Verzug bei Hughes, S. 130.

¹⁰⁰Schneidawind XVI, S. 162.