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Saxon Artillery at Gross Beeren (23 August 1813)

by

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On 23 August 1813, the Saxon light infantry of the Avant-Garde encountered the Prussian skirmish line a mile from Gross-Beeren at noon and *Reynier* decided to take the village. At 4pm, the Saxons deployed 16-20 guns to support the successful attack of Grenadier Bn von Sperl and II/IR1 König upon Gross Beeren. Once the village was taken, *Reynier* ordered his corps to make camp not realising that he faced the whole of the Army of the North except *Tauentzien's* IV Prussian *Armeekorps*.[42] The gun line advanced to 900 paces with the Prussian infantry 300 paces behind them in about half hour. The Saxon artillery then turned their attention upon the Prussian infantry and *Bülow* ordered his infantry into line but this caused so much confusion that they had to revert to column again.[43]

Saxon Foot Artillery at Gross Beeren on 23 August 1813

By 6pm, the 82 Allied pieces finally overpowered the Saxon artillery and *Bülow* ordered his 16,000 Prussian infantry to assault *Reynier's* right wing of 7,000 Saxons with the bayonet as small arms fire was

[42] Nafziger (1994) 101-4
[43] Nafziger (1994) 107-9

impossible due to the heavy rain. *Reynier* then moved *Durutte's* French Division that had been out of range of the Prussian guns to support the retiring Saxons but the French infantry greeted by canister through down their muskets and fled into the forest leaving their wounded General in their wake. *Reynier* then ordered *Lecoq's* Saxon Division to cover the retreat of his shattered corps against superior Prussian numbers. [44]

By 9pm, *Reynier's* 7ème Corps lost over 3,662 men (about 16%) including 2,096 Saxons. The Saxon artillery lost 20 gunners killed, 2 officers and 17 men wounded with 3 officers and 149 men captured. In addition the artillery lost 215 horses, 7 pieces and 53 wagons. The 2nd Horse Battery was reduced to three pieces with only enough gunners to man two of them having 1 officer, 55 men, 89 horses, 2x 6-pdrs and 1x 8-pdr howitzer captured. The 3rd Foot Battery lost 4 6-pdrs, 1 officer, 42 men and 43 horses (about half the train horses) so the remaining four pieces were retired to the Park, the men was distributed to the other batteries. [45]

Bülow's III *Armeekorps* saw the opportunity to attack *Reynier's* 7ème Corps at 5pm when the rain started to fall heavily making this a battle of the sabre, bayonet and cannon. The 12x Russian 12-pdrs, 6x Prussian 12-pdrs and 28x Prussian 6-pdrs opened fire at a range of 1,800 paces. They were opposed by just 44 Saxon guns. These advanced to 1,200 paces where the second Russian 12-pdr Battery and a further 4x Prussian 6-pdrs joined the gun line. To the left of the Prussian line, the Prussian 5th Horse Battery *von Niendorff* of the Cavalry Reserve advanced too far and five guns were destroyed by concentrated Saxon Artillery fire. [46] A further four guns of the Prussian 5th Foot Battery von Glasenapp of *Hessen-Homburg's* 3rd Brigade were destroyed forcing them to retire. This showed the efficiency and ability of the much denigrated Saxon Artillery. [47]

Postscript

Saxony joined the Allies at Leipzig (18 Oct 1813). In December 1813, for the III German *Armeekorps*, the Saxons provided a 6-pdr battery (8 pieces), 12-pdr battery (8 pieces) and two horse artillery batteries (6-pieces each). At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, half of Saxony was given to Prussia and the Royal Saxon army was not fully re-organised to join Wellington in the Netherlands but later accompanied the Austrian Army in the invasion of France.

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[44] Leggiere (2002) 170-2
[45] Titze (2006) II: 12
[46] Leggiere (2002) 166-8 & 336
[47] Nafziger (1994) 106-7