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UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

FAILURE IN 1813:

THE DECLINE OF FRENCH LIGHT INFANTRY AND ITS EFFECT ON NAPOLEON'S
GERMAN CAMPAIGN

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After Napoleon Bonaparte's failed Russian campaign in 1812, the *Grande Armée* had already begun to reform in France. Napoleon, having already returned to Paris prior to the conclusion of the Russian campaign, initiated the rebirth of his once illustrious *Grande Armée* by ravaging French Corps in Spain, local militia units in the French suburbs, and by reallocating the survivors trickling in from Russia. Unfortunately, in his haste to amass line infantry regiments, as well as enlarge the artillery units, Napoleon allowed his *infanterie-legere*, or light infantry, to be stripped of men and supplies. Light infantry officers and men were dispersed to several newly formed heavy and line infantry units in order to bolster the French Army's infantry backbone. Napoleon himself was unchallenged during the reconstruction and failed to realize the future effects of his short-term solutions when rebuilding the *Grande Armée*. The degradation of such a crucial component of the *Grande Armée* left the French vulnerable during their 1813 Campaign in Germany. The French light infantry regiments could not conduct ample reconnaissance or security missions for their heavier infantry counterparts, which resulted in increased casualties for heavier units. An overall lack of ability made light infantry unsuitable for supply and communications security, which left French interior lines exposed to coalition attack. Light infantry capabilities continued to decrease rapidly throughout the campaign, that by the end, they ceased to exist as skirmishing units altogether and merely became substandard infantry regiments. Napoleon's inability to understand the weaknesses of his light infantry created disastrous outcomes during the 1813 Campaign, because the French light infantry regiments could not execute the basic tactical tasks of light infantry.

From 1805-1812, Napoleon consistently utilized light infantry regiments as elite auxiliary forces that would either support or assume the decisive action. Napoleon and several of his marshals, employed light infantry units in key engagements because they exhibited high *esprit de*

corps, quality leadership, and performed essential specialty tasks in order to achieve victory on the battlefield. These skirmisher units managed to fix the Russian general, Count Levin August von Bennigsen, and his Russo-Prussian force at Friedland, which led to its destruction by the French in 1807.¹ Similarly, at Aspern-Essling, French marshals André Massena and Jean-Baptiste Lannes were able to employ light infantry in the seizure and security of villages and river crossings in the surrounding area, which prevented the French forces from being thrown into the Danube River in 1809.² Also, the French in the Spanish Campaign utilized light infantry in the protection of communication and supply lines, which greatly benefited forward operating units. Light infantry demonstrated their effectiveness in several prominent engagements throughout the Napoleonic wars, which included the Battle of Friedland, the Battle of Aspern-Essling, and in the Spanish Campaign.

The French Republic was the first nation to make mainstream the use of light infantry units on the European continent within their respective armies.³ Although light infantry was initially developed during the Seven-Years War, light infantry were only utilized by the British and French as skirmisher units in small woodland engagements in the Americas.⁴ However, the success of light infantry units during the American Revolution created a push towards adopting these units in European armies.⁵ The armies of the French Revolution, although the first to employ light infantry on the European continent, did not effectively structure or utilize these

¹ Andrew Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2014), 451.

² Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, 514.

³ Robert B. Bruce, Ian Dickie, Kevin Kiley, Michael F. Pavkovic, Frederick C. Schneid, *Fighting Techniques of the Napoleonic Age: Equipment, Combat Skills, and Tactics, 1792-1815*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 18.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Rory Muir, *Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon*, (London: Yale University Press, 1998), 51. Rory Muir asserts that light infantry were integral in creating a highly mobile army capable of achieving Napoleon's decisive victories. French light infantry became so effective that soon Coalition forces were clamoring to create their own elite light infantry units.

troops in the traditional sense.⁶ The French merely took advantage of a highly mobile, loosely formed infantry force that was defensible against both line infantry and artillery.⁷

Light infantry tactics were key for Napoleonic warfare. Skirmishers both harassed enemy units in restrictive terrain and heightened the psychological deterioration of enemy units.⁸ It was soon discovered that smaller units could inflict higher casualties against enemy units if they were spread out against thick vegetation or urban terrain.⁹ While heavy infantry battalions advanced to the front, light infantry units would screen and deter enemy counterattacks from outflanking the line infantry formations, allowing line infantry battalions enough reaction time to respond and counter act the enemy's actions.¹⁰ The light infantry regiments would march in close proximity to the main infantry column, and would break off from the column if enemy units attempted to engage the line infantry.¹¹ Lastly, light infantry units, after being relieved from holding objectives or escorting units to the front, would become front line reserves for commanders who could utilize them as basic infantry units if the situation demanded it.¹² The importance of light infantry regiments can be seen throughout every battlefield of the Napoleonic Wars. Napoleon himself highlighted the integral position light infantry held within the maneuvering of a corps, and its ability to support heavy units throughout the many successful campaigns of his reign.¹³

⁶ Bruce, *Fighting Techniques*, 11. The French initially utilized employed 'light infantry' units as highly motivated troops that could be deployed into decisive points of the battlefield swiftly. Several nations developed their own versions of light infantry after witnessing the success of the French, which included *chasseurs*, *tirailleurs*, *cacadores*, *grenzers*, *voltiguers*, and *jaeger*.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 178. Line infantry was considered to be the traditional format of an infantry unit, which consisted of an organized mass of rifleman wielding muskets. Similarly, grenadiers were considered heavy infantry.

⁸ Muir, *Tactics and Experience*, 67.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Jean-Paul Bertraud, *The Army of the French Revolution: From Citizen Soldiers to Instruments of Power*, trans. R. R. Palmer, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 239.

¹² Muir, *Tactics and Experience*, 20.

¹³ Henri Plon, *Commentaires de Napoléon Premier*, Tome. 6, (Paris: 1973), 12. Notes from Napoleon's memoirs discussing the French infantry in war.

Light infantry became important units for commanders on the battlefield due to their individual unit effectiveness and ability to rapidly deploy into conflicts. Light infantry soldiers carried lighter packs with less ammunition than normal line infantry units, which made them faster on the battlefield. They also carried lighter carbines, which allowed them to move faster than line companies and shoot over forty yards or one hundred paces.¹⁴ Some light infantry regiments even supplied their regular enlisted troops with pistols in order to engage enemy forces in close quarters street fighting or assaults.¹⁵ Light infantry units used whistles and horns that were distinctly separate from the main army force in order to communicate with their dispersed troops.¹⁶ Special weapons, equipment, and communication devices helped compound the tactical success of these units.

By 1813, France had raised thirty-seven light infantry regiments, five of which were created during the reconstruction of the *Grande Armée* in late 1812 and early 1813.¹⁷ Light infantry regiments created a heightened sense of *esprit de corps* and patriotism that no doubt developed due to the nature of their tasks.¹⁸ Because of their capabilities as reserves, several light infantry regiments got thrust into the decisive points in battles such as Marengo, Austerlitz, and at Aspern-Essling, which created a strong sense of unit pride and led to various unit decorations

¹⁴ Muir, *Tactics and Experience*, 53-54, 64.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁷ Digby Smith, *Napoleon's Regiments: Battle Histories of the Regiments of the French Army, 1792-1815*, (London: Greenhill Books, 2000), 208. Smith's work illustrates that French light infantry regiments were involved in every major campaign and battle of the Napoleonic Wars from 1805-1815.

¹⁸ Muir, *Tactics and Experience*, 199. Individual medals, unit awards, and imperial recognition was increasingly higher in light infantry regiments than in normal light units, which created an overzealous sense of pride and duty within the light infantry community.

and personal awards. Officers within these regiments became vehemently loyal to their units in the hopes of achieving battlefield glory to add to the heraldry of the regiment.¹⁹

One of the most decisive uses for French light infantry were their involvement during Napoleon's victory at Friedland. From December-June 1807 light infantry regiments spearheaded a series of skirmishes and assaults that helped drive the Russians further out of Poland and closer to their own borders.²⁰ Napoleon, eager to end his pursuits in Germany, had Lannes' V Corps advance to the village of Friedland in order to draw Bennigsen into conflict.²¹ Lannes utilized a small force of over 9,000 light infantry and skirmisher units in order to fix and hold the Russian Army until Napoleon arrived and crushed the fleeing Russians.²² Lieutenant Jean-Baptiste Barras, a *chasseur* in the Imperial Guard, documented the *chasseurs* and *voltigeurs*' effective screening and protection of French reinforcements as they poured into the battle unimpeded.²³

¹⁹ Bertraud, *The Army of the French Revolution*, 191. Bertraud discusses in his book, *The Army of the French Revolution*, that light infantry were integral not only to the French Army structure, but to eighteenth century tactics as a whole. Some of the first light infantry units in Europe were highly trained and motivated infantry soldiers and officers in the army of the new French Republic.

²⁰ John Gill, *A Soldier for Napoleon, The Campaigns of Lieutenant Franz Joseph Hausmann 7th Bavarian Infantry*, trans. Cynthia Hausmann, (London: Greenhill Books, 1998), 60. Lieutenant Franz Hausmann was an officer in the Bavarian Army that served in the French Army from 1805 until Bavaria's defection from France in 1813.

²¹ Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, 451.

²² Ibid.

²³ Jean-Baptiste Barres, *Memoirs of a Napoleonic Officer, Jean-Baptiste Barres*, ed. Maurice Barres, trans. Bernard Mill, (New York: The Dial Press, 1925), 110-111. *Chasseurs* and *voltigeurs* were crack shot infantry men who performed skirmishing missions ahead of line infantry battalions. Although outfitted in different uniforms, their tactical implementation mirrored one another.

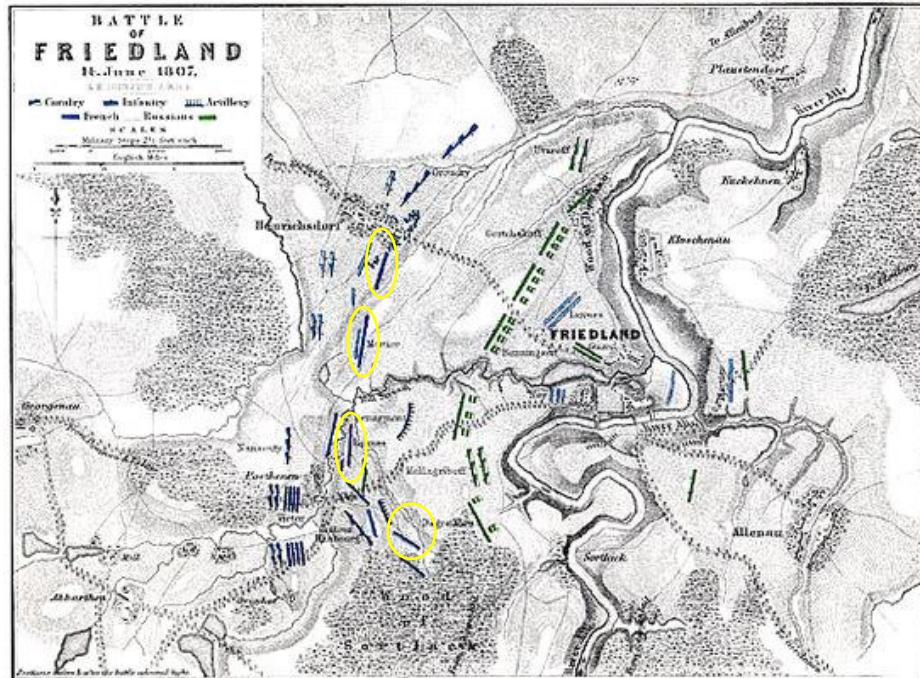


Figure 1. The Battle of Friedland, 14 June, 1807.²⁴

Light infantry regiments managed to effectively screen their lack of numbers on the battlefield, as well as cover the advance of the French Army's heavy reinforcements, which culminated in the envelopment of a Bennigsen. As a reward for exceptional battlefield heroics, the advance guard of light infantry was later positioned by Napoleon at the Niemen River as a guard of honor during the negotiations at Tilsit.²⁵ Light infantry established itself as a decisive factor within the French Army at Friedland, which undoubtedly caught the eye of Napoleon if he utilized Lannes' skirmishers as the imperial escort at Tilsit.

In the Danube Campaign of 1809, light infantry regiments were charged with seizing several villages along the Danube as the French army pursued the Austrians under Archduke

²⁴ Richard Moore, *The Battle of Friedland*, 1999, Napoleonic Guide, web.

²⁵ J. Dumaine and Henri Plon, *Correspondance de Napoléon I*, Tome. 15, (Paris), 345. Napoleon to Le Projet de Cantonnement, 17 June, 1807.

Charles. Several light infantry companies seized the city of Schwarz by hacking down the gates and storming the defenses of the city, which effectively pacified the Tyrol and cleared an open route to Vienna.²⁶ J. Chevillet, a cavalry trumpeter, denotes the effectiveness and bravery that the French *voltiguers* demonstrated throughout the Danube campaign, especially dealing with the village assaults that light infantry carried out throughout the banks of the Rhine River.²⁷ Outside of Vienna, at Aspern-Essling, Napoleon charged several light infantry regiments with the seizure and defense of both villages in order to establish a beach head for the French Army to cross the Danube in pursuit of the Austrian Army.²⁸ The Austrians began to counterattack the French defenders in Aspern and Essling aggressively on 21 May with both artillery barrages and infantry assaults.²⁹ Line infantry and grenadier companies fought back and forth for the villages of Aspern and Essling, which changed hands several times during the battle.³⁰

²⁶ Gill, *A Soldier for Napoleon*, 84.

²⁷ J. Chevillet, *Ma Vie Militaire, 1800-1810*, ed. Georges Chevillet, (Paris : Libraire Hachette, 1906), 164-165.

²⁸ Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, 514.

²⁹ Jean Roch Coignet, *The Narrative of Captain Coignet: A Soldier of the Empire, 1776-1850*, ed. Loredan Larchey, trans. M. Carey, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & CO., 1898), 173-175. Captain Jean Coignet commanded a company of grenadiers in the Imperial Guard and partook in all major campaigns from 1801-1815.

³⁰ Jean-Baptiste Marbot, *Mémoires Du General Bon De Marbot*, (Paris: Imprimeurs-Editeurs, 1919), 192-193. Each time a village was lost a light infantry company would reclaim it.

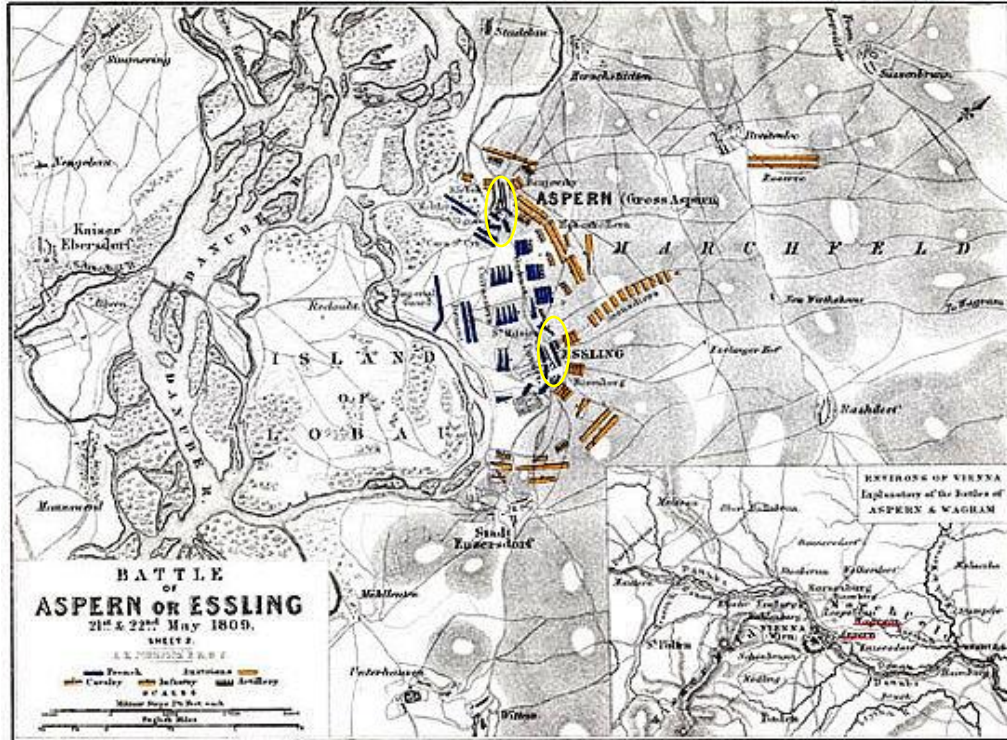


Figure 2. The Battle of Aspern-Essling, 21 to 22 May, 1809.³¹

On the morning of 22 May the 26th Light retook Aspern for the last time and held it until the French withdrew on the 23rd.³² Although the French lost the Battle of Aspern-Essling, light infantry regiments performed their duties magnificently and ensured the protection of the French Army both during their assault and after their withdrawal. Napoleon refused to mention the defeat in his personal correspondence and instead downplayed the loss and did not mention any particular highlights of the conflict.³³

The successful implementation of light infantry could not have gone unnoticed as both Aspern and Essling were considered the decisive points of the battle, and were seized several times by multiple light infantry battalions throughout the course of the battle. Napoleon's failure

³¹ Richard Moore, *The Battle of Aspern-Essling*, 1999, Napoleonic Guide, web.

³² Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, 514.

³³ J. Dumaine and Henri Plon, *Correspondance de Napoleon I*, Tome. 19, (Paris), 38-42.

to mention the light infantry's exceptional conduct in his after action bulletin to the Army was unprecedented. The Danube Campaign was the last decisive action that French light infantry would perform in front of the emperor until the 1813 campaign. The French Army's failure at Aspern-Essling most certainly cast doubt on the effectiveness of light infantry in the eyes of Napoleon. Light infantry were not afforded another opportunity to prove their worth to the French Emperor before the invasion of Russia.

The Spanish Campaign lasting from 1807-1814 became a graveyard of military careers for some of Napoleon's finest battlefield commanders, as well as an eventual cause of the decline of the French Empire. However, for light infantry regiments, the Spanish Campaign proved to be another shining example of their proficiency. Napoleon brought only eight of the available thirty light infantry regiments with him into Russia, which left twenty-two light infantry regiments in Spain from 1809-1812.³⁴ Several conflicts, including the Battle of Corunna discussed below, were major victories for the French and included decisive actions by light infantry regiments. Additionally, light infantry regiments were left in Spain in order to control towns, fortresses, supply depots, and communications lines from the ravaging Spanish guerrillas.

On 16 January, 1809 Marshal Nicholas Soult had chased the British Expeditionary Force into the Spanish port of Corunna.³⁵ Soult ordered his forward skirmishers to conduct an 'offensive reconnaissance' of the city in order to gauge the possibility of assaulting the city and capturing the British forces under Sir John Moore before they could escape.³⁶ Soult sent over

³⁴ Smith, *Napoleon's Regiments*, 182-215. Smith's research highlights that a majority of French light infantry regiments escaped the horrors of Russia and remained in other hostile corners of the empire until the reconstruction of the *Grande Armée*. More than twenty-three of the thirty-seven light infantry regiments remained intact after Napoleon's disastrous Russian Campaign in 1812, which allowed Napoleon to wield the largest cohort of light infantry ever held during his reign.

³⁵ J. Tranie and J. C. Carmigniani, *Napoleon's War in Spain: The French Peninsular Campaigns, 1807-1814*, trans. Janet S. Mallendar and John R. Clement, (London: Arms and Armour, 1982), 70.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

7,000 infantry soldiers into the harbor city to assault over 10,000 British soldiers encamped inside.³⁷ Several light infantry regiments stormed the city and fought several desperate battles to retake Corunna.³⁸ On the 18th of January 1809, Soult entered Corunna and captured eight British frigates, as well as hundreds of British canon.³⁹ However, Napoleon did not mention the event in any of his correspondence throughout January, 1809. After Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812, the Spanish Campaign took a back seat in French military affairs, and the case for light infantry went with it.

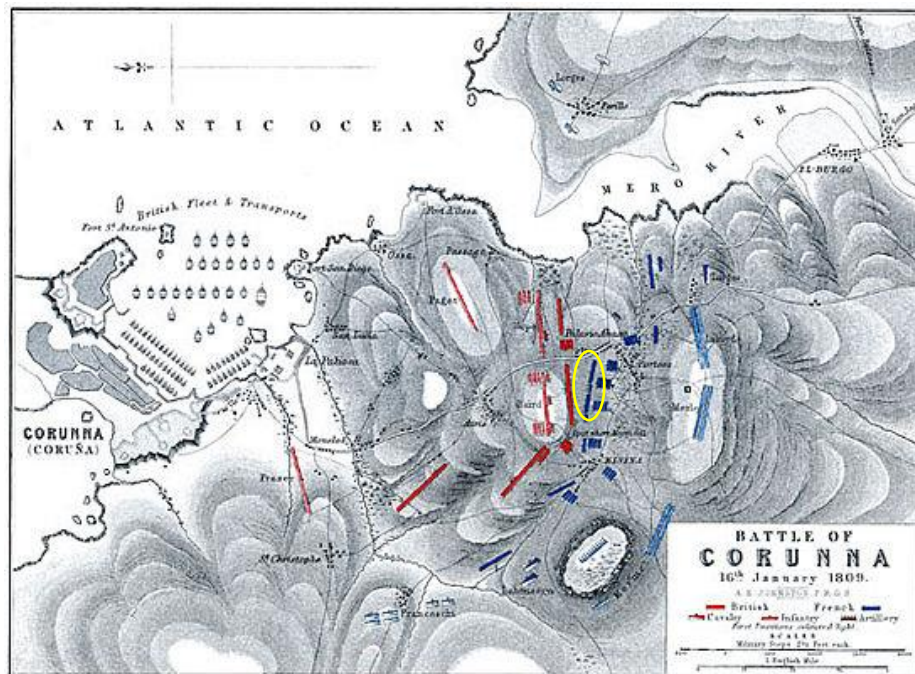


Figure 3. The Battle of Corunna, 16 January, 1809.⁴⁰

Although a period of decline began in the French Army of Spain during the invasion of Russia in 1812, it is important to note that dozens of light infantry regiments of the French

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 71.

³⁹ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁰ Richard Moore, *The Battle of Corunna*, 1999, Napoleonic Guide, web.

Empire were left to protect supply and communications lines, control towns and fortresses, and root out guerrilla factions in the Spanish mountains. General Jean-Baptise Marbot, a frequent French *aide-de-camp* and cavalry commander in Spain, stated that the French divisions within Spain created small units of light soldiers that would track down and kill or capture Spanish and English marauders in the countryside.⁴¹ These light regiments freed the rest of the line companies within a division from partaking in skirmishing missions, which reportedly worked fairly well in 1811.⁴² Marbot's testament to the skill and proficiency of light infantry illustrates the burden that light infantry units were able to lift off of their heavier counterparts. French light infantry ultimately bore the brunt of the laborious defenses of supply depots and outposts, which allowed line regiments and cavalry to deal with enemy's main combatants.

Napoleon's reconstruction of the *Grande Armée* in 1813 was disastrous for the French Army because the heavy infantry and artillery absorbed a majority of French resources, which left light infantry regiments understaffed, poorly equipped, and largely unprepared for their battlefield duties. The disastrous Russian Campaign of 1812 destroyed Napoleon's *Grande Armée* and with it his hopes of ruling Europe. In early December of 1812, Napoleon informed Joachim Murat, King of Naples and brother-in-law of Napoleon, and Eugene Beauharnais, Napoleon's step-son, that he would return to Paris in order to quell the suspected uprisings that were brewing in his absence.⁴³ As the remnants of the French Army straggled across Europe attempting to reach the safety of the French Empire, Napoleon busily began the colossal undertaking of reconstructing the *Grande Armée* from the units and conscripts available within

⁴¹ Marbot, *Memoirs Du General*, 418-419.

⁴² Ibid. The light regiments allowed the heavy infantry to limit their direct interactions with the partisans to strictly executions and the occasional ambush.

⁴³ J. Dumaine and Henri Plon, *Correspondance de Napoleon I*, Tome. 24, (Paris), 329. Napoleon's Bulletin to the Army, 3 December, 1812.

his empire, alone, and unimpeded by his marshals who were busy fighting their way back from Russia. The immeasurable energy of Napoleon's mind and the untiring labors of his overzealous imperial staff made feats of administration and logistics possible in the coming year.

In the early months of 1813, Napoleon reorganized the *Grande Armée*, and gave the imperial guard, line infantry and artillery regiments priority for the reallocation of men and supplies, while light infantry units were stripped bare of men and equipment. The immediate concerns during the resurrection of the *Grande Armée* were the reallocation of French troops to newly created units, the conscription of new recruits, and the training of new soldiers. The veteran soldiers of the Russian Campaign who reported for duty in 1813 accounted for just five percent of the men who left for Russia the previous year.⁴⁴ The Imperial Guard fell from 51,000 troops to just under 2,000, while French Corps mustered only 4,000 men each compared to the average 60,000.⁴⁵ Light infantry regiments suffered considerably high during the Russian campaign as well. Only 1,200 light infantry soldiers and officers remained of the fourteen regiments that invaded Russia with the *Grande Armée*. One regiment, the *Voltiguers* of the Young Guard, fielded only 95 men and officers in 1813, which was well below the standard 1,200 men that were usually present within light infantry regiments.⁴⁶ Napoleon attempted to revive his once might army and mustered the remaining resources the French Empire could offer.

Between December 1812 and April 1813, Napoleon withdrew 34 million francs from the treasury and began rebuilding his army.⁴⁷ Napoleon sent a letter to his Minister of War, General

⁴⁴ Roberts, *Napoleon*, 635.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Marshal Jacques Macdonald's Corps was virtually untouched in 1812, but consisted of only 60,000 troops, which meant that the only combat ready corps in the French Army was exceptionally average in size.

⁴⁶ Scott Bowden, *Napoleon's Grande Armée of 1813*, (Chicago: The Emperor's Press, 1990), 14.

⁴⁷ J. Dumaine and Henri Plon, *Correspondance de Napoleon I*, Tome. 25, (Paris), 4. Napoleon to Comte Mollien, 1 March, 1813. 34 million francs was an astonishing withdrawal from an already depleted French Treasury, especially when considering that Napoleon only allowed government expenditures on civilian affairs to be 10 million.

Henri Clarke, and demanded that he raise the resources necessary to outfit 280,000 conscripts in twenty days.⁴⁸ Napoleon wrote General Jean Rapp, the acting Governor of Danzig, nine days later stating that Rapp had to raise 300,000 men in Germany in order to support the French Army in the upcoming campaign.⁴⁹ Additionally, Napoleon requested almost 200,000 conscripts from the imperial territories of Magdeburg, Italy, Hesse, and Bavaria.⁵⁰ Of the 137,000 troops Napoleon had at his disposal in March, nearly 111,000 of them went into the infantry in 1813.⁵¹ Napoleon's sent over two dozen letters from 25 December, 1812-4 January, 1813, which demanded the conscription, outfitting, and movement of over a million men by the end of March. The Emperor's demands were not only insurmountable, but unrealistic. Napoleon's incessant micromanaging led to several detailed letters to General Clarke outlining the specific movements of regiments within the new *Grande Armée*. The reallocation of forces within the French Empire appeared simple for Napoleon as he sat in Paris, but results of the reorganization were disastrous both for the army and the light infantry.

Light infantry regiments entering Germany in 1813 were unprepared for the duties of the *infanterie-legere*, because the regiments returning from Russia were combat ineffective, regiments recalled from Spain were broken up and placed in line infantry companies, and the rawest recruits and substandard officers were placed into these units light infantry companies. Less than six percent of light infantry personnel and officers were present for duty on the first of February of the eight regiments that entered Russia.⁵² Of the over 25,000 men and officers who marched

⁴⁸ Plon, *Correspondance de Napoleon I*, Tome. 24, Napoleon to General Clarke, 25 December, 1812.

⁴⁹ Plon, *Correspondance de Napoleon I*, Tome. 25, Napoleon to General Rapp, 4 January, 1813.

⁵⁰ Plon, *Correspondance de Napoleon I*, Tome. 25, Napoleon to Eugene de Beauharnais, 28 March, 1813.

⁵¹ Napoleon to his Minister of War, General Clarke, 7 January, 1813.

⁵² Bowden, *Grande Armée of 1813*, 16-17. The eight regiments that undertook the Russian Campaign were the 13th, 15th, 7th, 33rd, 26th, 11th, 24th, 8th, and 18th.

into Russia, less than 1,600 were present for duty, and even less were combat effective.⁵³ The light infantry survivors from the I, II, III, and IV Corps were combined to help make the advance guard of the IV Corps under Prince Eugene, but these troops amounted to only two-thirds of the light infantry that would be present in an a traditional French Corps.⁵⁴ Napoleon began to remove the third, fourth, and reserve battalions from all light infantry regiments in Spain, in order to increase the ratio of cadre to conscripts within the French Army.⁵⁵

Additionally, Napoleon demanded that light infantry officers stripped from French units in Spain be combined with over eighty supply depot officers from Paris and placed within new regiments of the army in order to increase the officer ratio in the heavy and line infantry companies.⁵⁶ Napoleon continued to pull light infantry personnel in order to fill the ever growing needs of the French Army. In fact, several light infantry units, like the 19th *Chasseurs*, were dissolved and turned into cavalry Hussars.⁵⁷ Although the reallocation of veteran officers and soldiers helped Napoleon train and outfit his newly formed heavy and line infantry regiments, the light infantry units were left completely ravaged. Napoleon managed to fix a short term problem by having experienced infantry officers teach the newly conscripted forces, but failed to understand that average line companies were taught their basic battlefield tactics on the march, and benefited less from expert training than light infantry regiments who were relied upon to execute complex missions.

Napoleon began filling the now unrecognizable light infantry regiments with any personnel he could muster from around the empire. The newly created light infantry regiments,

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 35-36.

⁵⁵ Plon, *Correspondance de Napoleon I*, Tome. 25, Napoleon to General Clarke, 7 January, 1813.

⁵⁶ Plon, *Correspondance de Napoleon I*, Tome. 25, Napoleon to General Clarke, 4 January, 1813.

⁵⁷ Plon, *Correspondance de Napoleon I*, Tome. 25, Napoleon to General Bertrand, 8 February, 1813.

such as the 37th Light Infantry, were composed entirely of municipal guards from various cities around Paris.⁵⁸ The remaining light infantry regiments received the rawest leftover recruits, sailors from the French Navy, marines, underage troops, and other existing personnel from around the empire.⁵⁹ A shortage of rifles and muskets in 1813 ensured a similar decrease in the amount of carbines allocated to light infantry regiments.⁶⁰ Napoleon distributed muskets to all light infantry regiments in the hope of creating an all-purposed infantry soldier that could double as line infantry if necessary, which greatly deteriorated the light infantry's rate of fire and increased the individual soldiers load.⁶¹ The state of light infantry units towards the end of the reorganization was dire. A *sous-lieutenant* from the *chasseurs velites* stated that at the commencement of the 1813 Campaign he was charged with scavenging for sabers, belts, straps, drums, trumpets, and uniform articles for newly created officers, which were integral toward the reformation of the unit.⁶² Another report from a Bavarian lieutenant claimed that units stationed on the German borders were shipped new cannon, horses, trained infantry battalions, and officers by February, but resources to light infantry units were withheld.⁶³ A report made on 2 March, 1813 claimed that the 26th Light Infantry regiment did not know how to drill, but could reasonably load their weapons.⁶⁴

Unlike the French armies of the past, the *Grande Armée* of 1813 had difficulty training its conscripts on the march into Germany due to inexperienced leadership, an over-saturation of

⁵⁸ Bowden, *Grande Armée of 1813*, 23.

⁵⁹ Plon, *Correspondance de Napoleon I*, Tome. 25, Napoleon to Vice-Admiral Decres and General Clarke, 11 February, 1813.

⁶⁰ Bowden, *Grande Armée of 1813*, 38.

⁶¹ Gunther Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 66-67.

⁶² Barras, *Memoirs of a Napoleonic Officer*, 159.

⁶³ Gill, *A Soldier for Napoleon*, 189-191.

⁶⁴ Bowden, *Grande Armée of 1813*, 46.

conscripts in units, and a lack of uniformity in training guidance from cadre.⁶⁵ Veterans of the French Army began to desperately train the overwhelming number of raw recruits in basic drills, tactics, and skills necessary to survive the rigors of campaigning. Ill-prepared units with ineffective leadership proved to be theme across the French Army. By the time the *Grande Armée* took the field in 1813 there were few functioning light infantry units left, and only Imperial Guard units could be considered light infantry in the traditional sense.

The *Grande Armée* entered into Germany in April, 1813 with a dysfunctional light infantry force that was unable to properly perform reconnaissance and seizure of key objectives, skirmishing missions, or support the internal communications and supply lines of the army, which created an overall lack of effectiveness within the French forces. The *Grande Armée* departed from France with almost 200,000 soldiers in early April and began their march into Germany.⁶⁶ Napoleon wrote to his allies on 13 April, 1813 to begin deploying their own forces in order to rendezvous with the advancing French.⁶⁷ The initial intentions of the French ‘Grand Plan’ insisted on sending Marshal Nicolas Oudinot’s XII Corps of 25,000 to southern Dresden with Marshal Bertrand’s IV corps of 30,000. These corps intended to distract the Coalition forces from threatening the French Main force and would push Allied attention into southern Germany. Napoleon hoped that the diversion plan could lure the stronger Coalition forces away from Berlin, Stettin, and Danzig in order for French forces to push north and secure Germany, while also ensuring the support and loyalty of the Germanic states.

Also, Napoleon had sent Marshal Claude Victor to northern Germany, with support from the Saxons in order to control Hamburg. Victor’s assignment in Hamburg withdrew a further

⁶⁵ Ibid., 46-47.

⁶⁶ Plon, *Correspondance de Napoleon I*, Tome. 25, Napoleon to Marshal Michel Ney, 5 April, 1813.

⁶⁷ Bowden, *Grande Armée of 1813*, 194-196.

35,000 troops—12,000 cavalry and 23,000 infantry—as well as 106 guns from the *Grande Armée*.⁶⁸ Napoleon was unable to recover these forces until late in the campaign when Victor arrived in Dresden in late August.⁶⁹ Prince Jozef Poniatowski's Polish corps of 8,000 was also missing during the first half of the campaign, because it was under siege in Poland. However, the allies allowed the Poles to enter Napoleon's territory in order to free the Coalition corps tasked with besieging the Poles.⁷⁰ In the initial moves of the campaign Napoleon was forced to fracture his already weak force further in order to protect his flanks, which signifies that Napoleon's German allies failed to raise the over half a million men he demanded.

Initially, Napoleon's ruse confused the Prussian Army on the whereabouts and strength of the *Grande Armée*. Unfortunately for the French, Field Marshal Gebhard Leberecht von Blucher, commander of the Prussian Main Army, intercepted several dispatches that helped the Prussians determine the location and intentions of the advancing French forces.⁷¹ Blucher intended to trap Marshal Michel Ney's III Corps in pitched combat by holding reserve cavalry units on the rear and wings of his army, but decided to fallback in lieu of the Coalition's plans.⁷² On 1 May Napoleon began to truly mobilize in search of a decisive battle, but faulty reconnaissance reports and bad intelligence continued to impede the actions of the French Army.⁷³

Napoleon, rather blindly, crept towards Leipzig in expectation of a major conflict, while Allied cavalry patrols easily monitored the progress of the French main body.⁷⁴ The combined

⁶⁸ J. P. Riley, *Napoleon and the World War of 1813*, (Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 139.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ F. N. Maude, *The Leipzig Campaign, 1813*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1974), 148.

⁷¹ Michael Leggiere, *Napoleon and the Struggle for Germany: Volume I, the War of Liberation, Spring 1813*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 177-180.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 179-180.

⁷³ Riley, *World War of 1813*, 77-78.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

forces of Blucher and Scharnhorst caught Napoleon completely by surprise on 2 May at Lutzen when they fell upon Ney's unsupported corps. Ney held off the attack long enough for French forces to save the tattered remnants of Ney's force, but it was a narrow victory for the French Emperor, and demonstrated the predicament the *Grande Armée* found itself in. Ney's corps featured no cavalry units and relied entirely upon light infantry units to act as reconnaissance and screening forces. As these regiments were composed of raw recruits and inexperienced officers it was clear that French corps that lacked cavalry were left blinded by their inferior light infantry units. Captain Coignet, present during the Battle of Lutzen, claimed that, without the heavy infantry, the city of Lutzen and the field of battle would certainly have been lost, which was a testament to the poor state of the light infantry.⁷⁵ Captain Barras of the *chasseurs velites* recalled that he was the only one of five commanding officers to survive the conflict.⁷⁶ Barras asserts that his battalion was in a poor state and devolved into utter confusion on the battlefield due to a lack of senior leaders and sergeants.⁷⁷ Lutzen was the first minor engagement of significance in the 1813 Campaign, and it cast doubt on the abilities of light infantry regiments, especially in completing their specific task of seizing and holding urban areas. The chaotic scene that Barras experienced was illustrated by the significant amount of casualties his battalion took in a rather small and brief engagement. The loss of officers and experienced soldiers in the initial conflict of the campaign demonstrated that light infantry units were only going to deteriorate, rather than improve, as the campaign continued.

In a 2 May dispatch to Prince de Neuchatel, commander of French forces at Lutzen, Napoleon demanded immediate reconnaissance on Leipzig and Zwenkau in order to avoid

⁷⁵ Coignet, *The Narrative*, 245-246.

⁷⁶ Barras, *Memoirs of a Napoleonic Officer*, 161.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

another surprise attack.⁷⁸ Twenty days later Napoleon fought an unexpected battle with the Prussians outside of Bautzen, which devolved into a bloody engagement that concluded with the French winning nothing but the battlefield by 21 May.⁷⁹ Again, Barras' men were charged with storming the defenses at Bautzen, and although they successfully managed to pry open the gates of the city, his company suffered twenty-one men killed and wounded of the 100 men assigned.⁸⁰ Barras began to promote sergeants and officers each night in order to make up for the amount he lost in each engagement.⁸¹ The French believed they were facing the Prussian Main Army at Bautzen, but Baron von Muffling, an officer in General August Gneisenau's general staff, stated that the Prussians only fielded 5,000 men.⁸² Muffling's statements not only reveal the ineffectiveness of Napoleon's reconnaissance and tactics, but also highlights the Coalitions' light infantry capabilities and their ability to screen their numbers from French observers. Barras' account of the first two major engagements of the campaign continued to highlight the devolved capabilities of light infantry. Barras lost more than twenty percent of his already meager force during a minor skirmish, and was still utilized as a forward advance unit for the remainder of the campaign.

Napoleon began to rapidly move towards Dresden in order to both capitalize on his earlier victory at Lutzen and Bautzen and to avoid another disarming attack by Coalition forces. In order for Napoleon to successfully quicken the *Grande Armée's* pace, the French corps were forced to lower security and disperse troops across meandering roads, which allowed Napoleon

⁷⁸ Dumaine, *Correspondence* Tome .25, 253-254.

⁷⁹ Loraine Petre, *Napoleon's Last Campaign in Germany, 1813*, (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1974), 170.

⁸⁰ Barras, *Memoirs of a Napoleonic Officer*, 164-166.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 161-167.

⁸² Carl Von Muffling, *The Memoirs of Baron Von Muffling : A Prussian officer in the Napoleonic Wars*, (London: Greenhill Books, 1997), 36-39.

to regain the offensive operationally, but severely degraded the tactical competencies of the immature *Grande Armée*. The French Army struggled to move rapidly due to their inability to receive proper reconnaissance reports and information. Sub-standard light infantry regiments were unable to provide the protection or reconnaissance necessary to support heavy battalions and divisions in the field. This movement relied heavily on the capabilities of forward light infantry units, like Barras' battalion, which could have proved fatal to the French if the Allies had laid in wait outside of Dresden.

The first major issue that plagued the *Grande Armée* was the strategic consumption that eroded almost tens of thousands of soldiers, cavalry, and artillery units away from the French Army as they marched deeper into Germany. Poor intelligence continued to plague the French as Napoleon lost complete sight of the Allied Army for two days after their encounter at Lutzen.⁸³ Additionally, once contact with enemy forces had been reestablished at Bautzen, the French communication lines were susceptible to Coalition raids, which greatly affected the movements, coordination, and French preparations in the coming conflicts.⁸⁴ Although the *Grande Armée* marched to Dresden with 70,000 mounted soldiers and an army that had swollen to 400,000 strong, the capabilities of this mass were dubious.

By the time the French Army arrived at Dresden the garrisoning of fortresses left in the French Army's wake had claimed several thousand soldiers, dozens of artillery pieces, and hundreds of mounted units. The price of protecting the French imperial borders, and the establishment and security of communication and supply lines came at the cost of the *Grande Armée's* better units. Cavalry, artillery, and heavy infantry were Napoleon's priorities throughout

⁸³ James Lawford, *Napoleon: The Last Campaigns, 1813-1815*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1977), 40.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

the reorganization, and now they were strung across Germany. Napoleon had 351,000 men in total, but several hundred thousand of them were garrisoned in fortresses such as Hamburg, or monitoring full regions in Northern Germany.⁸⁵ Between the strategic holdings of Dresden, Hamburg, Lutzen, and Bautzen Napoleon had lost over 77,000 soldiers, and some of his ablest Marshals.⁸⁶ The French had almost 300,000 foot soldiers, which was enough to enter into pitched battle with Coalition forces individually, but was not enough to hope for a numerical superiority over the unified forces of the Coalition fielded over 700,000.⁸⁷ Although the *Grande Armée* could still field competent units, the continued displacement of corps, divisions, and battalions decreased the effectiveness of the French, and the ability for the light infantry to receive dependable support.

The communication and supply lines of the *Grande Armée* were critical to Napoleon in late August, but were susceptible to enemy raiding due to a lack of light units to defend their positions. During the armistice of Plaswitz, Napoleon began to centralize his forces, which now amounted to over 440,000 with a little over 55,000 soldiers garrisoned across several German fortresses. In order to supply and support these daunting troop numbers and operations, the French Army had to field an equally massive supply network. The French Army had over 40,000 soldiers attached to the dozen French corps; these soldiers specialized in the engineering, transportation, and logistical management of the campaign.⁸⁸ Napoleons reorganization at

⁸⁵ Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, 664.

⁸⁶ Ibid. The most important missing marshal was Marshal Davout, whom Napoleon shockingly tasked with the military and administrative control of Hamburg. Few of Napoleon's elite marshals from the 1805-1812 campaigns remained as Soult was in Spain, Massena remained in retirement, Bernadotte had defected, and Lannes was killed in 1809. Additionally, 50,000 soldiers were charged with defending Hamburg alone, which allowed Napoleon to cross the Elbe and continue his campaign. Although an important operational move, this action depleted Napoleon's already dwindling force and took Napoleon's last, arguably, self-sufficient marshal.

⁸⁷ Petre, *Napoleon's Last Campaign*, 170.

⁸⁸ Bowden, *Napoleon's Grande Armée*, 126-131.

Dresden in August 1813, forced the logistics corps to mobilize thousands of tons of provisions, which created numerous internal routes of supply.⁸⁹ The French logistic units and lines of supply required security details to protect their operations in order to continue supplying the French Army in the field; the light infantry were largely charged with executing this mission.

These massive supply lines continued to pull crucial soldiers off of the front-lines and into guarded positions across Germany. The lack of reconnaissance and skirmishing power of the light infantry began to compound the problems of the French Army as coalition forces came and went through French territory wreaking havoc and disrupting supply trains, which forced even more troops to be garrisoned at outposts and forts. Light infantry units were either too weak or too green to oppose the raiding Cossack forces. Several light infantry battalions began pulling cavalry companies off of the frontlines and from reconnaissance missions in order to bolster their patrols, but even these moves proved insufficient to stem the tide of the Russian raiders.⁹⁰ Light infantry regiments were unable to perform their duties in the defense of French supply routes due to a continued deterioration of abilities and personnel. Napoleon was forced to utilize the light infantry as patrolling units instead, which not only limited the amount of Cavalry and line infantry units he could field, but enticed coalition raiders to strike at both supply lines and unprotected patrols. The rapidly thinning French Army was unable to stem the tide of casualties that began mounting on both sides of the predicament.

The communications lines between France and Napoleon became a major decisive point for the Allies in 1813. Russian Cossacks became so notorious for their raiding capabilities during

⁸⁹ Petre, *Last Campaign*, 165-166. The provisions included 80,000 bags of flour for the Dresden garrison, 30,000 rations of bread for Dresden, 2,000,000 flour rations for the Army, 500,000 biscuits, 11,000 heads of cattle, and 36,000 meat rations, which barely supported the upkeep of the units to remain in Dresden.

⁹⁰ Barras, *Memoirs of a Napoleonic Officer*, 178-179.

the campaign that they were nicknamed “the Cossacks of the Elbe”.⁹¹ General Denis Davidov, a commander of several squadrons of Cossack cavalry, was able to easily raid the French defensive positions on their way to and around Dresden. Davidov’s Cossacks not only raided French supply depots, but broke up French patrols and even bartered with local towns people for information on French movements.⁹² Coalition forces were not only dwindling Napoleon’s reconnaissance capabilities, but they were rapidly expanding their own. Napoleon was forced to centralize himself at Dresden in order to coordinate its defense, the influx of corps and recruits streaming in from around Germany, and manage the daily functions of the French Empire. In order to continue to utilize his ‘interior lines’ of support and communication, Napoleon hoped that Dresden would survive at least six days under siege if he was attacked by the Coalition.⁹³ Even in Dresden, the French light infantry were unable to stop the marauding Cossacks from assaulting the earth works surrounding the city. General Rapp stated in his personal memoirs that the Cossacks killed so many French defenders at the forward security posts that he was forced to employ his “national troops”, which were little less than city militia.⁹⁴

However, the Allies targeted these lines of communication and the vulnerabilities inherent in their conception. By early October the Allied advance forces were moving across French lines of supply and communications at will.⁹⁵ In fact there were several days where the French Emperor was unable to send or receive letters due to the concentration of enemy

⁹¹ Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, *Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte*, ed. R. W. Phipps, vol. 3, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1891), 328.

⁹² Denis Davidov, *In the Service of the Tsar Against Napoleon: The Memoirs of Denis Davidov, 1806-1814*, ed. and trans. Gregory Troubetzkoy, (London: Greenhill Books, 1999), 196-198.

⁹³ F. N. Maude, *The Leipzig Campaign, 1813*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1974), 178.

⁹⁴ Jean Rapp, *Memoirs of a General: Count Rapp, 1823*, ed. and trans. by his family, (London: Henry Colburn and Co., 1823), 332-333.

⁹⁵ Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, 673.

raiders.⁹⁶ Additionally, Napoleon was deprived of over 100,000 soldiers who were either besieged in German cities or left to defend major fortresses on the Rhine.⁹⁷ The dominant presence of Coalition forces in the region made reconnaissance difficult, but Napoleon minimized the problem by keeping the French forces closely aligned around him, and in territory that made battlefield surveillance manageable.

Later, during the battle of Leipzig, Napoleon was starved for intelligence, which cost him the knowledge that the Allies remained in a state of confusion having divided their forces across several rivers that did not connect. Napoleon was unable to determine this until the evening of the 16th of October in which he could barely exploit the errors General Schwarzenberg, Supreme Allied Commander, had made.⁹⁸ The Emperor later stated that it was the failure of the young conscripts who were unable to properly follow the movements of the enemy.⁹⁹ Light infantry units graduated from tactical errors in minor conflicts to operational failures that came with dire consequences for Napoleon and his army. Napoleon's only solution to the crisis was to deploy more precious French cavalry into the surrounding area in the hopes of prolonging the field life of the *Grande Armée* in order to achieve his decisive victory and end the campaign.

The Battle of Dresden, which waged from 26 to 27 August, differed from the previous conflicts and was freed of the faults inherent in the new *Grande Armée* system. Napoleon won at Dresden because he centralized his forces around a strong fortification, which minimized his numerical lack of cavalry and light units.¹⁰⁰ Each division Napoleon placed in garrison or

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 675.

⁹⁸ Digby Smith, *1813: Leipzig, Napoleon and the Battle of the Nations*, (London: Greenhill Books, 2001), 65.

⁹⁹ Plon, *Commentaires*, 136. Notes from Napoleon's personal memoirs describing the 1813 Campaign and the Battle of Leipzig.

¹⁰⁰ Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, 662-672.

defensive measures deprived him of already deteriorated light cavalry and infantry forces, but fortifying Dresden allowed Napoleon to avoid some of the issues that plagued the *Grande Armée* the previous three months. Additionally, the fortification ensured that French communications and supply lines were secured, while the June armistice allowed Napoleon to continue to centralize the French Army and consolidate his forces around the fortified city. The Battle of Dresden provided Napoleon with false hope for the remainder of the campaign. The issues that had plagued the French Army up until this point were negligible due to the nature of a defense of a city. The flaws of the light infantry were undetectable as they were primarily utilized as line units due to the position and nature of Napoleon's defense. The Battle of Dresden allowed Napoleon to place misguided confidence again within the *Grande Armée*, and especially the light infantry. The culminating battle at Leipzig was quite different.

The Battle of Leipzig was fought from 16 to 19 October, and pitted Napoleon's *Grande Armée* of 200,000 against the more than 350,000 soldiers fielded by the Coalition forces.¹⁰¹ A decisive victory became paramount in October of 1813 when Napoleon's operational situation deteriorated around him as several German nations, including Bavaria, defected to the Coalition.¹⁰² The situation worsened as the French Army suffered several significant tactical losses in the month of September and October, which forced Napoleon to convene his forces on Leipzig in order to control the Rhine River and force the Allied Army into open battle.¹⁰³ Napoleon aligned his army within the town of Leipzig and in the terrain laying to the east of the city in order to control the advantageous naturally channeling river routes of the city.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Barras, *Memoirs of a Napoleonic Officer*, 178-184.

¹⁰² Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, 673.

¹⁰³ Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, *Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte*, ed. R. W. Phipps, Vol. 3, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 349-351.

¹⁰⁴ Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, 677-678.

Napoleon intended to dominate the major roads leading into the city in order to diminish the numerical superiority of the Coalition and achieve his sought after decisive victory.

The Battle of Leipzig was a disaster for the *Grande Armée*, and even the tremendous feats of the French were unable to bring to heel the overwhelming numbers of Coalition soldiers that poured into the French defenses. Tactically it was complete chaos for the inexperienced and poorly trained ground forces of the French Army. Barras' weak, withered, and drained company of *chasseurs* were unable to properly screen their battalion, who were ultimately all captured during the opening day of the attack.¹⁰⁵

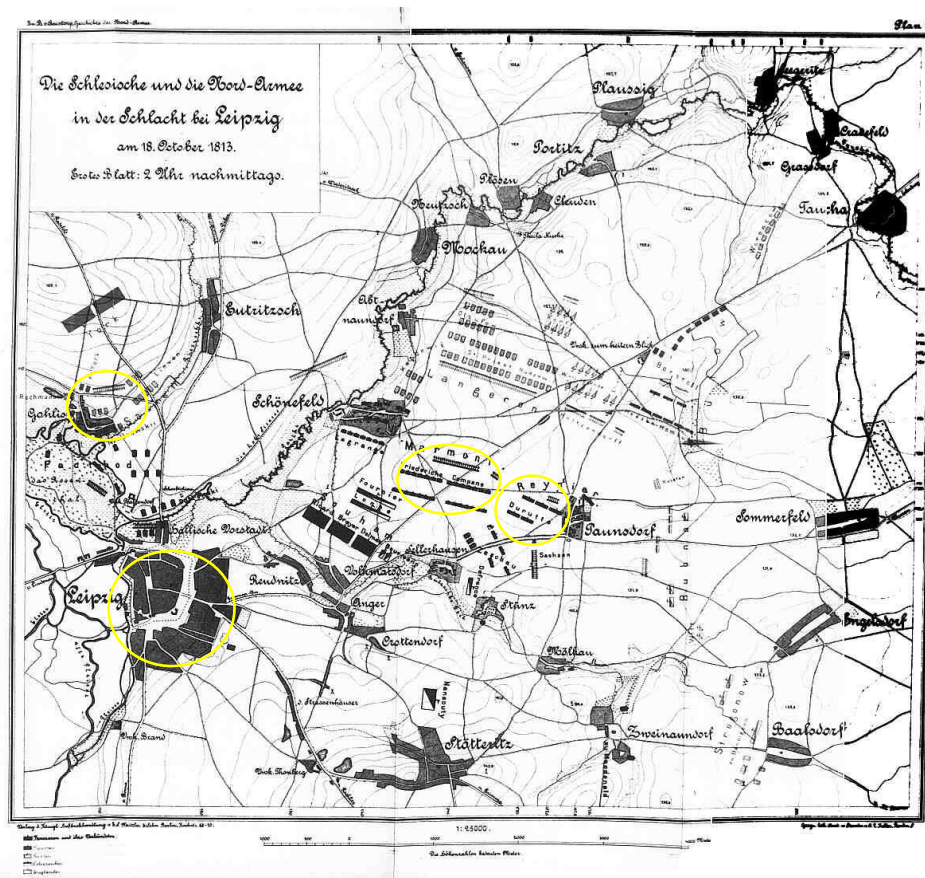


Figure 4. The Battle of Leipzig, 16 to 18 October.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Barras, *Memoirs of a Napoleonic Officer*, 182-183.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Burnham, *Leipzig-Situation at 1400 Hours: October 18, 1813*, 1995, Napoleon Series, web.

French light infantry units continued to suffer throughout the battle as whole companies of soldiers were cut down in the street fighting inside Leipzig.¹⁰⁷ The 16th was a day of indecision as the French wrestled away the surrounding area from the Coalition forces.

However, the 17th and 18th were disastrous days for the French. Left completely unprotected and without any light infantry regiments remaining in the field, the entire VI Corps ceased to exist by the opening of hostilities on the 18th. As Coalition troops surrounded them.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, the Saxon Army defected during the battle, which caused great confusion during the battle and put several hundred French soldiers to flight.¹⁰⁹ It can be identified here that light infantry forces ceased to exist entirely as separate units and more or less became reserve line infantry.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 184.

¹⁰⁸ Barras, *Memoirs of a Napoleonic Officer*, 183.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

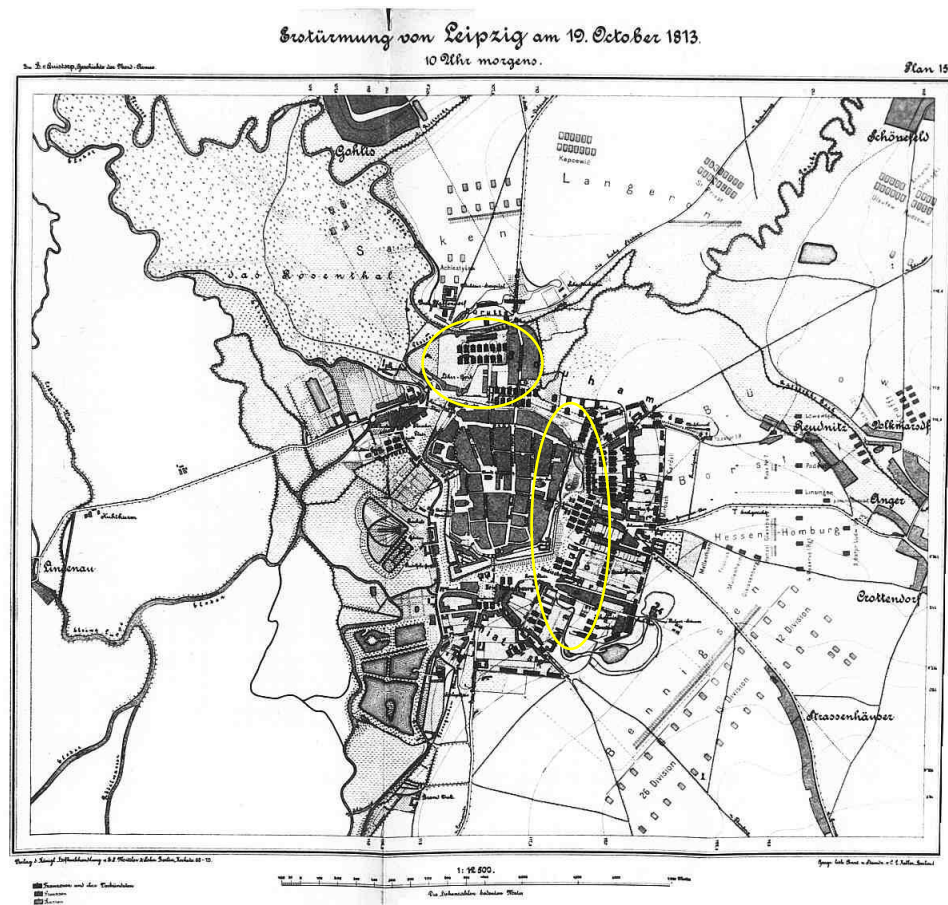


Figure 5. The Battle of Leipzig, 16 to 18 October.¹¹⁰

After three days of vicious fighting the French line, which was spread thin from the beginning, began to give ground and the French Army began to stream into the city in order to cross the river and avoid capture. The Allies began to shell the city, which created pandemonium within the French Army.¹¹¹ A major bridge on the western side of Leipzig, used to evacuate French forces on the 18th and 19th of October, prematurely blew up and stranded over 12,000

¹¹⁰ Robert Burnham, *Leipzig-Situation at 1000 Hours: October 19, 1813*, 1995, Napoleon Series, web.

¹¹¹ Digby Smith, *1813: Leipzig, Napoleon and the Battle of the Nations*, (London: Greenhill Books, 2001), 284-285.

French soldiers.¹¹² The destruction of the Elster Bridge represented the end of the ‘Battle of the Nations.’¹¹³

Light infantry regiments failed to properly conduct urban or assaulting operations, provide ample protection to heavy infantry units, or protect French communications and supply lines. These failures no doubt sprung from the haphazard formation of these units in January 1813. Ill-equipped, unprepared, and poorly trained officers and soldiers degraded these previously heralded regiments. Their operational performances demonstrated their ineffectiveness, but their tactical performances magnified them. From 25 April to 31 May 1813, light infantry regiments averaged almost sixty percent losses, which is five and even ten percent higher than line regiments, whom historically always suffer far greater casualties as they are the decisive infantry units on the battlefield.¹¹⁴ This period of time includes the initial conflicts at Lutzen and Bautzen, which illustrate the tactical immaturity of these regiments during the beginning of the campaign. Light infantry regiments only averaged 500 men by the time the French Army entered their battle positions at Leipzig. Almost half the brigades and divisions had no light infantry at all, which speaks volumes towards the tactical competencies of the French Army during the battle of Leipzig.

After the Battle of Leipzig, several French corps account for only one regiment of light infantry in their after action reports, and these regiments were composed of less than 200 soldiers.¹¹⁵ Line-infantry regiments retreated from Leipzig with less than five hundred soldiers and officers apiece.¹¹⁶ While in exile Napoleon discussed the battle at Leipzig and praised the

¹¹² Ibid., 271-275.

¹¹³ Ibid., 271.

¹¹⁴ Bowden, *Napoleon's Grande Armée*, 114-115.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 332-337.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Old and Young Guard, the cavalry, the artillery, and even the effectiveness of the heavy infantry, but did not mention light infantry.¹¹⁷ Inexperienced light infantry units were unable to perform their basic functions as skirmishers or advanced forward units, and were unable to conduct basic tactical tasks on the battlefield, which led to a structural breakdown of the French Army throughout the campaign. The inability to perform reconnaissance and screening operations, coupled with the inability to protect and defend supply and communications routes, as well as suffering continued battlefield losses eventually forced the capitulation of the French Army in the 1813 campaign

Napoleon was dealt a heavy blow with the loss of his army in 1813. Even though he managed to fight well into 1814, it was devastatingly clear that the French Empire had perished at Leipzig. The 1813 Campaign was plagued with miscommunication, cumbersome conflicts, a lack of effective combat units, and reconnaissance and surveillance problems. The weight of these factors undoubtedly led to the defeat of the *Grande Armée* in 1813. However, the French did not lose the 1813 Campaign at Leipzig, instead they had lost the initiative, the decisive battle, and the momentum signature of Napoleon's campaigns during the early months of the conflict. The German Campaign of 1813 was lost based on the decisions actions and events that stretched from January to June. The Campaign of 1813 might have been quite different if decisions Napoleon made in January had been rectified before the campaign began in April. The disastrous events in 1813, could have been avoided during the reorganization of the *Grande Armée*, specifically, the state of the light infantry.

¹¹⁷ Plon, *Commentaires*, 139-141. Notes from Napoleon's personal memoirs on the Battle of Leipzig, written several years after the fact while in exile on the island of St. Helena.

Although light infantry held a prominent place within the French corps system, and had proven their professional reputation as valuable and decisive assets in numerous Napoleonic campaigns, they were relegated to a second-class status behind other units during the reconstruction of the *Grande Armée*. Napoleon's incessant demands for line-infantry units, as well as a powerful Imperial Guard, led to the creation of ineffective light infantry regiments that were unprepared for the rigors of their tactical and operational duties. Their usual tactical capabilities of skirmishing, reconnaissance, and screening were lost on the newly formed regiments, who were unable to uphold the mantle of French light infantry. Napoleon continued to place heavy demands upon ill-prepared units, which resulted in tactical and operational problems throughout the campaign. The French Army's operational functions were ineffective, because light infantry units were unable to protect their supply trains, communications lines, screen their advancements, or even follow their enemy. These problems began to plague the *Grande Armée* until they had ultimately affected their operational capabilities too, which caused the French Army to be unable to achieve a decisive victory in almost a dozen conflicts spanning a period of six months. The initial subordination of light infantry during Napoleon's reformation of the *Grande Armée* had dire consequences for the French in 1813, and ultimately led to Napoleon's defeat in the German Campaign in 1813

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