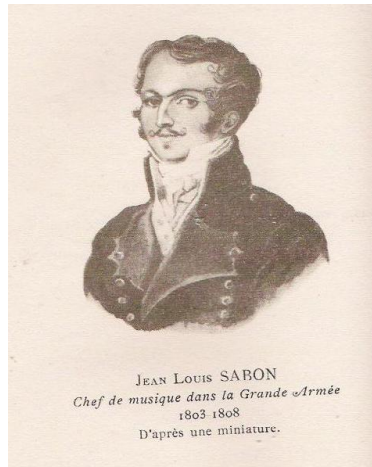


Mémoires of Jean Louis Sabon



English interpretation by Christopher Edwards 2009

Preface.

The following document is not a complete and full translation of his memoirs. It is highlighting the pieces which are of interest to the re-enactor of the 69eme regiment de ligne. He wrote in the first person, this is written in the third. Original spellings of names and places are kept.

His memoirs covers the period of history from 1802 through to 1808. They are incomplete and have small gaps that leave you wondering. The family destroyed the first attempt at his memoirs. The troop numbers used by Sabon can only be representative of the numbers he was told of, there are probably other historical inaccuracies, he wrote them some fifty years later than when the events happened. Nevertheless dramatic moments in all our lives stay longer in the memory banks. I

If you have any questions relating to a particular section or source, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Vive l'Empereur, Vive le 69eme, Qui se frotte s'y pique !

Christopher



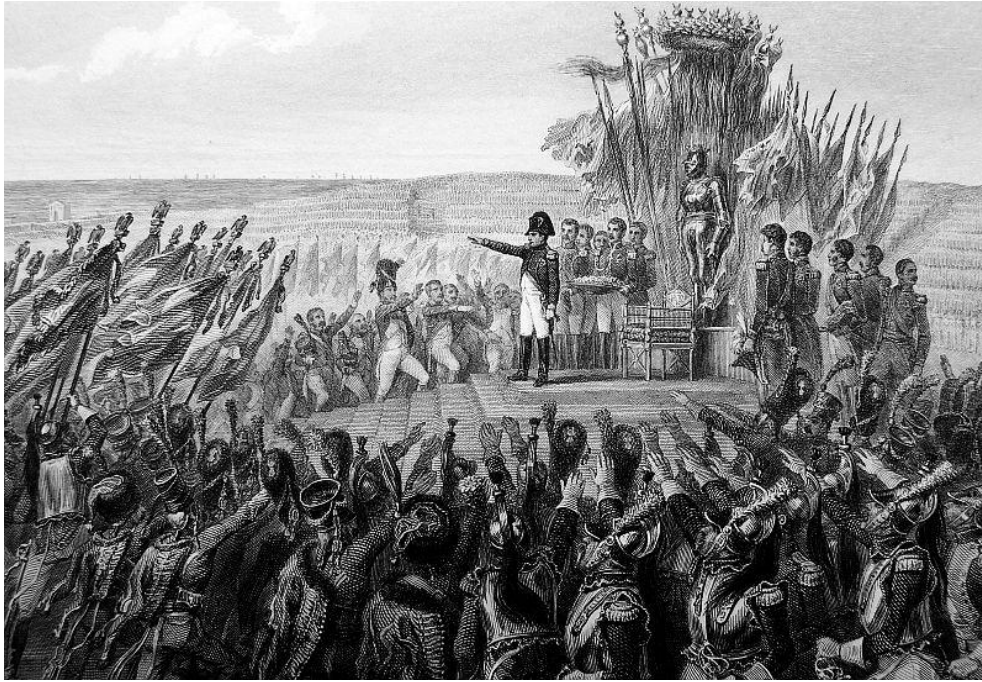
Citadelle in Besancon

Early Years, 69eme in Besancon

Jean Louis Sabon, was born in Geneva in 1791, his father was from the City, his mother from Marseille. Both his parents were accomplished musicians, his mother travelled to Lausanne to give concert recitals and take on students, he joined her there. He was found work as an apprentice lock maker, but had a big argument, ran off and left to find his mother at Besancon at that time. She was angry at his sudden appearance, a row ensued, and he ran off again. He saw the 69eme regiment training/ drilling in rue de le prefecture, Place St. Paul where he spoke to Francois, Chef de Musique, he refuses petit Louis as he was known, ' no we have already three like you, you are too small' The Commanding officer overheard the conversation and called petit Louis over, took him to the Capitaine d'habillement, and equipped him with a triangle. He paraded later, 'with plumet, sword on hip, and a triangle'. His sister pointed him out to his mother on the parade. General Oraison promised his mother that in time he would cool down and he would pull him out whenever she wanted.

Boulogne Camp

1803 November, the regiment left Besancon for the Camp de Boulogne. They were part of 6eme Corps under Ney. The camped at Montreuil sur Mer, near Etaples, incessant rain during their 25 day march there. His mother saw him off never to see him again.



The Boulogne camp was spread over a wide area, the ground carved up by carts and wagons, four leagues from the bourg of Etaples. The ground was high enough to see the sea and the sandy shores, surrounded by sterile dunes of Picardie. First night was spent under the stars, no straw, not blankets, no cover, no fire. Next day fifty men from each company went to get the rations for distribution, straw and blankets. Next they made barracks huts, 12-16 men per hut, musicians had three of them to do, first for the Etat Major, and the other two for 10 musicians each. (so at least 20 musicians in the band). Because of his ages and because he was not very clean he was made to sleep on the floor between two Africans Aly and Mohamet, one drummer caisse roulard, and the other a Cymbalist. They smelled worse than Sabon could describe. In the end the NCOs took pity on him and put him with one of the squads of his company, 5eme compagnie of the 2nd battalion. An old corporal Lecoer , a veteran of the Egyptian campaign, had the job of surveying Sabon and making sure he kept clean. Sabon said he was better treated there than being with the musicians.

The squad he was in was made up of old veterans and conscripts. One of them Rousset was at the siege of St. Jean d'Acre, he didn't know how to read nor write. He entered one of the Harems and took several items of jewellery , one of which a diamond worth 80,000 Francs. This jewel was so beautiful that one evening when he was getting undressed he lost it, but he quickly found it in the dark shinning off the moonlight. In combat and battles his comrades never lost sight of him., but despite close friendship none knew where he kept his diamond, they supposed he kept it 'between leather and skin' He was a good soldier, he took his retirement at the peace of Tilsit at Pezanace (near Cap d'Algues in France). He sold the diamond to a Colonel for 100,000 Francs.

The 69eme was made up of conscripts from Champagne, Brittany, Alsace, Besancon [and some Normandians CE] . Teased by other musicians, notably

Stephens, a bassoon player, for not quickly polishing and cleaning his boots, called a Mousse and Crapaud (he was only 12 at the time). After so much bullying he took up fencing, paying a 'sol' per day, 20 lessons per month for three months. He fought five duels (he writes about only one), he says he was never scared in his life.

He played the secretary for nearly all the conscripts in the squad, they were good to him whilst he wrote their letters at least. Training happened every day, and reviews. Even Mrs Ney, whom he describes as a beautiful blond with her red riding outfit. Ney was subject to abuse about the effectiveness of this massive camping army so started manoeuvres involving some thirty thousand men, which went off extremely well.

At the sound of three cannons, 25,000 men were read to embark for England, sailing or rowing. All the musicians were given carbines except Sabon.

The Emperor reviewing the camp when he came near Sabon. Sabon took off his Chapeau 'Sire, I do not have a musket', 'How old are you?' replied the Emperor, 'Sire I am 12 years old. He passed his pale hand under Sabon's chin, and lifted his head up, he continued walking without another word. Nevertheless Sabon was proud to have been touched 'by such a great man, I considered it an honour'.

He was pumped up by others to ask the Colonel Brun to get some leave. Colonel Brun was close pals with the Emperor, especially after a bottle of rum. He was kicked out and put under guard. (more later).

Mr. Trappier, from the town of Carouge, instructed Sabon, later Trappier became a Captain in the Imperial Guard. Sabon alternated Triangle, Cymbal, and 3rd Clarinette in the band.

Everyday some fifty or so men per company (roughly half) when out on barges in the sea, on one occasion twenty or so of these barges lost half their men. He asked to go along, he didn't have to being a musician and could easily have avoided the experience. The strongest man held the very end of the oar, the others nearer the gunwhale of the boat. After several lessons, dozens were sent to hospital, some never to return.

15th August, Napoleon's Birthday.

Each regiment was asked to host another, the 69^{eme} was received by the 28^{eme} de ligne. At this time there were 100,000 men.

Crosses of the legion of honour were distributed all day, the Emperor taking them out of the hat of Dugueschin. As the 69^{eme} had been in Italy and Egypt, they received a lot, the 1^{er} compagnie des grenadiers received no fewer than 32 arms of honour (1/3 of the men), and half the officers. Nearly all these men were later transferred off to the Guard. Sabon said ' I was really happy to be in a regiment with such valiant soldiers.

The encounter with Colonel Brun, he was too young and naïve, he was wound up to see him, he was kicked out literally (12 years old still), punished and put under guard. Sergeant Major Pichon went to get him out otherwise he would have been there a whole month.

Colonel Brun, no formal education, a brutal man, didn't like receiving advice, only understood strict obedience, he could only sign his name to papers as couldn't write. His secretary Engelot was harshly treated, Engelot complained one day, Brun went to strike him with his cane, Engelot grabbed it also and held it at arm's length, he said 'let go of your can, otherwise I will give you such a hiding the devil will cry for you'. The colonel dropped his end of the cane and offered a glass of wine, 'that's how I like my men to be, good 'bougre'.

They became companions and close friends thereafter. The men in the regiment held them both in high esteem. The colonel Brun was an intrepid soldier, determined, taking part in more than twenty combats and battles, not ever having been wounded.

1805

Twenty three months of camping on straw ended. September, 69eme, part of the Loison division received orders to cross the Rhine at Lauterbourg, on a pontoon bridge made for the purpose. Sabon was exalted he first saw battle at Elchingen against forty cannon and twenty thousand Austrians. The cannon rained down an incessant cannonade. Colonel Colbert, who commanded the lead of the 26e regt. of Hussars, trotted past the 69eme who were running to the attack. He said to his friend Colonel Brun 'Are you with us Colonel ?' 'Why not' was the reply and he charged with Colbert and cut the hulans of Eserhazy to pieces and overran the cannons, the enemy were completely routed.

Sabon described the Emperor that day as completely soaked, covered in mud, his famous grey coat, in equal doses of mud and grey colour, his hat soaked like a sponge which drooped down to the collar of his uniform. He found it an admirable sight and goes on in his memoires to exalt the virtues of such an Emperor. Sabon was now 14 years old.

Sabon goes on to describe his experience of the battle of Ulm, and the population confused, and raising arms against the French, and receiving the brutal consequences against their property and families...

Guntzbourg, 69eme received orders to leave at 5 o'clock in the evening. The regiment suffered a near riot. They were two pays behind (pret de soldat). On the orders to march the grenadiers stood still and shouted 'le prêt, le prêt'. As Sabon says this could have been very serious, they could have been shot on the spot. But solidarity meant that the Colonel paid out the back pay. The money of the three hundred dead soldiers from Ulm, Brun attempted to keep it back. When all paid out, they marched until five in the morning. Three hours of which were spent

trudging across tilled farmland, their boots and gaiters 'stuck to the ground like artichokes. When getting onto a road they could run, yet the mud on the road was liquid coming up to an inch over the soles of their boots.

Fighting with Ney in the Tyrol



On the 20th November 2009, they started to occupy Tyrol with Marshall Ney, who knew it well. As part of the Loison Division went through Lautzberg, Scharnitz, and Neustack Forts without real hindrance.



Sabon describes entry into Tyrol, 30,000 of them against 10,000 well positioned men in the heights around them in and around river Inn. Ney negotiated with

mayor of area. The Fourrier in the band Flovince translated the conversation for the benefit of Sabon as they were in earshot and Ney was speaking German. Ney explained to the mayor that if they took on the French, Napoleon would send others behind them, that they were as good as fighters in the night as in the day. If they backed down their religion, homes and women would be respected. The villages returned home. Because this lifesaving encounter was not a formal General to General encounter (and the Emperor was not present) this was not recorded in any bulletin.



Mittenwald mountains and forest

Nevertheless at Mittenwald, in the evening, the Tyroliens attacked, 600 soldiers of the 69eme killed 15000 Tyroliens, and they spared many more by pity. It was night, to fight at night you had to be brave and careful. You need to be determined and be used to fighting. Sabon had a word to say on Carbines at this point in his memoires. His experience was negative from his use of them in the Tyrol, a burden, necessitated a whole kit to carry with it, and if you lost that the carbine was useless. He picked up one from Mittenwald which had been abandoned and he sold it along with a violin he found upon his arrival at Inspruck (Innsbruck?) He sold it for 60 guelders (2 fr 50cents) the carbine 10 and the violin 50. [Note Mittenwald is famous for making violins]. This bargain helped out his troop who was suffering due to absence of the quarter master who had returned to the depot a Besancon.

Sabon explains that the men showed different behaviour in the camp than when in the field of battle, the mouthy, martial ones that made their duellist opponents tremble in the camp, often eclipsed themselves or showed great fear when facing the day of battle and were poor soldiers during it.

In Tyrol, Inspruck, two soldiers were shot. An old grenadier with three chevrons (21 years plus service) who whilst drunk, tore off the epaulettes off his captain, the other, who was in the artillery, had killed his comrade with a gun to take 15000 francs that they had pillaged together. He did it whilst moving through a forest, but was seen by an officer.

The execution was set for the moment of depart., all the Loison Division was under arms, the peasants dug holes for the two guilty men. Sixteen soldiers and corporals were ordered to fire, to the roll of a drum. The condemned went to their knees, the old soldier was barely conscious, because at customary discretion they gave him spirits. As for the artilleryman he refused to drink and have his eyes covered. The adjutant made the first sign with his cane with signalled 'joue' and a second for 'fire'. The two soldiers fell, the old soldier gave out a horrible groaning, he was finished off by an NCO ready for just such a task.

As they paraded off, and musicians at the head of the column, they were surprised to see only one corpse. The artilleryman, at the moment the officer ordered 'feu' threw himself face down and received a musket ball to his right arm, he saw that the NCO finished off the groaning grenadier so kept quiet and still. Before being buried he jumped up and ran off. He later appeared at a hospital to complain of a wound. He was treated as a vile murderer and he was given poison to drink.

The 69eme did not get to fight at Austerlitz. They were at Vilach when ordered to Saltzbourg. He talks of being well treated as they passed through several small villages and hamlets.

He wore a 'pantalon de nankin' a small 'habit' and no 'capote'. Ney saw him and commented to others, 'look at that musician, look at him with his nankin, despite 10 degrees Reamur, he keeps his cheeks vermeilles.



Saltzbourg and castle.

After their arrival in Saltzbourg they camped at Lauffen in Bavaria.



Images of Lauffen

Its there where General Loison lost an arm whilst hunting. Next stop was Leutkirch, a bad experience for Sabon, where he fell ill and ended up in hospital. It's here where he lost all, his shoes, shirts, trousers, all his effects were worn out and 'mis en loques' , nobody got paid, not even the officers. All his colleagues the musicians had mistresses. His bunk mate had one that gave him six Kreuzer per day. He was still completely naïve. He survived the hospital with the help of a young innocent daughter of a pharmacist, he was sent back to his company, (5eme 2 battalion). Camped at a rich village near Kempten, with orders to give to him all that he was missing.



Kempten and surrounding area.

Under the control of an old corporal armed with 4 billets de lodgement this was achieved. The first was used for bona-fide board and lodgings, the others he used to demand shirts and trousers off peasants, he received 15 aures of good canvas from one rich peasant instead in place of accepting a billet to house a soldier. He did this to three peasants so after a week Sabon was clothed.

Sabon talks then of fond farewells from the villagers, no hate, drinking of toasts as they left.

1806

Saxe, Eisenach [birthplace of Bach], the regiment beat Saxon dragoons despite their superb uniforms and physique.



Wartburg Castle near Eisenach

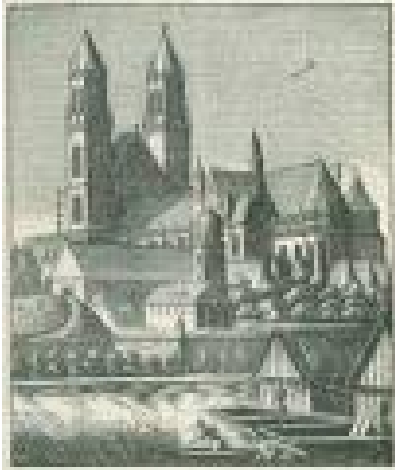
He describes almost frenetic passion and vigour of the French soldiers entering Prussia. Marched fifteen leagues a day to reach Iena on the 14th October, only noise he heard during this was the carriages, horses and clanking of breastplates, no song but purpose.

Napoleon's cortege strung out cutting through the troops and fog in total silence. Fog lifted, witnessed brilliant attack of Colbert again, passed a dying grenadier of the guard, caught up with 69^{eme} already moving up, picked up a Prussian carbine. The old Captain Monnier saw him, tapped him on the shoulder and said 'you are a good fool' because of all the musicians you are the first that I have seen in eight days !'

At the same time the Emperor came up to the 69^{eme} with his cortege, cannonballs landing all around. Berthier only ten paces behind from Sabon, called to Emperor every time a cannonball landed near them. Ney came up to them followed by a Hussar laden with captured standards, he came up to say the battle was being won on all fronts. The battle promptly ended, Napoleon left for Weimar and the 69^{eme} followed him. Sabon unharnessed a Prussian artillery horse and mounted it, exhausted after fourteen leagues. At eleven o'clock in the evening he arrived to see the town being subjected to the worst pillaging possible. In summary Sabon found himself shelter in two places, one of which, his postman Bertin, whom he had known since Besancon, insisted he take him to the place where two young girls had looked after him. Sabon now 16 still naïve and puritanical. He was stopped returning to see them during the passing by of the Quarter Master General Duroc, who pulled him by his ears and boxed him about, the aide du camp came to Sabon's aid.

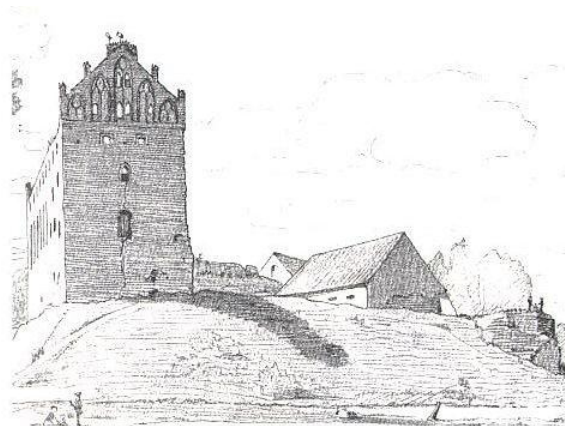
69^{eme} left Weimar for Erfurt which capitulated at their arrival, from there they pressed on to Berlin where they had a beautiful entrance. The inhabitants were petrified with shame. In Berlin the people were starving in poverty, musicians

collecting bread were stopped by young girls offering anything in exchange for bread. The French imposed all sorts of vexations on the people of Berlin. Much reference in the memoires is made to Frederic the Great's threat that if he got to Paris not one stone would be left standing on another.



Magdebourg

The 6eme division of which 69eme formed a part successfully attacked Magdebourg, 23,000 Prussians forced to surrender and return to their families, the capitulation was a humiliation as not a shot was fired. After Berlin there followed a succession of thatched villages, along long roads with groups of Jews selling things.



Skizze der Burg von 1881 (C. Steinbrecht)

Image of castle at Soldau

Soldau(t)

The Brigade had several skirmishes against 14,000 Prussians that were ahead of them. At Soldaut they cut the bridge but during the night the French engineers

rigged a pontoon, on the 25th December, the 69eme entered the town at 2am the 69eme and 76eme were masters of all the points of the town without having to use the bayonet, but after a sustained fire fight. (M. Thiers the official historian has this wrong.) Colonel Brun received compliments of the Emperor, as the general sent to do the job had no energy was floundering, and the Colonel pulled it off. The brigade was only 5,000 against 14,000 and without artillery, entering deeper and deeper into old Prussia an enclave inside Poland. It was at this moment that the professional musicians ('gagistes') suddenly left the regiment to join the Army of Italy. Three of them during a pause in a march, left their instruments on the bass drum. Sabon was a Cymbalist, the clarinette in F was left and was needed for all the melodies, Sabon was asked to look after it thinking that the others would turn up at some point. Sabon practiced with it at every opportunity. Eventually another musician after hearing play every tune by heart suggested Sabon replace 'Olivier' the professional (who was paid 90 francs per month). He agreed to take over on his arrival at Posen. The solo flute player was also called Olivier. Sabon was not greatly liked by the other musicians, two in particular, who had bad stories about the people of Geneva.

One morning, they were quickly ordered by General Marcognier to load their muskets for they had unknowingly walked nearly side by side in parallel to a Prussian infantry division and brigade of Prussian Hulans. Sabon had taken a horse from a farm with all its harnesses except a bridle, he kept with him a 'filet-bridge', he charged with the dragoons. The Prussian infantry division put down its arms after having fired a semblance of resisting volleys, the Hulans made a pretence of trying to help it but turned and galloped off.

The General Rouget gave Sabon the guard of the prisoners, they were about 1500 at least. Sabon used much bravado to carry it off, but regretting forcing the two Prussian officers to give him their scarves (a sign of rank). They gave little resistance but when he asked for one of their fine green high collared capes, he ran to a not too distant French dragoon officer who listened to the Prussian officer and came after Sabon, fortunately he had a fine horse and rejoined the passing 69eme who enjoyed the whole spectacle of this cheeky sixteen year old. He later sold the scarves for 16 Francs to some Jews for bread money, although he knew they were worth 60 francs.

That was the end of the Prussian army that day. 160 million francs in retributions. Ahead of Sabon were 100,000 men of the Russian army.

1807

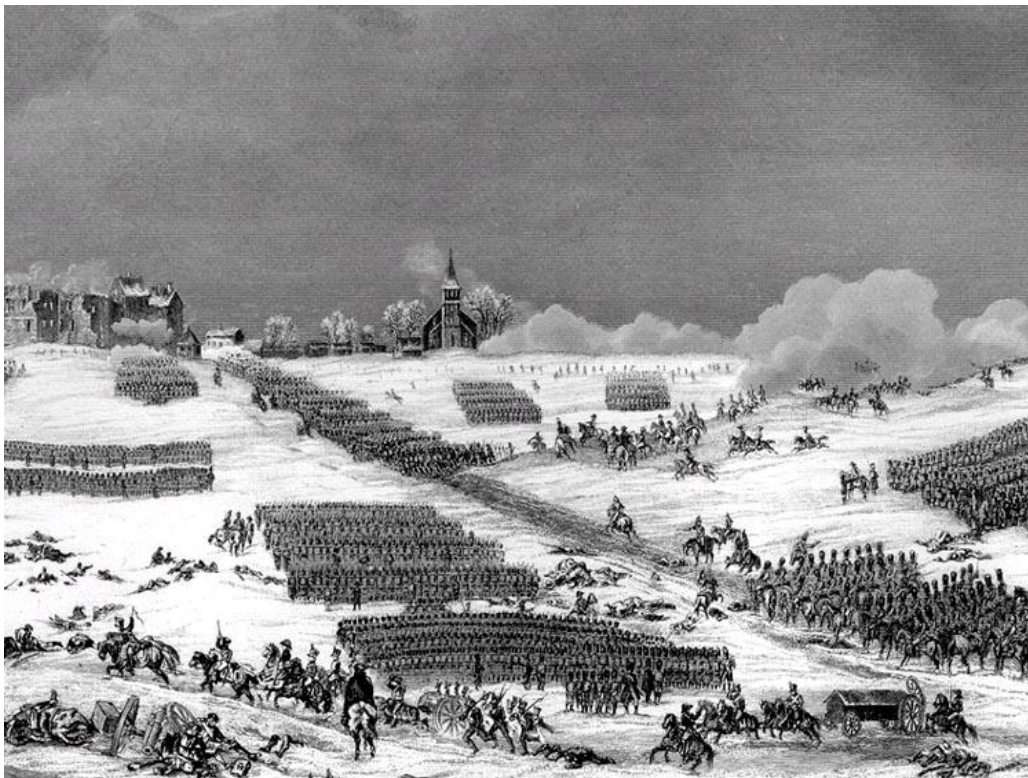
Sabon had a second occasion to speak to the emperor.

69eme were camped at a 'hovel' called Waltersdorf. (today a nice spa town).



Waltersdorf

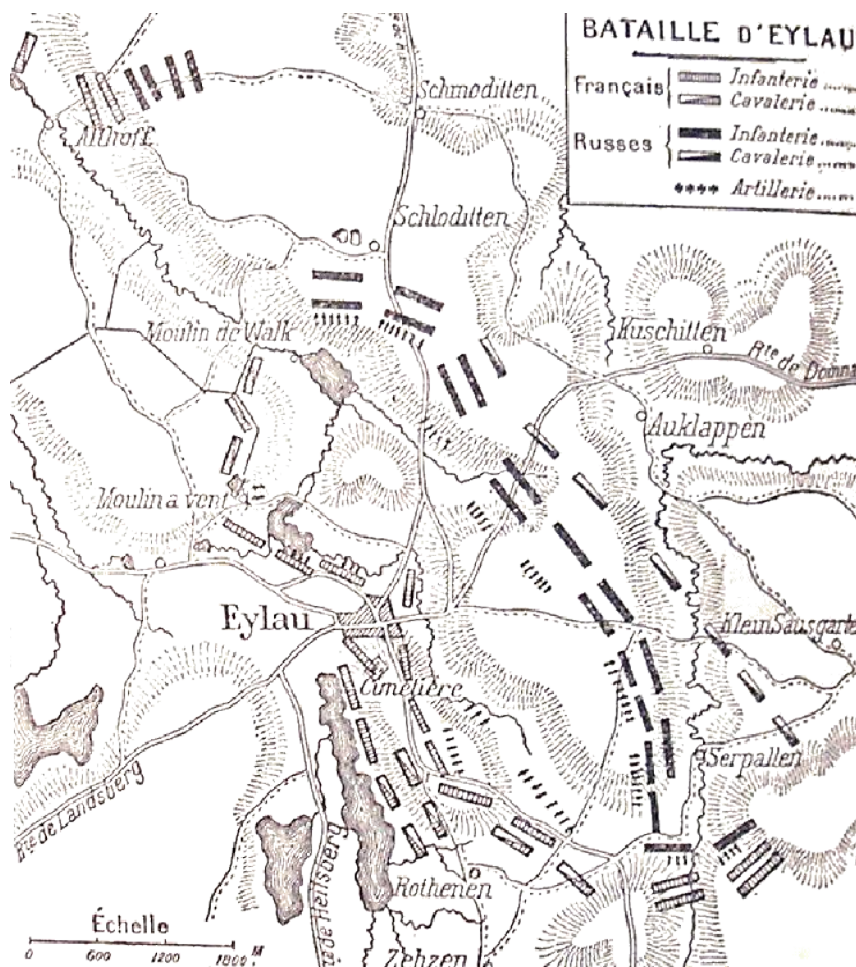
The musicians were busy baking potatoes, when an aide told them to vacate the site immediately, they replied we'll leave once our potatoes are cooked, but he responded that it was the site for the Emperor. The aid asked Sabon and another musician to stay put and keep the potatoes cooking. The Emperor came in, asked him in his low voice, 'what do you have there?' 'Sire potatoes at your service!' He pulled one out, but it was not yet cooked, they had to leave the potatoes and the Emperor, but his hunger was appeased by the satisfaction of meeting the Emperor. The night in Waltersdorf was awful for all the army, because of the cold and lack of bread and water. That night four foot of snow fell, and the nearby Russian army profited from it to decamp.



Eylau

The Imperial Guard gave chase and there was a series of murderous rearguard actions. He describes the horrible experience of walking over snow and dead bodies of both nations already pillaged by locals. He goes on to explain a successful maraud, filling two sleighs with lamb, goose, ham and potatoes, he rejoined the

69eme in the next village, and started to prepare a feast, yet at seven o'clock 7th Feb 1807, the canon sounded. He mounted a small pony to march off again. Part of his feast was lost and shared. He found an empty cottage with a dwindling fire, once he got the fire going he realised it was full of dead Russians strewn about the place about sixty in all. He was used to such scenes now; he cooked his goose which was hung by a string on a wooden rod struck into the floor. He witnessed from the cottage, the attempted encirclement of the Russians, but they fought a way out to Koenisberg. He remained undisturbed the whole night throughout the battle (Eylau). He describes Eylau as a sickening slaughter, he lost the hunger and thirst and no longer felt tired when he moved through the area. The village of Serpallen and Sausgarten (where he ate his goose) and Eylau were full of the dead.



On right you can see villages of Serpallen and Sausgarten that Sabon mentions.

Withdrawal from Eylau

Ney and the 6eme corps were largely unaffected by the losses taking up the head of the retreat with the 69eme joining it at midday. The Russians left them alone.

In the withdrawal many 'caissons' were left behind if they had no cannonballs, they left behind many wounded. Short of horses and transport. The engineers pulled all

the wagons together on the road to be left behind and the most seriously wounded left in them. The retreat was only a league wide. There followed a series of large explosions, only God, the Emperor and the Captain of the engineers can tell us whether this was an accident or planned.

They went back the same way they had come, yet the lakes were now sickly and green, because of the Russian bodies they had thrown in them before. They drank melted snow instead. Several days later they reached an area untouched and they received a quarter bread ration. Sabon describes them as dirty, ragged, without shoes, and covered in lice but despite that we were always happy, joking, and singing happy songs, ah the French, he says.

About 10,000 Cossacks harassed them continuously, Murat talked to the Emperor about it. Sire, it would please me if you gave me 'carte blanche', with a regiment of infantry who has done the Egypt campaign and sustained the charges of the Mameluke cavalry. Napoleon chose the 69eme.

Straight away Murat took the initiative, he left for Bichoffbourg in old Prussia, this allowed them to reshoe and re-clothe themselves. The Cossacks came in and out of the town day and night, so the 69eme had to be on their guard, firing from doors and windows where they were posted. They had a brigade of dragoons with them but their horses were so poor and they slipped around so much in the minus 15 degrees of cold. [Horses shod incorrectly for ice], that they brought little protection. Only once did the French get vengeance. A division of Cuirassiers was placed on a plain around the town, the Cossacks, couldn't tell the difference between the Cuirassiers and dragoons because of their white cloaks. They charged then what they thought to be dragoons. Sabon says 5,000 (half) the Cossacks were put to the sword, the Cuirassiers fenced so well that their arms ached for the following eight days. The order to beat the retreat came soon after, a clear night, at its coldest possible, that it gave frostbite to 500 men. Sabon suffered a little to his left heel. The quarter master had left him a horse which he mounted as soon as he found a saddle, he later sold it for seventy francs, which was a happy bargain.

Sabon was now sixteen and a half years old, good health, happy, sober even when there was plenty of drink around, didn't like spirits and didn't chase the women. His passion he says was music. If we interpret his words correctly he was a virgin until twenty years old in Madrid.



View of Elbingue

They marched to Elbingue, Ostorode, Gutstadt where there was food. General Marchand commanded their division, Colonel Brun became General. He was replaced by Colonel Frierrion (one of several different spellings found), gentleman, educated, Sabon asked his father to recommend him, for he was still with only three francs per month extra pay and the prêt de soldat. Yet he was now playing the melodies with his clarinette in F, indispensable to the band... The other musicians encouraged him to leave the regiment and join another where he would be more greatly appreciated and better paid. The old chief of music Francois left the corps and returned home, at 55 years of age Pere Lemoine replaced him, a bassoon player and composer.

Despite the area being better for food, they still had only three pounds of bread for four men, in it was secreted straw and rye. Marauding had to make up. They found 18 leagues from their residence a castle with a large pile of potatoes, during the night the peasant sowed their 'pois' (peas) the musicians went looking for them and brought back a plateful. The General Marcogne, organised a large scale maraud at three in the morning in the month of May. They surprised a village full of Cossacks, which escaped.

Sabon went into a home, found a poor woman breast-feeding, he had come to take her cow, he didn't want to but unfortunately for the crying woman, the General passed by at that moment, and insisted he take it. The general said 'better to kill the devil than be killed by him.'

Gutstadt

Sabon was one of the first to reach the town of Gutstadt and took the cow to the house where his squad was housed. The 69eme camp was situated two leagues from the town, the 69eme and 6eme Léger made various defensive arrangements, Vauban style ditches. The Russians were within pistol shot distance of them, in a pine wood. The generals promised them a bottle of spirits to those who brought them a sick or wounded Russian. Sabon did creep out and save one. He was pleased with his act of humanity, but the bottle was taken from him by one of the officers at the picket posts. He talks later about an incident where he marauded a horse, it breaks into his lodgings through an outside trap and is stranded in the basement with him, he spends this moment with his comrade from Champagne. A Bavarian trooper later comes into the building sees the existing horse and unsaddles his own and walks off, the pair of them wangle a ramp to get both horses out and they sell the extra horse to the 26eme Chasseurs, they got a Cossack pony in exchange.

They expected at any day a general attack. Every morning Ney got up at dawn, to go to their camp. 5 June, 3am, 80,000 Russians attacked the whole 6e corps (76,

69e, 6e line and light infantry...only 14,000 men). Sabon curious and feeling ardent, left his pack and clarinette with his comrade Charre and left for the camp, not thinking that he would not return to Gutstadt. The Russians had set fire to all the camp. The 69eme were 'en tirailleurs', Sabon couldn't find them. He climbed up to a mound, the Russians fired at him but the balls fell on men much lower than him, placed as skirmishers. Several officers swore at him for exposing himself and drawing fire and they chased him off. He liked the mound for the view of what was unfurling and the sense of danger it brought. He went to the right and arrived in the middle of the 'invincible company of voltigeurs,' which was retrenched behind another mound and defending it with vigorous fire.

The officer commanding said to him something mortifying about being a Geneva person and on the courage of a musician. The latter he deemed just, but he replied that he was mistaken with him, 'Give me a musket and you will see what a Genevan can do, me, I fear nothing' 'oh so you want a musket, ok you will have one but first you have to earn it, you see that Russian lying on the ground, thirty paces from us and on the enemy side, I think he is dead, I will give you Sergeant Robert, a legionnaire, (legion of honour holder), who will fire whilst you take the musket and cartridges off the Russian. Sabon said he had at that time a habit of the institute of Prytanee which you could mistake him for a student of medicine in. (The ecole of Prytanee was set up in La Fleche, the habit of the school is quite distinctive: it is dark blue with red facings, piping, collar, cuffs, and turn-backs, brass buttons. The Russian had a musket ball through his forehead and was still warm. The sergeant Robert, did not stop firing all the time whilst he removed the fifty cartridges from the giberne. He kept saying hurry up but that only made him laugh. He came back to the company to the admiration of all the voltigeurs, all old soldiers having been at Marengo, Saint Jean d'Acree, Ulm and Iena and amongst them Rousset, the soldier with the diamond.

The Russians received the order to advance, the voltigeur company was obliged to retreat, Sabon fired very accurately with his big Russian musket, and they congratulated him for every Russian that bit the dust. They were so close that they could see the colour of one another's eyes.

He ran out of cartridges, he asked a voltigeur to lend him some, a Strasbourgeois, whilst at 'joue' he replied look in my giberne, there was one left between wood and leather, he took it, loaded, and was at 'joue' when he received two musket balls in his left arm. His musket barrel was so hot he could handle it only by the strap, he threw it down and retreated like the others, without having been bandaged by a soldier that held his arm strongly with his cravat he would have lost a lot of blood. His comrade Charve came out from Gutstadt with his backpack and clarinet, and to console him a bit gave him a glass of aniseed drink that he had pillaged from a Russian Cossack company cantiniere. Then he took him to a chirurgien major, who stuck his finger in each hole at each side to see if they met. Sabon was lucky the balls had passed through without touching the bone. He bandaged him with straw freshly gathered from a field, and enveloped it tightly with Sabon's cravat, he was sent five leagues away to be better patched up.

At Ostorode a meat ration was given to him, and a poor aide-chirurgien, better described as a butcher) operated his arm with a blunt razor at where the ball had come out, to prevent the callus that can form in this situation. He just caught a lift with a passing cantinier with the retreating troops. The poor man was very sad, the Cossacks had pillaged him, and not having restored to him his young and pretty wife until she had been raped by all sixty of them. He put Sabon at the front of the wagon. He wanted people to believe his wagon was full of wounded in order to save what he managed to hide from the Cossacks. The 6eme Corps retreated to Deppere, an admirable treat that Ney came out honourably, not leaving a single canon or ammunition wagon to the enemy, this greatly increased their respect for him.

Elbingen

The next day 6th June, the Emperor arrived at Elbingen saw an injured person (Sabon on his wagon) sent an aide to ask who he was, where from, injured at what time, he replied succinctly, knowing it was going back to the Emperor. Several cavaliers of his etat-major came up to look more closely at Sabon, then turned away saying they didn't know him, (it was Sabon's habit of Prytanee which made them think he was one the elite). Sabon does say where he got this habit from.

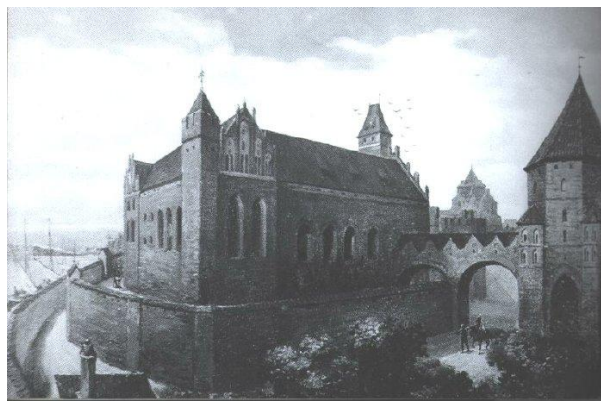


Image of Thorn

Thorn Hospital

At Thorn on the Vistula, where he was sent on foot of course, he entered a hospital where he was well looked after because of his small feat of arms which also gave him permission to come and go as he pleased. Gifted with a voracious appetite, he went to a baker (a lady) his ration being insufficient. The baker who was quite young said that she would not take any money from him, until he had healed, but when came the order to evacuate to Dantsick, she wouldn't take any money from him either. He also received great acts of kindness from the daughter of a chemist,

who gave him a fine soft scarf to support his injured arm, something that attracted women to him even more.

All the walking wounded were evacuated to Dantsick. The boat took them down the Vistula and passed the fort of Guadenz which fired on them. This fort did not surrender until the treaty of Tilsit. They were housed in a large village called Loyal.

The villagers had nothing but four walls and they were fed by the soldiers billeted there, this village like Gutstadt had been pillaged several times by both sides. General Rapp set up a review. He noticed Sabon and called out 'a wounded musician? that's a rare thing.

The captain of the voltigeurs, Nicholas, told him that he had been injured in fighting against the Russians, gun in hand, a 'brave' from Geneva. The general turned to Sabon and asked him 'what would you like,' Sabon being too shy didn't reply. The general said, 'do you want to go to Geneva, its very far but you will have three pennies per league. He replied that he had no parents there and did not say anything more. His neighbour asked for the Croix, all the regiment say you deserve it. The General at this moment saluted the Captain and mounted his horse. He never saw him again and didn't receive the Croix d'Honneur either. Sabon noted that that's what you get for being shy and straight, that all his contemporary Chefs de Musique had the Cross but did not do Napoleon's campaigns as he did, never under fire, never having fired a shot at the enemy but their colonels appreciated their loyalty to merit it.

Steinau (Ścinawa in Polish)

Tilsit peace signed by the two Emperors, orders came to leave Dantzick, and go to Silesia. Camped at Steinau, town of 4,000. The first company of grenadiers and the colonel occupied the town, the rest of the regiment was in the surrounding villages.

Sabon received, at this time, teaching from a Lutheran Pastor, and he made great progress as a musician at this time.

Musicians Stephen and Olivier were still 1st Bassoon Solo, and 1st Flute. Even these two agreed that Sabon should have some reward for his actions at Gutstadt. Mr Lemoine the new Chef de Musique, organized a practice, and Sabon acquitted himself very well at the session. He spent the winter at the home of the booksellers. The wife of which wanted to wallop him for breaking their chinaware, he was moved to another billet. The new billet was a Vet surgeon in the faubourgs of the town, where he said he enjoyed much better food. The couple looked after him as if he was their son.

Sabon goes on to talk about the 26 degrees heat in June in Poland. No food for three days, no real sleep for a week, dead, and dying comrades, yet a brigadier of the artillery train, lent him a horse to ride to a spot where he could get drinking water.

Steinau in Silesia, were happy days for French, lots of promises of marriage and baptisms.

Luben

Next they were sent to Luben, four leagues outside a village where Colonel Frierrion was housed. Bourgeois were very wealthy, musicians were asked to play at the local chateau.

The Colonel greatly vexed Sabon by commenting to Sabon, you were injured attempting to pillage, despite there being musicians and soldiers present to correct him, none opened their mouth in Sabons defence. Despite this, Sabon was recompensed for his good playing by putting him attached to the Etat Major with 60 Francs extra pay, and two 'gallons' on the collar of his habit.

Conclusion of Memoires

He finishes his memoires with an account of his duel with one of the two musicians, Stephens, who constantly chided him for being a Genevan. He provoked the duel by retorting about Stephens running away shouting 'sauve qui peut' during Soldaut Russian midnight attack. Sabon notes that during this attack the 69eme opened fire from the top of a powder depot ! The duel was fought, both injured, Colonel didn't find out, 'Sabon with fever for six weeks' 1808 4 mai.

No information available about what happened 1808-1814.

Biographical Notes:

In 1814 – he was Chef du Musique 69eme.

1er September 1814 – 69eme renumbered 64e

Letter of Colonel Charme exists detailing his commitments.

Fleurus June 17 battle (on the way to Ligny) he was taken prisoner but later released 22nd June by Baron le Bar, and was granted a passport to Bruxelles, Mons and St. Quentin.

Under Louis XVIII, 1816 became Chef de Musique of the 7eme Regiment Infanterie de la Garde.

31st August 1830 in 1830– he was made redundant.

1831 he was made Chef de Musique of the National Garde. 1836 he spent a short spell in Russia, returned to native Geneva and stayed there a time.

1858 in Carouges (Southern Normandie: Department of Orne)

Died 9th March 1862, at Nyon, Switzerland half way between Geneva and Lausanne, the first volume of his memoires were destroyed by the family.

