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Recollections of the War of 1812 by George Hay, Eighth Marquis of Tweeddale

THE following narrative is taken from the recollections of his military life written by George Hay, eighth Marquis of Tweeddale and later a British field-marshal. These are contained in a manuscript hitherto unpublished, preserved at Yester House, Haddington, the seat of the present marquis. The latter part of this manuscript, which alone is here printed, concerns his experiences in America during the War of 1812.

The future field-marshal was born in 1787 of a family distinguished in Scottish history. He entered the army, a boy of seventeen, in 1804, the year of his accession to the title and estates of his father, who had died a prisoner at Verdun, being one of the English travellers in France retained as a hostage by Napoleon. He grew up to be a man of splendid physique, later famous as a swordsman and horseman.

Lord Tweeddale begins his Recollections by a description of his early training as a subaltern, and relates his experiences with Irish recruits who became furiously drunk on board the small collier brig taking them to Liverpool and had to be kept in order at the point of the pistol. The Duke of Gloucester, then in command at Liverpool, who maintained Hanoverian ideas of discipline, wanted to try the recruits for mutiny, and it was only owing to the young subaltern's intercession and his acceptance of personal responsibility for their future conduct that the duke desisted. On this occasion, as later, Tweeddale acted as a friend to his men, knocking them down when they were drunk, but always ready to bail them out when in trouble. In this connection he tells an anecdote characteristic of his relations with the troops. He had to march them to Shorncliffe in the south of England and noticing a disposition on the part of some to tarry behind, he appointed a rear-guard with shillelaghs to administer appropriate correction on the laggards. When one of the recruits called out to him, that it was easy to make a long march on horseback but that the knapsacks weighed too heavy on them, he dismounted at once, asked for a knapsack of identical weight, and with his brace of pistols and the itinerary in addition, marched the whole way on foot to Shorncliffe.

The Recollections contain a vivid picture of English army life in the days of the Napoleonic Wars. Of adventures he enjoyed his full share. Certain of these were humorous, as his encounter with a brigand chief in Sicily who gave him letters of introduction to the great ladies of Palermo, one of whom, a countess of high position, was the bandit's own sister. Life in the army then was rough but not unkindly. In the Peninsular War, when two soldiers were condemned to death for looting, the sentence of hanging was carried out in the presence of the troops on two other men, who had died the night before in the hospital. We find Tweeddale risking his life by crossing a river under fire to rescue the wife of a German hussar who had been forgotten in a temporary retreat. And we see him going into a campaign with plenty of cases of champagne and claret, which on occasion he would lend to the Duke of Wellington. He was twice wounded and took part in a gallant cavalry action from which he returned, after being reported missing, to be rewarded by the great Duke with a pair of pistols which are still preserved at Yester. His Recollections sketch a hasty view of the entire campaign, without any particular idea of its broad significance or strategy, but with a real perception of the alternating episodes of fighting and drudgery, of marches and countermarches, relieved by fox-hunting, gaming, and entertaining.

He was invalided home from Spain after six years of foreign service. Before his health had been restored he joined his regiment which with most of the regulars from the Peninsula had been sent to Canada from Spain to take part in the war with the United States.

The Recollections are of particular interest to us because of the fine spirit of chivalry shown by Lord Tweeddale toward Americans. During the first half of the last century the slighting remarks of English travellers caused intense ill feeling in the United States. It is all the more pleasant to find in time of war, on the part of a then enemy, and a soldier with as much military experience as Lord Tweeddale, a high appreciation of our army. On the occasion of a subordinate writing to him in a manner disparaging to the Americans he rebuked the writer for using such language against an enemy of whom he ought to speak with the highest respect. And he expressed the wish that prisoners passing through his cantonment, if officers, be accommodated with his bedroom and invited to the mess as his guests, and if soldiers, that they be well taken care of at their meals, saying that he himself would defray the extra expenses of their stay. This letter was intercepted by the Americans unknown to him; the knowledge of it served him later in good stead.

The Recollections contain other passages of real interest. There is a fine description of the battle of Chippewa and of the British regulars, led by their officers on horseback, one of whom was Tweeddale, marching into action only to be shot down by the fierce fire of the " Kentucky riflemen " concealed behind a bank. After the armistice Lord Tweeddale visited the American flotilla under Commodore Chauncey at Sackett's Harbor, where everything " looked like a British man-of-war ". He was recognized by deserters aboard from the British navy who grinned at recognizing him. Later Commodore Chauncey told him that many of these had joined the American fleet to escape from the tedious blockade of the French ports. There is a charming appreciation for the cordial hospitality extended to Tweeddale both in New York and in Philadelphia. He describes his return to England in an American sailing packet, and tells of a duel which he arranged should take place across the stern of the vessel, and which was only narrowly averted at the last moment.

The Recollections were dictated by Lord Tweeddale to his daughter, when he was over eighty years of age and had become a very terrifying old man. He had then forgotten to mention the fact that he was himself taken prisoner at the battle of Lundy's Lane under circumstances which reflect equal credit on him and on his captors.[1] This anecdote was related by General Winfield Scott to William Howard Russell, the famous war correspondent of the London *Times* fifty years ago. It is printed in the latter's biographical sketch of the field-marshal's eldest son, himself a man of no slight distinction, in an introduction to the *Ornithological Works of Arthur, Ninth Marquis of Tweeddale* (London, 1881).

Russell had " heard General Winfield Scott, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the United States, describe a scene at Lundy's Lane where a young English officer (Lord Tweeddale), badly wounded and streaming with blood, stood at bay, with his back to the wall, striking fiercely with his sword against the bayonets of a host of Americans and exclaiming ' I will never surrender ' till Scott, who by a strange coincidence had captured his brother (Lord James Hay, subsequently a general in the British Army) on the banks of the Potomac, came up and saved his life ".

After his return to England at the end of the War of 1812, Lord Tweeddale took charge of his Yester estates which had suffered from neglect during his absence and introduced agricultural innovations, foreign at the time, such as deep ploughing and tile-draining. In

[1] No record of this incident has been preserved in the files of the War Department at Washington.

1842 he was appointed governor of Madras and by special arrangement with the Duke of Wellington, whose eldest son had married a daughter of Lord Tweeddale, the latter became commander-in-chief of the local army which stood in need of reorganization. It was said to be owing to the success of his efforts that the Madras army later did not rise in the Indian mutiny. He retired after six years to resume his agricultural pursuits. He died a field-marshal in 1876 at the age of 89. His portrait as a young man in a gallant uniform on horseback, painted by his friend Raeburn, is preserved at Yester.

LEWIS EINSTEIN.[2]

I went the following day to Plymouth where I met an old friend who commanded a ship of war and was about to sail with a convoy to Quebec. He pressed me to take a passage with him as the sea voyage and rest would cure my swelled leg. My regiment [3] was quartered at Fort George at the mouth of the Niagara river. I accepted the offer. On our passage we fell in with a field of ice, in the morning we ran along it. Towards dark we saw a very brilliant light about ten miles ahead. We made signal for the convoy to follow and made all sail as we approached the light. We saw a very high iceberg and when we neared it we saw a three-masted vessel heaving. We shortened sail and when within a few hundred yards of the iceberg we saw a large vessel under the lea of the iceberg we made towards her. I sat on the stern rail of the sloop, the vessel we saw was a privateer and with all sail she ran right across our head at about three hundred yards. All of a sudden I saw the side port-holes raised sailors standing by their guns, lights and fuses in their hands. Of course when right ahead of us we expected to have a broadside of grape but she passed across us and was soon lost sight of in the darkness of the night. It turned out to be one of the convoys preceding us. We fell in with other transports that had been taken by the privateer and retook by them by the time we had left the field of ice and got in among a lot of small icebergs.

On the banks of Newfoundland we had capital sport catching codfish as fast as we set down the hook the fish took it. The first bait was a piece of fresh pork, then we found a shellfish in the cod and baited with it. Nothing further occurred till we anchored at Quebec.

I got my regimental uniform made at Quebec and I was sent up by steamer to Mont[r]eal. I stayed a few days and left for Niagara where my regiment was quartered. It was a long fatiguing journey as I was obliged to ride on two horses I purchased at Mont[r]eal, both young and unaccustomed to troops, my leg was still swelled.

On my arrival at Niagara I found my regiment were at Chipawa.[4] When I arrived I had an attack of fever and ague for the first time. I

[2] Mr. Einstein is not responsible for the few annotations which it has been thought desirable to add to the interesting document which he has been so kind as to contribute. ED.

[3] Lord Tweeddale was lieutenant-colonel of the 100th Regiment.

[4] On June 22 the 100th Regiment was holding Fort Niagara, on the American side, across the river from Fort George. A few days later it was moved forward on the Canadian side to Chippewa.

found the drums beating for the troops to turn out and when I had taken my clothes off I received a message from the general [5] to say he was going to make an attack on the enemy and desired to see me. I returned for answer that I was in the cold fit of ague and that I expected the hot fit in a short time, he postponed the attack for an hour. The General wished to see me when I was dressed, he showed me the plan of the road and the position of the enemy. He said that he intended to march right in front by the road close to the banks of the Niagara to the point of a wood that extended on the right of the road back to the enemy's position. As the General asked my opinion I said I would rather march left in front as the enemy would most probably occupy the wood and if we were attacked and I was ordered to wheel into line the regiment would have its back to the enemy. He paid no attention to my remark, we were attacked as I expected. An aide de camp came to me and said the general desired that I should wheel into line. I told the aide de camp that if I should do so I should have my back to the enemy. I wheeled to the right the gre[n]adiers became the left company. I told off the companies according to formation. We drove back the enemy and the battalion moved round the point of the wood when we got on a plain.

At about 800 yards I saw a bank about five foot high in a straight line parallel to the regiment which had formed with its left on the river. On Guest's Island [6] there were four pieces of artillery playing upon us. The 1st regiment formed line on my right, the light companies had been sent to turn the flank of this bank behind which the American Kentucky rifle men [7] were posted. I never saw more than their heads when they fired on us. The attack in front was made before the light companies were sufficiently engaged on the flanks.

The officer commanding the Royals [8] and myself rode in front of our regiments and when about a hundred yards off the bank I got off my horse to be ready to get over the bank, but the fire was so heavy that both regiments came to a standstill and began firing.

I spoke to the captain of the grenadier company to move forward, he was at that moment killed. I then spoke to the lieutenant he was severely wounded, the second subaltern was killed. All I could do I could not get them to advance. The officers were all killed or wounded and the men suffered very severely. The Colonel of the Royals did all he could to get the men to advance, he got shot in his mouth and became speechless. At the same time I got shot in my game leg that cut the tendon Achilles in two. I could not move they put me on my horse, we retired. There was a zig-zag pailing on one side of the road by which we had advanced—I ordered the men to get over it and take down some of the pailings to let me through. We had just begun to form behind the pailing when a squadron of cavalry came up to us, the officer commanding desired us to surrender I told him if he did not retire I would order the men to shoot him and to fire upon the squadron. He retired immediately. I led my regiment back over the Chipawa creek, and gave over my command of the

[5] Major-General Phineas Riall, commanding under Lieutenant-General Gordon Drummond.

[6] Goat Island? The editor has not found this statement made elsewhere.

[7] Presumably the writer uses the term as a general phrase; no detachment specially composed of Kentucky riflemen was present.

[8] *I.e.*, the Royal Scots, commanded by Lieut.-Col. Thomas Pearson.

regiment to the only subaltern who was slightly wounded. The pickets were posted and the enemy retired.[9]

After getting my wound dressed I was sent down to the mouth of the Niagara river where I got a boat and crossed over to Toronto then York. I remained a day then continued my journey in a bateau rowed by four soldiers. We hugged the shore as the Americans had command of the lake. We landed on the shore, where we remained all night generally in very swampy ground. We took ten days between Toronto and Kingston. Having no surgeon to dress my wound it healed up at both ends. I rested a day at Kingston and then proceeded down the St. Lawrence in a hired boat and arrived at Lachine. We passed under the eyes of the Americans, they took no notice of us. Apartments had been hired for me at Montreal. The wound cured the fever and ague, but the swamps where we slept the night on the shore of the lake brought a return of the ague. The surgeon set about opening up where the ball had entered and came out, it passed through the tendon Achilles and when it healed the sores joined short by one inch or more from the chafing that took place.

Sir E. Provost the Governor-General of Canada[10] used to come daily to see and asked me many questions about the service in Upper Canada. I could only speak of my own regiment which I told him appeared to be composed of fine men. Their appearance was better than anything I had seen before in the British army. They had received compensation money for three years and they had entered upon a fourth year. It was impossible to say to what service they belonged as clothes were patched with every color of cloth. The result of our conversation was that after I had been two months at Montreal, Sir G. Prevost said to me that so many commanding officers are returned on leave and do not seem to have any intention of joining their regiments, that he had written to Sir G. Drummond that the first commanding officer that joins the division after he receives the order is to have the command of a brigade to command it till the end of the war. As soon as Sir G. Drummond[11] left my room I wrote to Mr Duff who had charge of the N. W. Co'y concerns that I wished to see him. I asked him if he could provide me with a cedar canoe and sixteen voyageurs next morning at Lachine to take me up to Niagara. The canoe was ready at the time I ordered and I proceeded to Lachine at daylight and my horses having remained with my regiment I had nothing to think of but the dressing of my wound, I arrived safe at the Falls of Niagara.

On my arrivale I waited on Sir G. Drummond. He told me that Sir G. Prevost had told me [him] to give the command of a brigade to the first commanding officer of a regiment that joined, and therefore he would put me in orders for that command.

The brigade consisted of the 59th, 82nd, 100th, and Glengarry Fencibles and the light companies of the 103rd and 4th.[12]

[9] Lord Tweeddale's conduct in the engagement at Chippewa is highly praised in Riall to Drummond, July 6, *Documentary History of the Campaign on the Niagara Frontier in 1814* (Welland [1896]), edited for the Lundy's Lane Historical Society by Captain (now Brigadier-General) E. A. Cruikshank, p. 32.

[10] Lieut.-Gen. Sir George Prevost, governor-general 1811–1815.

[11] Meaning Prevost.

[12] Meaning 104th. Drummond, Oct. 10, gives a similar statement of the force as under Lord Tweeddale's command at Queenstown. *Documentary History*, p. 243.

I was obliged to carry two crutches in front of my saddle, this was the cause of my being obliged to use crutches for three years after the tendon Achilles did not [heal?].

My knees also plagued me very much, but it was a great thing for me to command a brigade so I bore with these impediments. My brigade did all the night duties and made the reconnaissances. I never saw a better example of steadiness than my own regiment. I did not think they were so steady in a former action and I told them so. On making a reconnaissance to ascertain the strength of the enemy who had made a flank movement to turn our flank, I drew up the 100th regiment in line with ordered arms 5 or 6 hundred yards from a wood in which the enemy were. We made a dash with a company which caused the enemy to drive them backward to form on the border of the wood. The Major of the 100th regiment came to me and said I ordered the men to shoulder arms but they did not obey. I went with him to the regiment, on my way I met an old sergeant of the regiment and I asked him what this meant? He said, "Your Lordship said in a former action when you thought them unsteady that you would remind them of this at some future time. The men are determined to show you that they will receive the enemy if they are charged as you would like to see." Their conduct was wrong but it gave me great confidence in them afterwards. I placed the other regiments so that they could all support the 100th if they were attacked. Having ascertained the strength of the enemy my object was gained and we returned to Headquarters.[13]

The enemy retired and crossed over to their side of the Niagara river. They moved down opposite to Queenstown on the Niagara river, it was supposed they intended to cross there. I had marched the brigade during the night and occupied Queenstown, nothing further occurred they retired ultimately to Sackets Harbour.

The preliminaries of peace were signed, my brigade was broken up and my regiment went down to Kingstown.

During the time I was there I went down to Sacket's Harbour to visit the General who commanded the army. When I was detained at the gate of the fortification I asked to see General Jackson[14] and sent my card to him, they were at mess. An A.D.C. came to receive me and the General invited me to the mess. They were much surprised at my coming to Sacket's Harbour during the war. I told them that the preliminaries of peace had been signed and as my regiment was going to the low country, I did not like to lose the opportunity of making their acquaintance before leaving their neighborhood. The next day news of peace arrived. Commodore Chauncey asked me to inspect their fleet, I went on board the Commodore's ship a 74.[15] The yards were manned and I was received with all the honours.

[13] The reconnaissance described seems to be that at Cook's Mills, Oct. 19; the conduct of Lord Tweeddale in it is warmly praised by Drummond, *ibid.*, pp. 260–262.

[14] A slip of memory. Major-General Jackson was in command of the division of the South, and was at this time either in New Orleans or in Nashville. Most likely it was Major-General Jacob Brown.

[15] The only 74's at Sacketts Harbor were the *New Orleans* and the *Chippewa*, neither of which was completed at this time. *Amer. St. Pap., Naval Affairs*, p. 380. Commodore Isaac Chauncey's flag-ship was the *Superior*. 44.

Everything looked like a British man-of-war, I observed some of the men smile when I passed them. I asked the Commodore why they smiled. He answered they are deserters from the man-of-war in which you came out to America. I stayed one day and returned to Kingstown, my regiment was soon ordered to Montreal. I had written home to Greenwood and Cox [16] to have new clothing out by the opening of the St. Lawrence and I had sent the Tailor to be ready to fit the clothing as soon as the regiment arrived. I told the agents that the men had received the compensation, notwithstanding if the clothing did not arrive at the time I desired I would report the state of the regiment to the Duke of York.[17] The barracks were not ready at Montreal and we had some rough accommodation at Lachine for a few weeks. The men received everything new and felt proud of their appearance they had little to do. I kept a sentry night and day in the of the concern which had been converted into barracks to watch the fires in the night. The regiment was always first and received the reward.

I passed the winter at Montreal, the wound in my leg did not heal so I was obliged to get leave to go home.

I hired a sloop at St. Johns which took me through Lake Champlain. We got becalmed off and came to anchor. When we were sitting after our dinner taking our wine on the poop of the sloop a boat came off filled with Irishmen who were deserters from the 27th regiment. My servant was cleaning my morning clothes, one of them jumped out of the boat and asked who we were, he did not get a satisfactory answer. The remainder followed him and came aft. I observed the American sailors peeping up from the lower deck, and when they heard the Irishmen begin with their insolence to us and one of them take up a glass of wine, our party remaining quite still and making no observation. The Irishmen began to be saucy, on which the American crew came on deck and threatened to throw them into the Lake. They called them every name high-minded fellows could think of, cowardly deserters daring to insult officers in a friendly country. The Americans soon cleared the decks and threatened to duck the deserters unless they got into their boat and went away.

We left the next morning and landed at the end of Lake Champlain. We hired a waggon and arrived at [Albany?] where the landlady and her two daughters received us very kindly. They had heard of our coming there, we found everything prepared as it would have been at home. We stayed all night and the next evening we embarked in a steamer for Hudson's river and got to New York early next morning.

Some English young men by telling me that Napoleon had reentered France and added some offensive remarks. I went to the Hotel where rooms had been engaged for us and began dressing. A rap came to my bed room door by a waiter sent to inform me that eleven gentlemen of New York wished to see me.

They were ushered into the parlour. I soon finished my toilet and received them. After congratulating me on arriving in New York they introduced themselves to me by saying that they heard I was coming to New York on my way home and hoped that I would stay there some little time as each of them had invited a party to meet me at a dinner, at balls and evening parties during my stay in New York which would last about 11 days. I expressed myself very sensible of their kindness and as being

[16] Army contractors.

[17] Commander-in-chief of the British army.

honoured by their invitations. We talked on various subjects and on retiring they left their cards. I then had formal invitations which I accepted and I spent a very agreeable time at New York.

I stayed twelve days at New York and went to Philadelphia where I was most hospitably received. All sorts of gaieties were prepared for our party. After spending a very agreeable week at Philadelphia we returned to New York. An event happened the last night that we were at a ball, we were to leave the next morning at 6 o'clock by the ferry over the [Delaware]. I arrived in time but two of our party young fellows did not arrive. The Captain of the ferry boat was good enough to say that he would wait until I went back for the two young gentlemen. I sent one of our party who found them in the ball-room with two young ladies with whom they were desperately in love. They were obliged to tear themselves away and joined us looking very spoony.

On our return to New York I lived very much with Commodore Chauncey who was a shrewd broad-minded man. He told me much about the institutions in the U. S. A., about our sailors being tired of blockading the French ports so they entered the U. S. navy.

I expressed how much I had been gratified with my visits to New York and Philadelphia. He answered if you were to visit any of our large towns you would receive the same attention. I observed that I could not imagine why they had shown me so much kindness. He said do you not know I will tell you. After being wounded you desired the Major of your regiment to let you know everything that was going on in the Upper Province. You must have received a letter disparaging the U. S. army. You made a reply to him that he was not justified in using such language against your enemy, on the contrary that he ought to speak of them with the highest respect, and in your answer you desired that prisoners that passed through your cantonment if there was an officer he should be accommodated with my bedroom, that he should be invited to the mess as my guest, and if a soldier that a fatigue party should be warned to clear out the room, and that they should be well taken care of at their meals and that you would pay any extra for them during their stay in your cantonment.

The only mail that was taken during the war was that in which my letter was. It had been published in many papers in the States and wherever you go you will be received as you have been in New York and any of your family coming to the states will be made welcome.[18]

When my brother[19] took the Ambassador out to America in the

[18] The reader may be interested to compare a passage in the *Autobiography* of General Winfield Scott, who at Chippewa had borne the leading part in the fighting against Lord Tweeddale and his associates. After the close of hostilities, he says (p. 126) Lord Tweeddale "made several complimentary allusions to the prowess of our troops in the war. Scott passing through London, in 1815, to Paris, met the Marquess of Tweedale [*sic*] in the street, when the parties kindly recognized each other. The latter was on the point of setting out for Scotland and the former for France. Scott was assured of a welcome at Yester House, the seat of the marquess, if he should visit Scotland. The meeting soon became strangely misrepresented, on both sides of the Atlantic, to the great annoyance of the parties".

[19] Captain Lord John Hay, R. N., who in 1842 commanded the *Warspite*, in which Lord Ashburton came to America on his well-known mission. H. S. Burrage, *Maine in the Northeastern Boundary Controversy*, p. 319.

"Warspite" he went to New York and was received as I had been. I returned home in an American sailing packet, a brig. The first thing was to choose a president for our mess, there were 14 or 16 Americans and 5 English officers. Some wished to make me president but the Americans did not like a man with a handle to his name to fill that position, so an American was elected, in three days it was found necessary to change our president. Things went well until one morning when not far from the English coast an American gentleman quarrelled with one of our officers. The Americans said that it was necessary the quarrel should be settled by a duel immediately they got on shore, at a short distance. It was left for me to decide, I gave it as my opinion that they should fight across the stern of the vessel. That was considered too near and was not accepted. I then decided that the quarrel should be made up. A little reflection made our cousins think better of it, so the affair was compromised and the affair was made up.

We arrived at Liverpool, I left immediately for town. The next day I met Sir G. Murray who had just returned from Canada,[20] we agreed to go to Paris together. We arrived at the Duke's hotel on the anniversary of the battle of Vittoria.[21] There was a large dinner party, the present Emperor of Germany [22] and several royal persons were among the company. They were at desert when we were announced as having arrived. The Duke insisted on our coming into the dining-room as we were covered with dust. He made us come and sit beside him and asked the Prussion princes to make room for us. He then told me all about the Waterloo campaign. He said the army was principally composed of young soldiers, many were militia men unaccustomed to move in large bodies, but when formed in position to meet an attack nothing could move them but the orders of their officers. He then told me as a proof of this the 3rd regiment in Kempt's brigade had never seen a shot fired in action. They were attacked by the young guards. They stood firm behind a newly planted hedge. They were made to toe-dress as the sailors aboard a man-of-war by toeing the line of the plank. They received the attack and drove back the enemy, I asked the Duke why they did not advance, he replied I could not trust them in line there was no doubt about their pluck, but he could not depend upon them if made to move away from the hedge.

I asked the Duke when he felt secure that he had gained the battle. He told me that as soon as he saw the young regiments drive back the attack of the young guards he felt certain that if the older soldiers were attacked they would fight their way through all difficulties. He ended by saying that if he had had the Peninsular army instead of the young soldiers that fought at Waterloo he would have advanced after the young Guards were driven back.

The Duke asked me how I intended to employ myself, I told him my leg was in such a state from my never having laid up since I got the wound that I was unable to move without a crutch. He said you have never attended to the business of your property, you had better go home and attend to it. If ever I am employed on active service you may depend upon my not forgetting you.

[20] Major-General Sir George Murray, commander of the troops in Upper Canada and provisional lieutenant-governor Apr. 25–July 1, 1815.

[21] June 21, but on that day in 1815, three days after Waterloo. Wellington was of course not in Paris. It must have been some other battle that he was celebrating.

[22] William I., in 1815 Prince William of Prussia.