

Prenzlau & Taucha

Two forgotten Napoleonic backwaters.

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With the unification of Germany a multitude of Napoleonic battlefields became accessible for the first time in over four decades. I am sure that many fellow enthusiasts have made the pilgrimage to Jena/Auerstadt, Lutzen, Bautzen, Grossbeeren, and other 'holy' sites by now. Being posted in Berlin with the US forces at the time I anxiously awaited the lifting of travel restrictions into the former German Democratic Republic. Upon unification of the two Germanys in October 1990, armed with a rucksack full of references and excellent US Army topographic maps, I began visiting the battlefields I had read about for years.

Arriving at Auerstadt (Hassenhausen) early in the morning on October 14th, the 184th anniversary of the battle, I expected to find hordes of Napoleonic buffs crawling all over the fields and villages. Much to my surprise I was alone. After spending several hours retracing the Prussian attack against Davout's III Corps, I only came across one other 'tourist', a West German gentleman with a metal detector who had recovered several musket balls. Returning several times over the next two and a half years, I was always amazed not to find other Davout fans walking the battlefield.

While planning future trips to other battlefields I delved into my meagre library of Napoleonic references to find historical sites within a reasonable driving distance of Berlin. I came across two somewhat obscure locations which I would like to share with your readers.

Carl von Clausewitz, a name which is well known to all students of military thought and history, gained a great deal of his insight into military theory by being a participant in several of the Napoleonic wars' major engagements: Auerstadt, Borodino, Bautzen, Ligny, and the unsung holding action at Wavre by Thielmann's corps. At Auerstadt Clausewitz was aide-de-camp to Prince August of Prussia, who commanded a grenadier battalion. Following the Prussian Army's defeat at Jena/Auerstadt, the battalion retreated north through Berlin and attempted to join other units which were rallying at Prenzlau. Cut off by the French pursuit, the battalion was finally surrounded and surrendered to elements of General Beaumont's Dragoon Division. Clausewitz was captured along with the prince and spent the next several months in France as a prisoner of war.

In Roger Parkinson's biography of Clausewitz there is a sketch map depicting the final action of Prince August's grenadier battalion near Prenzlau. Comparing it to my topo map and an ADAC (German Automobile Club) map of the area, I saw that there had been very little change in the past 184 years. The engagement had taken place in the flood plain of the River Ucker just west of Prenzlau. Accompanied by a very understanding wife, I made the two hour drive north to Prenzlau, crossed the river, and passed a very enjoyable afternoon slogging around in the muddy fields with maps in hand. Two of the large drainage ditches mentioned in the biography still exist in the same relative locations. I am very confident that I was able to identify the location of Clausewitz's capture, at least within a hundred yards. Because it is a drainage area and floods regularly,

no monuments to the event are present, nor could I find any in the surrounding villages. It was a Prussian defeat, so I was not surprised.

Two hours south of Berlin is the urban sprawl called Leipzig. Unfortunately, many of the sites from the 'Battle of The Nations' are covered by apartment blocks, factories, and other modern eyesores. However, there is one which the Napoleonic wanderer may find interesting.

The lone British Army unit present at the battle, 2nd Rocket Troop, Royal Horse Artillery, was attached to Bernadotte's Swedish force. The troop's commanding officer, Captain Richard Bogue, was killed during an attack north of the city, and buried in a local cemetery in the village of Taucha. In 1813, Taucha was about four miles from Leipzig. The events surrounding his death are described in Anthony Brett-James' book *Europe Against Napoleon*. He also mentioned that near the end of the last century the Bogue family and the Royal Regiment of Artillery restored the stone monument over Captain Bogue's grave. I was determined to find this site.

Today Taucha is a close suburb of Leipzig, but it still retains some small village charm. On my 1:50,000 scale map I was able to identify the location of the village church. From my years in Europe I knew that there was usually a cemetery adjacent to every church. Also, in most villages and towns of any size in 'West' Germany, there is, normally a street sign directing you to the 'Friedhof' (cemetery), or a street named 'Friedhofweg' (cemetery way). However, this was not the case in 'East' Germany. There was a significant absence of street signs. (There are a couple of theories for this, but that is another story.) Taucha was no exception, no signs and no cemetery next to the church. After driving around the narrow streets and alleys for several minutes, we found what we were looking for. The cemetery was surrounded by a high stone wall with an iron gate at the street entrance. The old ladies entering with fresh flowers in their hands were a dead give-away.

In the back, northeast corner of the cemetery we found two monuments. The first, which we could see from the entrance, was a large gazebo-like structure with four columns in classical Greco-Roman style. It was protecting an obelisk topped with a large flaming cannonball, similar to the Grenadier Guards' cap badge. There were smaller versions of this decoration at the four corners of a brass ornamental fence on the top of the gazebo. The monument was the grave site of Graf Gotthard Johann Manteuffel, a Russian general and commander of the Saint Petersburg Dragoon Regiments. If my translation of the inscription (enclosed) is correct, he was wounded on October 16th, 1813, and died two days later. Next to Manteuffel's grave was Captain Richard Bogue's final resting place. Not as elaborate as the Russian's, it is a stone (marble?) cube approximately one meter on each side, protected by a wrought iron fence. Recessed into the face of the marker is a slab of darker stone with the following inscription in English and German:

SACRED TO RICHARD BOGUE NATIVE OF

HAMPSHIRE IN ENGLAND AND CAPTAIN IN HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S REGIMENT OF ROYAL HORSE ARTILLERY WHO FELL IN THE 31ST. YEAR OF HIS AGE GLORIOUSLY FIGHTING FOR THE COMBINED CAUSE OF GERMANY AND HER ALLIES AT THE BATTLE OF LEIPZIG ON THE 18th OF OCTOBER 1813, WHILE COMMANDING THE CONGREVE ROCKET BRIGADE, HAVING HIS DISTINGUISHED SERVICES AT THE VILLAGE OF PAUNSDORF BORNE A MOST CONSPICUOUS PART IN THE VICTORY OF THAT MEMORABLE DAY.

If one is going to holiday in Germany, Austria, or northern Switzerland I highly recommend taking a copy of John Gill's *With Eagles To Glory* with you. It is a wonderful account of Napoleon's German allies during the 1809 campaign and is filled with dozens of small unit actions. The book's excellent maps make it very easy for the enthusiast to retrace the events of numerous engagements, large or small. For the traveller who has the time there are hundreds of sites like these scattered across Europe. Many of them have not changed much over the years. Most people only visit the major battlefields such as Waterloo, Austerlitz, or Wagram, but I enjoyed finding the out-of-the-way

spots. So, get off the Autobahn, avoid the coach tours, and find your own special piece of Napoleonic history.

This is the inscription on General Manteuffel's monument:

Hier ruhen in Gott die Gebeine
des weyland verstorbenen
Grafen
Gotthard Johann
Manteuffel
Russisch Kaysserlichen General,
Chef des St. Petersbourgschen Dragoner Regiments,
Ritter verschiedener Orden.
Geboren in Liefland den 10ten Juny 1771.
tödtlich verwundet in der Schlacht bey
Leipzig den 16ten October 1813. und den
18ten October U. St. an seine Wunden, Seine
Vaterlandes und seines Monarchen
geendet.
Ihm setzt dieses Denkmal seinezartlich
geliebte um Ihn trauernde Gattin
Catharina Grafin Manteuffel
gebr. Zalesky.

“From our Paris Correspondent”

Paris, Prairial 3, Year II (22nd May 1794)

Paris trembles at Danton's arrest

All of Paris was stunned when the news came that Danton and his friends Camille Desmoulins, Delacroix and Philippeaux had been arrested. Requesting the opportunity to address the Convention, Robespierre rejected such calls saying “the object today is to determine whether the interest of a few ambitious hypocrites should outweigh the interests of the French people.” He continued “I say that anybody who is trembling at this moment is guilty, for innocence does not fear the public eye.”

The charges against the Dantonists are not understood, being accused of implication in a foreign plot. An enormous crowd crammed into the courtroom on Germinal II (April 2nd). Whilst Danton defended himself eloquently, his thundering voice drowned those of his accusers “People you will judge me when you have heard me. My voice will not only be heard by you but throughout all of France.” “Will the cowards who are slandering me dare to attack me to my face”. Danton fought throughout, moving his listeners, but the determination of the Committee of Public Safety is solid and there appears little chance of escape.

Execution

It was all over 3 days later. Danton and his colleagues watched by a vast and mainly silent crowd were taken in a tumbrel to the Guillotine, Danton being reported to have shouted out “Robespierre will follow me”. As he stood on the platform of the Guillotine, he said to the executioner Sanson - “Don't forget to show my head to the people. It is well worth the trouble”.

A Survivor

Not all those denounced to the Committee of Public

Safety have perished. General Jourdan, the victor of Wattignies, was summoned to Paris and arraigned before the Committee which demanded that he be dismissed and put under arrest. He was defended by Duquesnoy, a monk turned Representant en Mission, who vouched for Jourdan's loyalty. Returning to the front line news has now come in that he has been involved in a great victory.

Turcoing 16-18th May.

The enemies of France have been massing in the North with Austrian troops allied to British troops under the Duke of York threatening our northern borders. General Souham in command of the Armee du Nord in the absence of General Pichegru struck back at Allied troops trying to encircle him. Indecision on the part of Archduke Charles and poorly coordinated attacks allowed General Souham to seize the initiative.

Detaching Generals Vandamme and Bonnaud to hold the Austrians he lead his main force against the left flank of the Duke of York. The Duke of York himself was very nearly taken prisoner and whilst he was being pursued across country, the leaderless British troops were forced to retreat.

The Allies have taken over 3000 casualties, whilst 19 out of 28 British guns have been taken.

This welcome news has brought some cheer to a troubled Capital.

De Breuc.