

THE  
HISTORY  
OF THE  
KING'S GERMAN LEGION.

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CHAPTER I.

THE electorate of Hanover had not yet recovered <sup>1803.</sup> from the deep wounds which the French revolu- <sub>March.</sub> tionary war, the support of an army on her frontier, and, above all, the occupation of her territory by Prussia, had inflicted upon the resources of the state, and the spirit of the people; when new misunderstandings between France and England threatened her with a renewal of those afflictions from which she had just been relieved.

Measures of mistaken economy, and an extreme apathy on the part of the Hanoverian government, had been for some years operating to lessen the military importance of the electorate, and now rendered it ill qualified to assume a defensive position; the army had been reduced, the for-

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1803. tresses neglected, great part of the existing force  
 March. suffered to return home on leave of absence, many  
 vacancies in regiments, both among officers and  
 men, had been allowed to remain unfilled, and a  
 general relaxation of military discipline and mili-  
 tary spirit had been permitted to engender.

Official Returns. In March, 1803, the nominal strength of the  
 army, including cavalry, infantry, artillery, and en-  
 gineers, amounted to 15,546: of these, however,  
 more than one third were on furlough, and the  
 effective force could not be fairly estimated at  
 more than ten thousand men.

Such was the strength of the Hanoverian army,  
 when M. de Talleyrand's celebrated *note verbale* to  
 the English ambassador\* sufficiently indicated the  
 first consul's designs upon the electorate.

According to the principles of justice, good faith,  
 and the acknowledged rights of nations, Hanover  
 was justified in an expectation of being allowed to  
 remain an undisturbed spectator of the impending  
 contest; under the treaty of Basle she could claim  
 neutrality, and, as an integral part of the German  
 empire, the protection afforded her by the peace of  
 Luneville. But such claims had little weight with  
 the then ruler of France. Under the pretext that if

\* Communicated to lord Whitworth at Paris, on the 11th of March,  
 and which stated,—“ If we do not receive satisfactory explanation  
 respecting these armaments in England, and if they actually take place,  
*it is natural* that the first consul should march 20,000 men into Holland.  
 These troops being once in the country, *it is natural* that an encampment  
 should be formed on the frontiers of Hanover,” &c:

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the sovereign of two countries declare war as king of one, his other territory must necessarily be involved in the same contest, Napoleon justified his occupation of Hanover. 1803.  
March.

That such a calamity, however, was to be apprehended by the electorate, her prime minister, the baron von Lenthe, would not allow himself to believe: that he who had violated the most solemn engagements of the treaty of Luneville; who, instead of restoring the independence of Switzerland, Holland, and the Italian republic, was endeavouring to fix more firmly his despotic rule in those subjected countries;—he who, alike uninfluenced by national or personal honour, sought to evade his sacred promise to the German emperor, and withhold all indemnification to the grand duke Ferdinand for the loss of Tuscany;—he who had scarcely ratified the treaty of Amiens, when he took measures for its violation;—should now meditate a breach of faith with the empire by invading one of her provinces, baron von Lenthe persisted in considering a groundless and unwarrantable alarm; and notwithstanding the king's message to parliament of the 8th of March, the consequent preparations in England, (of which he, residing in London, must have been fully aware,) M. Talleyrand's *note verbale* of the 11th, and the still more decisive evidence of approaching war which an actual assembly of French troops in Holland furnished,—this unsuspecting statesman persevered in

1803. an opinion that no hostilities would take place, and  
 succeeded in rendering his colleagues in Hanover  
 equally insensible to the gathering storm.

March.

But his majesty was far from encouraging so groundless an expectation, and it must ever be lamented, by all those who value the attachment of a loyal people, and the feelings of a brave and devoted army, that the energetic measures which were on this occasion devised by our benevolent sovereign for the defence of the electorate and the protection of her troops, should have been frustrated by the false confidence of his Hanoverian minister.

Narrative  
 of general  
 von der  
 Decken,  
 MSS.

So early as the end of March, major von der Decken, aid-de-camp to his royal highness the duke of Cambridge, (who, without being a member of the Hanoverian cabinet, served as lieutenant-general in that army,) was commissioned, at an interview with which he was honoured by his majesty in London, to acquaint his royal highness that his majesty's wishes were, first, that endeavours should be made to procure assistance from Prussia, in case of which being unsuccessful, the troops to be drawn towards Stade, and if then found unable to oppose any effective resistance to the enemy, that they should be there embarked for England.

His late majesty, then prince of Wales, and their royal highnesses the dukes of York and Clarence, strenuously supported the views of the king, and the English ministry sanctioned the preparation of

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transports for the conveyance of the Hanoverian troops, and their being taken into British pay on their arrival in England. 1803.  
March.

This considerate and judicious design was, however, totally defeated by the inflexible pertinacity of baron von Lenthe; and the non-interference of the British government in Hanoverian politics left that minister at full liberty to guide the helm of the electorate, and to dictate to his acquiescent colleagues a temporizing and pernicious policy.

However, after England had been one month in expectation of, and in preparation for, an event of which his majesty's message to parliament intimated the approach, baron von Lenthe decided that some precautionary measures on the part of Hanover were also advisable, and in furtherance of this view an official communication was despatched from London, on the 8th of April, addressed to field marshal von Walmoden Gimborn, then at the head of the Hanoverian army. This document stated that, "it appeared adapted to circumstances to employ the present time, usually devoted to the exercise of the troops, to call in all those on furlough, and to make arrangements for a camp of instruction, in order that the regiments might be brought together without exciting public attention, and thus, at all

Darstellung der Lage worin sich das Hannöversche Militair in dem Monaten May, Juny, und July, 1803, befand.\*

\* This work is supposed to have been written by marshal Walmoden: it was published in Hanover, in the German and French languages, and nearly all the statements are verified by copies of official documents appended to the work."

1803. events, to prevent the scattered garrisons from  
 March. being unexpectedly cut off:" it further empowered  
 marshal Walmoden to take the steps necessary on  
 his part for the execution of the proposed plan,  
 which was stated to be, for the present, "solely  
 limited to measures of precaution."

The official note which contained these instruc-  
 tions reached marshal Walmoden on the 19th, and  
 on the following day he sought further instruction  
 from the ministry respecting the prescribed arrange-  
 ments, which not corresponding with his own no-  
 tions of the best means to be adopted for putting the  
 country into a state of preparation against danger,  
 also feeling doubtful as to the extent of preparation  
 intended to be made, led him to submit to the  
 ministry the following queries:—

Darstel-  
 lung, &c.

In what part of the country are the troops to be  
 assembled?

Upon what place are they to fall back?

Is the fortress of Hameln to be put in a state of  
 defence?

What are in general our means of resistance?  
 and,

To what extent shall we be permitted to employ  
 them?

The field marshal added his conviction that the  
 execution of "the measures which the approach of  
 danger would require, could not be effected in a  
 short time," and concluded by stating that "he  
 found himself obliged to press most urgently

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for a decision respecting the points of preparation alluded to, or to give up the possibility of being able to execute them with promptitude.” 1803.  
April.

The reply of the Hanoverian cabinet, on the 22d, was as inconsistent as extraordinary.

“ The ministry,” say they, “ entirely acknowledges the necessity for detailed determinations, which the object in view requires; nevertheless, as those determinations depend entirely upon the future developement of affairs, it would be not only dangerous but altogether impracticable to countenance them with too much warmth, and to fix positively upon points of detail. On the whole the ministry view two points as the most important to be first decided on; the one to avoid for the moment all that could *give umbrage*, or create notoriety, (*faire un éclat*,) by which what is feared might be brought on; the second to concert all the preparatory measures which are not contrary to the first point of view, and which might assist the execution of the king's orders.” Darstellung, &c.

The field marshal, perceiving clearly that this note of the cabinet empowered him literally *to do nothing*, decided upon laying the state of his hereditary dominions before the king himself, and on the 27th addressed a letter to London, in which he unreservedly detailed the situation of the country.

“ The army,” said he, “ is very different from what it appears on paper : it has been considerably

1803. weakened by desertion, which sudden changes and  
 April. alarms will increase, and it is absolutely deprived  
 Darstel- of all means of being recruited. We shall be  
 lung, &c. obliged to leave small garrisons in several places;  
 the fortress of Hameln cannot be abandoned; and  
 all the infantry that can be calculated on amounts  
 to ten thousand bayonets: the cavalry want more  
 than five hundred horses, part of which are em-  
 ployed by the horse artillery, from whom they can-  
 not be taken, and even replaced would be useless,  
 unless at the same time means are found to supply  
 one hundred and forty men, which the cavalry want  
 to complete," &c.

Meantime the designs of France became more developed, and the title of *armée d'Hanovre*, given to the troops which she had collected on the Dutch frontier, rendered their destination no longer doubtful.

Marshal Walmoden, therefore, delayed not in taking every step compatible with the restriction by which his exertions were bounded: the Elbe and Weser were reconnoitered, the necessary field equipage put in preparation, the repairs required at Hameln commenced, and on the 4th of May an exact account of what had been done was laid by him before the ministry, who were at the same time informed that, "in consequence of the interdiction of all preparations that might give '*umbrage*,'\*

\* The following anecdote, in explanation of the meaning attached by the ministry to the word "*umbrage*," was related to me in Hanover. The

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he found himself incapable of making any further arrangements." 1803.

May.

This declaration the marshal supported, on the following day, by a long and pressing note in which the ministry were plainly told that, "according to the principles which they had laid down, their measures literally amounted to *doing nothing*;" a considerable augmentation of the army was strongly urged upon them; the details consequent upon this measure brought to their notice; and, finally, they were requested to inform the marshal, who naturally felt that he would be held responsible for the execution of their plans, what were their absolute intentions with regard to the defence of the country. Darstellung, &c.

The ministry had already decided upon authorizing the assembly of the camp of instruction, suggested to them by the official communication from London, which has been already mentioned, when this note reached them; and marshal Walmoden was consequently, on the following day, empowered to undertake the arrangements necessary for the accomplishment of that object: no

general commanding the Hanoverian army having been instructed by the ministry not to suffer the troops to fire, and only in case of emergency "to use the bayonet with moderation," Baron A——, one of that body, was questioned by a friend, "whether such orders had absolutely been given," and "what was meant by using the bayonet with *CHRISTIAN moderation*?" The minister, in reply, acknowledged "that the statement was substantially true," but declared "that the word '*Christian*' was an uncharitable addition of the public!"

1803. notice, however, was taken of his observations  
 May. respecting an augmentation of the army, and the  
 Darstel- camp of instruction appeared to be the utmost  
 lung, &c. extent of preparation on which they were disposed  
 to venture.

With reference to this measure, marshal Walmoden reported, on the 9th of May, that the regiments could not be brought together in less than three weeks. The intelligence from London now furnished a confirmation of the probability that war would be immediately declared, and that from Holland announced the approach of a French army. Walmoden, therefore, again addressed the ministry, and after detailing the arrangements which he had been enabled to make, recurred thus energetically to the important point of augmentation.

“ The ministry have already been informed of the actual number of effective troops, and can judge what will remain after Hameln has been garrisoned with three thousand men; double the number remaining is necessary to support an obstinate and continued defence; the insufficiency of so weak a corps, however stimulated by duty its ardour and bravery may be, cannot escape the observation of the ministry. But we have resources; this is a fact not doubtful; they existed formerly, and we did not hesitate to have recourse to them under circumstances of much less danger than those which probably now await us. \* \* \* \*

“ This is no question of war with foreign coun-