

PICOT DE PECCADUC

1. ARTICLE DE WIKIPEDIA



Le *Feldmarschall-Leutnant* Henry-René Marie von Herzogenberg, ex-Picot de Peccaduc.
Lithographie de Josef Kriehuber, 1834.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/72/August_Herzogenberg_Litho.jpg

(The same portrait can be found on the site www.myheritage.cz. Note that the picture is the same, but the name is August)

Henry-René-Marie Picot de Peccaduc (ou de Peccadeuc), puis von Herzogenberg, né en 1770, était un sergent-major à l'École royale militaire à Paris en 1785, quand Napoléon Bonaparte (1769-1821) y était un cadet.

Selon le mythe napoléonien, Picot de Peccaduc, cadet le plus gradé de sa promotion, se mit entre Napoléon et son cadet ennemi Louis-Edmond-Antoine le Picard de Phélippeaux (1767-1799), futur contre-révolutionnaire, pour les empêcher de se donner des coups de pied l'un à l'autre, et par conséquent il reçut des coups de pied de tous les deux. Abel Gance, dans son film *Napoléon* de 1927, transposa cette scène de Paris à Brienne, où Napoléon avait été un sous-cadet.

Officier au moment où éclata la Révolution, il ne tarda pas à émigrer en Autriche, où en 1811 il prit le nom allemand de Herzogenberg (la montagne du duc, traduction de son nom de Peccaduc, qui a le même sens en occitan); il fit d'abord partie de l'armée de Condé. À partir de ce moment, il porta

constamment les armes contre son pays, prenant successivement du service en Angleterre, en Allemagne, en Espagne et en Russie. De retour en France avec les Bourbons, il obtint le grade de maréchal de camp en 1821 et, deux ans après, il fit la campagne d'Espagne.

Ses descendants comprennent le compositeur Heinrich von Herzogenberg (1843-1900).

Il mourut en 1826.

2. COMMENT

I would like to make a few remarks mostly based on Arthur Chuquet's "La jeunesse de Napoléon", 2nd edition, 1898.

The article on Wikipedia is fundamentally incorrect and does not give full credit to the remarkable figure of Picot de Peccaduc. Besides, almost one half of it is dedicated to an insignificant fact, which, moreover, is invented (the episode of Napoleon kicking his life-long enemy de Phélippeaux) and poorly reported.

1) First of all, I have a problem with both the age and the first name. Chuquet *in the text of the book* never mentions the first name and indicates (p.227) that Picot de Peccaduc was two years older than Bonaparte. He also informs us that he died at 67. The article in Wikipedia states that he was born in 1770, i.e. he was one year younger.

However, *in the extensive notes* attached to the text, p.420, Chuquet writes: **Picot de Peccaduc, Pierre-Marie-Auguste, born 13/2/1767 in Fougeray (diocese of Nantes).**

All indicates that Chuquet is right, and the article in Wikipedia *makes a single person of two brothers*. I found on Internet, [www.geocities.com/Heartland/Bluffs/2868/Rodokmeny/Sedlnitzky.txt] the following indication: "Pierre Jean-Baptiste Picot de Peccaduc, born 13/2/1767, died 15/2/1834". This tallies with the statement by Chuquet, see below, that Picot de Peccaduc died at 67. The name, however, is different, and I tend to side with Chuquet.

2) Secondly, a "sergeant-major" at l'Hotel du Camp-de-Mars was no ordinary sergeant-major. On 26 May 1784 Minister Ségur announced a re-organization of the school, which had been decreed one week earlier. The cadets were formed into a company consisting of four divisions. The company was under a "commandant en chef". However, the cadets preferred to call the commandant-en-chef sergeant-major, in agreement with previous regulations. Picot de Peccaduc was commandant-en-chef

or sergeant-major, i.e. the most brilliant cadet of the school. At the exam in September 1785 he was 39th in 58, the first of the École militaire (Napoleon was 42nd - However, he was two years younger).

3) Thirdly, as the Wikipedia article says, Picot de Peccaduc emigrated and made a career in the Austrian army. He was twice captured by Napoleon's armies, as a major of infantry at Ulm (1805) and at the battle of Tamm (1809) as a colonel. He was recognized, but released on both occasions. In 1811 changed his name from Peccaduc (Pic-a-duc) into Herzogenberg. He participated in the campaigns of 1813 (in the course of which he was seriously wounded) and of the Hundred Days. He died at 67 (Chuquet does not say when, but the date is 15/2/1834 – see above) as a lieutenant Feld Marschal. The last statement of Chuquet is worth quoting: "*...les officiers sortis des deux écoles qu'il avait gouvernées [the Austrian Academy of Engineers and the Academy of Knights] , évoquèrent souvent l'originale figure de ce Peccaduc-Herzogenberg à la taille imposante, à l'attitude martiale, à la voix si puissante qu'on la comparait au roulement lointain du tonnerre, de ce Français qui s'était fait Autrichien, mais qui gardait dans ses manières la gravité bretonne et regrettait peut-être sa première patrie, car jamais on le vit sourire*".

Early short biographies of Picot de Peccaduc call him a “traitor”. However, Napoleon himself felt ill at ease with his former colleague. The fact is that all pupils of the Académie Militaire had sworn loyalty only to the King, not to the abstract concept of “*patrie*”. Sixty per cent of them had “a white heart” (i.e. faithful to the King) and felt that they had only one word, and could not shift allegiance. Most of them emigrated. Of course, Napoleon would not go along with that. Yet, he knew that he had broken his word....Who was, really, the traitor?