

The Napoleon Series

The Cheveau-Legers du Duc d'Arenberg and the 27th Chasseurs-a-Cheval, 1806-1814

By [Daniel Clarke](#)

This is a short piece to show the changes in leadership of the Cheveau-Legers Belges du Duc d'Arenberg, and the 27th Chasseurs-a-Cheval when the regiment was taken into French service in 1808.

Cheveau-Legers Belges du Duc d'Arenberg (27th Chasseurs-a-Cheval)

The Cheveau-Legers Belges du Duc d'Arenberg were authorised to be formed in the autumn of 1806 by Napoleon, who wanted to utilise the manpower of Belgium in his growing armies. He gave Duke Prosper-Louis of Arenberg (1785-1861) the colonelcy of the regiment, even though he was a military amateur and just 21-years old. The regiment's recruiting base and depot was in the city of Liege, and it was to have four squadrons and be uniformed as a standard French Chasseurs-a-Cheval regiment. However, Prosper-Louis had other ideas, and wrote to Napoleon asking if he could add a fifth squadron to his regiment, the men from Arenberg and the German possessions his family owned, who were going to join other contingents from the Confederation of the Rhine. Napoleon agreed to this request, on the basis that the Duke clothed and paid for them himself. Prosper-Louis took even more liberties when he changed the style of his men's uniforms. Instead of the standard dark green jacket, his men wore tight fitting dolmans of the same colour, with rows of gold braiding across the chest, and amaranth coloured collar and cuffs. The officers even took to wearing pelisses as well. Unique among Napoleon's regiments it was recruited on a voluntary enlistment basis, and not conscription, which possibly explains why it could only usually field three squadrons and not five. After the abdication of Napoleon in April 1814 the regiment was disbanded, having served in north Germany and Denmark (1807-1808), Spain (1809-1813), Germany (1813), and France (1814).

The Commanders

1806-1811: [Colonel Prosper-Louis, 7th Duke of Arenberg \(1785-1861\)](#)

1811-1813: Major Leopold (Temporary basis, formerly of the 27th Dragoon Regiment)

1813: Colonel François Xavier Strub (1765-1856)

1813-1814: Colonel Charles-Gaudens-Alois-Marie Bruno de Saint-Georges (1775-1842)



Painting: Portrait of Major Leopold, in the Private Collection of Guy van Eeckhoudt

A portrait of Major Leopold with his Légion d'Honneur of the 27th Dragoon Cavalry Regiment, who took command of the 27th Chasseurs-a-Cheval after Colonel Prosper-Louis, Duke of Arenberg (1785-1861) was captured at the Battle of Arroyo Molinos in November 1811.

Arenberg Contingent Attached to the Cheveau-Legers Belges du Duc d'Arenberg (27th Chasseurs-a-Cheval)

As noted above, this contingent, about 350 men, was supposed to join other forces from the members of the Confederation of the Rhine, but Duke Prosper-Louis of Arenberg wanted them to become the fifth squadron of his cavalry regiment instead. The contingent was recruited from far and wide. It had soldiers from Belgium, France, and the Duke's German possessions, which included men who had fought in the Prussian and Brunswick armies of 1806 against Napoleon. It took time to train these men, so the contingent was sent to the regiment piecemeal during 1807-1808. It was disbanded in 1810 while the regiment was in Spain and the men distributed to the other squadrons.

The Commanders

1806-1807: Captain Alexandre Estournel

1807-1810: Chef de Escadron Jean-Nicolas Augé

Was born in the Alsace region, after the Arenberg contingent was disbanded he remained with the regiment as a squadron commander. He was recalled to France in the spring of 1811 for reassignment, but was killed by Spanish guerrillas while travelling.

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