

The Napoleon Series

Officers of the Anhalt Duchies who Fought in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1789-1815: Anhalt-Zerbst, Friedrich August, Prince of

By [Daniel Clarke](#)

Friedrich August, Prince of Anhalt-Zerbst was born on August 8, 1734 in Stettin (Szczecin), Prussia. He was the only son of Christian August, Prince of Anhalt-Zerbst and his wife Johanna Elisabeth of Holstein-Gottorf to survive into adulthood. His older sister was Sophie Auguste Frederike, who married Emperor Peter III of Russia, and after his death became Empress Catherine II, more commonly known as Catherine the Great. Friedrich was married twice, first to Princess Caroline of Hessen-Kassel in 1753 and then to Princess Friederike of Anhalt-Bernburg in 1764, but both marriages yielded no children.

Educated in Hamburg, Germany, and later Lausanne, Switzerland, he joined the Austrian army as a Major in 1751 in the 11th Cavalry Regiment, Cuirassiers, and became the regiment's inheritor (owner) in 1753, which meant it was given the title Anhalt-Zerbst. Trying to keep his small principality neutral during the Seven Years' War after the death of his father, Friedrich did not lead the regiment against the powerful Prussian army, who were his principality's neighbours. But, his mother decided to hide a French nobleman accused by King Friedrich II of Prussia of being a spy in the capital at Zerbst, and a Prussian force occupied his principality in February 1758. After this event the King of Prussia banished Friedrich from his lands in Anhalt-Zerbst and also the Imperial County of Jever, but allowed him to retain his rule. This meant that Friedrich could issue decrees that were then implemented by a governing council, whose members he could appoint. What this also meant was that he could still control the finances of his principality and this allowed him to live a very comfortable life.

After his second marriage Friedrich took up residence in Basel, Switzerland. From here he made a healthy personal income by selling soldiers that had been trained at the barracks he had built at Jever to the United Kingdom, for her wars in the Americas with the French. During this period of time, until 1783, Friedrich also received financial support from Austria as he had retained his military ranks; in fact he had been promoted to Generalmajor in November 1753, Feldmarschalleutnant in April 1756 and General der Kavallerie in April 1764, as well as Reichs General-Feldmarschalleutnant in May 1768, a rank of the Holy Roman Empire. In 1783 Friedrich resigned his position in the Austrian military, but was promoted in July 1785 to Reichs General-Feldzeugmeister in the Holy Roman Empire.

Having resigned from Austrian service, the French Revolutionary Wars still found Friedrich at the city of Luxembourg near the end of 1792, an important Austrian fortress.

There is little detail as to why he was in Luxembourg, a couple of explanations being perhaps that he was reviewing the men he had sent from his principality to fight with Austria, or that he was fulfilling his duties to the Holy Roman Empire by organising various detachments of Kreis troops there—soldiers called up by the various small German principalities that made up the Empire. It was in this city that Friedrich died on March 3, 1793, having never set foot back in his native lands since his forced exile in 1758.¹

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¹ Siebigk, Ferdinand, 'Christian August Fürst von Anhalt-Zerbst', *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Band IV, Leipzig, Duncker & Humblot, 1876, pages 158-159; Siebigk, Ferdinand, *Das Herzogtum Anhalt: Historisch, Geographisch und Statistisch Dargestellt*, Dessau, A. Desbarat, 1867, pages 219-221; Meyer, Melanie, 'Die Eskapaden des "Baron Maltzahn"', *Nordwest Zeitung*, 28.12.2010, http://www.nwzonline.de/jever/die-eskapaden-des-baron-maltzahn_a_1,0,704813408.html, accessed 06/1/2017