

The Napoleon Series

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

By [Daniel Clarke](#)

Friedrich Erdmann, Prince of Anhalt-Köthen-Pleß was born on October 27, 1731, in Köthen, in the Principality of Anhalt-Köthen. He was the youngest son of August Ludwig, Prince of Anhalt-Köthen and his second wife Johanna Emilie Countess of Promnitz, and was therefore the brother of Karl Georg Lebrecht, Prince of Anhalt-Köthen (1730-1789). He married Louise Ferdinande of Stolberg-Wernigerode in June 1766 and had several children. Of these, three of his sons fought in the Prussian army during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Friedrich Ferdinand (1769-1830), Heinrich (1778-1847), and Christian Friedrich (1780-1813) who was killed at the Battle of Kulm on August 30, 1813.

Friedrich entered the service of Prussia as a Staff Captain in the 26th Infantry Regiment, von Meyerinck, in 1751. However, all did not go as well as his father had hoped for him. Given the rank of Line Captain and a company to command, Friedrich soon fell into financial difficulty through gambling. His father refused to bail him out of his troubles, and as a result he was forced to resign his rank in October 1755. One of the conditions of his resignation was that he had to promise King Friedrich II of Prussia not to join the Austrian army, or indeed that of any of her allies. However, Friedrich soon found employment in the French army as an officer in the foreign German unit the Bentheim Infantry Regiment. Promoted to Brigadier on February 10, 1759, he was given command of the regiment, which changed its title to Anhalt. Ironically, just two months later he led his regiment at the Battle of Bergen on April 13, 1759 against an Anglo-German army allied to Prussia during the Seven Years War. Later that year he was also heavily engaged at the Battle of Minden on August 1, where the French army was again defeated. Near to the end of hostilities he was promoted to Maréchal de Camp in December 1761, and resigned from the army in 1766. In 1765 Friedrich's wife's father had died and left him his estates around Pleß, or Pless, (Pszczyna) in Upper Silesia, Prussia. Having fought against Prussia and her allies in the preceding years, it was not until 1767 that King Friedrich II agreed that he could take possession of the lands bequeathed him. It was at this point that he began using the title of Prince of Anhalt-Köthen-Pleß, creating a new branch of the line of Anhalt-Köthen.

Upon the completion of this, Friedrich then spent time traveling in Russia and later returned to his lands to administer them. When the French Revolutionary Wars began and King Louis XVI was executed in 1793, he resigned the rank he still held in the French army and was given the rank of Generalleutnant in the Prussian army as compensation.

Remaining in his small principality, he took no active part in the fighting and he died on December 12, 1797 in Pleß, or Pless, (Pszczyna), Upper Silesia, Prussia.¹

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¹ [No author found] "Die Fürsten aus dem Hause Anhalt in Brandenburgisch-Preußisch Kriegsdiensten", *Zeitschrift für Kunst, Wissenschaft und Geschichte des Krieges*, Band 10 (Volume X), Berlin, Posen und Bromberg, 1827, page 134; Siebigk, Ferdinand, *Das Herzogthum Anhalt*, Dessau, Germany, Publisher A. Desbarats, 1867, pages 232-233; Michaelis, August Benedict, *Einleitung zu Einer Vollständigen Geschichte den chur und Fürstlichen Hauser in Deutschland*, Volume III, Lemgo, Meyer, 1785, page 672; Straubel, Rolf, "Er Mochte nur Wissen, das die Armeemir gehoret", *Friedrich II und seine Offiziere*, Berlin, BWV - Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2012, pages 115-116; Cust, Sir Edward, *Annals of the Wars of the Eighteenth Century*, Volume II, 1739-1759, London, John Murray (Publisher), 1862, pages 322-323, 328-333