

## The Napoleon Series

### **Officers of the Anhalt Duchies who Fought in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1789-1815: Anhalt-Köthen-Pleß, Friedrich Ferdinand, Prince, and then Duke of**

By [Daniel Clarke](#)

Friedrich Ferdinand, Duke of Anhalt-Köthen-Pleß was born on June 25, 1769 in Pleß, or Pless, (Pszczyna), Upper Silesia, Prussia. He was the second son of Friedrich Erdmann, Prince of Anhalt-Köthen-Pleß (1731-1797), a Generalleutnant in the Prussian army, and his wife Louise Ferdinande of Stolberg-Wernigerode. He was therefore the older brother of Heinrich (1778-1847) and Christian Friedrich (1780-1813). In August 1803 Friedrich married Marie Dorothea Henriette Luise, Princess of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Beck, but she died that November. He married again in May 1816 to Julia of Brandenburg, a daughter of King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia, and they had no children.

Friedrich entered Prussian service as a Lieutenant in September 1786 in the 15th Infantry Regiment, von Kunitzky. Just under two years later, in March 1788, he became a Staff Captain in the 28th Infantry Regiment, von Kalckstein, but two months later he was made a Line Captain and company commander in the same regiment. When the French Revolutionary Wars began in 1792, he was promoted to Major on May 6 of that year and transferred to the 10th Fusilier (Light Infantry) Battalion, von Forcade—which changed its title to von Martini later in 1792. For his actions in 1792 he was given the Pour le Mérite in January 1793. With his battalion Friedrich fought with distinction in a host of engagements including at Hochheim on January 6 and Alsheim on March 30, 1793, where he was wounded on both occasions. In the early summer of 1794 in the month of June he was badly wounded in the right thigh and hip area during a skirmish at Lautern, near Kaiserslautern, which meant he was hospitalised from July until September of that year. However, he never fully recovered from this wound as it would re-open periodically, and over the coming years he would take lengthy breaks from service to visit various springs to recuperate.

When Prussia withdrew from the First Coalition against France, Friedrich became commander of the battalion in March 1795, and in September 1797 became Brigadier of the Upper Silesian Fusilier (Light Infantry) Brigade, made up of the six battalions recruited from that province. Also in 1797 his father died and he became ruler of Anhalt-Köthen-Pleß, because his older brother was unable to take up his rightful position. But, he remained in Prussian service and was given the Order of the Red Eagle in July 1797 and became a Lieutenant Colonel on May 17, 1800.

In 1802 Friedrich made the unusual request to switch from command of his light infantry battalion to the cavalry service. His request was granted, and he became a battalion commander in the 6th Hussar Regiment, von Schimmelpfennig, commanding five of the regiment's ten squadrons. Promoted to Colonel on May 26, 1803, he did not initially take command of the regiment. Instead, in April 1805, he took six months leave and traveled to the Austrian parts of Poland, Moravia (modern-day Czech Republic) and Wallachia (now a region in Romania). Coming to the end of his tour, his hip wound flared up while he was in the city of Bucharest, and while there he also heard rumours that Prussia might have been about to join Austria in her war against France. Friedrich, in some discomfort, returned to Prussia through Hungary as quickly as he could. On his return to he took command of the regiment on October 20, 1805, and would get to see action again against France the next year.

During the Jena-Auerstadt Campaign, Friedrich served in the advance guard of the army commanded by General der Infanterie Friedrich Ludwig, Prince of Hohenlohe-Ingelfingen (1746-1818), under the command of general Louis Ferdinand, Prince of Prussia (1772-1806). He did not fight at Saalfeld on October 10 where the prince died, as he was at the village of Pössneck a few miles east on outpost duty with five of his 10 squadrons. After his command was reunited, he fought bravely on the left flank of the army initially posted around Dornburg at the Battle of Jena four days later under the orders of Generalleutnant Jakob Friedrich von Holtzendorff (1741-1820). Following the retreat of the Prussian army and its dislocation, Friedrich fought at the skirmish near Zehdenick on October 26. During the fighting he managed to break through the French cavalry screen with his regiment and get across the Oder River. He then managed to gather some 3,000 troopers of various cavalry regiments and make his way to King Friedrich Wilhelm III's headquarters. Due to this feat he was promoted to Generalmajor on November 21, 1806, at the same time given the governorship of Upper Silesia and was also given the task of organising a force to try and relieve the siege at the fortress of Breslau (Wroclaw). Friedrich led his mixed bag of units to the fortress in December, but was beaten off by a division of Bavarians when the garrison refused to sortie from behind their ramparts. The next month, in January 1807, Friedrich used his small command to prevent the French from besieging the fort at Glatz (Kłodzko). At the end of the month he was made Chef of his regiment and followed the King to Memel (Klaipeda), joining him at the beginning of March.

Unhappy with the situation in Prussia after the Peace of Tilsit was signed in July 1807, he resigned his position on October 16, 1808 and returned to his principality to bide his time, having failed to get a field command in the Austrian army. Upon the news of Napoleon's heavy defeat in Russia, Friedrich paid for and equipped a squadron of cavalry that he presented to the Prussian monarch in February 1813. But, he was refused his desired active command with the main Prussian army in return for it due to his old wound. However, he was instead made commander of the Upper Silesian Landsturm.

Going back to his principality after the wars had ended, Friedrich was given the Order of the Black Eagle in May 1816. He took care of his principality's running, and was later made duke of a united Anhalt-Köthen-Pleß in 1818, after Ludwig Augustus, Duke of

Anhalt-Köthen died unexpectedly at the age of 17. In December 1819 he was named Chef of the 22nd Landwehr Infantry Regiment, which recruited its men from those who lived around Pleß. Also during the years before his death, Friedrich was given the Prussian Iron Cross, 2nd Class and the Austrian honour of becoming a Knight of the Golden Fleece on May 22, 1830. Moving to the town of Köthen, his new capital, he died there on August 23, 1830.<sup>1</sup>

Placed on the Napoleon Series: August 2017

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1 Montag, Reinhard, "Friedrich Ferdinand Herzog von Anhalt-Köthen-Pless", *Lexikon der Deutschen Generale: Die Generale der Königl. Preussischen Armee*, <http://www.lexikon-deutschegenerale.de/biografien/preussen>, accessed 09/4/2017; [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 135; Siebigk, Ferdinand, 'Friedrich Ferdinand Herzog von Anhalt-Cöthen', *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Band VI (Volume 6), Duncker & Humblot, Leipzig, 1877, pages 671-677; Combined Arms Research Library (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College), *Nafziger Orders of Battle Collection*, <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/carl/nafziger.asp>; Smith, Digby, *Prussian Generals of the Napoleonic Wars, 1792-1815: Anhalt-Köthen-Pleß. Friedrich Ferdinand, Herzog von*, *The Napoleon Series*, [http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/Prussia/PrussianGenerals/c\\_Prussianguenerals3.html](http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/Prussia/PrussianGenerals/c_Prussianguenerals3.html), accessed 09/4/2017; Wagner, August, *Der Feldzug der Preussischen Armee am Rhein in Jahre 1793*, Berlin, G. Reimer, 1831, pages 94-99; Elting, John R., and Vincent J. Esposito, *A Military History and Atlas of the Napoleonic Wars*, London, Greenhill Books, 1999, pages 60-66; Siebigk, Ferdinand, *Das Herzogthum Anhalt: Historisch, Geographisch und Statistisch Dargestellt* Dessau, Germany, Publisher A. Desbarats, 1867, pages 233-234; Petre, F. Lorraine, *Napoleon's Conquest of Prussia 1806*, Uckfield, United Kingdom, The Naval & Military Press Ltd, 2007, pages 124-125 and 133-135; Petre, F. Lorraine, *Napoleon's Campaign in Poland 1806-1807*, Driffield, United Kingdom, Leonaur Ltd an imprint of Oakpast Ltd, 2009, pages 122-123; Cust, Sir Edward, *Annals of the Wars of the Eighteenth Century*, Volume IV, 1783-1795, London, John Murray (Publisher), 1869, pages 241-244; Cust, Sir Edward, *Annals of the Wars of the Nineteenth Century*, Volume II, 1807-1809, London, John Murray (Publisher), 1862, page 26