

The Napoleon Series

Officers of the Anhalt Duchies who Fought in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1789-1815: Harsleben, [?]

By [Daniel Clarke](#)

Harsleben, whose first names could not be found, was most likely born in either the Principality of Anhalt-Dessau or Anhalt-Köthen during the latter part of the eighteenth century. No information could be found about his family relationships, or military service before or during the early part of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, if indeed he was in service at this time.

Harsleben first appears in the records during the first two months of 1814. He had the rank of an Oberleutnant (1st Lieutenant) and commanded what is referred to as the Anhalt Freiwilliger Jäger Detachment, or the Anhalt-Dessau Freiwilliger Jäger Korps. This small unit had no more than 50 men and was formed during February 1814. Some of the recruits came from the Anhalt-Dessau-Köthen Jäger Battalion, which had been organised in the spring and summer of 1813 by the Allies from former prisoners of war under the command of a Major Krohn, a Russian. These experienced soldiers from its scharfschützen detachment stiffened the ranks of the volunteers who made up most of the company. It is possible that Harsleben was one of these men from the Anhalt-Dessau-Köthen Jäger Battalion, or perhaps an officer from the Anhalt-Dessau Gendarmerie who volunteered for the command, as he wanted to see frontline, active service. Either way, being mostly a unit of volunteers, the soldiers actually had to purchase their own weapons and they seem to have chosen to arm themselves with the short, German scharfschützen rifle first manufactured in 1790.

When the company was fully mobilised under Lieutenant Harsleben, it was found to be too small to act as an independent force. Due to this it was attached to the two-battalion Anhalt-Dessau-Köthen Infantry Regiment, which was commanded by Colonel Hoppe and was also mobilising itself around Dessau at this time as well. The combined command saw Harsleben's Jägers march to Brussels, Belgium, where they were destined to join the 3rd German Corps commanded by general Karl August, Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach (1757-1828). They arrived in the city during the early part of February, and would spend most of the next month marching and counter-marching without seeing much of the enemy. With sore feet, but nothing much to show for their work, the regiment was directed to the fortified town of Tournai to reinforce the regiment of the Ducal Saxon Houses, which served as the garrison under the command of Colonel-Brigadier August Karl Baron Eggloffstein (1771-1834) of Saxe-Weimar. Come the end of the month Harsleben and his tiny command would finally get to see action against their French adversaries. This was because General de Division Nicolas-Joseph Maison (1771-1840), who commanded the French forces in the Low Countries, moved his corps against the town during the afternoon of March 31, having beaten a Saxon force at the Battle of

Courtrai earlier in the day so that he could make his escape toward Lille, France. The French arrived before the town walls during the late afternoon and began an artillery bombardment. Maison also sent infantry skirmishers up close to the walls, and they began to fell a number of the defenders, some of whom were most likely from Harsleben's company as his men carried their more accurate rifles as opposed to muskets. The next day Maison continued his retreat and the Anhalters saw little other service in the few weeks leading to the first abdication of Napoleon.

After the end of the war in 1814, Harsleben seems to have remained in the service of the small army of the Anhalt Duchies. In fact he seems to have gained not one, but two promotions in rank prior to the return of Napoleon from Elba in the spring of 1815. Also his small 50-man company was increased in size to a two-company battalion of approaching 250 men. All this meant that when the forces of Anhalt were sent against France once more, Harsleben went with the rank of Major and a command doubled or more in strength. Like the other formations from Anhalt that served in the 1815 Campaign, Harsleben's battalion helped to blockade the fortresses of Mézières and Charleville in northern France from July until September, before being demobilised once again. With the end of the Napoleonic Wars comes the end of Harsleben, as no further information could be found about this officer from Anhalt.¹

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¹ Rawkins, W. J., *Armies of the Confederation of the Rhine, The Rheinbund Contingents 1806-1813, Part 2: Anhalt, Lippe, Reuss, Schwarzburg, Waldeck, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Oldenburg & Frankfurt*, <http://www.thehistorybookman.webeden.co.uk>, pages 17-20, 30; Nafziger, George F., *The Armies of Germany and the Confederation of the Rhine, 1792-1815, Volume I*, Privately published, 1993, pages, 4-7; Nafziger, George, *The End of Empire: Napoleon's 1814 Campaign*, Solihull, UK, Helion & Co., 2015, pages 61-62, 368-369; Bucher, Ludwig Ferdinand, *Der Feldzug des Dritten Deutschen Armee-Corps in Flandern*, Leipzig, Hermann Costenoble, 1854, pages 57-58, 96-97, 207-211; Hein, Bernhard, "Geschichte des Dessauer Militärs", *Dessau Geschichte*, http://www.dessau-geschichte.de/dessau_geschichte_militaer.php, accessed 06/5/2017; Smith, Digby, *The Greenhill Napoleonic Wars Data Book*, London, Greenhill Books, 1998, pages 558-559