

The Napoleon Series

Officers of the Anhalt Duchies who Fought in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1789-1815: Piguet, Friedrich von

By [Daniel Clarke](#)

Friedrich von Piguet, like the commander of the Anhalt-Zerbst Dragoon Squadron, Andreas Dahle, may possibly have been born in the Principality of Anhalt-Zerbst. But he may also have been from another part of Germany, and went to the principality to join the mercenary regiments raised by the ruling prince to fight for Great Britain in the American War of Independence, 1775-1783. This raises the possibility that Piguet could have fought in that conflict during its latter stages.

What is known is that at the beginning of 1792 Piguet held the rank of Captain, and led the small—barely 200 men—Anhalt-Zerbst Jäger Infantry Battalion. Like the Dragoons, Piguet and his jägers joined the Austrian and smaller German forces at the city and fortress of Luxembourg in the Austrian Netherlands in early 1792. Here Piguet and his battalion remained until the spring, or possibly the summer, of 1794. For part of this time Friedrich Augustus, Prince of Anhalt-Zerbst (1734-1793) was part of the garrison, fulfilling his duties as a general officer of the Holy Roman Empire. The prince died in the city in early March 1793. Later in the year Piguet and only part of his battalion was moved to the village of Frisange, which was on the border with France, along the main road leading through Thionville to the city of Metz. Here, on September 12, he and his men first met the French in combat. At about 7am in the morning a French detachment of 450 to 500 infantry and cavalry came up the road from the south, and began to attack Piguet and his 30 jägers garrisoned in the village. Before becoming closely engaged with the French infantry, he managed to send a rider asking for reinforcements to Luxembourg—about 24 miles away. The French, who clearly did not push their advance or advantage in numbers, remained around the village until the Anhalters were reinforced. Piguet and his garrison were rescued by the now famous field marshal Gebhard Lebrecht von Blücher (1742-1819), who came up with parts of two or three Prussian cavalry regiments and the Anhalt-Zerbst Dragoons, which forced the French into a hasty withdrawal, as they had barely 40 or 50 cavalymen of their own.

After this small engagement, Piguet and his men remained in and around Luxembourg until the middle part of 1794, when all of the small German contingents in the area were moved up the River Moselle to the fortress at Ehrenbreitstein and the town of Coblenz (Koblenz), on the River Rhine. This was because the fortress of Luxembourg was reinforced with thousands of Austrian troops, who went on to hold the place against a French siege until the summer of 1795. After Piguet and his battalion reached the Ehrenbreitstein-Coblenz area, there is no clear information about what part they played in the autumn of 1794, and the campaign in 1795. In the latter part of 1794 there was no fighting in the area, and in 1795 there is some information indicating that Piguet served

in the Army of the Lower Rhine. There is the possibility, however, that Piguet's jägers remained in the fortress of Ehrenbreitstein as part of the garrison during this period, which is why he was involved with the defence of the place through much of 1796.

At the beginning of June 1796 Piguet and his battalion are listed as being part of the Ehrenbreitstein garrison, which was commanded by a Colonel von Sechtern—this was in fact Colonel, later Generalmajor, Johann Baron Sechter von Hermannstein (1739-1815). The fortress was, and still is, situated on the right (east) bank of the River Rhine, opposite Coblenz, on the hill of the same name. It was in the territory of the Archbishopric of Trier, and there had been a fortification on the same spot of some sort or another since the 9th or 10th centuries BC. The structure that existed in 1796 was built in the 16th Century, and was described as being in a poor state of repair when the French blockade began on June 9, 1796.

As well as Piguet and his 183-man battalion, Sechter von Hermannstein also had a battalion from the Electorate of Cologne, two battalions provided by the Archbishopric of Trier itself, and nearly two battalions made up of the small, company-sized formations provided by other minor German principalities; figures generally suggest a strength of about 2,500 men. On the French side, a General Andre Poncet (1755-1838) led a division of around 3,000 men. The blockade began on June 9 and lasted until September 17, when the French were forced to withdraw due to the Austrian victory at Würzburg on September 3, which forced the main French army back over the Rhine. According to one source the French lost 1,300 men killed or wounded, and the garrison as little as 123 men. Throughout the two and a bit month siege Sechter von Hermannstein kept a diary. In it he wrote that his garrison fired 32,539 cannon balls, 2,798 bombs (possibly mortars), 5,520 shells, and 137,104 musket balls or small arms rounds. For his services during this siege it is probable Piguet gained his promotion to Major, instead of at some other point during the year of 1796.

When the blockading French division withdrew, it is currently unclear if Piguet remained in the garrison through the winter and into the short April campaign of 1797, or if he was withdrawn and became part of Feldmarschall-leutnant Joseph Heinrich Baron Staader von Adelsheim's (1738-1808) Holy Roman Empire corps of 29,000 men. If the latter was the case, then Piguet's Anhalt-Zerbst Jäger Battalion would have seen no combat, because the French strategically turned and attacked the Austrian right flank, while Staader von Adelsheim's corps formed the centre along the east bank of the River Rhine. Either way after the short campaign and the Peace of Leoben, during the latter part of 1797 Piguet's battalion was amalgamated into one of the Austrian line infantry regiments. However, there is no record of Piguet holding a Major's rank in any Austrian regiment that

I could find. At the present time no further information could be found about his later service and life.¹

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¹ Austrian General Staff, *Krieg unter der Regierung des Kaisers Franz: Krieg gegen die Französische Revolution 1792-1797*, Band I, Vienna, L. W. Seidel & Sohn, 1905, page 536; Austrian General Staff, *Krieg unter der Regierung des Kaisers Franz: Krieg gegen die Französische Revolution 1792-1797*, Band II, Vienna, L. W. Seidel & Sohn, 1905, page 277, 340, 347, 355, 411; Dohna, Albrecht Leopold Wilhelm, *Der Feldzug der Preussen gegen die Franzosen in den Niederlanden im Jahr 1793*, Vol. III, Berlin, Stendal (publisher), 1798, page 260, 320-321; Angeli, Moritz Edlen von, *Erzherzog Karl als Feldherr und Heeresorganisator*, Volume I: *Erzherzog Karl in den Feldzügen gegen Frankreich von 1796 und 1797*, Vienna, Wilhelm Braumuller, 1896, pages 97, 214-217, 220-221, 250, 438-439, 492, 504; Smith, Digby, *The Greenhill Napoleonic Wars Data Book*, London, Greenhill Books, 1998, pages 124-125; George, Nafziger *Orders of Battle Collection*, Combined Arms Research Library (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College), <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/carl/nafziger.asp>, accessed 24/6/2017; Wurzbach, Constantin von, 'Sechter von Hermannstein, Johann Freiherr', *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich*, Volume 33 Sonnklar-Stadelmann, Vienna, Kaiserl. Konigl. Hof und Staatsdruckerei, 1877, page 249