

"von Riedesel?"--Not

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It is historically incorrect to refer to the Riedesel Barons as "von", or to General F.A. Riedesel as "von Riedesel." Various evidence supports my contention.

- A letter written in 1980 to Melvin Riedesel of Clarence, Iowa, by Hellmuth Offeney goes a long way toward putting this question to rest. Mr. Offeney was in the service of Kraft Riedesel, Freiherr zu Eisenbach, at the time. He wrote (in his best English):
 - *The Hessian family-group of the Barons Riedesel never used the nobility predicate of "von" (of in English). Although belonging to the most ancient nobility since the beginning of the 12th century, they self-called them by name only Riedesel without using the nobility predicate "von."*
- In private correspondence (1995), another member of the family concurs that the "von" was not used by earlier generations. However, he reports that some now use "von Riedesel" as a simpler alternative to "Riedesel Freiherr zu Eisenbach."
- Two German historians who made their life's work out of researching the Riedesels of Lauterbach never refer to any member of the family as a "von Riedesel." They had the cooperation of the family and full access to their private archives in Lauterbach. Professor E. Becker wrote four volumes of history prior to the Second World War; these works trace the family's history through about 1700. Baron von Galéra picked up the undertaking and contributed two more volumes which continue the story through about 1900 and may occasionally be found in large research libraries in the U.S.

The series title as used by Professor Becker was "Die Riedesel zu Eisenbach : Geschichte des Geschlechts der Riedesel Freiherrn zu Eisenbach, Erbmarschalle zu Hessen." In translation, "The Riedesels of Eisenbach: History of the the Lineage of the Riedesel Barons of Eisenbach and Hereditary Marshalls of Hesse." Not a "von" to be seen.

Where Did This Historiographic Error Originate?

It was probably with the publication of the memoirs of the General and his wife that the "von" seeped into use by writers. The son-in-law most responsible for this project was Auguste's husband, Heinrich von Reuss, who was attached to the Prussian court in Berlin. The publishers were also based in Berlin and used the "von" in the book titles. In these circles, the "von" predicate was the norm for the nobility. It literally means "of" and typically designated the name of an estate--a Wilhelm von Eichendorf was William (no last name needed) of the estate of Eichendorf. Riedesel was a family name, not a place name. Had they followed the practice of the Prussian nobility, the General would have been known as Friedrich Adolph von Eisenbach.

Later writers--good and bad--have relied on these papers and, without an intimate knowledge of the family, assumed that they were "von Riedesels." The earliest English translations of these papers referred to Charlotte as "Madame de Riedesel"--an oddly-chosen French expression.