

"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." The formal title granted by the Emperor in 1680 gave the adult men the title of "Riedesel Freiherr [baron] zu Eisenbach." Today, members of the family add "FzE" to their names as an abbreviation for Freiherr zu Eisesnbach. A wife is "Freifrau" and an adult daughter is "Freiin."

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 Eduard Edwin 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. A seventh volume published in 2003 is equally von-free.

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 Lineage of the Riedesel Barons of Eisenbach and Hereditary Marshalls of Hesse." Becker notes explicitly in the opening volume (p.16) that the "von" simply was not used in any official way.

Private correspondence over the past 30 years with representatives and members of the Riedesel zu Eisenbach confirm that the "von" usage was never part of the title, though some members have used "von Riedesel" in recent years as a simpler form of address.

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." This is simply inaccurate.