

HANS GEORG von ARNIM

Military commander, Statesman

* 1583, † 1641

Back in the 16th century when names of people and families were not referred to in standardized form, Hans Georg was sometimes also called Johann Georg, and his family was often referred to as either “von Arnheim” or “von Arnhaimb” and “Ab Arnheymb”. Common was also the Italian version: “Gio: Giorgio d’ Arnheim”. Hans Georg himself signed the peace treaty of Schweidnitz in 1633 e.g. as “Hans Georg von Arnimb”.

Hans Georg is from the Boitzenburg family, an Arnim branch of which the male line has become extinct. This particular Boitzenburg Arnim branch is nowadays referred to as “Old Boitzenburg” in contrast to those Arnims of Boitzenburg still alive.

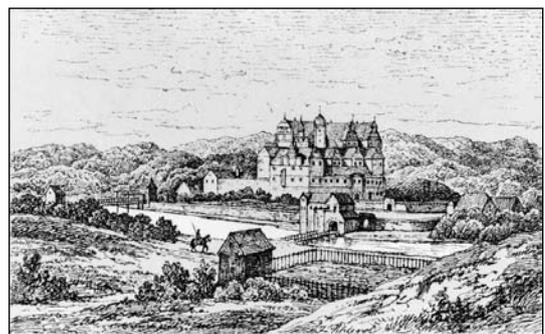
The ancestral estate Boitzenburg lies 20 km to the north of Templin in the Uckermark. In 1528 his grandfather Hans von Arnim exchanged the estate for the extensive fief of Zehdenick, which remained in hereditary possession of the line Arnim-Boitzenburg until it was expropriated in 1945. Hans Georg’s father, Bernd von Arnim (1542 – 1611), was the “Landvogt” of the Uckermark – Governor of this Royal province – and bore the title of ‘Margravian Lord Chamberlain’. His mother was Bernd von Arnim’s first spouse, Sophia, born von der Schulenburg (1556 – 1605).



Hans Georg von Arnim

- 1583 In the first half of the year Hans Georg von Arnim is born as the youngest son of the family.
- 1599/1600 He registers at the universities of Frankfurt /Oder and Leipzig.
- 1611 He inherits the heavily indebted estates Boitzenburg¹ and will have difficulties throughout his life to operate them financially successful, having to contribute money to the estate from his other earnings again and again.
- Hans Georg was not fortunate enough to receive a post in the state administration or at court from his feudal lord, the elector “Kurfürst” of Brandenburg, which might have improved his financial situation.
- 1613 He enters the services of the young Swedish King Gustav Adolf.
- 1614 He is appointed as colonel of a “regiment on foot”.
- 1615 He discontinues his services for King Gustav Adolf without having taken part in any military action.
- 1616-21 The debt of Boitzenburg continues to be a burden on his finances, and despite all his efforts he seems unable to stave off bankruptcy at first. However, in the end a solution was found in order to maintain the Boitzenburg estate.
- He takes up services for the Swedish King again.
- 1621/22 Hans Georg von Arnim takes services for Poland.
- 1622 -1625 He swears allegiance to the elector “Kurfürst” of Brandenburg.

- He inherits his father's feudal tenure.
He becomes regimental commander for Margravia Brandenburg.
- 1626 He enters imperial services as colonel and "Wallenstein's right-hand man."²
He is in supreme command of the troops which intend to occupy the land of the "Marken". Hans Georg negotiates favourable terms for the occupation of Brandenburg, driving the Danes out of the country and occupying Mecklenburg.
- 1628 He is appointed field marshal.
The siege of Stralsund ends unsuccessfully.
- 1629 Holds supreme command of an imperial army in Poland.
He is victorious over the Swedes on the "Stuhmer Heide".
He retires from imperial services.
- 1631 He enters the services of Saxony's elector; appointed as field marshal;
Battle at Breitenfeld where the imperial troops under Tilly's command are defeated by the united Saxonian and Swedish armies.
This leads to the liberation of Northern Germany.
Thereafter military campaigns in Silesia and Bohemia; Prague is captured but is reconquered by Wallenstein.
- 1632 Negotiations to re-enter Swedish services are thwarted and fail.
A new successful military campaign by Saxony's elector leads to the conquest of Silesia.
After the Battle of Lützen in which Swedish King Gustav Adolf is killed in action, Hans Georg von Arnim takes over the top command as lieutenant general³ of the entire Saxonian elector's army.
- 1633 Hans Georg's talent as a negotiator leads to the armistice of Schweidnitz between Wallenstein and the Protestant rulers, however this did not mean peace.
- 1634 A further attempt of Wallenstein to negotiate a peace treaty with von Arnim fails due to the attitude of the imperial generals and colonels.
Wallenstein is assassinated, and Hans Georg escapes this fate most likely because of an illness that prevented him from attending that particular meeting.
Victory over the imperial army at the Battle of Liegnitz, however disagreements between Saxonians and Swedes destroy any possible gains from this victory.
- 1635 Hans Georg von Arnim retires to his possession Boitzenburg.
After the Peace of Prague imperial and Saxonian troops, now being united, fight a battle in the Mark against Sweden.
Terrible devastations are the result, and Hans Georg tries to prevent his estate Boitzenburg from being occupied and destroyed.
- 1635 Diplomatic negotiations in all possible directions with the aim of finding a peaceful solution.



Chateau Boitzenburg, mid 17th century

- 1637 He is captured by the Swedes because they do not trust him.
 1638 He escapes and flees from imprisonment in Stockholm back to Germany.
- 1641 He re-enters imperial services.
 He was about to become the commander of the imperial army against the Swedes but, in fact, this does not happen any more.
 April 28th Hans Georg von Arnim dies in Dresden.

When reading the biography of Hans Georg von Arnim one could jump to the conclusion that he changed his employer and even his principles according to what served him and his career best.

On closer inspection however it does not seem to be that easy anymore.

First of all, at the time it was a normal procedure for a knight to offer your services to various lords and their differing agendas.. Once a job was done, one handed in his notice as per agreement and did not owe anything to each other and did not part on bad terms either. Beyond all his pledges of allegiance to various causes, Arnim seems to have had firm principles well-founded in his Protestant belief, and which made him redefine his own point of view and position in matters of warfare again and again.

Hans Georg had studied theology among other subjects, obtained a “profound and fine intellectual education” had a gentleman’s manner at court, outstanding language skills, a remarkable eloquence and astonished his surroundings with a remarkable memory. He was an extremely devout Protestant who always tried to defend the cause of his congregation. He had in mind to unite all Protestant forces of the empire in such a way that they would not only achieve military but also decisive political power. In a war that was not only waged on questions of faith but was also a substantial struggle for more power, however with no fixed battle fronts, coalitions constantly changed. Any party had to invariably adapt their war goals and Hans Georg was continually obliged to reconsider his own point of view and adjust it to new developments.

Golo Mann describes him in the following way: “He led such a devout life that he was called the ‘Lutheran Capucin monk’. He did not drink heavily at times his comrades drank each other under the table, did not enrich himself where others made a giant fortune, enjoyed listening to daily lectures by his preacher Dr. Preisibius, prayed with his soldiers before each battle (...) and considered discipline and protection of citizens as a principle for his troops like no other commander”. (5) Yet, he could not always prevent the brutal excesses of warfare and an army ravaging the countryside in search for food.

One can see in him a man who went beyond his learned professions of a soldier and military planner, leader and strategist to become a man with a social conscience, thinking politically and acting accordingly – attempting to influence events and act diplomatically.



Hans Georg von Arnim, memorial originally erected in Liegnitz in 1912, moved to Wuppertal in 1962

As an example for this thinking could hold his resignation from imperial services in 1629 after the Edict of Restitution, when Hans Georg, being a strict Lutheran, supported neutrality of the Protestant electors of Brandenburg and Saxony. When it became apparent that the Protestant countries could not be held in a neutral status he actively stood up for a mutual coalition of Saxony-Brandenburg-Sweden and fought together with Gustav Adolf, whom he had defeated only a few years earlier.

In 1632/33 he saw the opportunity of ending the war and took diplomatic steps to do so. "He had remained in constant contact with Wallenstein even after his resignation from imperial services; he had served Wallenstein as intermediary to Gustav Adolf and when Wallenstein in 1632/33 started to turn towards a peaceful policy - against the will of the court at Vienna - it was again the confidante of the Saxonian elector Arnim with whom he negotiated mostly".² The delicate negotiations among the warring parties - after all, Arnim was an active lieutenant general of Saxony's elector at that time - led to the armistice of Schweidnitz in 1633.

Hans Georg had the idea of working out a peace treaty that would re-establish the status from before the war and secure the future of the Protestant countries, but also secure the liberation of the countries from foreign troops. Whether Wallenstein, who increasingly realized how futile the warfare was, would have agreed to these plans, too, remains in the dark. However, he let Arnim to believe he would agree. But the endeavours for peace failed. There were too many opposing interests at play.

When after a year and the subsequent assassination of Wallenstein a new attempt to negotiate failed again and differing positions became more and more entrenched, it seemed most appropriate to start fighting the imperial troops immediately. To Arnim's regret the political ambitions of his elector were not concise enough to consolidate the success of Liegnitz and convert it politically.

On the contrary. In the Peace of Prague of 1635, the emperor and the elector of Saxony agreed to give away Silesia, which had been conquered to convert to Protestantism. "Arnim had raised his voice in vain. And as he had once declared in Breslau that he would rather break his sword than give up the Protestant cause in Silesia, he now remained true to himself unhesitatingly."⁴

He returned to Boitzenburg in the Uckermark from where he fostered his diverse connections, and perhaps also intrigues. The general suspicion of the Swedes and his subsequent imprisonment in Stockholm seem to support this idea.

In 1635 after the Peace of Prague a completely new situation had developed. Emperor and Saxony got along well with each other and various Protestant parties had predominantly adhered to the treaty; however foreign powers had not been included. France had entered the war to support Sweden. Now it seemed important "to preserve the lands and possessions of Protestant Germany and at the same time drive out the intruders." (2) Hans Georg von Arnim wanted to and eventually was able to devote himself to this goal. He became the commander of the imperial army but, unfortunately, died in 1641 in the middle of all the preparations for this battle.

The relationship between Wallenstein and lieutenant general von Arnim was characterized by esteem, respect and trust. Even shortly before his assassination Wallenstein, who had been removed from office and stripped of his powers by the imperial court and his own generals,

put his hopes on von Arnim regarding both the political situation and his own life. . However, the hesitant standpoint of his Brandenburg and Saxonian negotiation partners as well as an occurring illness prevented Arnim from appearing in time.

“He was one of the most pronounced figures amongst the military leaders of the Thirty years’ war and probably the most eminent statesman and general who had ever been in the services of Saxony’s elector”.²

Golo Mann calls him a “military diplomat” and characterizes him as follows:” He had become something like a private politician and general agent of the Protestant powers on his own initiative, whereby he just about got his money’s worth, but not more either; he bequeathed his possession Boitzenburg with a mortgage as heavy as when he had come into his inheritance.”⁵

¹ Strictly speaking the “Unterhaus Boitzenburg”. The vast property was then divided into an upper and a lower house.

² Deutsche Biographie, edited by the History Commission of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, Vol. 1, Duncker u. Humblot, Berlin 1953

³ Lieutenant general was the deputy of the general commander, the general field marshal was the leader of the cavalry or of a removed part of the troops

⁴ Devrient, Ernst: from “Das Geschlecht von Arnim”, part II, vol. 2 p. 65, Prenzlau 1922

⁵ Mann, Golo, Wallenstein, Frankfurt a/Main 1971

Text by Jasper von Arnim, March 2003

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