

Wilhelm, Crown Prince of Germany

By [Martina Weinland](#)



Wilhelm, Crown Prince of Germany (1882-1951)

This photograph shows Wilhelm, Crown Prince of Germany and German heir to the throne, with a horse. The caption reads: "Zu den Kämpfen um Verdun. Unser Kronprinz im Felde." (To the Battles of Verdun. Our crown prince in the field.)

Unknown photographer, n.d., n.p.

IWM (Q 115376), <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205045971>.

Preußen, *Friedrich Wilhelm* Victor August Ernst von

German heir to the throne

Born 06 May 1882 in Potsdam, Germany

Died 20 July 1951 in Hechingen, Germany

Summary

Wilhelm's education was dominated by a strict regime focused on preparing him for the military. As pro forma commander of the 5th Army at the Battle of Verdun, Wilhelm weakened his own position in the military chain of command and was later blamed for the failed offensive in Verdun.

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Early Life and Education

Wilhelm, Crown Prince of Germany (1882-1951), eldest son of [Wilhelm II, German Emperor \(1859-1941\)](#) was born on 6 May 1882 at the Marmorpalais in Potsdam. Wilhelm joined the 1st Company of the 1st Grenadier Regiment. He completed his education from 1886-1900 in Plön at a school created especially to prepare him for his role as monarch. His fellow pupils were recruited from the nearby Cadet academy. In 1900 Wilhelm entered the military and served for one year with the First Guards Regiment in Potsdam. He then attended university in Bonn. After graduating he worked at several ministries within the Prussian government. Wilhelm soon became the bearer of hope for the radical right opposition “*Alldeutsche*” movement, which sought to create a Greater [Germany](#) (*Großdeutschland*). The crown prince was linked to the movement even after 1914, although he never associated himself with it.

World War I

Due to mobilization, Wilhelm took pro forma command of the 5th Army on 2 August 1914, while generals such as [Konstantin Heinrich Schmidt von Knobelsdorf \(1860-1936\)](#) and [Walther Freiherr von Lüttwitz \(1859-1942\)](#) carried the real responsibility for military success. The army was based in Koblenz at the time and was preparing to defend the [Western Front](#). In 1915 the German army was restructured, leading to the formation of “*Heeresgruppen*”. Wilhelm took command of *Heeresgruppe Deutscher Kronprinz*, which was based in [France](#) between Noyon and Verdun in 1916, a position he held until 1918. Wilhelm’s actions during the [Verdun Offensive](#) and the arguments between his staff and Major General Schmidt von Knobelsdorf led him to be blamed for the offensive’s failure.

After World War I

Following the [German revolution](#) in 1918, Wilhelm renounced his rights to the throne. He returned from exile in the Netherlands in 1923, though he failed to re-establish a monarchy headed by a *Kaiser*. Wilhelm died in 1951 and is buried on Burg Hohenzollern.

Martina Weinland, Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin

Selected Bibliography

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- [Offizier-Kriegsberichterstatter d. Heeresgruppe \(ed.\): **Kämpfe der Heeresgruppe Deutscher Kronprinz 1917**, Mézières-Charleville, 1917: Feldruckerei A.O.K. 5.](#)
- [Ries, Helmut: **Kronprinz Wilhelm**, Hamburg, 2001: E.S. Mittler.](#)
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External Links

- [Bearb. von d. Offizier-Kriegsberichterstattern d. Heeresgruppe: Kämpfe der Heeresgruppe Deutscher Kronprinz, 1917 \(Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen\) \(Book\)](#)
- [Hervier, Paul Louis: The two Williams; studies of the Kaiser and the Crown prince, London 1916 \(Internet Archive\) \(Book\)](#)
- [Wilhelm, Crown Prince of Germany: The memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany. London 1922 \(Internet Archive\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
- [Wilhelm, Crown Prince of the German Empire and Prussia: My war experiences, London 1923 \(Internet Archive\) \(Primary Source\)](#)

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