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## Peacetime Attrition in the Army of Frederick William I, 1713-1740

WILLERD R. FANN

**O**FTEN enough to make it worthy of attention, one encounters the assertion that the annual peacetime turnover of enlisted men in the eighteenth-century Prussian army amounted to 20 percent or more of the total. As put by Robert Ergang in his recently reprinted biography of Frederick William I: "The enlistment, it is true, was for life, not for a short period. Frederick William's soldier was a *miles perpetuus*. . . . Accordingly the number of those mustered out each year was not overwhelming. Nevertheless, the aged and sick who were dismissed each year amounted to about 20 percent of the standing army." In addition, "the number of deserters . . . was large. . . . The total for the entire reign was 30,216, the lowest number in any one year being 401 in 1739."<sup>1</sup> The same figures can be found in Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army*: "In no single year of this reign did fugitives from the army number fewer than 400, and the total number of desertions between 1713 and 1740 was 30,216. More important sources of attrition were age and sickness which led annually to the discharge of 20 per cent. of the effective force."<sup>2</sup>

Theodore Ropp varies the wording but says much the same thing: "Though enlistments in the Prussian army were for life, the turnover was high. Old age, disease, and desertion made it necessary to replace about a fifth of the army each year."<sup>3</sup> In a work that deals in detail with the manpower policies of eighteenth-century German armies, Fritz Redlich repeats the figures mentioned above: "In Prussia, in the reign of Frederick William I, about 20 per cent of the companies were discharged annually as a matter of principle," and "to prove the magnitude of the [desertion] problem," Redlich mentions later, "in the course of

1. *The Potsdam Führer* (New York, 1941; reprint, 1972), pp. 70, 72.

2. New York, 1956, p. 8.

3. *War in the Modern World*, rev. ed. (Durham, N.C., 1962), p. 54.

his reign 30,216 men ran away.”<sup>4</sup> In a somewhat generalized form, the same point appears in a standard textbook on military history: “Prussia raided and seized men where they were found for lifetime enlistments but, due to desertion, still had a replacement rate of 20% per annum.”<sup>5</sup> More intensive scrutiny of the literature would perhaps reveal further restatements of this theme.

The recurrence of the figures 20 percent and 30,216 makes it apparent that we deal here either with widely known and well-established facts or with a common source, or both. In this case the explanation lies in the existence of a common source. All of the statements quoted above are inspired, directly or indirectly, by Max Lehmann’s pioneering essay on Frederick William I’s recruiting policy. Lehmann says, in reference to Frederick William’s infantry regulations of 1714: “Already in 1714 he issued a general order that twenty-five ‘of the oldest and worst’ men of each company, that is 20 percent of the total, were to be discharged annually. Finally, the more quickly his army grew, the more it suffered from desertion, that curse of all professional armies.” In this connection, Lehmann mentions that there were 30,216 desertions between 1713 and 1740, a sum nearly equal to the army’s total strength of 35,584 officers and men in 1712.<sup>6</sup>

These statistics are of interest because they seem to belie the conventional view of Frederick William’s army as a long-service force. The same could be said of Frederick the Great’s army, since manpower policy was not appreciably altered after 1740. Instead of a veteran soldiery characterized by permanence and longevity, we see a fluid personnel subject to rapid turnover. An annual attrition rate of more than 20 percent would mean, on the average, that a complete renewal of the enlisted strength of the Prussian army took place in less than five years; in other words, the average term of service of the “professional” soldiers of the eighteenth century was not exceptionally longer than that of the draftees of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Still more surprising deductions inevitably follow: if enlistments were for “life” and old age was a major reason for discharges in Frederick William’s army, but the

4. *The German Military Enterpriser and His Work Force* (Wiesbaden, 1964), 2: 210, 215–16.

5. David Zook and Robin Higham, *A Short History of Warfare* (New York, 1966), p. 103.

6. “Werbung, Wehrpflicht und Beurlaubung unter Friedrich Wilhelm I,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 67 (1891): 262.

average term of service was less than five years, then the typical Prussian recruit was likely to be a man on the threshold of old age or a man who aged with such alarming speed as to be a biological oddity.

Can this be correct? The answer is obvious. The portrait of an annual 20 percent-plus attrition in the eighteenth-century Prussian army is a myth. It originated in an error committed by the normally reliable Max Lehmann. The passage in the infantry regulations of 1714 to which he refers reads as follows: "The regimental proprietors are to display diligence in securing recruits for the companies, and are to see that twenty-five of the oldest and worst men *par bataillon* are discharged each year, and that better and younger ones are recruited to take their places."<sup>7</sup> Thus the twenty-five annual discharges authorized by the king were *per battalion*, not *per company* as stated by Lehmann. Since a battalion included five companies, the authorized number of discharges per company was five, not twenty-five. The mistake is perplexing, partly because Max Lehmann, who had already written extensively on military history, must have known the difference between a company and a battalion, and partly because he included the passage quoted above in an appendix to his article.<sup>8</sup>

If it is false that more than 20 percent of the Prussian army had to be replaced each year, what was the actual percentage? Although the archival materials on which quantitative conclusions could be based were destroyed in 1945, it is still possible to piece together an accurate statistical profile of Frederick William's army from printed sources. The relevant data are summarized in Tables 1-5 of the appendix. They show the number of N.C.O.s and privates "deserted," "died," "discharged," "recruited," and the average strength in the three branches of the army, infantry (including field artillery), cavalry, and garrison troops, for each half of Frederick William's reign and for the whole period 1713-40.<sup>9</sup>

7. Johann Christian Lünig, ed., *Corpus Juris Militaris Des Heil. Röm. Reichs* (Leipzig, 1723), 2: 951.

8. To be sure, Lehmann's version of the text is not entirely accurate. As quoted by him, the introductory phrase reads: "Die Obristen sollen die Compagnien fleissig bereisen [sic]. . . ." It should read: "Die Obristen sollen sich in Recruitirung der Compagnien fleissig beweisen. . . ." See "Werbung, Wehrpflicht und Beurlaubung," p. 284; Lünig, *Corpus Juris Militaris*, 2: 951.

9. The source for Tables 1-4 is "Mittheilungen aus dem Archive des Königlichen Kriegsministeriums. III. Statistische Nachrichten über die Armee Friedrich Wilhelms I," *Militär-Wochenblatt* 76 (1891): 1031-36. This, in turn, was derived from the monthly *Generallisten* prepared for the king on the basis of monthly returns submitted by individual regiments. There were some gaps in the material, which have been taken into

There are obvious statistical contrasts between the two halves of Frederick William's reign, as can be seen in the figures for desertion (Appendix, Table 1). Almost 70 percent of the desertions took place in the first half of his reign. In fact, almost 50 percent, nearly all in the infantry, took place in the years 1713–19. The inflated desertion rate of those years was primarily due to arbitrary and brutal recruiting methods. By the mid-1720s more orderly and rational recruiting methods had come into use, and the desertion rate among native Prussians correspondingly declined. Desertion remained a serious threat, however, because Frederick William progressively increased his reliance on foreign recruits. By 1740 one-third of the Prussian army was composed of foreigners. They were frequently unreliable. In particular, the king's passion for tall soldiers meant that force or fraud was often used by recruiters if no other means succeeded in snaring a desirable giant. Thus, among the foreigners, there remained a high propensity to desert. But it was not translated into a high rate of desertion. In the second half of Frederick William's reign, preventive measures were improved, and it became increasingly difficult for would-be deserters to escape. From 1727 to 1740 the desertion rate was 1.0 percent per year, a small percentage by eighteenth-century standards.<sup>10</sup>

Even taking Frederick William's reign as a whole, the Prussian army did not suffer exceptional losses from desertion. The figure 30,216 desertions between 1713 and 1740 is conventionally cited as proof of a massive desertion rate.<sup>11</sup> Baldly stated, and juxtaposed with the 1712

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account in our analysis: data on the king's regiment were not included; the records for 1716, except December, had been lost; garrison units were not fully reported prior to 1719.

Table 5 has been computed on the basis of the actual strength of the army in 1713, 1715, 1720, 1729, 1733, 1738, and 1740. See Curt Jany, *Geschichte der Preussischen Armee* (2nd ed.; Osnabrück, 1967), 1: 659–60. The strength of the king's regiment has been deducted, since it was not reported in the *Generallisten*. Other sources utilized in developing Table 5 were Curt Jany, "Die alte Armee von 1655–1740 (Formation und Stärke)," *Urkundliche Beiträge und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Preussischen Heeres* (Berlin, 1905), no. 7; and the so-called "Massow List" of 1748, "Die Preussische Armee und ihre Augmentation unter der Regierung Friedrich Wilhelms I, von 1713 bis 1739," *Militair-Wochenblatt* 25 (1840): 37–39, 41–48, 50–52.

10. Ergang's statement, "the lowest number [of desertions] in any one year being 401 in 1739," is only partly correct. The year is right, but the figure is wrong. It should be 459. See "Mittheilungen aus dem Archive des Königlichen Kriegsministeriums," pp. 1035–36.

11. This figure is slightly inaccurate. It first appeared in the introductory text of the "Mittheilungen aus dem Archive des Königlichen Kriegsministeriums" (p. 1034). It was

strength of the army (35,584), it appears to suggest an enormous attrition. In evaluating the significance of this figure, however, it is necessary to keep in mind that it refers to a period of twenty-seven years and that the strength of the army steadily increased between 1713 and 1740. In reality, the overall desertion rate from 1713 to 1740 was modest, 1.9 percent per year. Thus, instead of demonstrating that there were massive losses from desertion, the statistics actually show the opposite. Even during the first half of Frederick William's reign, the desertion rate was only 3.2 percent per year, excessive by later Prussian standards, but not exceptional by those of contemporary armies.<sup>12</sup>

Losses from disease (or accidents, suicide, etc.) were still smaller than those from desertion (see Table 2). To be sure, as late as 1860 it was regarded as an "eternal verity" of military medicine that disease, not wounds, killed most soldiers.<sup>13</sup> But heavy losses from disease, like losses from wounds, were a phenomenon of war. In peacetime soldiers were neither subjected to hardships which might weaken their resistance to disease, nor concentrated in unsanitary camps which might encourage mass contagion. The death rate in the Prussian army between 1713 and 1740 was 1.4 percent per year. Since some losses were incurred in the

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obviously supposed to be the sum of the figures for desertion given year by year, arm by arm, and rank by rank in the appended tables (pp. 1035–36). Addition of the same figures, however, yields a sum of 28,691 (our Table 1, which is the basis of our calculations, shows a sum of 28,687 because we have disregarded the fragmentary garrison data for 1718). If one takes into account probable desertions in the months Jan. – Nov. 1716 and probable desertions in the king's regiment, the actual total of desertions from 1713 to 1740 was likely somewhat more than 31,000. The totals in Table 1 refer to successful desertions. There were many unsuccessful attempts to desert, but they were not reported in the monthly lists. Not all deserters were lost to the army, since men often deserted in order to secure a new bounty by enlisting in another regiment (where they would reappear, statistically, under the rubric "recruited"). Others returned in response to pardons. It should also be noted that some of the desertions counted in Table 1 took place in the war years of 1713–15 and 1735. Thus real losses and peacetime losses from desertion were somewhat less than is indicated by our figures.

12. As mentioned above, there was large-scale desertion in the infantry during the years 1713–19. After 1719, however, desertion tapered off sharply. Thus, despite the abnormal desertion of 1713–19 (6.6 percent per year), the overall desertion in the infantry between 1713 and 1740 averaged only 2.1 percent per year. By comparison, peacetime desertion in the French infantry between 1716 and 1749 is estimated at 4.4 percent per year. See André Corvisier, *L'Armée française de la fin du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle au ministère de Choiseul: le Soldat* (Paris, 1964), 2: 737.

13. Adolph Richter, *Geschichte des Medizinal-Wesens der Königlichen Preussischen Armee bis zur Gegenwart* (Erlangen, 1860), p. 315.

field during the years 1713–15 and 1735, the peacetime death rate was actually somewhat smaller.

It is more difficult to establish the discharge rate. For one thing, the data are incomplete; cavalry discharges were not reported until 1727, infantry discharges were not reported until 1714 (see Table 3). More important, bookkeeping methods had the effect of artificially inflating the discharge figures. The discharges reported by the regiments in the monthly lists included not only men who were actually released from service, but also men who were promoted to higher rank or who were transferred from one unit to another. Thus a private promoted to N.C.O., or an N.C.O. promoted to ensign was counted under one rubric as being “discharged” and under another as being “recruited” (see Table 4). The same was true of infantrymen and cavalrymen transferred to the garrison battalions. It was a matter of principle that “no soldier is to be discharged who is still capable of service in the garrisons.”<sup>14</sup> Almost all of the N.C.O.s and privates counted as “recruited” in the garrison troops were men who were simultaneously counted as “discharged” from the line.<sup>15</sup>

If allowance is made for those factors, we can estimate the real discharge rate in the infantry as approximately 2.5 percent per year between 1714 and 1740, considerably less than that specified by the regulations of 1714.<sup>16</sup> The discharge rate in the cavalry from 1727 to 1740 was approximately 1.4 percent per year. As the relatively low numbers of “recruited” suggest, it was probably no greater during the period 1714–26. Thus the discharge rate for the army as a whole from 1714 to 1740 was still less than that for the infantry alone. Insofar as the infantry

14. *Acta Borussica: Ergänzungsband*, “Die Briefe König Friedrich Wilhelms I. an den Fürsten Leopold zu Anhalt-Dessau, 1704–1740” (Berlin, 1905), p. 326.

15. Men transferred to the king’s regiment or who were selected as grenadiers within the regiments were also counted as discharged. Since there is no way to determine their numbers, we have made no effort to take them into account in determining the discharge rate.

16. As of 1714 an infantry company included 134 enlisted men. See Lünig, *Corpus Juris Militaris*, 2: 951. To have discharged five men per year, as required by regulations, would have meant an annual loss of 3.7 percent. If one excludes N.C.O.s and interprets the wording of the regulations as applying only to privates, it would have meant an annual loss of 4.1 percent of the authorized number of privates. New regulations adopted in 1726 no longer specified a fixed annual number of discharges, but merely stipulated that captains were “to keep their companies in good condition at all times, and if there are inferior men in any company, to see that they are dismissed and that other, more suitable men are recruited to take their places.” *Reglement vor die Königl. Preussische Infanterie* (Potsdam, 1726), p. 552.

is concerned, as with desertion, there is a striking statistical contrast between the two halves of Frederick William's reign. From 1714 to 1726 the discharge rate in the infantry was approximately 4.5 percent per year, but for the period 1727 to 1740 it was less than 1.0 percent per year.

There are at least two reasons for this discrepancy. First, the high discharge rate of 1714–26 undoubtedly reflects an effort to implement the requirement of the regulations of 1714 that the “oldest and worst” men of each battalion should be discharged annually. Emphasis, here, should be placed on the word “worst,” which in Frederick William's vocabulary would be virtually synonymous with “short.”<sup>17</sup> Many of the discharged men, whatever their age or physical condition, were simply too small by the king's somewhat irrational standards. The regiments were under constant pressure to recruit taller soldiers. By the mid-1720s the “worst” had largely been culled out of the army, or at least had been transferred from the line to the garrison battalions, and the discharge rate correspondingly declined. A second apparent reason for the relatively high discharge rate of Frederick William's early years was the gross racketeering that characterized recruiting. It was common for press gangs to seize men as “recruits” only to release them a short time later after payment of a sum of money, ostensibly to defray recruiting costs.<sup>18</sup> Such practices were brought under control, though not

17. A usage eventually codified in the so-called “Recruiting Regulation” of 1732 where the difference between “good” and “bad” companies or regiments was rigorously defined in terms of height: “Disposition und Ordres, wornach die Königl. Preuss. Infanterie Regimenten von dato d. 1. 8br. 1732 wegen der Werbung sich zu verhalten haben sollen,” *Militair-Wochenblatt* 26 (1841): 82–83. See also Curt Jany, “Die Kantonverfassung Friedrich Wilhelms I,” *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preussischen Geschichte* 38 (1925): 229. The requirement of the regulations of 1714 that the oldest men should be replaced by “younger” ones does not mean that Frederick William preferred youthful soldiers, but merely that he preferred youthful recruits who could be expected to render many years of service. Old soldiers, being less likely to desert and more habituated to discipline, close-order drill, and the manual of arms than young ones, were the backbone of the Prussian army. See Willerd Fann, “On the Infantryman's Age in Eighteenth Century Prussia,” *Military Affairs* 41 (1977): 165–70. By regulations, an old soldier could be discharged only “when he is no longer able to march.” “Disposition und Ordres, . . . von dato d. 1. 8br. 1732,” p. 87.

18. See Kopka von Lossow, *Geschichte des Grenadier-Regiments König Friedrich I. (4. Ostpreussischen) Nr. 5.* (Berlin, 1889–1901), 1: 212; 2: 2, 48; [Anton König], *Versuch einer historischen Schilderung der Hauptveränderungen, der Religion, Sitten, Gewohnheiten, Künste, Wissenschaften u. der Residenzstadt Berlin* (Berlin, 1792–99), 4/1: 101, 103. Similar practices could be found in other countries. See R. E. Scouller, *The Armies of Queen Anne* (Oxford, 1966), p. 122.



eliminated, in the 1720s; and, again, the discharge rate correspondingly declined.

In any event, most of the discharges in the infantry between 1714 and 1726 were not due to old age or invalidity. Only in the second half of Frederick William's reign can it be said that the majority of discharges in the infantry were due to those reasons. By that time, however, the discharge rate was quite modest. It is correct to say that it was a matter of principle to keep soldiers in service for as long as possible, and that the majority of men discharged each year, in normal circumstances, were discharged for reasons of age and invalidity. But it is not correct to infer that the maturity of the soldiers resulted in a large annual turnover of personnel. Exactly the opposite was true. The longevity of the soldiers meant that few men had to be discharged each year and that few replacements were required.<sup>19</sup>

What general conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing discussion? Given a desertion rate of 1.9 percent, a death rate of less than 1.4 percent, and a discharge rate of less than 2.5 percent, we can estimate peacetime attrition in Frederick William's army to have been well under 6.0 percent per year. If one regards the second half of Frederick William's reign as the proper measure, the *normal* rate of attrition was still smaller, not more than 4.0 percent per year. The latter pattern continued throughout succeeding reigns. To the end, in 1806–7, the Old-Prussian army remained a long-service force with a minimal turnover of manpower in peacetime.

It is surprising that Lehmann's erroneous assertion that 20 percent of Frederick William's soldiers were discharged each year should have been accepted without question. Given the tactical value of seasoned veterans in eighteenth-century warfare, the costs involved in recruiting replacements, the king's notorious parsimony, and the limited economic and demographic resources of his kingdom, such a figure is inherently

19. Ironically, some years before the appearance of his study of recruiting under Frederick William I, Max Lehmann had noted the characteristically low discharge rate in Frederick the Great's army, less than 1.0 percent per year in the early 1750s. He attributed this, correctly, to the longevity of the soldiers. *Scharnhorst* (Leipzig, 1886–87), 2: 72; cf. Curt Jany, "Der preussische Kavalleriedienst vor 1806," *Urkundliche Beiträge und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Preussischen Heeres* (Berlin, 1904), no. 6, pp. 13–14; and Kopka von Lossow, *Geschichte des Grenadier-Regiments Nr. 5.*, 2: 106. The same was true in Frederick's later years and under his successors. See [Matthias v. Lossow], *Denkwürdigkeiten zur Charakteristik der Preussischen Armee unter dem grossen König Friedrich dem Zweiten* (Glogau, 1826), p. 125; Fr. L. v. Wachholtz, *Aus dem Tagebuche des Generals Fr. L. v. Wachholtz*, ed. C. v. Vechelde (Braunschweig, 1843), p. 60.

questionable. Ergang seems to have sensed the conceptual problem, hence his qualification that “the number of those mustered out each year was not overwhelming.” Unfortunately, the qualification merely compounds the error. Such a drastic attrition, indeed, would have been “overwhelming.” It would have meant accepting yearly losses in peacetime comparable to those of wartime.<sup>20</sup>

The way in which the desertion problem is often interpreted, especially the use of the 30,216 figure to support the conclusion that there was consistently large-scale desertion between 1713 and 1740, is similarly misleading.<sup>21</sup> Not only does such usage insinuate a false picture of the extent of desertion in the Prussian army, but also it obscures the real nature of the problem. Desertion, indeed, was an important matter. Innumerable royal edicts and instructions concerning desertion, and the elaborate precautions taken to prevent it, show the seriousness with which desertion was viewed by Prussian kings. But such concerns do not mean that massive peacetime losses from desertion were the norm. Rather, when considered in light of the actually low desertion rate, they are testimony to the inherently low ability of the Prussian army to tolerate desertion. The real problem was rooted in the circumstances mentioned above: the individual soldier represented a valuable commodity when measured against the limited resources of the Prussian kingdom. Even small losses from desertion were costly; large losses, year after year, would have been unbearable.<sup>22</sup> Thus the assumption that there

20. By coincidence, in determining the compensation to be paid to the regiments for their losses in the campaign of 1715, Frederick William estimated the average loss at 25 men per company. See König, *Residenzstadt Berlin*, 4/1: 372; cf. Jany, “Die Kantonverfassung Friedrich Wilhelms I,” p. 232.

21. Aside from the examples given above, an illustration of the apparently dazzling effect of the 30,216 figure can be found in a well-known essay on eighteenth-century militarism by Walter Dorn. He says, in connection with Frederick the Great’s reign (1740–86): “There was more desertion from the Prussian army than from any other army in Europe.” The quantitative support offered for this dubious generalization is a footnote: “From 1713 to 1740, 30,216 men deserted from the Prussian army.” *Competition for Empire, 1740–1763* (New York, 1940), p. 98. Dorn’s source was Philipp Losch, *Soldatenhandel* (Kassel, 1933), p. 35. Losch was concerned with rehabilitating the reputation of the much-maligned Hesse-Cassel troops and cited this figure as evidence that, after all, more noted armies suffered from massive desertion. Relevant statistical data for Frederick the Great’s army are scanty, but what is available indicates that the peacetime desertion rate during Frederick’s reign was even less than that during Frederick William’s last years. See Jany, *Geschichte der Preussischen Armee*, 2: 248, 3: 61–62; Lehmann, *Scharnhorst*, 2: 72.

22. The pay of an infantry private, no matter how experienced or well-trained, was fixed at slightly more than three talers per month by the regulations of 1726. *Reglement vor die Königl. Preussische Infanterie*, p. 593. By contrast, to secure a desirable, but un-

was large-scale desertion in peacetime, like the assumption of a high discharge rate, is not only factually inaccurate, but also conceptually confusing. It inadvertently ascribes to the Prussian army an ability to absorb losses which it did not, in fact, possess.<sup>23</sup>

It was partly because there was, in reality, but a small turnover of personnel that Frederick William and Frederick the Great could maintain a standing army numerically comparable to those of wealthier and more populous states; it was partly because of the longevity of the soldiers that the Prussian army could maintain the tactical efficiency which gave it a qualitative edge over its enemies. Heavy losses, whether in peacetime or wartime, could be fatal on both counts. Frederick William's combination of domestic militarism with a pacifistic foreign pol-

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trained, foreign recruit could cost "600, 700 talers or more" according to the Recruiting Regulation of 1732. "Disposition und Ordres . . . von dato d. 1. 8br. 1732," p. 86. Even after 1740, when recruiting expenses had been pared, it still cost about 300 talers to acquire a foreign recruit in peacetime. Erwin Dette, *Friedrich der Grosse und sein Heer* (Göttingen, 1915), p. 33. Domestic recruiting was cheaper, but meant the withdrawal of valuable elements from the work force of a labor-intensive economy and incited illegal emigration of young men in rough proportion to the volume of recruiting. E.g., see "Renovirtes Edict wegen der aus Furcht der Werbungen ausgetretenen Landes-Kinder," Feb. 19, 1718, in Lünig, *Corpus Juris Militaris*, 2: 970 ("The country is being ever more denuded of inhabitants"). These problems, while faced by other eighteenth-century states, may have been more acute in the Prussian kingdom because its relative position among the powers depended primarily on frugal financial management and superior military efficiency. As put by Frederick the Great: "Some of our generals think that one fellow is as good as another and that the loss of an individual soldier can have no effect on the whole. But what in this case may apply in other armies, does not apply in ours. . . . When a soldier whom one has drilled for two long years, in order to bring him to a certain level of proficiency, deserts and is either inadequately replaced or is not replaced at all, the consequences will in the long run be serious." *Friedrich der Grosse: Militärische Schriften*, ed. Adalbert v. Taysen (Berlin, 1883), p. 3.

23. By way of apologia for the Prussian troops, Curt Jany cites statistics to show that the purportedly more patriotic French experienced greater losses from desertion than the Prussians in the early 1800s. *Geschichte der Preussischen Armee*, 3: 367. As Peter Paret has noted, although the comparison is accurate, it ignores the most important implication of the facts in question: a Napoleonic army had the resilience to tolerate losses from desertion which would have crippled the armies of the *ancien régime*. *Yorck and the Era of Prussian Reform, 1807-1815* (Princeton, 1966), pp. 96-97. It is not hard to find other examples of armies which experienced much greater long-term losses from desertion than the Prussian army. For instance, in a twenty-four year period from 1867 to 1891, the United States Army suffered an average annual loss of more than 15 percent of its strength from desertion. See Robert Utley, *Frontier Regulars* (New York, 1973), pp. 15-16, 23. Given the situation of the United States in this period, such losses, though annoying, were not critical. Given the situation of Prussia in the eighteenth century, they would have been financially and militarily ruinous.

icy has been the subject of ironic comment by historians.<sup>24</sup> It is intelligible, though, if one understands that Prussian military power depended on the existence of a force of carefully drilled veterans who could be replaced only at a prohibitive cost in time, effort, and money. Similar considerations stood behind Frederick's maxim that Prussia's wars should be "short and lively." A long war used up invaluable veterans and threatened the small kingdom with "depopulation."<sup>25</sup>

To exaggerate peacetime attrition by 300–400 percent or more, especially to exaggerate the discharge rate by 700 percent or more, leads to a serious distortion of reality and makes it difficult to understand the constitution and sociology of the eighteenth-century Prussian army. Unfortunately, what might be called "Lehmann's Disease" seems to have seriously infected the literature, at least the relevant American part of it.<sup>26</sup> The problem, of course, is not unusual in scholarship. Once an error gains currency it takes on a life of its own. Nevertheless, we can at least hope to have ended the life of this error, despite its distinguished pedigree and apparent persuasiveness, and to have dispelled once and for all the myth that Frederick William I had to replace more than one fifth of his soldiers every year.

24. E.g., T. B. Macaulay: "His feeling about his troops seems to have resembled a miser's feeling about his money. He loved to collect them, to count them, to see them increase; but he could not find it in his heart to break in upon the precious hoard." *Critical, Historical and Miscellaneous Essays and Poems* (New York: John W. Lovell, n.d.), 2: 660.

25. *Friedrich der Grosse: Militärische Schriften*, p. 86; cf. *Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand* (Berlin, 1846–57), 8: 217; and *Die politischen Testamente Friedrichs des Grossen*, ed. Gustav Volz (Berlin, 1920), p. 140.

26. German historians do not seem to have copied Lehmann's error, perhaps because they have paid more attention to Curt Jany's writings, where the provisions of the regulations of 1714 are accurately reported: "Die Kantonverfassung Friedrich Wilhelms I," p. 229; and *Geschichte der Preussischen Armee*, 1: 680. On the other hand, neither Jany nor any other German historian, as far as we know, has pointed out Lehmann's error.

## APPENDIX

TABLE 1: NUMBER DESERTED

	<i>Infantry</i>		<i>Cavalry</i>		<i>Garrison<sup>a</sup></i>	
	N.C.O.s	Pvts.	N.C.O.s	Pvts.	N.C.O.s	Pvts.
1713-26	731	16,627	66	1,678	20	936
1727-40	624	4,439	119	1,837	77	1,533
1713-40	1,355	21,066	185	3,515	97	2,469

TABLE 2: NUMBER DIED

	<i>Infantry</i>		<i>Cavalry</i>		<i>Garrison<sup>a</sup></i>	
	N.C.O.s	Pvts.	N.C.O.s	Pvts.	N.C.O.s	Pvts.
1713-26	616	6,084	121	1,184	46	487
1727-40	797	7,904	245	2,319	79	1,089
1713-40	1,413	13,988	366	3,503	125	1,576

TABLE 3: NUMBER DISCHARGED

	<i>Infantry</i>		<i>Cavalry</i>		<i>Garrison<sup>a</sup></i>	
	N.C.O.s	Pvts.	N.C.O.s	Pvts.	N.C.O.s	Pvts.
1714-26	2,777	24,979	?	?	117	1,615
1727-40	1,846	9,847	373	5,007	224	2,375
1714-40	4,623	34,826	?	?	341	3,990

TABLE 4: NUMBER RECRUITED

	<i>Infantry</i>		<i>Cavalry</i>		<i>Garrison<sup>a</sup></i>	
	N.C.O.s	Pvts.	N.C.O.s	Pvts.	N.C.O.s	Pvts.
1713-26	4,889	58,472	597	13,000	202	3,648
1727-40	3,546	31,795	975	11,956	343	4,972
1713-40	8,435	90,267	1,572	24,956	545	8,620

TABLE 5: AVERAGE STRENGTH

	<i>Infantry</i>		<i>Cavalry</i>		<i>Garrison<sup>a</sup></i>	
	N.C.O.s	Pvts.	N.C.O.s	Pvts.	N.C.O.s	Pvts.
1713-26	2,908	33,183	860	10,228	210	3,404
1727-40	3,482	41,338	1,205	14,705	277	4,096
1713-40	3,195	37,260	1,032	12,467	255	3,865

<sup>a</sup>1719-26/1740