Hubertusberg to Auerstädt: The Prussian Army in Decline?

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The Prussian army in the years 1763–1806 has generally been depicted as an institution in decline. A fossilized, gridlocked structure, a backward-looking adherence to unrevised concepts of war first developed under Frederick the Great, a reactionary willingness to risk Prussia's destruction rather than reform its military system in any consequent way: these are the reasons most commonly cited for the double defeat at Jena and Auerstädt and the debacle that followed—a collapse so complete that Joachim Murat allegedly reported to Napoleon that the fighting was over because no enemies were left!

I

This essay offers an alternative perspective on the evolution of the Prussian army from Hubertusberg to Auerstädt, a perspective integrating military developments with policy-making. The military logic of the Age of Reason combined with common sense evaluation of Prussia's strategic and economic positions to suggest that the state's optimal force structure should be front-loaded: geared for maximum immediate efficiency to produce maximum immediate results.

The catalytic agent for institutionalizing this concept was Frederick II. From the beginning of his reign he believed Prussia's wars were best fought in a context of clear, positive goals susceptible of becoming subjects for discussion. The optimal way to achieve these was neither to exhaust one's adversaries nor to destroy them, but rather to establish, by an initial victory or series of victories, the wisdom of negotiation as an alternative to further struggle.[1]

The King's basic principles were confirmed and deepened by the Seven Years' War. Between 1756 and 1763, Prussia confronted Europe in arms and came away victorious, but at a price that left the state shaken to its physical and moral foundations. As many as 180,000 of Frederick's subjects had died in uniform. Entire provinces were devastated to a degree recalling the Thirty Years' War—houses burned, animals requisitioned, people scattered. Prussia's currency had been debased. Prussia's officials had gone unpaid.

[1] Jay Luvaas, 'Frederick the Great: Education of a General', in H. Bausum (ed.), *The John Biggs Cincinnati Lectures in Military Leadership and Command, 1986* (Lexington, Va., 1986), pp. 23–37; Werner Gembruch, 'Struktur des preussischen Staates und aussenpolitische Situation zu Beginn der Herrschaft Friedrichs des Grossen', in MGFA (ed.), *Friedrich der Grosse und das Militärwesen seiner Zeit* (Herford, 1987), pp. 9–32.

Above all, the implied social contract established since the days of the Great Elector, with service and loyalty offered in return for stability and protection, was challenged to its core.

Frederick was correspondingly determined to secure the physical and moral recovery of his kingdom as quickly as possible. But the postwar *rétablissement*, with its financial reforms, its economic programme, and its encouragement of immigration, was only part of the King's grand design. Frederick also came away from the Peace of Hubertusberg committed to the concept of the Prussian army as a strategic deterrent. The King had perhaps been slow to learn, but the second half of the Seven Years' War had demonstrated to him beyond doubt that the capacity and the readiness to make war were far more important to Prussia's security than the waging of war itself. If after 1763 most of the European powers demobilized, Prussia reorganized. When the post-war shakedown was completed, Frederick's army counted over 150,000 field and garrison troops. Fewer than half of them were immediately available outside of the drill and manoeuvre season in late autumn, but by now no one questioned the fighting power of Prussia's conscript cantonists despite the fact that in peacetime they spent only two months of each year with their regiments.

The large size of the Prussian army had to be matched by high quality. Prussia had neither the human nor the material resources to wage a drawn-out war except at serious risk to the state's long-term interests. The Seven Years' War could only happen once. A repetition might well mean the end of the House of Hohenzollern, whether by conquest, coup, or rebellion. In consequence Frederick perceived as essential a military system able in the first instance to frighten off potential enemies, and in the second to win the kind of immediately decisive victories the Prussian army, for all its good qualities, had previously failed to achieve. The King of Prussia, Frederick had declared in 1752, must not only make war his principal concern. He must also inspire zeal in those who have chosen 'the noble and dangerous position of arms'. That meant strict discipline, unconditional obedience, prompt execution of orders. The concept was no mere exercise in pedantry. The quick, decisive victories vital for Prussia's strategic position depended for Frederick on a military system rigorously controlled in every possible detail from the top down.[2]

It is possible to compare Frederick's reforms after 1763 with the evolution of the Schlieffen Plan between 1894 and 1914. In both cases military planners faced with potentially overwhelming odds sought to develop what Arden Bucholz calls a 'Great Symphony', synthesizing state-of-the-art technical procedures and high levels of will power in systems designed to achieve their ends through an endless capacity for taking pains.[3] In Frederick's case the

[2] Frederick II, 'Das politische Testament von 1752', in G. B. Voltz (ed.), *Die Werke Friedrichs des Grossen*, 10 vols. (Berlin, 1912–14), vii. 164ff; 'Das Militärische Testament von 1768', ibid. vi. 246ff.

[3] Arden Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen and Prussian War Planning* (New York, 1991).

technical procedures involved human beings. No other option was open in a pre-industrial era: the only real force multipliers were the men in an army's ranks.

After 1763 the Prussian common soldier's transformation into a military cyborg was facilitated by every means possible. Frederick's dictum that the soldier must fear his officer more than the enemy has usually been described as reflecting his experiences in the Seven Years' War, processed through his growing misanthropy.[4] An alternative interpretation is that Frederick sought to achieve with his rank and file what the Great General Staff sought in a later century to achieve with mobilization plans. The King was looking forwards, not backwards, seeing Prussia's salvation in an army so comprehensively drilled and so well integrated that what Clausewitz calls 'fog and friction' would find no room to enter.[5]

Frederick was all too conscious of his own mistakes as war-leader and battle-captain—conscious enough to do everything in his power to avoid their repetition. Standards of discipline were tightened and made more comprehensive. Punishments that earlier had been applied selectively to the unwilling and the incapable became general practice in regiments whose colonels increasingly vied for the King's attention at reviews and manoeuvres. Drill movements, always precise and demanding, became exacting to the point of impossibility even for experienced men. Frederick's principal concern was to perfect the quickest possible deployment from columns of march to the complex attacking lines required by the oblique order. Clockwork regularity was the order of the day, and woe to any critic of the principle.[6]

It is important to reiterate Frederick's belief that discipline and drill were not ends in themselves, but facilitators of war-fighting. Frequent negative references to the Prussian soldier as a machine or an automaton have obscured the fact that he was seen as part of an integrated weapons system. The complex geometric evolutions perfected after the Seven Years' War were ultimately designed to facilitate the individual soldier's quick deployment into battle formation and his disciplined execution of small arms drill under the worst, most confusing circumstances. The musket he carried, although dismissed by one critic as 'neither firearm, pike, nor club',[7] was in its definitive form a weapon refined and developed along the lines of the modern submachine gun or assault rifle. Prussia's gun designers and practical soldiers alike favoured ease of usage and enhanced rates of fire over ballistic qualities.[8]

Yet the friction Frederick worked so assiduously to eliminate in his army

[4] As in Christopher Duffy, *Frederick the Great: A Military Life* (London, 1985), pp. 244ff.

[5] This line of argument is developed in my forthcoming monograph, *The Wars of Frederick the Great*.

[6] Curt Jany, *Geschichte der Preussischen Armee von 15. Jahrhundert bis 1914*, vol. iii, *1763–1807*, 2nd rev. edn. (Osnabrück, 1967), pp. 81ff; R. von Priesdorff, *Saldern. Der Exerziermeister des Königs* (Hamburg, 1943).

[7] Cited in F. Meinecke (ed.), 'Aus den Akten der Militärreorganisationskommission von 1808', *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preussischen Geschichte* 5 (1892), 139.

persisted in entering by the back door and through the windows. Some of the King's own decisions had significantly adverse effects on the army's performance. The quality of uniforms issued to the rank and file steadily decreased—an important morale factor, and a not insignificant financial burden on men required to make up loss and damage from their pay. Grain allowances for the cavalry were cut to the point where in spring and summer the horses depended on grazing for much of their nourishment. Frederick continued to stockpile resources in the royal arsenals and magazines. By 1776 Breslau and Berlin between them held 72,000 bushels of grain—enough to feed 60,000 men for two years. Reserve stocks of weapons, uniforms, and equipment were maintained at correspondingly high levels. It was only on an everyday basis that the King behaved like the proverbial farmer who sought to save money by reducing his ox's feed by a half-cup of oats per day. Just when the animal had been put on a diet of nothing at all, it inconveniently died.[9]

This cheese-paring had a particularly unfortunate impact on a particularly vital element of the army. Frederick had always preferred high numbers of professionals, whether foreigners or Prussian subjects without roots in their society. His increasing reliance on cantonists during the Seven Years' War had been a move of desperation. The Testament of 1768 asserted that even in wartime recruits should be raised in one's own country 'only when sternest necessity compels'.[10] Foreigners did cost more money than cantonists, but their presence freed corresponding numbers of Prussian subjects to contribute to their state's economic reconstruction. It was small wonder that Prussian recruiters began scouring central Europe almost as soon as the guns fell silent.

The high reputation of the Prussian army made it relatively attractive to would-be soldiers. Prior to 1756 only 50,000 or so aliens had served Prussia's king. By 1786, 110,000 of the 190,000 men under Prussian arms were outlanders. All authorities agree, however, that after 1763 the foreigners in Prussian service were a far cry from what they had once been. Sheer numbers played a part; expansion brought dilution. Other explanations stress an increasingly brutal discipline, or focus on such details as the replacement of regimental recruiting by a pool system that destroyed the incentive of captains and colonels to seek the best men possible.

Personal economics played a role as well. As Prussia's economy recovered, prices rose steadily. Foreign soldiers were among the first to feel the pinch, as a growing gap between their pay and their expenses forced more and more of them to seek employment in the civilian economy. They found themselves

[8] W. Eckardt and O. Morawietz, *Die Handwaffen des brandenburgisch-preussisch-deutschen Heeres, 1640–1945* (Hamburg, 1957), pp. 43 ff, is technically accurate but typically critical in evaluating the M1782.

[9] Christopher Duffy, *The Army of Frederick the Great* (New York, 1974), pp. 199ff, summarizes this cheese-paring and its consequences.

[10] Frederick the Great, *Werke*, vi. 226–7.

at a significant disadvantage compared to cantonists with claims to local loyalty and identity. The obvious results were consistently empty pockets and a never-ending search for whatever casual labour might be available. Desertion was a logical consequence. It is no accident that most of the worst horror stories of preventive and punitive measures against 'French leave' date from the period after 1763.[11]

Prussian recruiters also faced the consequences of a changing *mentalité*. The Enlightenment, with its rejection of war as violent and unnatural, had begun to penetrate village schoolrooms and pulpits. The general economic upturn in central Europe after 1763 absorbed many potential volunteers. And for genuine tearaways, service in one of the German regiments maintained by the French government offered better prospects than those provided by a Prussian army obsessed with cutting corners at all costs.[12]

Another of Frederick's unintended contributions to the Prussian army's confusion of ends with means involved the growing capriciousness of his critiques at reviews and manoeuvres. The post-war Prussian army was too large, the King by now too frail and remote, to sustain the network of informal contacts that had served to diminish, if never to eliminate, the consequences of Frederick's whims. Regiments would be commended one year and condemned the next. The careers of field and general officers, their places in the army's pecking order, followed no predictable pattern. Nor could they easily be readjusted by improving next year's performance, since no one could ever be sure what Frederick wanted. Under these circumstances it was only logical to concentrate on doing everything *in* the book *by* the book as well as it could be done. If one nevertheless met professional disaster, at least there remained the satisfaction of having met official standards.[13]

This was hardly an environment calculated to foster independent thinking in

[11] Jany, *Armee*, pp. 447–8, and Duffy, *Army of Frederick the Great*, pp. 57ff, emphasize the negative aspects of Prussian service. Cf. also Kurt Schützle, 'Über das Rekrutierungssystem in Preussen vor und nach 1806/07 und seine Auswirkung auf die geistig-moralische Haltung der Soldaten', *Militärgeschichte* 17 (1977), 28–35. For purposes of comparison cf. J. A. Houlding, *Fit for Service: The Training of the British Army, 1715–1795* (Oxford, 1981), and Rodney Atwood, *The Hessian Mercenaries from Hessen-Kassel in the American Revolution* (New York, 1980). Without attempting to whitewash late-Frederician discipline, it is worth noting that the most vivid accounts of the system's horrors were likely to be composed by critics: officers like the author of 'Versuch von der Kriegesszucht', *Kriegsbibliothek* i (1755), who favoured a discipline based on honour and mutual respect, or soldiers distinguished from the common run by their literacy who perceived themselves as having been enlisted by guile or force. Such works as Ulrich Bräker's *Der arme Mann im Tockenburg* (Zürich, 1789; reprint Munich, 1965) are best taken at a certain critical distance. Willerd Fann, 'On the Infantryman's Age in Eighteenth Century Prussia', *Military Affairs* 41 (1977), 165–170, stresses the rootedness foreigners and old soldiers generally had in their regiments.

[12] Cf. Henri Brunschwig, *Enlightenment and Romanticism in Eighteenth-Century Prussia*, transl. F. Jellinek (Chicago, 1974); Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare* (New York, 1980), pp. 31ff.

[13] Jany, *Armee*, 99ff, describes the process from a more or less sympathetic perspective. Cf. Hyppolite J. R. de Toulongeon, *Une mission militaire en Prusse in 1786*, ed. J. Finot, R. Galmiche-Bourer (Paris, 1881), and J. A. Guibert, *Journal d'un Voyage en Allemagne, fait en 1773*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1803), i. 170ff.

the rising generation of officers. Frederick's ruthless purging of commissioned bourgeoisie after 1763 had less significance in this respect than is commonly asserted. Just because a man was born without 'von' before his name did not automatically bless him with the insight and wisdom genetically ascribed to an aristocrat. Indeed the reverse was often true. Conscious of their marginal position, few non-nobles were anxious to risk already shaky careers by injudicious boat-rocking. Commoner officers, coming from a milieu without a significant military heritage, usually learned their craft by direct experience and often tended to guard jealously the limited stock of knowledge they had won at such high prices.[14]

For all its shortcomings the Prussian army effectively performed its assigned role in Prussia's state strategy while Frederick lived. Its greatest success came in the 1778–9 War of the Bavarian Succession, the 'potato war'. Far from being the debacle or the farce often presented in narrowly focused military histories, the conflict provided the kind of diplomatic/political triumph Frederick had always hoped for from the army he had spent his life building. Not only was Austria's claim to the Bavarian heritage turned away. Frederick, who began his reign as the disturber of Germany's peace, emerged as the defender of the sovereign rights established in 1648. Prussia, with some help from Saxony, had deterred the ambitions of a Habsburg government able to raise, on paper at least, a force of 300,000 men for a campaign its rulers ultimately decided was not worth undertaking against Prussia. Prospects of a quick victory, even against an ageing Frederick, seemed limited compared to the risks of a general war.

For Prussia the costs were acceptable relative to the gains. The 30,000 men who died or deserted included large numbers of foreigners enlisted for the purpose of being expended in the place of Prussian subjects. Expenses had been met from current revenues, with the war chest remaining essentially untouched.[15] And far from shrugging off the operational shortcomings of his army, Frederick took some pains to scale off the worst of the rust that had spread beneath fifteen years of paint and polish. Specifically he increased the numbers and effectiveness of those light troops he had so long regarded as no more than cannon fodder. In addition to raising three regiments of fusiliers specifically intended for the light service, he increased the *Jäger* to a ten-company regiment—though three-quarters of them were for a time equipped with muskets instead of the rifles implied in their name.[16]

[14] Gottlieb Friedländer, *Die Königliche Allgemeine Kriegs-Schule und das höhere Militär-Bildungswesen 1765–1813* (Berlin, 1854); F. K. Tharau, *Die geistige Kultur des preussischen Offiziers von 1640 bis 1806* (Mainz, 1968). Cf. also U. Waltzoldt, *Preussischen Offiziere im geistigen Leben des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Halle, 1937).

[15] This interpretation of the Potato War is developed in *The Wars of Frederick the Great.*

[16] Peter Paret, *Yorck and the Era of Prussian Reform* (Princeton, 1966), pp. 33–4; C. F. Gumtau, *Die Jäger und Schützen des Preussischen Heeres*, vol. i (Berlin, 1834), *passim.*

II

Frederick's death would under any circumstances have been a watershed in the Prussian army's history. For forty-six years he had been its commander-in-chief in fact as well as in title. He had shaped the army in detail to fit a specific concept of warfare. Any successor would have had to face the problem of confronting a structure so totally integrated that change, even the most moderate change, risked destabilizing the whole. Frederick William II, Frederick's nephew, was as unlikely a warrior-king as could be imagined. His uncle had cashiered his father for incompetence during the Seven Years' War. Frederick William held no grudge, but neither did he seek to compensate by mastering the soldier's craft. His victories were won in the boudoir: a string of mistresses and illegitimate children offered a direct contrast to Frederick's misogynistic puritanism.[17]

Personally as well, the monarchs were as different as chalk and cheese. Where Frederick was caustic, remote, and austere, Frederick William was courteous, gregarious, and likeable—presumably willing to listen to advisers who sensed new directions in the craft of war. The German *Aufklärung*, which reached its full bloom in the 1770s, had a significant impact on military thought between the Rhine and the Vistula. Like its counterparts in literature, art, and philosophy, the new generation of military theorists was less concerned with establishing scientific systems than with broadening and disseminating practical knowledge.[18]

The experience of the Seven Years' War, moreover, had shaped an image of war in Germany differing significantly from that current among French military intellectuals. The experiences of Kolin and Rossbach, of Zorndorf, Kunersdorf, and Torgau suggested that war was a human endeavour as well as the province of reason. The Seven Years' War was the first conflict in history to be reported from the bottom up as well as from the top down. Significant proportions of the Prussian army's junior officers and cantonists were literate. As much to the point, these men usually had someone at home anxious to learn if all was going well. The large number of memoirs published by survivors and participants reinforced the argument that the genius of Frederick the Great depended on the courage and goodwill of the common soldiers and junior officers.[19]

Count Friedrich Wilhelm zur Schaumburg-Lippe-Bückeburg played a key role in institutionalizing this approach. His career had been that of a military

[17] John E. Stine, 'King Frederick William II and the Decline of the Prussian Army, 1786–1797', (PhD Dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1980), pp. 86ff.

[18] Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought from the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 25ff.

[19] Cf. *inter alia* J. W. Archenholz, *Geschichte des Siebenjährigen Krieges in Deutschland*, 6th edn, 2 vols (Berlin, 1860); C. F. Barsewisch, *Meine Kriegs-Erlebnisse während des Siebenjährigen Krieges 1757–1763* (Berlin, 1863); and from enlisted perspectives, H. Bleckwenn (ed.), *Preussische Soldatenbriefe* (Osnabrück, 1982).

cosmopolitan: service with the English-Hanoverians at Dettingen in 1743 and under Austrian colours in Italy in 1745, commander of Ferdinand of Brunswick's artillery during the Seven Years' War, and finally Portugal's successful resistance to Spanish invasion in 1762–3. Returning to his home state, he introduced universal military service as part of a comprehensive structure of reforms designed to make his subjects into citizens and his citizens into soldiers. The Count's advocacy of mobilizing moral as well as physical resources was shaped by his belief that states organized for war on such lines could more readily deter their greedier, more ambitious neighbours.[20]

One might call Lippe's concept 'Prussia written small', and it had not a few antecedents in Prussia's experience. The Old Dessauer's appeals to the good will of the rank and file, the relative humanity of pre-war recruit training, were foundations on which genuine camaraderie had been built during the Seven Years' War—camaraderie whose decline the officers did not always greet with approbation in the years after Hubertusberg.[21]

The process of rebuilding pride in service began with an institution particularly congenial to the late eighteenth century. Regimental schools emerged everywhere in Prussia during the 1770s and 1780s. They initially owed less to pedagogy than to economics, as colonels concerned with the increasing poverty of their men sought to provide instruction in marketable skills. The schools had a broader stabilizing function as well. By providing soldiers' children with academic and practical instruction, they encouraged fathers to stay with their families and remain in the ranks. Potsdam, epicentre of the Prussian military machine, provided the model. Beginning in the early 1780s, all children of the garrison from 5 to 13 were required to attend a school whose facilities and curriculum were state-of-the-art, with salaried teachers expected to limit corporal punishment as they taught not only basics, but more esoteric subjects like essay-writing and high German.[22]

Nor did enlightened personnel policies stop at the classroom door. Frederick William had long criticized, albeit in a casual fashion, what he regarded as the excessive strictness of the army's discipline. A series of orders abolished, at least officially, the most extreme of the physical punishments introduced in the years since Hubertusberg. A new 'Regulation on Recruitment' was introduced to curb the frauds and abuses that had hindered enlistment and retention of the foreigners who were still so important to Prussia's military

[20] The Count's writings can be found in C. Ochwadt (ed.), *Wilhelm Graf zu Schaumburg-Lippe: Schriften und Briefe*, 3 vols. (Frankfurt, 1977–83). The best treatment of his career, despite its limited focus, is Christa Banaschik-Ehl, *Scharnhorsts Lehrer, Graf Wilhelm von Schaumburg-Lippe, in Portugal. Die Heeresreform 1761–1777* (Osnabrück, 1974).

[21] Cf. 'Über die Aufklärung des Militärs', *Militärische Monatsschrift* i (1785), 590–601; Col J. von Scholten, *Was muss ein Offizier wissen*? (Dessau and Leipzig, 1982); and the summary in Max Jähns, *Geschichte der Kriegswissenschaft, vornehmlich in Deutschland*, 3 vols. (Munich and Leipzig, 1889–91), iii. 2439ff.

[22] The best brief treatment of this subject is Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 46ff.

efficiency. That process was also reformed at its other end. Frederick William proclaimed that anyone joining the army could count on life-long security. Soldiers' homes were expanded in capacity and accessibility. Regiments organized 'invalid companies' for those veterans still able to perform housekeeping duties. Family allowances were introduced for men with children under 13. Pensions were increased and in part made retroactive to veterans of the Seven Years' War and the Potato Campaign.[23]

Implemented as intended, the new conditions of service would have significantly professionalized the army. Not only would foreigners have been easier to recruit and retain; more Prussian natives might have been encouraged to seek military careers despite legal and social pressures against such a decision. A possible consequence might have been a standing army built around committed long-service regulars, 'thirty-year men' with good benefits and solid prospects for a pension. In wartime the mobilized cantonists could take their cue from the professionals. With a similar structure, substituting militiamen for cantonists, the Duke of Wellington took the measure of Napoleon's best marshals and eventually of the master himself. Speculation on the possibilities for Prussia between 1792 and 1806 invites anyone interested in history's might-have-beens.

Changes in personnel policies were accompanied by changes in organization. In 1787 each line infantry company received ten *Schützen*. These 'sharpshooters' were selected for physical fitness and mental alertness, and given special instructions in marksmanship and skirmishing. There were too few of them, however, to make much difference to the way a battalion fought. Instead the *Schützen* proved a valuable source of young, active noncommissioned officers. Those picked for the assignment were as a rule more interested in gaining promotion than improving their fieldcraft. Colonels and captains for their part welcomed these 'chosen men' more as assets to unit command structures than as a select group of specialists whose tactical skills were of limited use in peacetime. In the long run the *Schützen* seem to have contributed a fair amount to improving the general efficiency of the infantry. They did less to develop its collective capacity to fight in open order.[24]

If the *Schützen* soon lost their intended function, the same could not be said for the twenty fusilier battalions also created in 1787. These were different in essence from the light troops of Frederick's wars. Instead of being formed *ad hoc* from the army's dregs, the new battalions grew from the three light regiments created by Frederick II, by converting several grenadier and line battalions, and by selecting some of the best companies from the army's garrison regiments—a solid base on which to build new traditions.

[23] The most important royal orders on this subject have been published in E. von Frauenholtz, *Das Heerwesen in der Zeit des Absolutismus*, vol. 4 of *Die Entwicklungsgeschichte des Deutschen Heerwesens* (Munich, 1940), pp. 298ff.

[24] *Instruction für sämtliche Infanterie-Regimenter und Fusilier-Bataillone. Exercieren der Schützen betreffend* (Berlin, 1789); Jany, *Armee*, pp. 160, 165–6.

Their officers were a similar blend of old and new. Frederick William initially sought to distinguish the fusiliers from his uncle's misbegotten Free Battalions by insisting that their officers be of 'undoubted noble birth'. In practice, Frederick William allowed exceptions, while the light infantry regulations of 1788 even permitted the commissioning of sergeants. Ambitious bourgeois sought and received commissions in the fusiliers: by the 1790s about a quarter of the fusilier officers were untitled. On the other hand, the official emphasis on preserving the aristocratic character of these new units' leadership kept the fusiliers from being regulated to the army's sidelines as something less than 'real soldiers'.

The fusiliers wore green uniforms instead of the traditional blue. They carried a more accurate version of the regular musket. They used hunting horns for signalling. They fought in two ranks rather than the regulation three. These characteristics reflected their mission. The fusiliers were not originally intended to work closely with the battalions of the line, but to operate semi-independently against enemy forces in wooded or broken ground. As skirmishers they were expected to maintain a common direction, never to get too far from each other, and to open fire and cease fire at command or risk a flogging.

This was more than what Peter Paret calls a 'reluctant transition'. The fusiliers were created to fight not the as-yet non-existent *tirailleurs* of revolutionary France, but true irregulars best challenged by combining the virtues of initiative and discipline. The tactics recommended for the new battalions strongly resemble those employed, for example, by British light infantry in North America during the final stages of the French and Indian War. Nor were they entirely out of synchronization with the fighting style of the Light Division in Wellington's Peninsular army.

At least as important as drill regulations for the fusiliers was man management. Fusilier companies, like those of the line, combined cantonists and 'foreigners': ninety of the former, seventy-five of the latter according to the tables of organization. They were expected to raise personal and small-unit initiative to degrees hitherto unknown in the Prussian army—even to the point of living off the countryside. Discipline was correspondingly based heavily on appeals to professionalism and comradeship. Relations between NCOs and ordinary soldiers were seen as reflecting common commitment to a common enterprise; physical punishment was a last resort. Being a fusilier was something special. As a result, fusilier battalions seldom lacked recruits of good quality.[25]

The fusiliers' regulations could readily be overlooked by battalion com-

[25] *Reglement für die König. Preuss. leichte Infanterie* (Berlin, 1788); Paret, *Yorck*, pp. 56–7, 265; Jany, *Armee*, pp. 161–3. Cf. Peter E. Russell, 'Redcoats in the Wilderness: British Officers and Irregular Warfare in Europe and America, 1740 to 1760', *The William and Mary Quarterly* 35 (1978), 629–52; David Gates, *The British Light Infantry Arm c. 1790–1815: Its Creation, Training and Operational Role* (London, 1987).

manders concerned with proving that fusiliers really belonged in the line army's order of battle. Field training wore out uniforms and equipment at rates alarming to the army's bookkeepers. Practice ammunition was doled out in rounds. Nevertheless, as light troops Prussia's fusiliers were not to be despised—particularly for new creations. Officers like the future reformer Neithardt von Gneisenau took advantage of their own experience (in his particular case service in North America with the Ansbach-Bayreuth contingent) and utilized an increasing number of unofficial, plainly written handbooks to train their companies and battalions in open-order tactics without bending existing regulations too badly.[26]

The light infantry also met, and passed with flying colours, an operational test. In 1787 the Stadtholder of the Dutch Republic, facing domestic crises that flared into a mini-revolt, turned to Prussia for succour. In mid-September Frederick William despatched 25,000 men under Ferdinand, Duke of Brunswick, who had won laurels in independent command in the Seven Years' War. The task force included several light units, among them two fusilier battalions and part of the *Jäger* regiment. They set the invasion's pace despite bad weather and bad roads. Brunswick understood political as well as military offensives. He announced that no one who did not interfere with his troops would be harmed. In a short time the Prussians occupied Utrecht and Amsterdam against no significant resistance. The Stadtholder's position was restored. His opponents kept silent, changed sides, or fled the country in the face of Prussian bayonets.[27]

This neatly executed counterinsurgency operation is usually either interpreted in a political context as one of the Ancien Régime's last triumphs before the Revolution, or dismissed as inconsequential compared to the full-scale military operations just over the horizon. It was in fact another affirmation of the Prussian army's quality as a deterrent force, formidably capable of maintaining its interests in its designated zones of influence. To contemporary observers there seemed no question that the Prussian army was an effective instrument of Prussian state strategy under its new monarch, as it had been under the great Frederick. Prussia not only gained an alliance with a grateful Stadtholder in 1788. On 13 August, Frederick William also signed a treaty with Great Britain. London's concerns about Prussian territorial ambitions vis-à-vis Poland—concerns fully justified by subsequent Prussian policies—were overcome in good part by the performance of Prussia's soldiers.[28]

[26] Paret, *Yorck*, p. 61; E. F. von Fransecky, 'Gneisenau', *Militär-Wochenblatt* 41 (1856), 41–2.

[27] T. P. Pfau, *Geschichte des Preussischen Feldzuges in der Provinz Holland im Jahr 1787* (Berlin, 1790); P. de Witt, *Une Invasion prussienne en Hollande en 1787* (Paris, 1886); and R. Senckler, *Der Preussiche Feldzug in den Niederlanden im Jahre 1787* (Berlin, 1893), cover the military details. The best general account is Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands 1780–1813* (London, 1977), pp. 64ff.

[28] Old but still useful on this subject is Friedrich Karl Wittichen, *Preussen und England in der europäischen Politik 1785–1788* (Heidelberg, 1902).

The Prussian army exercised its deterrent role successfully in eastern Europe as well. In 1787 Austria and Russia once more went to war against the Ottoman Empire. As the price of her neutrality Prussia suggested Poland's western territories. Frederick William backed his claim by deploying no fewer than 145 battalions in Silesia and along the Saxon frontier in the fall and winter of 1789. Austrian Emperor Leopold II, who succeeded his brother Joseph in February 1790, decided to switch rather than fight. The July 1790 Convention of Reichenbach established the diplomatic basis for Prussian territorial gains at Poland's expense. A year later Prussia's rapid mobilization against Russia led Empress Catherine to reconsider her objections to Poland's dismemberment and convinced Austria to transform the Reichenbach agreements into a full-fledged alliance.[29]

These diplomatic successes were by no means the unmixed result of sabre-rattling. Yet events from 1787 to 1791 clearly showed that whatever might be the Prussian army's shortcomings compared to ideal military standards, no European power was willing in practice to call the Prussian king's bets. A case can indeed be made that the army of the early 1790s was too convincing for the state's good. The passive deterrence characteristic of the final twenty years of Frederick's reign was modified under Frederick William II into an active policy at times difficult to distinguish from intimidation. No statesman can afford to forget the street fighter's axiom: never let your mouth buy more than your hands can pick up. Prussia was still the least of the great powers, with a corresponding risk of overplaying its cards. Yet for all his shortcomings as a military monarch, Frederick William II was at successful pains to avoid strategic overstretch.

III

The King's prudence showed most clearly in his French policies. Exact responsibility for the outbreak of war between revolutionary France and the central European powers in 1792 continues to be debated. If France declared war first, Prussia and Austria had begun moving troops towards the French frontier weeks earlier. If the Girondins sought to extend the blessings of liberty, equality, and fraternity across the Rhine, the King of Prussia and the Austrian Emperor perceived the long-term advantages of crippling France by repeating on a larger scale Prussia's performance of 1787 in the Dutch Republic.

From the beginning Prussian policy was based on limited commitment to the anti-French coalition. The Seven Years' War cast a long shadow. Frederick William was determined to avoid his predecessor's fate of fighting a war for

[29] T. C. W. Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London and New York, 1986), pp. 54ff; Derek McKay and H. M. Scott, *The Rise of the Great Powers, 1648–1815* (London and New York, 1983), pp. 245ff; and Steven T. Ross, *European Diplomatic History 1789–1815: France Against Europe* (New York, 1969), pp. 37ff, are readily accessible analyses.

Prussia's existence without reliable allies. Prussia proposed to take as much or as little of this war as it willed—a position facilitated both by relative geographic remoteness from the French threat and by the restricted appeal of revolutionary ideology in Prussian lands.[30] Even in the western provinces, traditionally open to influences from across the Rhine, initial enthusiasm for the French new order tended to be muted as the practical effects of French occupation became apparent.[31]

Poland offered far more promising opportunities for aggrandizement. When, in October 1792, Prussia declared itself willing to continue the Austrian alliance only if compensated by Polish territory, Vienna saw no alternative to accepting Poland's dismemberment despite Austria's refusal to participate in the process. Catherine too by now was willing to accept this solution. The Poles were not. The Russo-Prussian partition treaty of 23 January 1793 touched off a general insurrection. The patriot party was particularly successful against overextended, badly led Russian forces. Catherine unwillingly requested aid from Frederick William, and Prussia's King was happy to oblige. The expeditionary force had its share of problems against an enemy with nothing to lose. Eventually, however, the insurrection was crushed. A third partition agreed on by Russia, Prussia, and Austria in 1794 erased Poland from the map as a political entity for over a century.[32]

From Prussia's perspective the game had been well worth the stakes. Frederick William was in a position to congratulate himself on having outdone his uncle. Prussia's new territories might not have been as rich as Silesia, but they were almost as large. They had been gained, moreover, in cooperation with Prussia's neighbours—cooperation facilitated at every turn by the presence and the performance of Prussia's army. Austria needed Prussian troops to fight the French. Russia needed them to suppress the Poles. Both missions had been performed effectively on the operational level. If the Polish insurgents had been consistently unobliging by refusing to stay in one place for a single decisive battle, the Prussian army had ultimately worn them down and worn them out. The fusilier battalions in particular had shown to advantage in the 'little war' against Polish partisans, while the hussars were well on their way to recovering a light-cavalry heritage long lost under Frederick the Great.[33]

[30] Blanning, *French Revolutionary Wars*, pp. 69ff, remains the most up-to-date treatment in English of this subject. Cf. also Frank Attar, *1792, la Révolution française déclare la guerre à l'Europe: Géopolitique de l'Europe de 1792* (Paris, 1992).

[31] T. C. W. Blanning, *The French Revolution in Germany: Occupation and Resistance in the Rhineland 1792–1802* (Oxford, 1983), *passim*.

[32] William W. Hagen, 'The Partitions of Poland and the Crisis of the Old Regime in Prussia', *Central European History* 9 (1976), 115–28, is a solid overview. Cf. Leonard Ratajczyk, 'Evolution of the Polish Armed Forces, 1764–1921', in S. Fischer-Galati and B. K. Király (eds.), *Essays on War and Society in East Central Europe, 1740–1920* (Boulder, Co., 1987), pp. 169–71.

[33] Jany, *Armee*, pp. 314ff is detailed and positive about Prussia's performance. Paret, *Yorck*, p. 63, is anecdotal and critical.

Prussia's withdrawal in 1795 from the anti-French coalition and its conclusion of the separate Peace of Basle has usually been interpreted as a consequence of economic crisis and diplomatic myopia. Standard accounts describe the exhaustion of the war chest left by Frederick II, forcing Prussia to depend on foreign subsidies. Austria was unwilling and unable to underwrite her old enemy. Britain's offer of financial support was contingent on Prussia's troops operating for all practical purposes under British command and in British interests. This reversion to the days of the Great Elector was regarded as intolerable, even at the price of abandoning Prussia's territory west of the Rhine to French rule. Frederick the Great had relied heavily on subsidies to keep the field for much of the Seven Years' War. Frederick William did not perceive a similar urgency. Nor was he about to mortgage Prussia's future by embarking on war to the knife against France because of a British hostility that seemed to be based as much on ideology as on interest.[34]

Once again the King's decision was in good part underwritten by an army that between 1792 and 1795 performed up to and beyond reasonable expectations. Prussia's senior officers were no worse than their British and Austrian counterparts or, on the whole, their French enemies. Even Brunswick's lacklustre behaviour at Valmy could legitimately be written off as a case of opening-night jitters. Inexperienced troops facing strong positions in bad weather seldom achieve glory. Brunswick himself showed to better advantage in the next campaigning season, whose primary result was the successful recapture of Mainz.[35]

Tactically and operationally Prussia's performances were also solid. Prussian contingents operating in the Rhineland, their principal zone of commitment, had no opportunity for the kind of pitched battles Frederick II had waged a generation earlier in Bohemia and Silesia. The region's wooded, broken terrain forced deployment in relatively small combined-arms task forces. While these did not become organic units like the French divisions, they were usually kept together for long enough periods of time to develop some cohesion. For the most part their commanders handled them capably. After some seasoning the line battalions combined well-regulated volleys and well-controlled local counterattacks to match, if not always to master, the *élan* of their opponents. Prussian light infantry proved formidable opponents against French foragers and raiding parties. In large actions as well, notably Kaiserslautern in November 1793, the fusiliers taught some sharp lessons at high tuition in marksmanship and skirmishing.

[34] John M. Sherwig, *Guineas and Gunpowder: British Foreign Aid in the Wars with France 1793–1815* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), pp. 45–53, understates the role of state pride in Prussia's decision. For British social and political conservatism see I. Christie, *Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain. Reflection on the Avoidance of Revolution* (New York, 1984).

[35] The process was facilitated by the unpopularity of the French, who came as liberators but remained as conquerors. See T. C. W. Blanning, *Reform and Revolution in Mainz 1743–1803* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 275ff.

The theatre of operations offered no opportunity for the use of massed cavalry in the style of Seydlitz and Ziethen during the Seven Years' War. Prussian troopers nevertheless proved effective in brigade and squadron strength, despite uniform changes that favoured the parade ground more than the battlefield. The hussars consistently outrode and outfought their French counterparts in the skirmishing and outpost fighting that dominated the campaign. As for the artillery, its mobility had improved significantly since the days of the great Frederick despite the fact that its teams and drivers were still civilians. And for all the praise heaped on the French artillery reforms under Gribeauval, Prussian guns were seldom silenced or driven from the field by their opponents.

Another encouraging aspect of the army's performance was its morale. Prussian light units developed a strong identity as the army's élite, who performed their missions or went down fighting. In particular the *Jäger*, barely respectable when the war began, won a reputation as a fighting force second to none on either side. The line battalions were not far behind in self-image. Particularly in the Rhineland, supply systems consistently broke down. Living conditions were Spartan at best. Much of the fighting was cut-and-run operations against an elusive enemy who occasionally mounted the kind of fierce mass attacks unfaced by western armies since the height of the Ottoman wars. Singly or in combination, such conditions had devastated European armies for over a century. Prussian desertion rates, however, remained acceptable—particularly in the context of French propaganda stressing the advantages of coat-turning in the cause of freedom.[36] The Prussian army at mid-decade seemed, in short, well suited to support the policy of opportunistic neutrality Frederick William II bequeathed to his son in 1797.[37]

Saturnine and pessimistic at the age of 27, Frederick William III tended to assume the worst about most situations. He comes off poorly in most histories for failing to take counsel of Prussian hawks on the nature of the French threat. In fact Frederick William's cautious outlook fitted Prussia's immediate realities.[38] His refusal to be drawn into the ramshackle Second Coalition of Russia, Austria, and Britain seemed the soundest of common sense as the new alliance blundered from one military disaster to another. France had

[36] Stine, 'Frederick William II', pp. 139 ff, is a recent overview based on archival holdings from the then GDR. Jany, *Armee*, pp. 235ff, provides the details and is predictably affirming of the army's performance. *Pirmasens and Kaiserslautern*, pub. by the Abtheilung für Kriegsgeschichte of the German General Staff as vol. 16 of *Kriegsgeschichtliche Einzelschriften* (Berlin, 1893), is a case study with all the strengths and weaknesses of the General Staff school of history. Paret, *Yorck*, pp. 70, refers to the *Jäger* regiment's new standing. Günther Gieraths, *Kampfhandlung der brandenburgisch-preussischen Armee, 1626–1807* (Berlin, 1964), pp. 170ff, is useful for its list of the small-scale detached operations characteristic of the fighting along the Rhine, where the *Jäger*, fusiliers, and hussars showed to such advantage.

[37] Cf. Philip Dwyer's essay in this issue.

[38] The best and most comprehensive analysis of his character is Thomas Stamm-Kuhlmann, *König in Preussens grosse Zeit. Friedrich Wilhelm III. der Melancholiker auf dem Thron* (Berlin, 1992).

proposed an alliance as early as May 1798, but that prospect too had a cloven hoof.[39] Lying as she did between contending powers, Prussia faced the alternative risks of leading the forlorn hope for one adversary or becoming everybody's battlefield.

What saved her from having to choose sides for almost a decade was her army. From the French point of view Prussia was better conciliated than fought. For anti-French coalitions, actual or potential, Prussian soldiers were increasingly regarded as necessary in a successful continental war. Prussia's military reputation was also enhanced by default. Austria's performances against the French grew worse instead of better as the century waned. Russian soldiers knew how to fight and die, but their commanders failed increasingly to cope with French tactical and strategic flexibility. Britain's military contributions in Europe between 1793 and 1802 are best described as inadequate, if not pathetic, despite marked subsequent improvement.[40]

Frederick William III was by no means blind to the risks of French aggrandizement. In June 1802 he met with Tsar Alexander of Russia and came away with a personal commitment to the allied cause, reinforced in the royal bedroom by his wife Marie Louise, 'the best man in Prussia'. The King, however, had absorbed his great-uncle's commitment to the principle that Prussia was not a royal fief, to be taken to war at the will or whim of her monarch alone.[41] Nor was the First Consul (soon to become Emperor) of France backward in showing good will. In his effort to win Prussian support Napoleon offered temptations even the great Frederick might have found difficult to resist.

In the reorganization of western Germany under French auspices in the aftermath of the 1802 Peace of Lunéville, Prussia's benevolent neutrality was rewarded by extensive territorial gains in Westphalia and to the north of Thuringia.[42] These acquisitions bore a certain risk. They shifted Prussia's centre of gravity westward, making her more directly involved in the ongoing

[39] Cf. John M. Sherwig, 'Grenville's Plan for a Concert of Europe, 1797–99', *Journal of Modern History* 34 (1962), 284–93; and P. Bailleu (ed.), *Preussen und Frankreich von 1795 bis 1807. Diplomatische Korrespondenz*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1881–7), i. 193–4.

[40] Cf. Russell F. Weigley, *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo* (Bloomington, Ind., 1991), pp. 292ff; Gunther E. Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversaries: The Archduke Charles and the Austrian Army, 1792–1814* (Bloomington, Ind., 1982); and Kurt Peball, 'Zum Kriegsbild der österreichischen Armee und seiner geschichtlichen Bedeutung, in den Kriegen gegen die Französische Revolution und Napoleon I', in W. v. Groote and K. J. Müller (eds.), *Napoleon I und das Militärwesen seiner Zeit* (Freiburg, 1968), pp. 129–82. For the British cf. G. J. Evelyn,' "I learned what one ought not to do": The British Army in Flanders and Holland, 1793–95', and Piers Mackesy, 'Abercromby in Egypt: The Regeneration of the Army', in A. J. Guy (ed.), *The Road to Waterloo. The British Army and the Struggle Against Revolutionary France, 1793–1815* (London, 1990), pp. 16–22 and 101–10. Richard Glover, *Peninsular Preparation: The Reform of the British Army, 1795–1809* (Cambridge, 1963), also remains useful.

[41] Stamm-Kuhlmann, *Friedrich Wilhelm III*, pp. 173ff.

[42] See the note of 17 January 1802 to the French ambassador, in Bailleu, *Preussen und Frankreich*, ii. 67ff.

Anglo-Austro-French rivalry. The new lands also significantly improved the links between the monarchy's eastern and western halves. They seemed as well to prove the continued wisdom of Frederick William's foreign policy. Prussia's unprepossessing monarch appeared to have achieved the dream of every gambler: to win without betting.

IV

Could Prussia continue to straddle the fence without splitting herself open? The answer by the turn of the century depended almost entirely on the actual and perceived effectiveness of an army facing a clear challenge to its half-century's dominance of Europe's military scene. France, not Prussia, now set the standards of warfare. Adapting to second place is never easy in a milieu where a close run counts for nothing. The French army was likely to improve rather than decline. It was also backed by significantly greater human resources than anything Prussia could hope to match. For three-quarters of a century the state's ace in the hole had been a recruiting system that systematically tapped native manpower without exhausting it. That in turn allowed the maintenance of an army able to sustain Prussia as a first-rank power—as long as no other state copied or improved upon the method. The *levée en masse* did not permanently bring all classes of French society into uniform. By the mid-1790s most of the bourgeoisie were keeping their sons safely at home, or in staff and non-combat assignments. The real difference between the armies involved numbers. Now France too had begun mobilizing its lower classes systematically, and had several times as many of them to call into service.[43]

The manpower imbalance was exacerbated by the steady decline in foreign enlistments after 1795. By 1802 the Prussian army counted only 80,000 professionals to 140,000 cantonists. Increasing the army's domestic cadres was theoretically possible. Official figures gave just over two million eligible cantonists in 1799, 2,300,000 in 1805. By the time all the legal exemptions were calculated, over 300,000 men could be conscripted in a given year.[44] Numbers, however, were by themselves a red herring. Prussia's position relative to France prefigured that of the USA or the Federal Republic of Germany relative to Russia during the Cold War. Matching France man for man was impossible, even without the accompanying risk of gridlocking a society arguably already too finely tuned for its own good. Nor did even the most ardent Francophobes ever believe Prussia could defeat Napoleon's

[43] The paradigm shift is developed admirably in Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Art of War in the Age of Napoleon* (Bloomington, Ind., 1970). Cf. Peter Paret, 'Conscription and the End of the Old Regime in France and Prussia', in *Clausewitz and the History of War: Essays* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 53–74; Alan Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters: The Army and French Society during the Revolution and Empire* (New York, 1989); and W. S. Moody, 'The Introduction of Military Conscription in Napoleonic Europe, 1789–1812', (PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 1971).

[44] The revised regulations of 1792 for the canton system are in Frauenholz, *Heerwesen*, pp. 309–36. Cf. F. F. Wilke, *Handbuch zur Kenntnis des preussischen Cantonwesens* (Stettin, 1802). Summaries include Jähns, *Kriegswissenschaft*, iii. 2,225ff; and Jany, *Armee*, pp. 435ff.

burgeoning empire single-handed. Proposals like Karl Friedrich von Knesebeck's 'Fatherland Reserve', with its advocacy of a popular levy based on the universal obligation to perform military service, were correspondingly widely criticized as more likely to weaken than improve both the army's effectiveness and the state's strategic position.[45]

Nor were the nay-sayers mere military mossbacks more frightened of disrupting their system than of attacking its shortcomings. They argued cogently that the French army of the new century, the force the reformers explicitly or implicitly proposed to counter, was not the half-disciplined 'armed horde' of the early 1790s. Napoleon and his marshals instead led regiments strongly comparable to those that had marched to glory with Frederick: large cadres of experienced professionals supplemented by conscripts little different from Prussia's cantonists.[46]

To match such an adversary Prussia must develop a 'quality army' able to counter mass and skill with even greater fighting power. Conceptualizing such a force was no easy task in the context of rapid, continual changes in the craft of war, combined with a state strategy that at its most successful kept Prussian troops and officers from updating their operational experience. Beginning, however, with Frederick the Great, the Prussian army had been influenced by the belief that successful war-fighting required both practical knowledge and theoretical education. Frederick had argued in his *Éléments de castramétrie et de tactique*, written in 1770, that courage alone did not suffice for a senior officer. Generals must use judgement in everything, and judgement depended on knowledge. War, Frederick argued, was not a matter of improvisation but a subject that could be treated theoretically. Concepts derived from historical experience and applied to specific cases could substitute for direct experience.[47]

The man most responsible for applying Frederick's legacy to the Prussian army of the early 1800s was Gerhard von Scharnhorst. He had both a distinguished combat record and a reputation as one of Germany's best military theoreticians when Frederick William III convinced him to transfer from the Hanoverian army in 1801. Scharnhorst's first significant act in his new appointment was to found the *Militärische Gesellschaft* in Berlin. This body was a self-conscious élite. Including civilians as well as officers, its ultimate purpose was to develop 'an aristocracy of education'—not the limited, formal instruction of the technical military schools, but *Bildung*, the cultivation of individual character and understanding by the open, systematic exchange of ideas and information within an intellectual community.

[45] Johannes Ziekursch, 'Die preusschen Landreservebataillone 1805/06. Eine Reform vor der Reform?', *Historische Zeitschrift* 103 (1909), 85–94.

[46] John Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791–1794* (Champaign, Ill., 1984); John R. Elting, *Swords Around a Throne: Napoleon's Grande Armée* (New York, 1988).

[47] *Éléments de castramétrie et de tactique*, in Frederick II, *Ouvres*, ed. J. D. E. Preuss, xxix (Berlin, 1856), 4.

The divided counsels that eventually produced the disastrous contradictions in strategic deployment during the Jena/Auerstädt campaign were not exclusive products of the Prussian system. The high commanders of revolutionary France had shown no greater ability to cooperate among themselves, while Napoleon's marshals resembled more a pack of pit bulls than a sworn brotherhood of arms. Scharnhorst was a pragmatist. He proposed not to challenge directly the Prussian army's traditional (and so far successful) way of doing things, but to introduce, a few at a time, a new generation of leaders with a common background who would advise and assist their nominal superiors in commanding the state in arms that Scharnhorst saw as necessary for Prussia's survival.

These new men would provide as well an unobtrusive infusion of fresh blood. Gerontocracy has so often been cited as contributing to Prussia's debacle in 1806 that it sometimes seems as if companies were led into battle by captains in Bath chairs sipping restoratives. Most Prussian senior officers were in their sixties—a sharp contrast to a French high command whose average age was well under 40. A decade of peace had offered, however, no opportunities to develop a corps of battle-tested counterparts to Napoleon's marshals. Simply making a clean sweep, replacing generals with men a decade or so younger, was no guarantee of improved efficiency. Attempting such a process was likely instead to have the negative result of polarizing an officer corps that needed above all to work together.[48]

At its most promising, Scharnhorst's project for changing Prussia's command structure was long-term, requiring years if not decades to take full effect. In the years just prior to Jena, Prussia's military reformers concentrated as well on overhauling three specific elements of the military system, each likely to produce quick results. The first, and by far the most controversial, was doctrine: how the army fought. Even committed supporters of traditional linear formations could not deny the impact of French assault columns covered by swarms of skirmishers. Nor could they ignore the increasingly widespread belief that open-order tactics could be countered only by open-order tactics. Images of musketeers in line being picked off one by one, until only isolated files were left to fire into the smoke at their invisible tormentors, had just enough basis in reality to give weight to the reformers' case. Prussian light troops might have been able to take the measure of their French counterparts man for man and battalion for battalion. There were, however, too few of them to cope with an enemy that could at need deploy entire line regiments in open order.

[48] Among the voluminous writings on Scharnhorst's life and career, the most relevant on this subject include Günther Wollstein, 'Scharnhorst und die Französische Revolution', *Historische Zeitschrift* 227 (1978), 325–52; Hermann Büschleb, *Scharnhorst in Westfalen: Politik, Administration, Kommando im Schicksalsjahre 1795* (Herford, 1979); and Charles White's excellent *The Enlightened Soldier: Scharnhorst and the Militärische Gesellschaft in Berlin, 1801–1805* (New York, 1989).

Increasing the number of fusilier battalions and the percentage of *Schützen* in the line regiments could be no more than a palliative. Instead, the advocates of military reform cited both French and Prussian experience to stress the need for changing the army's patterns of recruitment, education, and training. Mercenaries and cantonists held in ranks by traditional discipline had limited prospects against what a steadily increasing body of literature described as a national army that incorporated in its ranks a cross-section of France's population and infused formal instruction with patriotic enthusiasm. Adam Heinrich von Bülow particularly insisted on the personal freedom of the individual soldier as the key to victory. Linear formations were useful only on the parade ground. In battle soldiers must move on the run and be armed and equipped like hunters. When necessary, their natural enthusiasm should be reinforced by alcohol![49]

This extreme position found limited favour among men like Gneisenau, Gerhard von Scharnhorst, and Carl von Clausewitz, who sought to synthesize the open-order tactics of the Revolution with the closed linear formations that had continued to prove their worth when properly handled. The *Militärische Gesellschaft*'s published *Proceedings* included a large number of essays on tactics. Most of them discussed the proper balance between line and light forces; most of them emphasized the importance of treating common soldiers with humanity, appealing to their good will and intelligence. As this article has shown, such ideas were hardly new in Prussian military circles. They nevertheless attracted an increasing amount of negative attention from critics who argued that if Prussia must become like France to fight France, there seemed no point in fighting France at all.

The objections reflected more than social conservatism. Enthusiasm and instinct had throughout history proved themselves ephemeral qualities on the battlefield when compared to training and discipline. French soldiers had time and again proved themselves too volatile, too unstable, to implement linear tactics effectively. Rossbach was frequently cited as an example of the inherent French tendency to 'charge like hell—both ways'. The German infantryman was more cold-blooded, at his best in a firing line. Pride of craft and pride of unit were what sustained such men in battle. Nor should it be forgotten, the reformers' critics argued, that during the Seven Years' War Prussia's peasant cantonists had shown themselves no less imbued with love of *Heimat* than were French volunteers and conscripts for *la Patrie*.[50]

Even Scharnhorst agreed that one of the major reasons for the outcome of the War of the First Coalition was the difference in stakes: 'one side had everything to lose, the other, little.'[51] That comparison described the essence

[49] A. H. D. von Bülow, *Neue Taktik der Neuern, wie sie seyn sollte* (Leipzig, 1805).

[50] The debates are summarized in White, *Enlightened Soldier*, pp. 76ff, and Paret, *Yorck*, pp. 73ff.

[51] 'Entwicklung der allgemeinen Ursachen des Glücks der Franzosen in dem Revolutionskrieg', in C. von der Goltz (ed.), *Militärische Schriften von Scharnhorst* (Dresden, 1891), p. 203.

of Prussian state strategy in the decade after 1795. Its goal was precisely to *limit* the risks of war, not only with France but with every other power as well. A second major way of improving that strategy's prospects involved improving the army's administration and logistics. Frederick II had sustained to the end a system of rigid centralization, giving up no more control than his infirmities demanded. Under his successors the *Oberkriegskollegium*, established in 1787, assumed increasing importance. This Supreme War Board included seven departments responsible for the principal arms of service, supply, mobilization, and military pensioners' dependants. It is usually described as a self-sustaining, Byzantine bureaucracy preoccupied with turf wars and administrative routine. Similarly the embryonic General Staff remained restricted to such limited, technical concerns as determining march routes and camp sites. On a more positive note the individual agencies were usually competent in their particular spheres, and by no means unresponsive to procedural changes if given a lead by the King who was also the supreme commander.[52]

In the years before 1806, Prussian systems of field requisition were overhauled and simplified. Baggage, supply, and ammunition trains were reduced—the latter arguably below margins of operational safety.[53] Prussia, however, was confronting a gap between myth and reality. Administrative reformers tended to cite as an example the alleged French practice of living off the land. Critics replied by calling up images of whole regiments collapsing into marauding bands of foragers. The doubters had clearer perceptions than the visionaries. Even the revolutionary armies had never really been self-sustaining, while Napoleon's tendency to ignore logistical concerns brought his operational plans to the edge of disaster time and again. The Ulm/Austerlitz campaign of 1805, often cited as the Emperor's strategic masterpiece, was characterized by a supply situation that went 'from bad to desperate', with discipline eroding to the point of collapse as the *Grande Armée* made up for the quartermasters' shortcomings by ravaging an already stripped countryside.[54]

If case-hardened veterans of a dozen campaigns broke ranks because of hunger, could more be expected of relatively domesticated Prussian troops? The army's revamped logistic system still lacked flexibility—a weakness highlighted in 1806, when the wagon trains faced consistent difficulty in keeping pace with troop movements. In defence of the supply services, however, it may be said that Prussian strategy in the Jena/Auerstädt campaign was so

[52] Jany, *Armee*, pp. 150ff; Hans Helfritz, *Geschichte der Preussischen Heeresverwaltung* (Berlin, 1938), pp. 173ff.

[53] W. O. Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms 1786–1813* (New York, 1945), p. 84.

[54] Martin van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (New York, 1977), pp. 42ff, discusses the *Grande Armée*'s supply problems in 1805. Cf. Paul Heinsius, 'Der Wandel der Logistik in den Napoleonischen Kriegen', in MGFA (ed.), *Die Bedeutung der Logistik für die Militärische Führung von der Antike bis in die neueste Zeit* (Herford, 1986), pp. 87–108. The quotation is from Weigley, *Age of Battles*, p. 380.

random that no logistical system based on animal power was likely to keep pace with the high command's constant changes of mind!

The final focus of reform, organization, arguably proved a greater stumbling block than command, doctrine, and logistics combined. The principal structural weakness of Frederick the Great's army had been its lack of structure above the brigade level. Almost from the beginning of the Revolutionary Wars the French had employed permanent divisions combining infantry, cavalry, artillery, with enough support and logistic services to sustain independent operations. Under Napoleon the divisions were integrated into army corps, miniature armies of between 10,000 and 20,000 men whose combat power and sustainability were exponentially greater than the same numbers organized as divisions.[55]

As early as 1801 Scharnhorst had argued for introducing the divisional system in the Prussian army. But even in the *Militärische Gesellschaft* his was a minority position. One set of critics argued that the rapidly changing conditions of war made it unwise to set any organization in cement. Others believed in the Frederician system's continued utility—particularly for an army that expected to fight a defensive war. A divisional system might be well-adapted for an army desiring to pose threats of invasion to its neighbour. Prussia's deterrent strategy, on the other hand, did not call for such a force structure.[56]

The result was gridlock. Not until after the beginning of the Jena/Auerstädt campaign was the Prussian army finally reorganized in combined-arms divisions. Apart from the normal problems confronting improvised formations with inexperienced commanders, the new units were badly balanced: two infantry brigades, each of four or five battalions, a fusilier battalion as light troops, a brigade of heavy cavalry, and anything from five to ten squadrons of light horsemen.

With only three batteries of artillery supporting these heterogeneous units, opportunities for overwhelming an enemy with sudden concentrations of firepower were non-existent. The binary structure of the infantry offered almost no scope for tactical manoeuvre. The heavy cavalry brigades were too weak to make an impression by themselves, and their creation deprived the Prussian army of the one element Napoleon seems to have feared most: the strong, well-trained mounted reserve that had so often turned the tide of battle during the Seven Years' War. Led by men with limited experience outside their own branch of service, the new formations were of more burden than benefit,

[55] Steven T. Ross, 'The Development of the Combat Division in Eighteenth-Century French Armies', *French Historical Studies* 4 (1965), 84–94; Robert M. Epstein, 'Patterns of Change and Continuity in Nineteenth-Century Warfare', *Journal of Military History* 56 (1992), 378–88.

[56] Cf. Ernst von Rüchel, 'Über einige militärische Diversitäten, Denkwürdigkeiten der militärischen Gesellschaft in Berlin', iii (1803), 401–2; and Carl von Clausewitz, *Nachrichten über Preussen in seiner grossen Katastrophe*, vol. x of Grosser Generalstab (ed.),*Kriegsgeschichtliche Einzelschriften*, (Berlin, 1808), p. 428.

creating expectations of mobility and flexibility they could not fulfil under operational conditions.[57]

V

Prussia's deficiencies in the Jena/Auerstädt campaign reflected the state's failure to prepare for an inevitable, all-out war with France.[58] Prussia's state strategy for over a decade, however, had been designed to avoid exactly that contingency. A good horseman, Helmuth von Moltke observed a half-century later, does not drive even the boldest steed against an obstacle it cannot hurdle. Despite its shortcomings, the Prussian army of 1806 can reasonably be described as being well into the process of introducing the new ways of war developed over the previous decade. One might even suggest that the army had adapted too well to what a later generation would call mid-intensity war and counterinsurgency operations, in the process taking for granted the continued ability to win a Leuthen or a Rossbach. In comparative terms the Prussians were about where the Austrians stood four years later at Wagram. Not until at least 1810 would Britain's principal field army in the Iberian Peninsula reach the tactical and administrative levels at which Prussia stood just prior to Jena. Russia as late as 1814 remained unregenerately unreformed and significantly successful.

Contemporaries frequently blamed the collapse of Prussia's state strategy in 1805/6 on the shortsightedness of Frederick William III and his political advisers. That line of argument found high favour later in the nineteenth century with General Staff historians anxious to establish the necessity for military autonomy in decision-making.[59] It appeals as well to twentieth-century academic Whigs overwhelmingly sympathetic to the reform movement as a major step in a 'right' direction subsequently abated by conservatives and militarists.[60] The position's flaw is its Prussocentrism: the assumption that Prussia from the first essentially miscalculated the intentions of imperial France. The key to Europe's situation lay not in Berlin but in Paris. It was the mushrooming in 1803/4 of Napoleon's unfocused ambitions—and what seemed the limitless capacity of the French army to enforce its emperor's pretensions. Diplomacy became for Napoleon no more than the conduct of war by other means. Prussia, with its Frederician heritage of wars waged for

[57] Cf. the critiques in E. von Conrady, *Leben und Werken des Generals der Infanterie . . . Carl von Grolman*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1894) i. 45–6, and Max Lehmann, *Scharnhorst*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1886–7), i. 412–13.

[58] The most eloquent statement of this thesis, Clausewitz, *Nachrichten*, is now available in abridged form in English in *Carl von Clausewitz, Historical and Political Writings*, ed. and transl. by Peter Paret and Daniel Moran (Princeton, 1992), pp. 30–84.

[59] The most eloquent and comprehensive statement of this thesis is Colmar Freiher von der Goltz, *Von Rossbach bis Jena* (Berlin, 1906).

[60] Cf. *inter alia* Rudolf Ibbeken, *Preussen 1807–1813. Staat und Volk als Idee und Wirklichkeit* (Berlin, 1970), and Reinhard Koselleck, *Preussen zwischen Reform und Revolution. Allgemeines Landrecht, Verwaltung und soziale Bewegung von 1791–1848* (Stuttgart, 1967).

limited political objectives, was slow to recognize the paradigm shift in French behaviour. Yet a solid body of evidence suggested Prussia still held a trump card in its army. When war broke out once more between France and Britain in 1803, French troops overran the Electorate of Hanover, creating exactly the kind of direct geographic contact that both Frederick William had sought to avoid. French diplomats, however, described the operation as temporary and suggested that continued Prussian neutrality would be amply rewarded. In the event Prussian troops did occupy Hanover without resistance in October 1805; the French garrison withdrew expeditiously.[61]

This success only reinforced the confidence that had led to Frederick William's refusal to join the Third Coalition pitting Russia and Austria against Napoleon on the Continent. The King's decision was facilitated by a belief, scarcely unreasonable given past experience, that the adversaries were evenly enough matched to wear each other down. The French might win, but at a cost, making the Prussian army an even greater factor in European affairs. Like Napoleon III sixty years later, Frederick William's political decision in the event left his state facing France alone. The acquisition of Hanover was followed in the aftermath of Austerlitz by a series of one-sided negotiations binding Prussia to supply troops for Napoleon's war with Russia and close her ports to British ships and goods. As a final indignity, rumour had it that Napoleon was willing to return Hanover to Britain in return for peace.

Rather than accept client-state status, reduction to the level of Bavaria or Württemberg, Frederick William declared war. He had the full support of a Gallophobic war party headed by Queen Marie Louise, who, according to some accounts, refused sex to her husband until he consented to draw the sword. The King also hedged his bet. While negotiations were still incomplete in the summer of 1806, Russia was willing—indeed more than willing once Austria had withdrawn from the war—to support Prussia as part of a Fourth Coalition to include Britain and Sweden. The only drawback was Prussia's credibility. With French envoys also discussing peace terms with Alexander, it seemed necessary for Prussia to take the lead and show good will.

That meant fighting—but not a fight to the finish. Prussia declared war in September. That left just time enough in the campaigning season for one major battle. And all the Prussian army had to do there was to bloody Napoleon's nose, buying time for Russian bayonets and English guineas to bring their respective influences to bear. This was not an optimal strategic situation, but neither was it generally perceived as being outside the capacities of Prussia's military establishment. The war hawks of 1806 included many of the officers most active in the military reform movement. While men like Clausewitz and Scharnhorst were unlikely to sharpen their swords on the steps of the French embassy, neither did they see themselves as engaging in a forlorn hope to salvage Prussian honour. Nor, based on over a decade's

[61] Stamm-Kuhlmann, *Friedrich Wilhelm III*, pp. 180ff.

experience, were there any obvious reasons to expect disaster—at least before the campaign began.[62]

The collapse of Prussia's army and government in the aftermath of Jena and Auerstädt represented a logical, almost a natural, consequence of the Frederician concept of front-loaded warfare culminating in a quick, decisive battle waged by the state's cutting edge: its armed forces. One might say Prussia behaved in fact as Frederick expected Prussia's enemies to behave in principle! Yet at the same time the end of Prussia's old order was the consequence of a state strategy that ultimately failed to recognize the relative decline of Prussia's international position between 1763 and 1806. That lack of insight in turn reflected continued high levels of confidence in Prussia's army—confidence that, as this article has shown, was by no means unjustified in specific terms.

In the real world, however, absolute faith is always misplaced. Between Hubertusberg and Auerstädt the Prussian army was shaped and utilized as a deterrent force in the context of a multi-power international system. Suddenly it was required to fight an all-out war single-handed against an empire. The result was not surprising, but neither was it predetermined. While armies cannot afford to get things too badly wrong in times of peace, Prussia's generals and soldiers had not marched blindly into a dead end in the years since the Peace of Hubertusberg. Nor did the army disgrace itself in 1806. For all their shortcomings in planning and command, the Prussians fought well enough to give their opponents more than a few bad quarters-of-an-hour. It represents no concession to a later century's patrioteers to assert that Prussia in 1806 faced a French army at the peak of its efficiency, commanded by one of history's greatest captains at the height of his powers. Defeat at such hands, while it pitilessly exposes weaknesses, is by no means *prima facie* evidence of irreversible dry rot.[63]

Prussia learned from disaster. Strategically the reformed army operated strictly within a coalition held together by a common denominator no less firm for being low: the defeat of Napoleon. Until the Emperor's first abdication, it was Prussian statesmen and Prussian generals who stressed the importance of

[62] Brendan Simms, 'The Road to Jena: Prussian High Politics, 1804–06', in this issue treats this subject in more detail, though with different emphases. In a military context Scharnhorst's often-cited memorandum of April 1806, recommending the creation of a national army, printed in von der Goltz, *Rossbach bis Jena*, pp. 543–9, is best read as a gesture for the present and a counsel for the future rather than a cry of desperation. His commitment to a strategic offensive against France (cf. Lehmann, i. 370ff) could hardly have been executed by an improvised *levée en masse*, and nothing in Scharnhorst's career suggests he believed in the power of popular enthusiasm by itself to defeat the *Grande Armée*.

[63] From the Prussian perspective, O. von Lettow Vorbeck, *Der Krieg von 1806 und 1807*, vol. i, *Jena und Auerstädt* (Berlin, 1899), is the most detailed treatment. J. Tranie and J. C. Carmigneani, *Napoléon et l'Allemagne-la Prusse 1806* (Paris, 1992), is an excellent presentation from the other side of the hill. For less patient readers, despite its presence in the war-gaming Osprey Campaign Series, David Chandler, *Jena 1806. Napoleon Destroys Prussia* (London, 1993), is a superb summary by the master of the field.

keeping the alliance intact by fighting the French wherever and whenever possible, leaving the aftermath of victory to take care of itself.[64]

Operationally the Prussian army of the Wars of Liberation was much more the force of a *Kleinstaat* than its Frederician predecessor had ever been. Not intended to strike decisive, independent blows, it was governed by tactical doctrines stressing the use of combination punches to develop and discover weak spots, followed by breakthroughs in a small-scale version of B. H. Liddell Hart's expanding torrent.[65] It would be another half-century before Prussia sought to play an independent military role. Even then the kingdom would pursue the limited objectives characteristic of Frederician strategy. And in victory, Moltke and Bismarck would accept for two decades the army's deterrent role that was the other half of the great king's legacy to the least of Europe's great powers.

[64] Gordon A. Craig, 'Problems of Coalition Warfare: The Military Alliance against Napoleon, 1813–1814', in *War, Politics and Diplomacy: Selected Essays* (New York, 1966), pp. 22–45.

[65] Dennis E. Showalter, 'The Prussian Landwehr and its Critics, 1813–1819', *Central European History* 4 (1971), 3–33, develops this interpretation of Prussian doctrine in detail.