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Foreword

When Colonel Charles Jean Jacques Joseph Ar- dant du Picq fell on the field at Longeville-lés-Metz in August 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War, France lost her most astute military observer and commentator of the last half of the nineteenth century. Born in 1821, Ar- dant du Picq graduated from the Saint-Cyr military academy in 1844, served in the Crimean War during the siege of Sebastopol, where he was captured, and subsequently in Syria and Algeria. Promoted to colonel in 1869, he had been in command of the 10th Regiment of the Line for a little more than a year and a half.

At the time of his death, Colonel Ardant du Picq had published only fragments of his cogent studies on the behavior of men in battle and the dynamics of combat. Some of his observations were edited by a family friend and published in 1880 by Hachette et Dumaine, but it was not until 1903 that his published writing and unpublished notes were edited and presented in a complete edition by the well-known journalist Ernest Judet. The 1903 edition, published by Librairie Chapelot under the title Études sur le com- bat: ancienne et moderne, became popular in the French army during World War I, being used to support the disastrous doctrine of offensive à outrance, a doctrine that Ardant du Picq himself would probably have rejected.

Ardant du Picq’s interests were not in strategy or tactics, but rather the behavior of men in combat and such related topics as courage, fear, and unit cohesion. His observations were based on a thorough reading of the literature on ancient battles as well as eighteenth-century and Napoleonic warfare. Of course, his own experiences in the Crimea, Syria, and Algeria were also considered. He was among the first military commentators to address war at its sharpest end in a comprehensive way.

Almost a century after the first and only English translation of Ardant du Picq’s masterwork, Dr. Roger J. Spiller has brought forth a felicitous new English translation of Ardant du Picq’s cogent observations on the behavior of men in combat. Dr. Spiller’s work has two principal virtues. First, it is a fresh, readable English translation of Judet’s 1903 edition. Second, the
translation, as well as Dr. Spiller’s commentary and notes, are infused with a thorough knowledge of almost 100 years of evidence and study accumulated since World War I on such subjects as the psychology of battle, shell shock, unit cohesion, and post-traumatic stress syndrome. He has thus aligned the classic work of Ardant du Picq with the scientific scholarship of the past century and produced what will no doubt become the standard English translation of Ardant du Picq’s classic work for some time to come.

Charles R. Shrader
Carlisle, Pennsylvania
Introduction

Toujours la question essentielle

At about seven o’clock one morning in August 1870, the French army’s 10e régiment d’infanterie de ligne halted its march along a road just south of Longeville-lès-Metz. The regiment had been on the move since before dawn. The troops had just started their coffee when they came under shellfire from two guns of the Prussian 2nd Horse Artillery positioned across the Moselle on the heights of Montigny. The troops scattered for the cover of an embankment, but one shell landed amid members of the 3rd Battalion, killing its commander and several other officers, and wounding ten more. One of the wounded was the commanding officer of the regiment. He had remained standing while his men ran for protection.

The shell had shredded the colonel’s legs, “mutilated in a frightful manner,” the regiment’s history reads. His abdomen had also been severely contused by a shell fragment. The colonel’s men pulled what was left of him to the lee of the embankment, and a surgeon rushed to his aid. The regimental history does not tell us whether the colonel’s wounds were at all survivable, but they were serious enough for the colonel, no doubt suffering from shock by then, to suggest to the surgeon where his right leg should be amputated. The surgeon demurred. The colonel was evacuated to a military hospital across the river in Metz, where he died a few days later.  


The death of Colonel Charles Jean Jacques Joseph Ardant du Picq marked the end of a career that any French officer of his day might have admired. His comrades would not have valued his bookishness, on display since his cadet days at École spéciale militaire de Saint-Cyr. Such reputation as he had was not as an intellectual but as a seasoned soldier, as a decorated veteran of campaigns in the Crimea, Syria, and Algeria. Without the distinguished pedigree or powerful friends that aided so many careers, he had advanced steadily if not spectacularly through the officer ranks. At a time when the average age of a captain in the French army was forty-three, he became a colonel at the age of forty-seven. When he died, he had commanded his regiment for nearly a year and a half.

Du Picq’s death marked the beginning of another career, one in which his influence as the author of Études sur le combat, or Battle Studies, was far greater than when he lived. Yet as his posthumous reputation grew, the more du Picq himself gradually passed from historical view. That he left behind few traces of his life and career made his obscurity all the more complete. The Ardant du Picq who comes to us now is little more than a shadow behind his book.

Battle Studies is now regarded as a minor classic of military literature, the first systematic exploration of human behavior in the extremities of combat. Du Picq was not interested in the grand problems of military theory or strategy that preoccupied other military thinkers. He spent his life in the tactical world, and this was the world that shaped his values and formed the boundaries of his studies. And it was in the tactical world that du Picq believed the source of victory could be found, not in elegant theories or inventive strategies. For him, the wellspring of victory was an army that succeeded where


4. Three French scholars have attempted to rescue Ardant du Picq from obscurity. The first was the French army officer Lucien Nachin. As a captain in 1925, he wrote the first critical study of du Picq for the Revue militaire française, nos. 51 and 52 (September and October 1925) (hereinafter cited as “Nachin 1925”). This essay appears to have drawn on a more extensive record of his service, which has long since disappeared. Nachin published an edition of Études in 1942 and, in 1948, another edition with commentary for Berger-Levrault. Six years later, LTC Victor Petit, a friend of Nachin, produced a small study: A la recherche d’Ardant du Picq (Paris: Editions Berger-Levrault, 1954) (hereinafter cited as “Petit”). Much later, Chef de bataillon Frederic Guelton published “Qui est Ardant du Picq?” in Revue historique des Armées, no. 3 (1991): 3–14 (hereinafter cited as “Guelton”). Taken together, the work of these scholars has extended considerably our knowledge of du Picq’s life and career.
it mattered most: in direct violent contact with the enemy. All else in war was subordinate to success here, and failure here meant failure everywhere.

In the last few years of his life, du Picq feared that war was outgrowing the capacities of armies to fight. How could his army’s antiquated mass formations survive on the fire-swept battlescapes of modern industrial warfare? Conventional military wisdom held that a fighting unit’s offensive power was best spent by its mass—the collective physical weight of its soldiers—densely organized in line or column, hurled like a rock against the enemy. Ideally, it was believed, a properly trained and commanded formation sustained its physical cohesion from the onset of its attack through the final assault when the enemy was overwhelmed, regardless of the punishment inflicted on the attackers by enemy fire.

Du Picq’s experience taught him, as it no doubt taught others, that such an ideal bore little resemblance to reality. The offensive power of any massed formation, no matter how cohesive at the beginning of an attack, dissipated with each step toward the enemy. Commanders bent every effort to retain as much control over their troops for as long as possible, knowing that at some point the cohesion of their formation would dissolve into so many individual soldiers, struggling to live out the day.

Military leaders proposed various remedies. The most promising of these envisioned assigning skirmishers a more decisive role in battle. Some of France’s colonial regiments such as the Zouaves had “opened” their formations, relying less on mass than on soldiers’ initiative. These elite units were renowned for tactical speed and aggressiveness, but France’s military leaders doubted such exotic formations, while successful against native peoples, were capable of withstanding sustained battle against orthodox European armies.

Anyway, who could imagine an army of Zouaves, who could conceive how to command tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of soldiers fighting in this way, deciding for themselves when to fire or not, when to advance or retreat? The very thought was anathema. Opening tactical formations meant that commanders would surrender control over their troops, with no assurance of achieving tactical objectives. Exchanging control for mere survival was no answer at all: that would accomplish what the enemy wanted to do in the first place, to destroy an opponent’s physical cohesion—its unity of purpose and action. Soldiers fighting on their own or in small groups could never compensate for the loss of such an advantage. Du Picq believed that the answer to this puzzle could be found in those parts of the tactical world and human behavior that military thinkers had barely touched.
Du Picq was not especially well equipped for the task that lay before him, and his army was not then distinguished for its intellectual vitality. Most of his colleagues were content not to think about national policy, grand strategy, or the changes besetting the world of battle. France could look back with satisfaction on its army’s victories in the Crimea, in the Italian War of 1859, and in Algeria, although none of these successes bore up under close inspection. Beneath appearances lay an institution that had steadily devolved since the Revolution. Instead of keeping abreast with the ever-changing strategic landscape of Europe and advancements of military technology, its leading operational principle was “le système D: on se débrouilla toujours—we’ll muddle through somehow.” Little was demanded of du Picq’s fellow officers, each of whom society regarded as “a great overgrown child, decent enough but still a little uncouth and backward.” Their social origins and professional upbringing seemed calculated to defeat any intellectual impulses, so much so that the career of any officer who dared to venture into the written world stood at some risk. The memoirist Théodore Fix recounts Napoleon III’s minister of war, Marshal César-Alexandre Randon’s reaction to discovering an officer, studying at late hours in the Dépôt de la guerre: “I didn’t expect to find you in the archives; you loved to be on horseback in the old days!” As Michael Howard has written, it was enough for the French army to assume an “inborn genius in its commanders and [in] its junior officers only obedience to orders, a good seat on a horse, and unflinching bravery under fire.”

The egalitarian composition of the officer corps, in which two-thirds once had been rankers, sustained this professional climate. On the eve of the Franco-Prussian War, 11,347 of the 18,643 officers had been promoted from the ranks. As an infantry officer, Ardant du Picq would have been in the minority; the 3,557 academy-trained infantry officers served alongside 6,633 rankers who had been commissioned. Nor could Saint-Cyrians claim

much social distinction over their fellow officers. Most cadets came either from military families, gendarmes, or the minor ranks of the civil service. In 1869, 54 percent could not pay for their schooling. As the son of a minor civil servant, du Picq would at least have fit in socially with his classmates.

Whether hostile or merely indifferent to intellectual pursuits, the outlook of the army produced officers who were not keeping pace with the professional demands that modern warfare was about to make of them. Indeed, they were not keeping pace with society at large; whereas public education had expanded in France during the first half of the century, the widespread illiteracy of French officers taken prisoner during the Franco-Prussian War astounded their German captors. In the ranks, the picture was even gloomier: a survey in 1863 found that “a quarter of all army recruits were said to speak ‘patois’ and nothing else [and] some recruits never learned French at all.”

In this environment, the few officers who shared du Picq’s intellectual traits stood out all the more. From his earliest days, he seemed to make no effort to conceal the reading habits he had acquired as a boy. Despite a certain intractability, he was apparently well liked and respected as a cadet at Saint-Cyr and later as a junior infantry officer, “gaining naturally and without effort the affection of his equals and the respect of his subordinates,” according to his brother. His superiors spoke of his quirkiness, his “excentricité.”

He was no scholar. He was almost twenty-one when he finished public schooling at Perigueux. He had designs on joining the navy, but he was deficient in mathematics and turned to Saint-Cyr instead and here was required to take his entrance exam twice before being admitted at the rank of 218.
out of 316 in his class. But he was a voracious reader and, after graduating from Saint-Cyr in 1844, when he was assigned as a sous-lieutenant to the 67e régiment d’infanterie de ligne at Lyon, he spent all his spare time in garrison with books.¹⁵

More worrisome still, Ardant du Picq displayed an independence of mind that worked at odds with his lowly station as a junior garrison officer. On the anniversary of the battle of Austerlitz in 1851, Napoleon III staged a coup d’état, dismissed the Corps législatif, and called on the people of France to endorse him for a ten-year term as president. In the plebiscite that followed Ardant du Picq refused to support the coup, an act that earned him the disapproval of his colonel, who counseled him against jeopardizing his career. “Colonel,” he said, “since my opinion was asked for, I must suppose it was wanted.”¹⁶

Had he been an incompetent officer, inattentive to his duties, his intellectual bent and his forthright personality might have damaged his career, but his advancement seemed not to suffer. His performance was sufficient for promotion to lieutenant four years after leaving Saint-Cyr, and four years after that, in 1852, he was advanced to captain, all while serving with the 67th Regiment at Lyon.¹⁷

He was still with the 67th when the Crimean War began two years later. Public enthusiasm over the prospect of a glorious adventure with the new Army of the Orient filled the volunteer ranks. He was keen to go as well. When he learned that the 67th was not among the formations selected for the French expedition, he managed a transfer on January 24, 1854, to one that was: the 9th Battalion, chasseurs à pied, then posted at Fort de Nogent-sur-Marne.¹⁸ The chasseurs were light infantry, already regarded as a cut above regular line infantry, as were the already famous Zouaves, all toughened by their service in Algeria.¹⁹ The 9th was to be part of General Fran-

¹⁵. Guelton, 4.
¹⁷. Thus by the age of thirty-one, Ardant du Picq had already attained the rank at which most French officers expected to retire, regarding their career as having been successful. See Porch, 17.
¹⁸. Guelton, 6.
¹⁹. The chasseurs had only been organized in 1839 and made permanent formations a year later, when ten battalions were established and their name formally approved. The chasseurs prided themselves on superior marksmanship, tactical agility, and speed of maneuver. The regular infantry required ten commands to deploy from column to line, the chasseurs, one. Their distinctive marching speed was partly the result of training in gymnastics, and so their “double-quick step” of 160–180 paces per minute was known as pas gymnasion. For a
coise Canrobert’s 1st Division, one of the three in the original expedition. In April, Ardant du Picq’s battalion boarded the Ville-de-Marseille and l’Alger at Toulon, bound for Camp de Fontaines at Gallipoli.20

British and French Allied forces poured into the camp on the Dardanelles, but without any discernible strategy. How the armies might best be used to protect Turkish sovereignty against Russian claims on the Balkan principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, no one seemed to know quite yet. But the increasing congestion in the camps and the inevitable appearance of disease prompted the Allies to decide on a relief expedition to the Danube Delta, ostensibly to encourage the Russians to withdraw farther than they had already. The withdrawal of the Russians from the provinces removed the declared casus belli and supposedly settled the long-standing “Eastern Question,” but the Allies were ill disposed to call for a cease-fire. Nor were the Austrians being helpful, moving troops into the area as the Russians departed. The French and English worried that the Austrians’ true aim was a more permanent occupation of the principalities. The result, in short order, was an Allied expedition aimed at “rescuing” the Danubian principalities.21

The seaport town of Varna was chosen as the Allies’ first base of operations, and by mid-July a considerable force was ordered into the Dobruscha region of the Danube Delta. The enemy the Allies found in the Dobruscha was not the Russian army, but cholera, which struck Canrobert’s 1st Division with particular force. After only two days, Canrobert’s men were dying “like rotten sheep,” and sick lists were growing so rapidly he was forced to retreat to Varna, carrying with him several hundred infected soldiers after having buried many more. By the end of July, sixty French soldiers were dying every day.22 Between July 14 and August 5, the French admitted 1,287 soldiers to its hospital at Varna, of whom 705 died outright. Two days later, 257 more were admitted to the “rat infested barracks” used as a hospital. The situation grew so serious the French dispersed their hospital, establishing several smaller ones around the town for occupation by cholera victims alone.23


22. Ibid., 192.

23. [Somerset John Gough Calthorp], Letters from Head Quarters: or, the Realities of the War in the Crimea, by an officer of the Staff (London: John Murray, 1856), 38–41.
If du Picq had been moved by the same romantic impulses that had driven so many volunteers into the army, he was quickly disabused of them on this expedition. As Canrobert retreated from the Dobruscha, du Picq was one of those detailed to dispose of the dead and escort the sick back to Varna. Soon enough, he contracted the disease himself yet managed to make his way back to Varna, where he was carted off to the hospital on August 10.24 That was the night a suspicious fire destroyed much of Varna and the military stores the Allies had collected there, including his hospital. He escaped by dragging himself to a field, where, as his brother recalled, “the healthfulness of the air gave him unexpected relief.”25

By then, the Allies had already decided their next port of call on the Black Sea would be Sebastopol. Collecting what was left of their stores, they hastily abandoned the pestilential region and sailed toward a fortress that had not figured in anyone’s original campaign plans. Ardant du Picq was not among them, however; he was invalided back to France to recover and did not rejoin the 9th Battalion until December 1854, when it was well entrenched at Sebastopol.26

Spurred on as much by the mounting sick lists as by any strategic imperative, the Allies landed at Calamita Bay in early September and began fighting their way toward the objective. Success at the battle of Alma opened the way to Sebastopol, but not until the victories at Balaclava and Inkerman were the Allies’ positions sufficiently secure to invest the town. By the time Ardant du Picq returned from his convalescence the Allies had settled in for the long siege and the miseries that beset the field.27

The siege was to last eleven months, the greater part of which was devoted to each sides’ strengthening positions, building redoubts and intricate trench works to defend them, advancing and ranging hundreds of artillery pieces, and managing support arrangements for the several armies that eventually numbered more than 1.5 million men. The French alone dug sixty-six kilometers of trench lines to encircle the town, the British fifteen.

Du Picq’s battalion, still part of Canrobert’s 1st Division, was placed on the Allied left flank, opposite the Russians’ Central Redoubt. As elsewhere along the lines, the terrain in the no-man’s-land between the French and the

27. Ibid. Figes, 191–192. See also [Marie Octave Cullet], supra, 61–62.
Russians was a welter of ravines, most of which were exposed to direct fire from Russian batteries.

The British army occupied the center of the Allied position, while the strongest sector of the Russian defenses around the Malakoff Redoubt on the right flank was invested by the main French force. From the outset, the Malakoff Redoubt was the centerpiece of the Russians’ defenses and attracted the greater part of the Allies’ efforts. As the two sides perfected their positions, harassing artillery fire and trench raids, often at night and some involving thousands of men, became routine.28

As the siege ground on through the winter months, and as the generals bickered with one another and with their home governments, all sides looked ahead impatiently toward the grand assault that would decide the fate of the war. By April, the Allies had laid a track from the port of Balaklava to move up more heavy artillery and mortars, bringing the total number of their guns to 500. Finally, on April 9, the Allies began a ten-day bombardment, to be followed by a general attack all along the line. The Allies fired 2,000 rounds per day throughout the bombardment, killing or wounding nearly 5,000 Russian soldiers and civilians. The Russians replied with their own 409 guns and 57 mortars. Aside from one doomed sortie against the Russian lines, the British gave up the offensive for the time being.

Canrobert gave up his command to General Aimable Pélissier in May, however, and Pélissier was as avid for an attack as were the British. Another plan was laid on that focused the Allied attack more directly against the Malakoff by seizing the critical Mamelon and Quarry outworks guarding the great redoubt. Yet this attack, launched early in June, misfired as well. Despite the French having captured the outworks at the cost of 7,500 killed and wounded, the Russians broke the momentum of the assault. The Malakoff remained in Russian hands.29

But the Malakoff was now vulnerable, and another attack was set for June 18. To the soldiers who were to make the assault, however, vulnerability was only relative. Several hundred yards of open ground separated the lines between the outworks and the Malakoff. The assaulting troops would be exposed to frontal and flanking fire as they navigated the ditches and abattis, only to be met by concentrated rifle fire as they used ladders to scale the walls of the great redoubt. Their commanders told them half of them would

29. Ibid., 359–361.
be killed before reaching that point. Moreover, General Pélissier decided to cancel the three-hour preparatory bombardment planned before the assault, presumably to preserve some element of surprise. Pélissier could not have been more wrong: a deserter from the French general staff had already given the details of the attack to the Russians. Several of Pélissier’s commanders protested his decision. One was relieved of command. Another, one General Mayran, having failed to dissuade Pélissier, returned to his place at the head of the assaulting regiment, saying “there’s nothing left to do but get killed.” He was killed, along with perhaps as many as 6,000 others in the French columns. No French soldier got as far as the Malakoff that day. Both sides agreed to a truce the following day to collect the dead and wounded, while Allied commanders spent their day apportioning blame—or defending themselves against it—for the misbegotten assault.

So began the miserable summer of 1855 at Sebastopol. Whereas the French had suffered less illness than the British during the winter of 1854–1855, now the tables were turned. Cholera and typhus made their inevitable appearance in the French trench works. The work of the gunners on both sides was prodigious. During June and July, Allied artillery rained down on the Russian positions, killing 250 Russians for the 75,000 rounds fired each day. Allied losses were about the same. The prospects of victory were as far away as they ever had been.

Du Picq and the 9th Battalion were posted on the left of the Allied lines, opposite the city of Sebastopol proper, and although the so-called Town Front was not the focal point of the Allied assaults, no part of the line was immune to Russian fire. In the intervals between the more dramatic attacks, life in the trenches was a dangerous monotony as ever, punctuated by harassing artillery fire, sharpshooting, night raids back and forth, and a constant struggle to improve fighting positions while exposed to the enemy.

The dominant Russian stronghold on the Town Front was the Central Bastion, built to bar the way into the town. The Russians protected the bastion with forty guns along with flanking bastions, the Bastion du mat to the south and the Bastion de la Quarantine to the north. On June 18, General de Salle, who had succeeded Canrobert to command the sector, ordered a general attack against all three bastions, aiming storming columns toward each. None succeeded. Two days later, French troops began to sap toward

30. Ibid., 364–365.
31. Ibid., 364–371.
32. Ibid., 376–377, 386.
the Central Bastion, a project expected to last three weeks. By mid-August, they were within just a few yards of the ditch protecting the bastion.33

But the French commander in chief, General Pélissier, had a grander project in mind. Even after the disasters and disappointments of that summer, Pélissier was convinced the Russians were now dangerously weak. He called for a new attack all along the line with massive artillery support, and for once the Allied commanders were in accord. Pélissier’s new plan guaranteed that Ardant du Picq and his men would face the Russian guns yet again. The new attack on September 8 would be preceded by a three-day artillery preparation, along with a supporting attack against the Central Bastion. Du Picq makes no mention of having participated in this attack, which in any case gained no ground at all. If he did, he obviously survived with whole bones, because he was then assigned to lead the storming column of the 9th Battalion in the grand attack three days hence. His objective, once again, was the Central Bastion.

The preparatory bombardment that began on September 5 was of a scale unprecedented in the siege—and perhaps in military history up to that point. Fifty-thousand shells rained down on the Russian defenders every day. Whatever was left of the town was pulverized, leaving “essentially a phantom,” according to a Russian officer who suffered through the bombardment.34 At 5 A.M. on September 8, the bombardment became even more furious, and then, unaccountably, the firing stopped at 10 A.M. The Russians tensed, ready to meet the expected Allied assault. But nothing happened. The Russians relaxed. Then at noon, ten and a half French divisions emerged from their positions to storm the Russian lines. In du Picq’s sector, at 2 P.M., five divisions rose to the assault against the Town Front and its three bastions. The official history of the 9th Battalion records the scene—and Captain du Picq’s eventual capture:

The demi-battalion on the left is encouraged with remarkable energy by Captain Ardant du Picq. A terrible fire of musketry, 20 guns, the shock from exploding fougasses every moment, all tell of the terrible obstacles before us. Nothing can arrest the élan of our brave chasseurs. Our ranks are decimated. . . . Captain Ardant du Picq and Lt. Becdelievre, carried forward by their courage, are made prisoners in the same trench where

34. Figes, 376–377, 387.
the flag of the 9th falls. Everyone in the trenches sees their glorious failure.\textsuperscript{35}

Perhaps as many as 250 men attacked with du Picq that day.\textsuperscript{36} Twelve actually got into the Russian trenches.\textsuperscript{37} But the French assault on the Malakoff Redoubt finally succeeded; launched so unexpectedly and with such overwhelming force the defenders barely had time to reach their guns, it spelled the end of any effective defense of Sebastopol. The Russian commander, General Mikhail Gorchakov, immediately ordered the forts blown up, the ships scuttled, and the town evacuated.\textsuperscript{38}

Du Picq made no reference in his later writing to his next few months in Russian hands. The scant record of his service has no entry as to where or in what conditions he was held, whether he was evacuated, or whether he had to live through another conflagration like the one he had survived at Varna. But when he was finally released on December 13, he had a promotion to major (chef de bataillon) waiting for him, a promotion by preferment for meritorious service rather than mere seniority. His brigade commander, Louis Trochu, who would later become president of France, had trooped the 9th Battalion’s line that morning, trying to steel the men for what awaited them. He evidently had watched du Picq’s column attack the bastion and was responsible for his commendation.\textsuperscript{39} Years later, the trajectories of du Picq and Trochu would intersect again.

The Crimea had shown du Picq the worst that war could offer: a major conflict, ignited by the most dubious motives, in which nearly a million soldiers died, mostly from diseases spread by their own ignorance\textsuperscript{40}; a war in which the combatants were comparable numerically, technically, and professionally; a war fought with tactics that had fallen dangerously behind the capacities of the weapons employed; indeed, a war in which the art of war itself had regressed. A decade later, when du Picq attempted to paint a picture of modern war, the Crimean War was his canvas.

\textsuperscript{35} Historique du 9e bataillon de chasseurs à pied, quoted in Guelton, 5–6.
\textsuperscript{36} The demi-battalion du Picq commanded that day consisted of the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th Companies. Nachin, ADP 1948, xxiv.
\textsuperscript{37} Appendix V, 178–179.
\textsuperscript{38} Figes, 392–394.
\textsuperscript{39} Appendix V, 179. Nachin, ADP 1948, xxv.
\textsuperscript{40} One of du Picq’s few direct references to the Crimean War in Études sur le combat is a bitter outburst against his army’s inadequate medical services. See 119–120. The French army lost 10,240 killed in action at Sebastopol, but a further 75,000 died from disease. The original French contingent at Sebastopol was 75,000. See Figes’s accounting at page xix.
Du Picq emerged from the war unscathed, a decorated veteran. His experiences in the trenches were not appreciably different than those of other company grade infantry officers at Sebastopol. After the war, a general public that had been fed an almost daily diet of frontline journalism was treated to an outpouring of war memoirs. He seemed in no hurry to write about his war, but when he did begin to write, his war experience invested his writing with a credibility that could not have been achieved in any other way.

Now a thirty-three-year-old major, du Picq was granted leave and made his way back to his father’s house in Limoges. Temporarily assigned to the 100e régiment d’infanterie de ligne, he would take up his permanent posting with the 16e Chasseurs à pied in March 1857. During his leave, he married the nineteen-year-old daughter of a physician in nearby Saint-Leonard, Cather ine Fraissex du Bost, and during the next year his son Georges was born.

Over the next two years, du Picq nearly disappears from historical view, caught up in the busy life of a field grade garrison officer, now the head of a growing family. Only once does he resurface, mentioned in an inspector general’s 1858 report on his regiment, which pronounced the young officer as difficult and withdrawn (“peu convenable avec ses superieurs et manqué de tact avec ses inferieurs”) a verdict that echoed his reputation at Saint-Cyr, but that was apparently at odds with his domestic behavior as a devoted husband and doting father.

His family life was about to be disrupted, however. In May 1859, Napoleon III intervened in the Italian struggle to overthrow Austrian rule in the Piedmont. His regiment was not among those ordered to the front, and he did not petition to join the intervention as he had before the Crimean War, perhaps content to attend to his new family in Toulouse. He watched the great battles at Magenta and Solferino from afar, and not without interest. But he was not to remain in Toulouse much longer. The French army did not lack for work in 1860. Napoleon III already had designs on Mexico that would lead to the French expedition of 1863, and France and Great Britain were already engaged in the Opium War in China. And in the summer of 1860, du Picq found himself once again at sea with his troops, this time bound for Beirut.

In the region of Greater Syria known as Mount Lebanon, then under Ottoman rule, long-standing sectarian hatreds between the Maronite Christians

41. See Figes, 304–315.
43. Appendix II.
and the Druze erupted in a violent uprising in early 1859, when Maronite peasants revolted against their feudal overlords. The so-called Keserwan Uprising spread throughout Mount Lebanon, where more than sixty villages near Beirut had been put to the torch. The Druze, traditionally favored over the Maronites by the Ottoman Porte, soon retaliated. By the spring of 1860, sixty Maronite villages had been burned, their inhabitants either killed or made refugees, all with the connivance of Ottoman troops. In early June, the Druze successfully laid siege to the Maronite town of Deir al Qamar and massacred more than 1,500 Maronites. The violence spread as far as Damascus, where in mid-June, Druze and Sunnis killed between 7,000 and 20,000 Maronites. The Ottoman governor of the Damascus vilâyet refused to intervene, and indeed some Turkish troops participated in the massacre. Among the dead were the American and Dutch consuls.44

European embassies in Istanbul were already appealing to the Ottoman Porte to quell the violence. The Porte did send a frigate and two battalions to Beirut, which had not yet been touched by the uprisings, and an Ottoman emissary arranged for a temporary cease-fire. None of this satisfied the European powers, however. Napoleon III, evoking an ancient commitment to defend Christianity in the Holy Lands, led an international chorus of outrage, enlisting Great Britain, Prussia, Austria, and Russia to join France in demanding that the Ottoman Porte intervene to put an end to the bloodshed. On August 3, the five powers agreed to mount a relief expedition. France was to provide the bulk of the force, some 7,000 troops. The French general Beaufort d’Hautpoul was named commander in chief of the expedition. Addressing his troops before departure, the general said their mission was to help the Sultan’s troops “avenge humanity shamefully outraged.”45

Du Picq and his battalion received orders to deploy immediately. The 16e left Toulouse for Marseilles, where they boarded the steamer La Borysthene on August 6, to sail for Beirut via Malta and Alexandria. A week later, he


wrote to his wife, describing a pleasant, uneventful voyage, a picture at some variance with the account of another passenger.\textsuperscript{46}

The French expedition to Greater Syria is now cited as the only instance of humanitarian intervention in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{47} News of the massacres quickly reached the European public through a press invigorated by improvements in communications since the Crimean War. Moved in part by public interest, the Great Powers’ convention authorizing the expedition declared their intention only to quell the violence in Lebanon, especially toward the Maronites, and made no claims to territory or other concessions. The Ottoman Porte consented to the expedition, although by the time du Picq arrived Ottoman troops had suppressed most of the violence.\textsuperscript{48} Only the thousands of refugees choking Beirut and the smoldering ruins of villages along the road to Damascus were left to greet him and his men.

Toward the end of September, du Picq marched a day and a half with his battalion up the Damascus road, into the Bekka Valley as far as Kab Elias, now “devastated, burned, or abandoned.” Ottoman troops had already been in the vicinity and were nowhere to be found. Twelve companies of infantry were left to defend what was left of Kab Elias, and two more on the road toward Beirut, at Baada. These postings would be augmented by cavalry, artillery, and engineers over the coming months. Du Picq thought the march was to “no military purpose,” and by October he was back in camp “without incident in the Druze mountains.” He did not go into detail about the human devastation he would have seen along the road, telling his wife instead to read accounts then being reported in \textit{Le Press} by a journalist who was traveling with him.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{46} Charles Ardant du Picq to Catherine Ardant du Picq, August 12, 1860, in Petit, 19. Baptistin Poujoulat, who was returning to Syria after a twenty-five-year absence, complained of the “unbearable heat” both on deck where the soldiers berthed and the cabins, which were “sweating rooms where one cannot breathe.” He evidently suffered from seasickness for much of the voyage. Poujoulat is quoted in Fawaz, 115.


\textsuperscript{48} In contrast to the many demands made of China by France and Great Britain at the onset of the Opium War, by this time only a few months old. Louet, 15. Napoleon III’s address to the troops of the French expedition before embarkation is quoted in Fawaz, 115.

Introduction

From the beginning of the expedition, du Picq seems to have been under no illusions about the state of affairs in Lebanon. He was in accord with the mission of his expedition, but he believed his government was altogether too conciliatory toward the Ottomans. He thought that behind the Ottomans’ concessions to the Great Powers lay a desire to rid the region of Maronites altogether. Du Picq thought that, of all the sects in Lebanon, the Maronites alone were “active, industrious, intelligent,” and with a “sense of law.” Meanwhile, “these brave Turks . . . put all possible obstacles in our way,” refusing the French permission to march on to Damascus. “Damascus is quiet, we do not need you,” they were told. 50

The tenuous peace, still complicated by the growing number of refugees, nevertheless held over the succeeding months. Ardant du Picq’s chasseurs and a battalion of Zouaves watched over the peace, resettled several destroyed villages, helped Maronites rebuild houses, and shared their rations with “the unfortunate victims of Turkish fanaticism and cruelty of the Druze.” 51 The expedition had been intended originally to last only six months, but the Great Powers agreed on a second convention, extending the mission six months more. Not surprisingly, during the spring du Picq’s letters reveal an increasing frustration and impatience over official inaction, as well as skepticism that the realities of life in Lebanon will have changed by the time he left. Du Picq’s brigade commander, August Ducrot, was equally frustrated. “We are still in the same uncertain future,” Ducrot wrote in January, “the country’s situation changes little, lot of miseries, of worries among Christians, a great insolence and continuing threats from Turks. Absolute inaction by our army.” 52 When the date for the expedition’s withdrawal was set for the end of May, few protests were likely to have been heard from the French camp.

On the eve of his return to France, du Picq considered his future in the army. He warned his wife of future separations. As chef de bataillon, he would be obliged as usual to spend summer training away from garrison, “not to mention still very likely chances of war with anyone.” Although he had been made chevalier of the Légion d’honneur in December, he thought he would be lucky to be promoted to lieutenant colonel, but of course that meant even

50. Ardant du Picq to Catherine Ardant du Picq, November 22, 1860, in Petit, 30. In this letter, Ardant du Picq accurately describes in some detail relations between the various sects in the region.
51. These “hearts and minds” operations are described by August Ducrot to Madame Ducrot, October 17, 1861, in Rochemonteix, 126.
52. August Ducrot to Madame Ducrot, October 18 and 27, 1861, in ibid., 132.
greater responsibilities and “following the cycle of the military machine and all its movements.” He seemed content; higher rank did not interest him. “You know my indifference to rank,” he wrote. “The rank of Marshal of France is therefore not for me.”

Du Picq and his chasseurs returned to Toulouse in the summer of 1861, but in the following year they were to move again, this time to the garrison of Paris. The garrison was composed of the Imperial Guard and three line infantry divisions and meant to enforce public order, but they also served as show troops for ceremonial duty. This meant constant drills and inspections for the troops, in which “not a gaiter button” could be left undone, and schooling for officers on the niceties of comportment and regulation. But du Picq was no ceremonial soldier, nor were his troops, and his personality almost guaranteed he would run afoul of his superiors eventually. In January 1863, the 16e failed an inspection by their brigade commander, General Julius de Marqueuet, who in du Picq’s presence declared the chasseurs the worst troops he had seen in thirty years of soldiering.

Du Picq reacted furiously, four days later writing a letter directly to Field Marshal Bernard Magnan, the commander of the Paris garrison. His dignity had been insulted, he protested, and his capacity to serve as the chasseurs’ chef de bataillon had been questioned in front of his troops. Honor, as well as the wounded reputation of his troops, required him to relinquish his post and be assigned elsewhere. Magnan agreed to his demands, and less than two weeks later du Picq was reassigned to the 37e régiment d’infanterie de ligne in Lyon. Not long after his transfer, he drew a quite different appraisal from another inspector, who praised his dignity and character, although the general noted he was rather “inflexible” in the performance of his duties, which, the general also noted, du Picq freely acknowledged. Nevertheless, the inspector believed he was a “tres bon officier de guerre.”

Du Picq may have already been on the list for promotion to lieutenant colonel when he challenged the commander of the Paris garrison. If this episode was not enough to cement his reputation as a “difficult” and “eccentric” officer, an encounter with the minister of war, Marshal Randon, may

55. Ibid., xxxii. Since the chasseur battalions were “tainted” by having originated in Algeria, some part of this contretemps may have been due to the well-known mutual disdain of the metropolitan army and the Armée d’Afrique, which Trochu called the “African Mutual Admiration Society.” Trochu is quoted in Holmes, 32.
have been reason to delay his promotion. According to du Picq’s brother, Randon had asked du Picq for his opinion on the quality of the chasseurs’ shoes, to which he bluntly replied they were very bad. Perhaps it was just as well du Picq was shipped off to Lyons and the 37e, far from the capital and the chance of further insubordination. A year later, his sins forgiven or forgotten, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel of the 55e régiment d’infanterie de ligne on the eve of its deployment to Tlemcin, Algeria.

Save for a brief mention in his brother’s reminiscence of du Picq’s having taken part in two campaigns, no record of his service in Algeria has survived. Effectively second in the regiment’s chain of command, du Picq’s life in garrison would have been much the same as in his earlier assignments, but with even more responsibility for the maintenance, training, and discipline of the command. For the moment, the western reaches of the colony were quiescent, but the scars of France’s 1830 invasion and Marshal Thomas Robert Bugeaud’s brutal pacification campaigns would never really heal.

What is more likely is that du Picq not only kept to his reading habits after the day’s duties had ended but also began writing, for it was in the garrison at Tlemcin that in 1865 he took his first steps toward the essays that eventually became Études sur le combat. He composed two short pieces, “The Employment of the Rifle and the Chasseurs,” and “The Companies of the Center.” None of his surviving work tells us whether these pieces were simply aides-memoir to share with a small circle of colleagues, or whether he was planning a larger work, but both of these pieces contributed to a longer “Memorandum on Infantry Fire” that served as one of the appendices to the 1903 edition of Études.

Scholars have speculated that the catalyst for du Picq’s study was the Prussians’ defeat of the Austrians, contrary to French expectations, at the battle of Sadowa in 1866. A leading historian of the war a generation later was not wrong in writing that the “thunderbolt of Sadowa fell on Paris . . . pro-

56. Appendix V, 179.
57. Appendix III.
58. Bugeaud’s subsequent influence over French colonial campaigning as well as tactical thinking in both the Algerian and in the metropolitan army are detailed in Bruce Vandevort, Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, 1830–1914 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), esp. 56–67.
59. “The Center,” that is, the main body of the battalion formation for combat, exclusive of skirmishers, or voltigeurs.
60. See Appendix I. See also Nachin 1925, 368.
ducing as much effect as if it concerned a French Army.” Sadowa ignited furious debates throughout the government of Napoleon III, the Corps législatif, the army, the leading journals of opinion, and the greater public. As Richard Holmes has written, the leading military question before France from 1866 until the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War was “not whether reform should take place, but the form it would take.” Sadowa was not the catalyst of du Picq’s work, but the news of the battle no doubt contributed to the sense of urgency that flows through his essays. Although he would have been loath to admit it, his references to Sadowa in Études suggest that he thought the Prussians’ performance in the battle was the highest expression of the military art as it then existed.

Du Picq was certainly not the only French officer driven to the pen by the news of Sadowa. Louis Trochu, his old brigade commander from the Crimean War who had watched him lead the demi-battalion against the Central Redoubt and who had recommended his promotion, had himself advanced in rank. When France entered the Italian War, he had command of a division. In a war noted for the incompetence of commanders high and low, Trochu stood out at Magenta and Solferino for his composure under fire and for maneuvering his troops “with an almost peacetime precision.” He finished the war with his reputation not only intact but much enhanced by a Grand Cross added to his Légion d’honneur.

Yet Trochu’s personality and opinions often counterbalanced his successes. By the 1860s he had assumed the pose of a uniformed aesthete. Worse yet, he was an unregenerate Orleanist, a stance guaranteed to excite the deepest suspicions of Napoleon III and especially Empress Eugenie, who came to hate him enthusiastically.

Even before the shock of Sadowa interrupted French complacency, Trochu was expounding on the inherent superiority of the Prussian army, declaring before an audience at the Artillery School at Metz in 1864 that the Prussian army had the best morale in Europe. Despite his transgressions, he was assigned to study problems of mobilization in the Ministry of War in 1866, and he participated in what was supposed to have been a secret

62. Holmes, 93. Holmes (at 91–97) has expertly summarized the labyrinthine interplay of official policymaking and public opinion during the prewar period.
63. See the sketches of Trochu in Alistair Horne, The Fall of Paris (New York: Penguin, 1985), 72–73, and 98; Howard, The Franco-Prussian War, 37; and Wawro, 42–43.
64. Wawro, 43.
commission that was to report to Napoleon III on the state of the French army. Trochu made the results of the report public in *L’armée française en 1867*, published anonymously, that leveled a searing indictment of the nation’s preparedness and the army’s decrepitude.\(^{65}\)

*L’armée française en 1867* aroused not only official but public interest, going through sixteen editions in three weeks.\(^{66}\) For Napoleon’s opponents in the *Corps législatif*, the book became a manifesto for deputies set against the emperor’s military plans. And yet, the citizens of France did not share their government’s sense of urgency. For good and sufficient reasons, among them the draft lottery for active service and the widely abused system permitting paid replacements for unlucky recruits, the public “loathed soldiering, and Sadowa did not make it more palatable for them.”\(^{67}\) Inside the army, Sadowa stimulated articles in both military and public journals as well as “a rash of projects . . . by soldiers and civilians alike, ranging from the rational to the widely impracticable.”\(^{68}\) This was the national atmosphere in which du Picq began to write his own book.

In April 1866, three months before Sadowa, du Picq and his regiment traded their colonial garrison in Tlemcin for a new posting in metropolitan France, at Besançon. This was where he began his work in earnest. Now within the reach of libraries, he could draw on the works that would form the foundation for the essays that he published privately and anonymously as a pamphlet in 1868 as *Études du combat d’après l’antique*.\(^{69}\)

Even as he published and distributed copies of his pamphlet in 1868, du Picq was expanding the scope of his research, this time addressing contemporary warfare. He was clearly not interested in the grand questions of

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68. Holmes, 94. See, for one example, the lead essay of the managing director, M. Noiriot, “Projet d’organisation militaire,” in *Spectateur militaire*, vol. 7 (January–May 1867): 1–30.
69. [Ardant du Picq], *Études du combat d’après l’antique* (Besançon: Veuve Valluet et fils, 1868). One of the recipients of his pamphlet, Andre Alfred Poilecot, a fellow officer of chasseurs who had fought at Sebastopol with the 9th Battalion, replied with a fulsome thank-you, expressing his regret that du Picq was not advertising his work more broadly, and assuring him that he would place it in the local library at Limoges for the edification of all, especially fellow officers. Poilecot reprinted his letter to du Picq in his *Histoire du siège de Sébastopol suivie du siège de Saragosse* (Limoges: Editions Ardant et C. Thibaut, 1872), 123.
statecraft and national defense policy that so animated Trochu. He was not interested in pronouncements on the higher art of war or the military theories that purported to explain them. He believed this approach, often based on vacuous assumptions, and uninformed by the realities of the battlefield, led inevitably to dogma whose only merit was that it did not demand much thinking.

The references du Picq cited both in his pamphlet and in his later notes reflected a lifetime of reading in the history of the military art, yet by 1868 he had concluded that his arguments could not rest solely on a foundation of history, however illuminating. Instead, he believed the evidence for his arguments lay beyond the reach of history as it was then written. “The smallest detail,” he wrote, “taken from an actual incident in war, is more instructive for me, a soldier, than all the Thiers and Jominis in the world. They speak, no doubt, for the heads of states and armies but they never show me what I wish to know—a battalion, a company, a squad, in action.”

But how to get at those “smallest details”? The solution he reached was by no means obvious. He would call on his fellow officers to recount their own experiences in order to unearth the sine qua non of war, the human nature of combat itself.

Du Picq’s solution was not original, however. In 1830, the British army commissioned Captain William Siborne to construct a precise model of the battle of Waterloo at its most critical moment. As part of his research, Siborne sent out a circular letter to all the officer veterans of the battle, asking them to recount their actions. Siborne also wrote to the Ministry of War in Paris, which responded with an understandable silence.

Du Picq gives no sign of knowing about Siborne’s labors, but the practice of collecting primary data, especially statistical data, by means of surveys was well understood and practiced in France, where professional organizations had existed since the beginning of the century. There is no reason to think du Picq was ever involved with these societies. His decision to employ

70. Among the better-known authors cited by du Picq in Études sur le combat were Marshal de Saxe, Polybius, Caesar, Xenophon, Thucydides, Marshal Bugeaud, Froissart, Frederick the Great, Turenne, Cromwell, Napoleon I, Prince de Ligne, General Ambert, Marshal Blücher, General Gouvion Saint-Cyr, Epaminondas, Jomini, Folard, Prud’honne, Cuizot, Machiavelli, Gustavus Adolphus, Montecuccoli, Marquis de Cambray, and Plutarch.

71. See Appendix VI.

72. Siborne’s work eventually led to a two-volume history of the battle and, as John Keegan notes, the “largest single collection of primary sources material on Waterloo ever assembled.” Keegan drew extensively on this collection for his own analysis of Waterloo in The Face of Battle (New York and London: Viking, 1976).
questionnaires—as well as Siborne’s, whose purpose was descriptive, not analytical—was innovative, but not the stroke of genius as it has been portrayed. The quest for social data of all sorts was well under way by du Picq’s day.73

Early in 1868, du Picq sent out his circular letter, and by the summer some were replying.74 He told his correspondents that his objective was to collect data “to serve as a base for what might be a rational method of fighting.” The questions he posed, the implications behind them, and what he expected to learn would combine to set his course as he composed what eventually became *La guerre moderne*, the second part of Études.75

Given the attitudes then prevailing among his professional colleagues, one wonders how du Picq’s questions were received. “At what point,” he asks, “has this control [in the attack] escaped from the battalion commander? When from the captain, the section leader, the squad leader?” Such a question must have seemed presumptuous or impertinent, and most of his colleagues were satisfied not to think about its implications.76

In April 1869, du Picq was promoted to colonel and command of the 10e régiment d’infanterie de ligne, then garrisoned at Limoges. Two regimental inspections dating from this time conform to the now-accepted view of a competent but unusual officer: “Mind a bit weird,” wrote one inspector, while another suggested du Picq could do “with a little less eccentricity,” even though he was “a very distinguished senior officer.”77

As he worked on his essay on modern battle, and even as he refined his ideas, du Picq attempted to make his views on “the defective state of the army and the perils of the situation” known to his superiors in Paris. His reception in Paris was disappointing: “they take all that philosophically,” he told his brother.78 He was right. Beyond the heated debates over military

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74. One of the earliest replies, dated August 23, 1868, recollecting a company-grade officer’s experiences at the battle of Magenta, is reproduced in Appendix II.

75. Appendix VI.


77. Nachin, ADP 1948, xlii.

78. Appendix V, 179.
policy, little had changed in the French army, Sadowa or not. Marshal Edmond Leboeuf, who had succeeded Marshal Adolphe Niel as minister of war, was confident his army was ready to meet the Prussians. “From Paris to Berlin,” he said, “it will be a mere stroll, walking stick in hand.”

The stroll would begin in earnest when the French army was ordered to mobilize after war was declared on Prussia on July 19, 1870. Napoleon III had found a pretext for the war he had dreamed of since Sadowa.

The French mobilization was something of a comic opera. Some postwar critics claimed France had no war plan, but as Douglas Porch and Richard Holmes have written, the problem was there were altogether too many, none of them definitive. By the end of the month, Napoleon III and his marshals had reached a consensus of sorts to concentrate two armies, one at Metz, and the other at Strasbourg. Once the movement to the frontier was complete, the two armies would join near Strasbourg and advance across the Rhine, then northeast to meet the main body of the Prussian army. A third army, held momentarily in reserve at Châlons, would then advance to cover the rear at Metz.

The regiment was the largest standing formation in the French army. Mobilization required swiftly organizing higher echelons of control and the staffs that went with them; brigades, divisions, corps, and armies alike had to be brought to life, commanders and their staffs assigned, then moved to assembly points to oversee the concentration of troops and materiel. “The confusion,” Trochu would write later, “was indescribable.”

Ardant du Picq assembled his 10e régiment from its posts at Limoges and Angouleme to join the VI Corps, then concentrating at Châlons under the command of General Canrobert, his old division commander from Crimea days. The 10e was assigned to Julien-Charles Pechot’s brigade of the 1st Division, commanded by General Michel Tixier. The regiment stood in corps

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80. The onset of the war can be briefly explained by a paraphrase of Thucydides: the war began because of the growth of power in Prussia and the fear this inspired in France. The chain of events leading to the war is concisely detailed in Wawro, 16-40. Wawro’s description compares favorably with Émile Zola’s in *Le Debacle*, trans. Leonard Tancock (New York: Penguin, 1972), 34–35.
81. Holmes, 165–171, esp. 170; and Porch, 45.
83. Trochu is quoted in Porch, 46.
review on July 31 and, six days later, was ordered to Nancy with the rest of the division. There they remained until the French defeats at Forbach and Reichshofen, when forward elements of the VI Corps were ordered to return to Châlons. By August 10, the regiment received new orders, this time to move forward with VI Corps to reinforce the defense of Metz. By this point, the two French armies had been reorganized, and Canrobert’s VI Corps now formed part of the Army of Metz. The 10e took up defensive positions at Metz in front of the Montigny repair shops of the eastern railroad lines just south of the fortress on August 12.84 By the morning of August 15, Prussian cavalry had reached the outskirts of Metz, unsure whether the French meant to defend the city or retreat. In fact, by that time, elements of VI Corps, including Ardant du Picq’s regiment, had already withdrawn across the Moselle and were at Rezonville. The Prussian high command, riding up to the heights of Montigny and seeing “immense clouds of dust,” soon concluded the French were evacuating and ordered their II Army to pursue the retreating forces.85 That was the point at which the Prussian 3rd Lancers and the horse artillery battery accompanying them reached the heights of Montigny, unlimbered their guns, and fired on the mass of troops collecting on the road across the river. Not long after, Ardant du Picq was carried back to the military hospital in the city. He died of his wounds on August 19.86 His regiment had yet to fire a shot in the war.

Ardant du Picq left behind a mass of notes, far from a finished manuscript, in the care of his still-young family at Limoges. Six years after his death, some of these notes were published in the Revue de la Reunion des officiers, but with changes to the manuscript Lucien Nachin describes as un-
accountable. Three years later, with the help of an officer in the territorial army, du Picq’s family arranged for Hachette’s publication of his essays free of creative editing, in the first edition of *Études sur le combat*. Beyond receiving perfunctory notices in *Le Figaro* and in the *Revue critique d’histoire et de littérature*, as well as the scholarly *Journal des Economistes*, *Études* was not reviewed in either public or military circles. Yet there is reason to believe that within the cloisters of the newly reorganized École supérieure de guerre of the 1880s Ardant du Picq was not entirely forgotten. As the early notices showed, it was all too easy to reduce Ardant du Picq’s work to little more than a cheer for the much-cherished traditions of *élan*, however disappointingly it had served the army against the Prussians. By fits and starts, the French army was already attempting to reconstruct itself in order to prepare for the *revanche* that most officers believed was inevitable. Ardant du Picq’s book began to appear in the syllabi of the École in the 1890s. One of his leading promoters, not surprisingly, was an officer who came to the faculty from command of chasseurs, Louis de Maud’huy, who was assigned to instruct the course in infantry. Maud’huy introduced the latest works in psychology and physiology to his students, and du Picq’s work was among those. Just how widely Ardant du Picq’s ideas were broadcast through the rest of the faculty is difficult to judge; the capacity of faculty to ignore each other’s work should never be underestimated. Yet, by 1896, the reach of Ardant du Picq’s book already extended to Great Britain. That year, Douglas Haig was recording notes from *Études* cited during lectures at the British Staff College. Claims made for Ardant du Picq’s influence during the

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87. Nachin 1925, 64.
closing decade of the century could easily be overstated, but he clearly had not been forgotten by some of the professionals.93

Études rose to military and public prominence with the publication of a new edition in 1903. What, exactly, drove Ernest Judet, the right-wing editor of Le Petit Journal, controversialist, and anti-Dreyfusard, to bring out this new edition is unknown. Judet’s edition coincided with a constellation of social anxieties in the leading industrial nations that had been in the making for more than a generation. The intersection of democratic, social, and technological change in the nineteenth century and the urban congestions it produced gave rise to widespread hand-wringing over the battleworthiness of modern man. Within military circles, this anxiety translated into questions about whether the new democratic, urban man was equal to the mental and physical demands of war, and if not, how to compensate for his assumed weaknesses. One of the more elaborate expressions of this anxiety was Ivan Bloch’s pioneering multivolume study, The Future of War, published in 1898. But Bloch’s massive work, its argument against the utility of modern battle, and its statistical reasoning offered no relief. Although professional soldiers seemed happy to ignore Bloch’s findings or deride them, echoes of his concerns were increasingly voiced in Western military circles.94 For the professionals, Ardant du Picq was approachable in a way Ivan Bloch was not, and his prescriptions for the creation, management, and sustainment of soldierly morale in the extremities of offensive combat—even short-term soldiers—seemed to offer a counterweight to their concerns.

But whether du Picq’s work was one of the foundation stones of the French School of modern warfare is more problematic. What is more certain is that Judet’s edition appeared at a propitious time, when the army was being battered by the effects of the Dreyfus controversy and the new republican government.95 Judet’s anti-Dreyfusard sentiments coincided nicely with those of the younger generation of officers who believed their armée de métier was being sacrificed at the altar of republicanism. Études came to serve a talismanic function in fin de siècle French military thought. Robert Doughty has written


93. See Gat’s reservations about Ardant du Picq’s influence in his History of Military Thought, 308.

94. See Gat, 377–380.

that Ardant du Picq’s ideas “permeated the entire French army and provided the inspiration for the offensive a outrance.” His emphasis on moral supremacy in battle flowered most luxuriantly in Loyzeau de Grandmaison’s 1906 influential study on infantry training, promoting superior morale as the ultimate weapon, one that drove attacking troops the last few yards against fire into the enemy’s line.96 No one cited Ardant du Picq’s few excursions into tactical design; as doctrines and weapons advanced, those were soon out of date. His pronouncements on human psychology, poorly schooled to begin with, were seized upon by writers who were little more conversant with the subject than he was. Military writers found him useful chiefly to shore up their own arguments, ignoring Ardant du Picq’s often qualified and conditional judgments. Their technical arguments were founded more on the results from recent wars in the Balkans, Manchuria, and South Africa.97

From the appearance of the second edition of Études, one could hardly find an issue of a military journal in France that did not pay homage to Ardant du Picq’s work. The well-known historian of the Franco-Prussian War, Pierre Lehoutcourt, published an extensive essay on Ardant du Picq and his influence, significantly titled “Un Précurseur,” in Le Revue de Paris in 1904, further promoting his work in the public eye.98

Du Picq’s public reputation grew steadily and went through eight editions in the years before the Great War. When France went to war once again, his book went into the trenches with the poilus. In what is perhaps the most widely cited scholarly essay on Ardant du Picq in English, Stefan Possony and Étienne Mantoux wrote that “with the exception of [Leo Tolstoy’s] War and Peace,” Études was “the most widely read book in the French trenches during the First World War.” Possony and Mantoux offered no evidence in support of this claim, however.99 This claim had been made before, and

96. While it is true that de Grandmaison overemphasized the value of morale, even he argued that on the modern battlefield a frontal assault over open ground was impossible. See Hew Strachan, The First World War, Volume I: Call to Arms (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 188.


more authoritatively, by Jean Norton Cru, in his remarkable and controversial study of French combatant literature of the Great War. The same claim, based on Cru’s earlier judgment, was made in L. M. Chassin’s anthology of French military literature published only a few years before Possony and Mantoux wrote. Either of these works could have been the missing source in Possony and Mantoux’s important essay.

In the many appraisals of Études, it is forgotten that it is above all an unfinished work. The book is commonly treated as a fully realized study, but du Picq only left behind a statement of his ambitions, and those were never fulfilled. He was still unable to see his intellectual horizon when he took his regiment off to meet the Prussians. He left behind a body of manuscripts, only part of which—his essays on ancient combat—he was able to publish. Those could be regarded as finished to his satisfaction, but it would be optimistic to think that the larger portion of what became Études sur le combat, Part II, “Modern Battle,” was a finished work. Moreover, readers cannot be confident that the order in which those later essays were placed was what Ardant du Picq himself would have decided. The two final chapters—on “Command, General Staff, and Administration,” and “Social and Military Institutions; National Characteristics”—seem better suited to introduce Part II. Given their imperfect state, he might well have decided not to include those at all.

Seeing his work as it stands now, outside the context in which it was written, readers are free to see connections where none exist, and to read into his text messages Ardant du Picq never intended. Such dangers lurk for any book once freed of their authors, but not many books have been so popular with military writers, their authority invoked in selective or tendentious quotes.

“suggested to Ardant du Picq the composition of his own” was Possony’s. Mantoux was on active service with the FFI by then. He did not survive the war. Michael P. M. Finch, “Edward Mead Earle and the Unfinished Makers of Modern Strategy,” Journal of Military History, vol. 80, no. 3 (July 2016): 798.


101. The sequencing of a manuscript is no small matter in textual reconstruction. An author’s ideas may evolve as the writing advances, and misplacing the order in which its parts are conceived may have the effect of rendering the author’s ideas contradictory or illogical.
Not until the publication of S. L. A. Marshall’s *Men Against Fire* in 1948 did any writer make a name for himself exploring the parts of war that interested Ardant du Picq, and not until the appearance a generation later of John Keegan’s seminal work, *The Face of Battle*, did any scholar improve on what this obscure French officer had written in his spare time. Moreover, the intellectual resources available to any writer in nineteenth-century France who wished to address the questions that interested Ardant du Picq were very limited. Even had he spent his career in Paris, the tools he could draw upon would have been of little help to him. The state of knowledge about human psychology in France at midcentury was on the verge of a sea-change, in which scientific medicine was about to shoulder aside older schools that opposed psychology as a natural science. Just as he was writing, Jean-Martin Charcot was beginning his experiments on hysteria at the Salpêtrière in Paris, but the work of Charcot and others belonged to the realm of elite medicine, well beyond the garrison gates at Limoges. Ardant du Picq was left to his own devices, in far-flung garrisons and encampments, to deduce from his readings a set of ideas that passed his own test of experience and that of his comrades.

How, then, is the modern reader to regard the manuscripts that Ardant du Picq left behind? Surely not as history. Although history plays a critical role in his work, his reconstructions of ancient battles and later references to modern battles are employed not as proofs, but as illustrations. Then as now, historical knowledge alone, however much it might illuminate a contemporary question, was insufficient to carry a point of argument. But it was important to him to show how historical knowledge could prompt new insights on modern questions; “nothing, especially in the trade of war, is sooner forgotten than experience. . . . Nevertheless, let us try to hold to facts,” he wrote in 1869.


103. Ardant du Picq has been criticized because the statistics from ancient battles concerning the balance of forces engaged and the number of casualties have been revised by modern scholars. I am not convinced that, had he more modern findings available, he would have drawn different conclusions. His arguments did not rest on these case studies alone.

104. Appendix I.
Introduction

Which of Ardant du Picq’s “facts” attracted so much attention from admirers and critics alike? Of all the military writers in nineteenth-century France, he alone attempted to escape the prison of orthodoxy, demonstrating that new, alternative paths to understanding war were still open, investigating parts of war where even Clausewitz had not ventured. It was in those parts, Clausewitz wrote, that “the light of reason is refracted in a manner quite different from that which is normal in academic speculation.”105 Orthodox military thought, long the handmaiden of statesmen and high commands, was organized to elucidate grand principles aimed at controlling the entirety of war with little thought for the parts of war that interested Ardant du Picq most. In the rare instances where they were considered at all, they were treated as derivatives of larger truths, which if correctly understood, will naturally act in accord with them. Ideally, national policies and their strategies will determine the shape of the army built to serve them. That army will prepare accordingly, raising its recruits, training its soldiers and commanders, devising its operational and tactical doctrines, and acquiring the materiel necessary to accomplish its mission. And yet, Ardant du Picq insisted, reality always intervenes; “the difference between theory and practice is incredible,” he wrote.106

His approach was the polar opposite of orthodox theory, which he denounced as “mechanistic.” His theoretical world was composed almost exclusively of the infantry battalion at the moment of contact with the enemy. Although innovations in small arms contributed substantially to the violence of modern battle, he had little to say about their proper distribution and employment. His treatment of other arms, the cavalry and artillery, was perfunctory, and his few mentions of logistics amounted to little more than complaints about its inadequacy. He declared he would waste no time on the proper design of battle formations, examining the merits of attacking in column or line, a subject he dismissed as “pedantry.”107 His only real interest, “toujours la question essentielle,” around which all his thinking turned, was the soldier, “the fundamental instrument of battle,” within the world of combat.108 This perspective was at once his study’s greatest strength, and, so easily misread, its greatest weakness.

106. See below, 69. See also John Keegan’s indictment of orthodox military thought and, not incidentally, orthodox military history’s treatment of battle, at 39, 65.
107. See below, 69.
108. Ibid., 51.
Du Picq’s insistence that war is best understood from the perspective of the soldier was by no means original. He paid due homage to the observations of Marshals Maurice de Saxe and Auguste Marmont, among others. Much of his study of ancient combat was meant to show how the ancients, chief among them the Romans, intuitively anticipated his own thinking on how to shape and use armies in accord with human rather than material capacities. But his predecessors had not elaborated on their insights to the degree that satisfied him. Too, the lessons that could be drawn from them belonged to earlier times and places, and du Picq was interested most of all in the army that stood before him.

Equipped with what he could glean from his readings in history, responses to his questionnaire, and not least his own experience, he painted a picture of the soldier in extremis, stripped of the patriotic devotion, romantic image, or heroic poses so beloved in popular literature. Nor was this soldier’s behavior constant, as it is so often assumed, neither consistently brave, cowardly, or stoic. He admitted that some soldiers seemed capable of banishing their fears to act heroically, but such acts were extremely rare and momentary. Ardant du Picq’s soldier was psychologically fragile. His performance in battle was the product of his fears, which, if he were left to his own devices, drove him from one act to another in the service of l’instinct de conservation, the instinct of self-preservation.

He had little patience for time-worn notions of élan and l’esprit militaire, usually promoted as near-magical qualities supposedly unique to the French, by which most military writers convinced themselves their nation would prevail in any war. When he used these terms he was more precise, trying to explain exactly what produced such qualities. He took it as a given that men were more alike than not and that “centuries have not changed human nature.” In a passage often overlooked, he could not give up the

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109. Ibid., 46. “We assume that all the personnel present with an army, with a division, with a regiment on the day of battle, fights. Right there is the error,” he wrote. Professional soldiers needed no convincing; few would have contested Marshal de Saxe’s well-known dictum that “the courage of men must be reborn daily, that nothing is so variable.” Marshal de Saxe, Mes reveries, in The Roots of Strategy, vol. 1, trans. Thomas R. Phillips (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1940), 190.

110. Ibid. The concept of an instinct of self-preservation was well established by the time Ardant du Picq wrote. See, e.g., Jean-Louis Alibert, Psychologie des passions, ou Nouvelle doctrine des sentiment moraux (Brussels: Chez August Wahlen, Tarlier, C-J Dematfile, et al., 1825), 11, in which the author declares this instinct innate in all animals.

111. Holmes, 161. These qualities, when combined with le système D, supposedly protected the nation from its enemies, especially the stolid Prussians.
commonly held notion that every nation possessed certain attributes. He conceded that human nature “may be manifested in various ways according to the time, place, the character and temperament of the race.” Even so, national characteristics alone were never of sufficient power to overcome the soldier’s first instinct.

The instinct of self-preservation as Ardant du Picq understood it posed important questions. If this instinct were so all-powerful, how could soldiers function at all in combat? Soldiers obviously did fight. What enabled them to overcome their instinct? Ardant du Picq’s answer was discipline, created and sustained by the commander, the one who would lead them into combat. Yet, no matter how adept the commander, his efforts would inevitably fall short. He argued that in any battle there came a point at which the commander could no longer attenuate fear. That was the moment in which the commander would lose control of his troops. “The animal instinct of self-preservation always gains the upper hand,” he wrote.

The mere suggestion that commanders were not all-powerful, not all-seeing, not at every moment in contact with the enemy presiding over an orderly unfolding of his intentions, must have struck many of Ardant du Picq’s colleagues and superiors as anathema. His battle was not under control from beginning to end but inevitably degenerated into one of chaos and uncertainty, filled with men fighting, whether on the attack or in defense, not for glory or victory but to preserve themselves.

Ardant du Picq believed the violence of modern warfare induced fear that was more intense than ever. Because of modern weaponry, battles were more terrifying even though they were less deadly, even though man’s capacity to withstand fear was as fixed as it had been when Caesar met the Gauls. “Man is capable of standing before only a certain amount of terror,” he wrote. “Today there must be swallowed in five minutes what took an hour under Turenne.” Behind this passage, one can hear the incessant barrages at Sebastopol.

112. Indeed, his case studies of ancient combat depend heavily on national characterizations: “The Gaul,” he wrote, was “a fool in war,” while the Roman was a “politician above all,” and “not essentially brave.” See below, 8–10.
113. I am indebted to Richard McNally, professor and director of clinical psychology at Harvard University, for his tutelage on the current scientific literature concerning the instinct of self-preservation.
114. Ibid., 7–10.
115. Ibid.
116. Ibid., 47.
Yet, du Picq did not argue that battle depended on an individual’s performance alone, nor were formations merely collections of individuals. Then as now, battle is a test not only of individual strengths and weaknesses but also of the collective power of a military formation contending against its enemy. Yet, military units are never as robust and unchanging as theorists and military writers imagine them to be. He would have understood John Keegan’s dictum that “inside every army is a crowd struggling to get out,” that the moment a formation begins to take action it begins to disorganize itself.\textsuperscript{117}

He believed that discipline was essential even though it was insufficient to resist the formation’s tendency to disintegrate under the stresses of battle. The discipline he imagined could not be achieved by a commander without first binding his unit together socially. A cohesive unit could accomplish feats of arms beyond that which could be accomplished by soldiers who had not been socially integrated. This social integration, he believed, was the engine of morale itself. And, “in the last analysis,” he wrote, “success in battle is a matter of morale.”\textsuperscript{118} Without morale, armies were doomed to defeat.

Of all Ardant du Picq’s assertions, his claims for the power of morale in battle may have excited the most admiration and criticism.\textsuperscript{119} Morale meant for him the sum of a military unit’s collective psychology, which expressed itself in the unit’s performance in battle. A talented commander might inspire morale in his unit, but the real source of morale lay in the comradeship among the troops themselves, and he thought it was stronger in troops who had soldiered together for a long time. The relationships created by long-standing association, he believed, encouraged the troops to support one another in combat with no prompting from their chain of command. Given proper arms and realistic training, soldiers thus carried with them into battle another advantage. As attacking formations tended to disperse

\textsuperscript{117} Keegan, 175.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 109.
\textsuperscript{119} Much of the modern criticism may have begun with the essay by Possony and Mantoux, “Du Picq and Foch: The French School,” 206–233, which scholars have argued overstated the debt Foch owed to du Picq’s thinking. Ardant du Picq does not figure in Douglas Porch’s formidable \textit{The March to the Marne}, while Jack Snyder, in his \textit{The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 57–106, accords his work a more influential role in French military thought. A more recent assessment of Ardant du Picq’s influence can be found in Gat, 408–411; and in Wawro, 174, 307, for whom Ardant du Picq’s theory was “nonsense on stilts,” but lived on despite its obvious contradiction by the course of the Franco-Prussian War.
as they closed with the enemy, comradeship acted as a counterweight, delaying the point at which the unit lost its cohesiveness and the tactical control of the commander. The value to the commander of this “mutual surveillance” among the troops was therefore more important than ever: even if the course of battle separated him from most of his troops, the troops themselves could rely on one another to fight their way through the danger. “Let us ensure cohesion by the mutual acquaintanceship of men and officers; let us call French sociability to our aid,” he wrote. With indifferent leadership, without comradeship, a mass of troops approaching one’s defenses might be intimidating, he thought, but there were “only fifty or twenty-five percent who really fight.”

Though powerfully expressed and argued in greater detail, du Picq’s assertions were not appreciably different than those of the most tub-thumping proponents of l’esprit militaire and élan of his day. The degree of power he assigned to morale was another matter, however. Ardant du Picq believed superior morale could achieve victory even in the face of superior numbers and arms. “He will win who has the resolution to advance,” he wrote. In his discussions of both ancient and modern battle, he derided the assumption that battles were decided when forces collided in a frenzied melee. For that reason he had little faith in massed assaults, which he found “incomprehensible” and wasteful. Instead, he thought, a force armed with greater morale would inevitably find that its enemy would rather retreat, often in disorder, than engage in sustained physical contact. He was sure this explained why casualties were so high in ancient warfare: soldiers in disordered retreat were easy prey, exposing themselves to slaughter. In modern warfare, he argued, “there is no shock of infantry on infantry. There is no physical impulse, no force of mass. There is but moral impulse.” Such dicta as these overshadowed more reserved, if not outright contradictory, assertions elsewhere in his text. Even while extolling the virtues of superior morale, he cautioned

120. See 130.
122. See 61.
123. Ibid., 63–64.
his readers to remember that during the attack one should “cover infantry troops before their entry into action; cover them as much as possible and by any means; take advantage of terrain, make them lie down.” Throughout his text, he revealed a preference for skirmishers, whose dispersion and tactical flexibility seemed to better suit the modern battlefield, but he believed an army could rely on skirmishers too much; “this talk of skirmishers in large bodies is nothing else but an euphemism for absolute disorder,” he wrote. Unified formations must be employed, not for the shock of their mass, but for their moral effect, and for that, formations must remain under the control of the commander until the crucial moment. In one of the few passages in which he discussed tactics in a conventional way, the mass of the battalion serves mainly as the means by which the commander can move his troops up to the assault itself, at which point unity of action and tactical control devolves to small groups or individual soldiers. For the commander, “determining the moment when man abandons reason and becomes instinctive is the essence of the science of combat.”

Contrary to prevailing opinion that the French citizen could only learn soldiering in nine years, Ardant du Picq believed that troops properly recruited, trained, formed, and led could be made into the kind of army he imagined within three years. The raw human material from which armies at the time were raised was the subject of no small amount of hand-wringing by government officials and social commentators alike from the middle of the nineteenth century to the Great War. Ardant du Picq was not immune to these concerns. Resigned to the need for a mass army rather than a long-standing corps of professionals, he believed that the progress of democracy in France made raising such an army all the more difficult. “A democratic society is antagonistic to the military spirit,” he wrote, and for that reason “the military spirit is dead in France.” And although there was an inherent “lack of power in mob armies,” France had set its course, and there was little to do but accept the military liabilities that came with it. Resigned as he was to the realities of the day, he nevertheless saw qualities in his fellow citizens that might be drawn upon: “The French are indeed worthy sons of their fathers, the Gauls. . . . The good Frenchman lets himself be carried away, inflamed by the most ridiculous feats of arms into the wildest enthusiasm. . . . French sociability creates cohesion in French troops more

124. Ibid., 71–73.
125. Ibid., 45.
Introduction

quickly than could be secured in troops in other nations. . . . How much better modern tactics fit the impatient French character?” A
drant du Picq’s optimism was at odds with that of his old brigade commander, Louis Trochu, who lacerated French soldiery every bit as much as French policymakers in his denunciations of the army in 1867, reserving his most biting comments for long-service soldiers, the “old grumblers,” grognards. They were “Whoremongers,” wastrels of the worst kind, drunkards who habitually evaded their duties by any means at hand, insular, taking refuge in grimy garrisons in out-of-the-way provinces. What could be made of such men without stern discipline?

Even with his more forgiving view of the potential of his soldiers, Ardant du Picq was careful to emphasize the role of discipline throughout his manuscript. If indeed France was to have a mass army made of such imperfect material, her only salvation lay in the quality of her professional officers and noncommissioned officers, and among these, he emphasized, officers of the line, not the staff, mattered more than anyone. If the military spirit had indeed vanished from French society at large, the professionals were its last remaining repository. Inasmuch as modern democracy prized wealth above all, he thought officers should be paid more and allowed more leisure in order to elevate their prestige and attract candidates. “There is little taste for the military life in France; such a procedure would lessen it. The leisure of army life attracts three out of four officers, laziness, if you like. But such is the fact,” he wrote. The officer corps could take up the place of the aristocracy of old, but it would be an aristocracy of valor. And in return, France would have its mass army, commanded by officers lacking “in firmness” but with no little pride; “in the face of danger they lack composure, they are disconcerted, breathless, hesitant, forgetful, unable to think of a way out. They call ‘Forward! Forward!’ at the head of their formations.”

There was no such drama in Ardant du Picq’s last moments commanding his regiment. No painter would bother to stretch his canvas to depict Ardant du Picq’s wounding, and no one would record his death a few days later, one of the tens of thousands of French soldiers to follow. He left behind a collection of manuscripts, some nearer final draft than others, whose se-

126. Ibid., 126.
127. See Wawro, 43–44, for an especially pungent description of the army on the eve of the war.
128. See below, 123.
129. Ibid.
130. Ibid., 127.
quence could only be assumed, and whose line of argument was marred by inconsistencies, contradictions, and digressions. Once collected in a single volume, Ardant du Picq’s work could be seen as an attempt to think about war differently, one that turned conventional military thought on its head. Although unschooled in psychology, even the crude schools that then prevailed, he reached into parts of war that until then had been addressed, if at all, in hoary aphorisms and clichés. His hopes to substantiate his insights with more precise, systematically researched evidence had not been satisfied when he died. In spite of its shortcomings, Études sur le combat had opened the door to the heart of the soldier’s war like no other work before its time and few works after.
About This Translation

The original edition of Ardant du Picq’s *Études sur le combat* was published in Paris in 1880 by Hachette. This edition consisted of a compilation of du Picq’s unpublished essays. A family friend, one Captain Letellier, about whom little is known, undertook the compilation at the family’s request. Captain Letellier did not explain the condition of the manuscripts he worked with, and internal evidence suggests he did little if anything to edit them. Both the content and the organization of the book reflect its unfinished state. For all its deficiencies, this was the only edition readers knew for nearly a generation, and today it can be freely accessed online.

In 1903, Ernest Judet, a well-known and controversial journalist, published a much improved edition. Judet enlisted the support of du Picq’s family, and one of the more valuable features of Judet’s edition was the addition of a biographical sketch of du Picq by his brother. For the main body of the text, Judet used a light editorial hand, but he did make one significant change: the introduction in the old edition became Part One’s chapter VII in Judet’s edition, a change that made good editorial sense.

Jude’s 1903 edition drew a great deal more notice than the original, running through eight printings before the Great War. And one authority has claimed that with the exception of *War and Peace*, *Études sur le combat* was the most popular book in the French trenches during the war. There is good argument, then, for regarding Judet’s edition as the “definitive” edition in French.

In 1921, two American army officers, Colonel John N. Greely and Major Robert Cotton, translated the Judet edition into English. Their work has served as the “standard” English edition since then. They modestly described their translation as “unpretentious,” but Anglophone readers have depended on it for nearly a century, and it has served them well. I suspect Greely and Cotton were working under something of a deadline, as I was
not. Too, the emergence of considerably more biographical information about du Picq’s life and career over the years since has permitted me to see his work in a better perspective than was available to them, and to introduce his work in a way that I hope will assist the reader in understanding just how remarkable du Picq’s work was. Inevitably, this better perspective has influenced my translation.

This translation is also based on Judet’s 1903 edition. Any disquisition on the trials and tribulations of translation is of little use to readers who find their way to this book. There are almost as many schools of the art of translation as there are translators. One practical principle has guided me in this work, and it takes the form of a question: Were Ardant du Picq as fluent in English as he was in French, what would his text have looked like when he wrote it in the late 1860s? In part, that will explain both the Gallic flavor of his diction, and also what some may regard as rather old-fashioned—that is, mid-nineteenth-century—English.

My own editorial interventions have been conservative, consisting mostly of footnotes as a means to identify or explain references and military terms whose meaning have faded into obscurity. I have taken care not to disturb the paragraphing in du Picq’s text, and my intention here was to retain the epigrammatic qualities in a text that in many instances will strike the reader as du Picq’s thinking with his pen. This book, after all, was a work very much in progress.