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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a book is normally a solitary activity. A collaboration poses a unique set of challenges, especially when the two authors live a considerable distance from each other, even in the age of the internet and instantaneous communication. There are ways, however, to surmount these challenges. Therefore, I (RLD) would like to state at the outset that the principal author of this work is Daniel J. Hughes. Dan called me in 2014 and asked me to update what was already a massive work. My major contributions were made in chapter 8 and in the concluding remarks of each chapter. The conclusion was written jointly. The fact that we had already coauthored two articles made the process rather smooth.

I (DJH) wish to acknowledge the following individuals who were particularly important to the writing of this volume. First and foremost is my coauthor, Professor Richard DiNardo. The late Professor Donald Douglas of Wichita State University largely created my interest in German history. Two professors at the German Military History Research Office (then in Freiburg), the late Manfred Messerschmidt and the late Wilhelm Deist, guided my early ventures into the historiography of the Prussian army. The staff of the German military archives, especially the late Dr. Friedrich Christian Stahl, eased my early use of the archives. The late Dr. H. O. Malone of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command made immense contributions to my career. My former colleague and current friend Samuel J. Lewis, formerly of the US Army Command and General Staff College, generously shared his insights into the German army's institutions and ideas.

I (RLD) would like to express my gratitude to the following people and institutions. My friend Jack Tunstall was kind enough to provide material from the Austrian archives. The successive heads of the German military archives in Freiburg, and their respective staffs, made every research trip there a very productive experience. Likewise, the staffs of the state archives of Baden-Württemberg and the Bavarian military archives were tremendously helpful. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College and the financial assistance provided by the Marine Corps University Foundation. And it is always a pleasure to work with the University Press of Kansas. Personally, two people who helped shape my professional career are Cynthia Whittaker,

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professor emeritus from Bernard Baruch College, and the late Professor David Syrett. I would also like to acknowledge my wife, Rita, for her saintly patience while I worked on this project. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Daniel J. Hughes. When Dan called me several years ago to be his coauthor on this volume, I was delighted to renew our collaboration and excited about the impact this work could have.

Although a great many people have been mentioned here, we alone are responsible for the work. We therefore accept responsibility for any errors of commission and omission.



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PREFACE

From the wars of German unification (1864–1871) to the present time, the German army has been one of the most widely studied, criticized, and imitated military organizations in the modern world. In forging the united Germany that emerged in 1871, the Prussian army created new military and political realities in Europe. The new imperial German military establishment was really a combination of the militaries of Bavaria, Saxony, Württemberg, and Prussia, but the core of the organization was certainly provided by Prussia. Some authors still refer to the “Prusso-German” military system.¹ The Prussian War Ministry and the Great General Staff exercised considerable influence in domestic politics. War planning was almost exclusively the province of the General Staff.

The military effectiveness of the Prussian army system was beyond doubt in 1871, and other military establishments sought to imitate the Prussians, in form if not in substance.² Based on this reputation, the German army seemed equally formidable as the First World War began. The military collapse in 1918 brought the end of the German Empire but did not end the army’s role in domestic politics, as it assisted in establishing both the Weimar Republic and Adolf Hitler’s dictatorship. The army’s reputation for military effectiveness, however, especially at the tactical and operational levels of war, remained. That reputation has been somewhat diminished by generations of careful study, both in Germany and elsewhere. Nonetheless, the image of the German army as a force capable of operational and tactical brilliance in both world wars remains strong, especially in the popular imagination and even in professional military circles.³

Because of the army’s role in establishing one line of military theory and practice, scholars in a variety of disciplines from 1871 to the present day have addressed the German military experience from their varying perspectives. Military thinkers, historians, officers, and defense professionals have examined German systems in the context of the continuing need to prepare military forces for large-scale conventional warfare. German concepts of the conduct of warfare, leadership, command, combat effectiveness, organization, and other topics have been suggestive in shaping military structures and methods. The rise of airpower and the development of nuclear weapons had their effects on the conduct of land warfare, but they did not render the German system entirely irrelevant.⁴

This volume is an institutional study of the most essential components of the German system between 1871 and 1918.⁵ It examines various foundational areas such as theory, doctrine, institutional structures, training, and the officer corps. The major focus of this work is adaptation and change. The army had to adapt and change in the face of rapid technological developments, while also trying to figure out what a future war would look like and planning for it. Doctrinal changes in the pre-1914 period were often manifested in subtle ways, usually in the form of slight revisions in successive editions of the manuals that shaped the army's tactics. A detailed examination of these modifications is necessary, as a series of minor changes over time can add up to a major change. In war planning, there was one major shift in German thinking about how to conduct a future war in the period between 1871 and 1914. After that, alterations in war plans and mobilization schedules were made subtly and to provide flexibility for the army.⁶ The need for adaptation and change only increased after 1914, when theory and doctrine met the reality of modern warfare and was found wanting in a number of respects. Although this study considers battles and campaigns, occasionally in some detail, they are not the primary focus and are discussed mainly in the context of institutional adaptation and change.⁷

The German army in this period reflected the federal nature of the German Empire and thus consisted of four state armies—those of Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg. The king of Prussia, who also held the position of German emperor, was the unifying individual under the German constitution of 1871. The Prussian army was by far the largest of the four state contingents and dominated all aspects of the army's training and doctrine. Domestically, the Prussian army remained what it had always been: a royal army dedicated to the Prussian state's conservative and monarchical social structure. These two fundamental aspects of the army's identity played important roles in determining its social and political place in modern Germany, but they also substantially influenced its internal workings in everything from officer selection and training to tactics and command from the lowest to the highest levels. The army was, in short, a bulwark against the emperor's internal opponents as well as Germany's foreign enemies and rivals.

As noted earlier, this volume focuses on theory and practice leading up to the First World War and on the variety of adaptations that became necessary as the war progressed. The army struggled to adjust to the dichotomous nature of warfare between 1914 and 1917. Trench warfare on

the western front forced the army to abandon many of its fundamental prewar principles and practices. The almost constant presence of the German High Command on the western front introduced the practice of micromanagement to a degree that senior field commanders found severely constraining. On the eastern front and in the Balkans, however, traditional approaches in tactics, operations, and command remained relatively intact. More favorable force-to-space ratios and less capable enemies allowed the army to attain major (but not decisive) victories within its traditional methodological framework. In preparation for the desperate final offensives of 1918, the army's leadership faced the necessity of retraining its tactical units to return to the kind of mobile warfare (*Bewegungskrieg*) it had prepared for in 1871–1914. This was no easy task, as years of trench warfare (*Stellungskrieg*) in the west and massive casualties had robbed the army of leaders and units experienced in these traditional methods.

Ultimately, the purpose of this work can be stated simply: to provide a comprehensive examination of the army of the *Kaiserreich* as an institution. This aim is also reflected in the chronological scope of the work, which covers the entire history of the German Empire. Thus, although there are some allusions to them, there is no extended discussion or analysis of the wars of unification from which the empire arose.⁸ Likewise, although some attention is paid to the empire's military institutions when they were still in an embryonic state in Prussia during the early nineteenth century, a detailed discussion of that period of Prussian history is beyond the scope of this work. We hope this work gains the attention not only of those with an interest in the Great War but also of those readers who are drawn to the broader history of Germany's imperial era.

Before beginning our examination, some explanation is in order. First, names in this volume are rendered in the German version rather than the English. Thus, the German emperor in 1914 is referred to as Wilhelm II, not William II. Likewise, this volume uses German place names as they existed in 1914. For example, the capital of Austrian Galicia is Lemberg, as opposed to Lvov (Russian), Łwów (Polish), or Lviv (Ukrainian). This practice applies to general officer ranks as well. Thus, a *Generalmajor* is equivalent to an American one-star general, and a *Generalleutnant* would have two stars if the Germans used such a system.⁹ Other common German terms also appear in the text for the sake of simplicity and consistency with the documents and literature on which this study is based.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY

FOUNDATIONS

On 16 June 1871 the city of Berlin, capital of the new German Empire, played host to one of the greatest military parades in its history. The occasion was the end of the successful war against France and the creation of the German Empire under Prussian domination. This, the third of the wars of unification, was the historic high point of the Prussian army, which, over the next forty years, reaped the rewards of its great victories. The parade was a symbolic end of the old era in Prussia and the beginning of the imperial, or *Wilhelmine*, period of modern Germany. At the head of his glittering military machine rode Wilhelm I, king of Prussia and German emperor. Behind him came one of the most popular men in Prussia—indeed, in all of Germany: Helmuth von Moltke, chief of the Prussian General Staff and architect of the victorious campaigns in Bohemia and France.¹ Behind him marched the elite of the Prussian army—the guards infantry and cavalry—and many of the army's future leaders. In troubled cooperation with Bismarck, the army had created the new Reich in three victorious campaigns against Denmark (1864), Austria and its German allies (1866), and France (1870–1871). In addition to creating the military foundation of the new empire, Moltke's victories served to legitimize the Prussian army's theories and philosophy of war, elements of which endured in a variety of armies until the last decade of the twentieth century.

Bismarck's empire offered a political solution to the question of German unification, but only within a framework that by its nature resisted many of the forces that gave rise to Germany's growing wealth and power. This Prussian solution—unification from above rather than from below, and therefore conservative rather than democratic—created a federal state resting on the closely related foundations of monarchical government, military force, and the psychological consequences of the wildly popular victory over France. Prussia thus entered the new era in a manner that left its traditional social structure and its monarchical political structure intact. The aristocracy retained its power base and its ideology. The state

therefore represented the powerful forces that sought to control or even destroy the forces of political and social modernization.

The Royal Prussian Army

The army remained a primarily royal institution under the new German Constitution. Its officers and men retained their traditional oaths to the king of Prussia, whose legitimacy as commander rested in the traditional power and authority of the Prussian monarchy rather than in the Prussian Constitution of 1850 or the German Constitution of 1871. In the entire army, only a single officer, the war minister, took an oath of loyalty to the Prussian Constitution. Military conventions concluded between Prussia and many of the other states of the German Empire incorporated the smaller contingents directly into the Prussian army or imposed its structural and doctrinal framework on them.² Although Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg retained their state armies, the Prussian system dominated in almost every aspect, especially in theory and structure of the armed forces.

The Prussian army's foundations lay in its traditional role in shaping and defending Prussia's monarchy and social order, dating to the days of the Great Elector (1640–1688) and King Friedrich Wilhelm I (1713–1740). The former made the army the fundamental pillar of the state, while the latter permanently drew Prussia's landed nobility into military service as officers.³ The Prussian army thereafter served two major functions. It was, perhaps most obviously, the state's primary means of survival and expansion. Less obviously today, the army was the guarantor of the Hohenzollern monarchy's power and of the illiberal rule of Prussia's upper classes.

The army's organization reflected its aristocratic and monarchical character. Three institutions played key roles in shaping the army's structure, personnel system, and way of war. These were, respectively, the War Ministry, the Military Cabinet, and the General Staff. The strong and sometimes eccentric personalities that dominated the army from 1871 to 1918 did so within the framework of these three institutions.

The War Ministry

The Prussian War Ministry was created as part of the Stein-Hardenberg efforts to reform the Prussian state after its military defeat at the hands of

Napoleon in 1806 and its subsequent collapse.⁴ The key military reformer was Gerhard von Scharnhorst (1756–1813), who led the Military Reform Commission established by King Friedrich Wilhelm III in July 1807. As part of the effort to introduce the principle of ministerial responsibility in the military arena, the commission gained royal approval to create what later became known as the War Ministry on 15 July 1808. Scharnhorst's goal was to centralize responsibility for all military affairs under the War Ministry, which accordingly had two main departments: the General War Department (*Allgemeine Kriegsdepartement*) and the Military Administration Department (*Militär-Oekonomie-Departement*). The War Ministry would thus unify administration, campaign planning, and personnel affairs under a single responsible cabinet secretary.⁵

The reformers immediately encountered the two enduring problems of bureaucratic rationalization of the Prussian military system. The first was the issue of the king's authority as supreme commander of the army (*Kommandogewalt*). No king was willing to compromise on this, either by creating a single official to administer all military affairs or, even worse from the royal point of view, by allowing any popular body to interfere in the exercise of this authority.⁶ The royal edict of 1808 establishing the War Ministry thus did not give that office command of the field army during wartime, a responsibility that in theory remained a personal function of the monarch until the collapse in 1918. Friedrich Wilhelm III, faced with this problem, declined to appoint a war minister until 1814, when Hermann von Boyen, a relatively liberal reformer, became the first person to hold that office.

The second issue that remained problematic throughout the remaining century of Hohenzollern rule in Prussia was that of direct access (*Immediatvortrag*) to the king. Even as the war minister began to assume control over nearly all military functions, the commanding generals (corps commanders) retained the right to report directly to the king, and by 1900, several dozen high-ranking positions had acquired that privilege. As a practical matter, the army always lacked any unified control beyond the person of the monarch.⁷

The War Ministry's General War Department, headed initially by Scharnhorst, was in theory responsible for the most important matters related to command, while the Military Administration Department dealt with administrative affairs. The General War Department had three main subordinate sections for personnel affairs, general staff functions, and weapons and related issues.⁸ The first of these departments was partic-

ularly problematic because it managed the most sensitive issue in the entire Prussian system. From the point of view of the monarch and the aristocracy, nothing was more critical than selecting, promoting, assigning, and dismissing or retiring officers.

The Military Cabinet

This office, initially known as the Section for the Administration of Personnel Affairs, was later officially designated the Military Cabinet, and it is known to history by that name.⁹ The origins of this shadowy institution lay in the early eighteenth century and the king's *Generaladjutants*, who administered various official duties involving sensitive, important, or secret matters.¹⁰

From the beginning, the head of the Department for Personnel Affairs was also an adjutant to the king. He thus had direct access to the monarch, even though he was a subordinate of the war minister. For the period between 1814 and 1857, most correspondence and decisions related to personnel matters went through the various war ministers, who were unwilling to exert themselves in sensitive personnel decisions or to challenge the right of their subordinates to report directly to the king.¹¹ Following the Revolution of 1848–1849 and the creation of the Prussian Constitution of 1850, the struggle to emancipate the Military Cabinet from the War Ministry began in earnest.

This process originated in 1857 when King Friedrich Wilhelm IV (who ruled from 1840 to 1859) ordered that all directors of the Department for Personnel Affairs be chosen exclusively from his personal adjutants or from generals attached to his personal entourage.¹² Edwin von Mantuffel, who headed both the Department for Personnel Affairs and the Military Cabinet from February 1857 through June 1865, used his position as general adjutant to bypass the war minister, who gradually lost control over personnel actions. This continued until 18 January 1861, when a cabinet order gave the head of the department the right to conduct his business, issue orders, and render personnel decisions without the approval of the war minister, who thus formally lost all ministerial responsibility for these actions.¹³

Subsequent war ministers, especially Julius von Verdy du Vernois (April 1889–October 1890), attempted to rein in the chief of the Military Cabinet, but to no avail.¹⁴ A very small number of individuals, usually fewer than ten officers and about a dozen civil servants, thus controlled

the vast majority of the army's decisions related to officer personnel.¹⁵ In 1861 the Military Cabinet received authorization to publish personnel actions without the formal approval of the war minister.¹⁶ The Military Cabinet's responsibilities were defined as the execution of all highest (royal) orders in assignments, promotions, retirement, pay, punishment, granting of awards, permission to marry, and dismissals of officers and officer candidates.¹⁷

Only the direst circumstances could force the king to subordinate the Military Cabinet to any other military authority. In the spring of 1918 such a moment arrived when Erich Ludendorff's power was sufficient to cause the removal of the chief of the Military Cabinet, but not for reasons of personnel administration.¹⁸ For all practical purposes, from 1860 until the end of the monarchy, the Military Cabinet made nearly all personnel decisions in a secret and frequently arbitrary manner with no oversight except by the king himself.

As a result, the chief of the Military Cabinet became the most powerful person in the army, second only to the king, and he was capable of intimidating officers at all levels, active or reserve. He was therefore the most feared person in the army, perhaps in all of Prussia or even all of Germany. The resulting witticisms and complaints about the cabinet's arbitrary decisions had no impact on the chief's authority. *Wie Gott will und Albedyll* (as God and Albedyll wills) was the saying used to describe the reign of terror when Emil von Albedyll held the office (April 1872–August 1888).¹⁹ Another officer remarked that anyone who lacked personal “connections” with important men in the Military Cabinet had to trust his fate to the mercy of his beloved God.²⁰ In 1870 the chief of the Military Cabinet was powerful enough to assign officers to Prince Friedrich Karl's staff and subordinate units with complete disregard of the prince's desires.²¹

The Military Cabinet, which had no role in planning or conducting campaigns, made the appointments to key command positions, sometimes with the approval of the General Staff, but sometimes against its recommendations.²² On the whole, however, the chief of the General Staff could assign his officers as he wished.²³ Nevertheless, even Count von Schlieffen could not prevail in making General Staff assignments if the Military Cabinet was determined to resist his requested appointments.²⁴

Finally, in 1883, a royal order completely emancipated the Military Cabinet's personnel functions from the War Ministry.²⁵ This served to shield the Military Cabinet from both the Prussian parliament and the Reichstag. From 1893 onward, the Military Cabinet also had a very influential

role in officer personnel affairs in Württemberg's army.²⁶ It was small wonder that the army's enemies in the Reichstag referred to the Military Cabinet as "antediluvian" and "absolutism in its clearest form."²⁷

Despite consistent criticism from political parties in the Reichstag, the army made no secret of its desire to preserve royal control over all personnel matters.²⁸ In 1909 the war minister, the ultraconservative General Karl von Einem, vigorously defended the process in the Reichstag, thus formally and officially reversing the position taken by Scharnhorst and the Military Reform Commission. Despite the secrecy and arbitrary action inherent in the process, many officers regarded it as necessary in a royal army such as Prussia's.²⁹

The General Staff

The third of the three key institutions of the Prussian army was the General Staff. Although the earliest origins of the Prussian General Staff can arguably be traced to about 1655, its modern history began in 1802. In January and November of that year, Colonel Christian von Massenbach proposed the establishment of a permanent staff that in peacetime would plan for various eventualities that might arise. Shortly thereafter, in 1803, King Friedrich Wilhelm III ordered the reorganization of the Quartermaster General's Staff into the General Staff and made Lieutenant General von Geusau its first chief.³⁰ As Geusau was nearly seventy years old and distracted by other duties, his three key assistants, the most notable of whom was Scharnhorst, did most of the work.³¹ Although the General Staff was largely in place in 1806, it could not save the Prussian army from the French army under Napoleon. Nevertheless, many important figures in the future development of the General Staff performed well enough to survive with their reputations intact, including Scharnhorst, Müffling, Valentini, Rühle von Lillienstern, and Boyen.

In July 1807 the reform process began in earnest, and Scharnhorst became chief of the General Staff (then still called the Quartermaster General's Staff). He remained in that capacity until August 1813, when he was succeeded by August Wilhelm von Gneisenau, one of his close associates in the reform party. Massenbach, largely discredited as a field soldier by his actions at Prenzlau, had no opportunity to implement his ideas, which had always taken second place to those of Scharnhorst.³² The latter's memorandum of 1808 established the wartime composition of the General Staff as one colonel, four majors, eight captains, and twelve lieu-

tenants.³³ Both Gneisenau and Scharnhorst were thus key in establishing the basic features of the General Staff system, which lasted well into the Second World War. The General Staff officially received that designation on 20 June 1817.³⁴

As previously noted, Scharnhorst successfully implemented his proposal that the chief of the General Staff become a subordinate of the war minister. He further proposed that the General Staff adopt a functional organization with four sections: strategy and tactics, internal administration, replacements, and artillery and munitions. Although opposition from conservatives prevented the full implementation of his plan, the General Staff played a key role in the final campaigns against Napoleon. Scharnhorst in those years established the fundamental principle that the General Staff officer, at whatever level he functioned, should remain in the background, giving the commander advice and support without limiting the commander's authority or tarnishing his image with subordinates and the troops at large. When Scharnhorst died of complications from a wound suffered at Gross-Görschen, Gneisenau took his place as chief of the General Staff.³⁵

Gneisenau's contributions to the ethos and methods of the General Staff were nearly as important as Scharnhorst's. Gneisenau emphasized clarity in communications, brevity, and reliance on general directives rather than detailed orders. He also developed the concept of joint responsibility, which, though unwritten, remained one of the fundamental pillars of the General Staff system until Hitler abolished it in the Second World War. Under this principle, the General Staff officer assumed responsibility for his commander's decisions; thus, the officer's evaluation was in part dependent on the performance and fate of the commander he advised. Eventually, the army accorded its General Staff officers the right to register a dissenting opinion in the unit's war diary if they had strongly advised the commander against a particular course of action. Joint responsibility did not mean joint or shared command, however. The Prussian army, throughout its long history, recognized only a single commander in any given unit. So firm was the resolve not to dilute the authority of the commander that the Prussian army never established positions such as deputy or vice commander, as had been the practice in many other armies.

From 1815 until its growth in power and prestige during the wars of unification (1864–1871), the General Staff functioned in difficult circumstances but continued to establish the basic procedures that laid the

foundation for its later glory. From the outset, the General Staff had two elements. The *Grosser Generalstab* (Great General Staff) in Berlin worked directly under the chief of the General Staff on the centralized functions assigned to it by the War Ministry. Other General Staff officers, collectively known as the *Truppengeneralstab* (General Staff in the units), served as chiefs of staff and primary advisers to corps commanders and, intermittently until 1853, division commanders. These officers worked directly for their units' commanders but remained General Staff officers in every sense. The two groups were part of the same select body of General Staff officers, and any individual might find himself in either group at any given time. Most officers rotated consistently but with substantial variation among the Great General Staff, the unit General Staff, and normal command assignments at levels appropriate to their rank. This practice had the dual purposes of providing trained advisers to large unit commanders and ensuring that the General Staff did not stagnate and become a military ivory tower out of touch with developments in the army.³⁶ This remained standard practice until the end of the Second World War.³⁷

The General Staff was not a particularly important or vibrant institution for much of the period between 1815 and the arrival of Helmuth von Moltke in 1857. It lost much of its royal support and vitality as the reformers declined in influence or left the army. Its assigned officer strength declined from sixty-nine at the beginning of the postwar period to a mere twenty-four in 1824. The divisions lost their General Staff officers that year, creating a gap that lasted almost thirty years. For the next three decades, the General Staff performed its work in the shadow of the War Ministry.³⁸ Its chiefs accepted this subordinate position.³⁹ The General Staff had limited direct influence on the army's training, doctrinal manuals, weapons development, and related areas, and the war minister continued to exercise his authority through ad hoc commissions to deal with specific issues as they arose. The results of the mobilization of 1850 demonstrated that neither the army nor its General Staff was prepared to deal with a serious military crisis.⁴⁰

Although the Prussian General Staff had several influential chiefs in the first half of the nineteenth century, the decisive personality in establishing the General Staff's position for the period covered by this study was Helmuth von Moltke.⁴¹ When Moltke became chief of the General Staff in 1857, that body was but a minor element of the War Ministry, responsible for only a fraction of the duties and functions later associated with it. This quiet but effective chief gradually extended his involvement

in these and many other areas. In 1858 the General Staff gained control over corps staff rides. In 1861 the king extended this authority to the maneuvers of large units. Of even greater importance, in 1858 Moltke ordered the General Staff to use railroads for large exercises in peacetime, and in 1859 he instituted the extensive coordination between the army and the Prussian railway system that became the foundation of Prussia's speedy and efficient mobilizations in 1866, 1870, and 1914.⁴²

The size of the General Staff increased as Moltke extended its influence. When Moltke became chief, the General Staff had fewer than 65 officers, and only about 20 of them were in Berlin. By 1900, the General Staff had nearly 300 officers, more than 100 of whom served in the central staff in Berlin.⁴³ The number of fully qualified General Staff officers was greater, since at any one time some of them were commanding units at various levels or serving on special assignments. Between 1900 and 1914 the General Staff doubled its strength, growing to about 650 officers. About 150 of them worked in the main sections dealing with mobilization, strategic planning, intelligence, education and training, fortresses, military history, and so forth.⁴⁴

Standing Army or Citizen-Soldiers?

The nature of the army's use of manpower and its unit structure were just as important as the High Command structures discussed above. The revolutionary changes in society and warfare brought about by the French Revolution forced Prussia to reduce its reliance on the lowest classes of society and foreigners to fill its enlisted ranks. To a limited degree, the monarchy had (unwillingly, but of necessity) enlisted the resources of the entire state in the final struggles against Napoleon after 1812. The military reformers had hoped, like the French, to create a revitalized nation of citizens rather than subjects and, in the military realm, an army of citizens who would support the state out of commitment rather than the coercion that had characterized the army of the *ancien régime*. To that end, Prussia emerged from the Napoleonic wars with a relatively small active army and a substantial body of citizen-soldiers, the *Landwehr*, with elected officers and relatively independent units of marginally trained civilians. The army's unit structure, like so many other aspects of its development, thus went back to the reforms of Scharnhorst and his colleagues.

The long struggle over the Prussian *Landwehr* and the effort to create a viable system of reserve forces illustrate the difficulties the Prussian army

faced in reconciling the potentially conflicting demands of military effectiveness and political reliability. The *Landwehr* issue first arose during the dark days between the battles of Jena/Auerstädt and the final victories over Napoleon. The reformers hoped to combine the principle of universal military service with a reserve army of citizen-soldiers. Scharnhorst hoped to use these two innovations to bind the army more closely to the population and to preserve a democratic base within the army. Royal decrees established the principle of universal service on 9 February 1813 and instituted the *Landwehr* on 17 March of that year.⁴⁵ The latter decree broadened the similar steps already taken by the provincial Diet in East Prussia after General Yorck von Wartenburg deserted Napoleon and joined the advancing Russians to drive the hated French out of Prussia and Germany.

The *Landwehr* was not the only effort to draw the great mass of the population directly into the twin efforts to unite people and nation and to eject the French from Prussia. When mobilized, the *Landwehr* would be part of the regular army, with appropriate pay, discipline, and administrative arrangements. Scharnhorst also proposed a second line of reserves, the *Landsturm*, to be composed of all physically fit citizens. These reserves would engage in guerrilla warfare against the enemy, like the Spaniards had done in 1808. To be used only as a last resort, the *Landsturm* was not expected to have military discipline or administrative arrangements. Its members, moreover, would be organized and used without regard to social origins. A royal decree on 12 April 1813 officially established the *Landsturm*.⁴⁶ From the outset, the *Landwehr* and *Landsturm* were controversial because they threatened the layering of Prussian society and because many conservatives were fearful of the long-term consequences of arming the population.

In the spring of 1814 Hermann von Boyen became Prussian war minister and began the task of creating a long-term peacetime army, including reserve forces. Boyen soon came up with a plan that reaffirmed the principle of universal military service and assigned all able-bodied men to one of four sections of Prussia's armed forces: the active army, the *Landwehr* of the first and second levies, and the *Landsturm*. The *Landwehr* of the first levy was to conduct limited peacetime drills and serve alongside regular forces during wartime. The *Landwehr* of the second levy, consisting of veterans of the regular army and of the first *Landwehr* levy, was to perform garrison duties in wartime. The *Landsturm* was to be an emergency mobilization of all men between the ages of seventeen and fifty not serving in the other three military forces.⁴⁷ The new law also established the princi-

ple of the one-year volunteer, which became the backbone of the state's reserve forces and one of the main elements linking Prussia's upper classes and educated middle classes with the army and the monarchy.

Boyen and the other reformers saw the *Landwehr* as an institution that would bind people and army together and create a citizen-based officer corps as a balance to the aristocratic and conservative officers of the active army. Thus, the *Landwehr* was to consist of coherent and independent units rather than serve as a source of individual replacements for the active army. Boyen wished to ensure that the *Landwehr* officer corps, in large part elected by local units, would train its own units and command them upon mobilization. The original plan called for mixing three *Landwehr* and three active battalions in a wartime brigade.⁴⁸ Boyen's proposals became law on 3 September 1814. Unfortunately, the statute was very vague and required additional implementing legislation and regulations, which gave conservative opponents an opportunity to dilute its effects.⁴⁹

The debate over the desirability and effectiveness of such a reserve system continued unabated through the next several decades and foreshadowed many of the disputes over the great military reforms of 1860. Conservatives attacked the idea of separating the line from reserve forces on political and military grounds. Those who opposed universal military service saw the *Landwehr* as an unreliable force of dubious value to the active army in wartime and one that might turn against the monarchy in a crisis. Prominent officers, from princes of the royal house to powerful figures such as Job von Witzleben, warned of the consequences of Boyen's reforms.⁵⁰ Civilian liberals, in contrast, saw the *Landwehr* and its middle-class officer corps as the "only counterweight to the noble officers of the army." In a similar vein, others saw the *Landwehr* officer as the only guarantee for the citizens' spirit in the army.⁵¹

In the years between 1815 and 1860, the *Landwehr* encountered many difficulties in finding capable officers and forming effective forces, even at the company level. *Landwehr* officers came almost entirely from very poorly trained one-year volunteers, a problem made worse by the relatively small size of the active army and the departure of officers who had experience in the wars of liberation.⁵² Numerous observers warned that the *Landwehr's* officer-related problems naturally extended to the units' overall capabilities. Prussia's failure to implement universal military service deprived the *Landwehr* of a sufficient number of experienced soldiers to replace those who left.⁵³ Shortages of funds only made these fundamental problems worse.⁵⁴

Between the end of the Napoleonic period and the Roon reforms of 1859–1860, the *Landwehr* had several opportunities to either prove its worth or demonstrate the correctness of its critics. In each case its performance confirmed that it was of marginal value as a military force. In 1831 Prussia mobilized part of its forces, including some reserves, because of the Polish uprising, and it did the same in 1832 because of the French invasion of Belgium. Each mobilization revealed numerous weaknesses, and the *Landwehr* was no exception. From the king's point of view, the *Landwehr's* performance during the Revolution of 1848 was, if anything, even worse, and this was especially true of the officer corps. The *Landwehr* units, which turned out to be weak militarily, all too frequently were less than reliable politically.⁵⁵ The *Landwehr* made, in the words of one distinguished historian, a “lamentable” showing.⁵⁶ Further mobilizations in 1850 and 1859 showed little if any improvement.⁵⁷

These weaknesses were related to both officers and units and to military as well as political issues. Many *Landwehr* officers were too old, even by Prussian standards. Some units had company-level officers who were up to forty-nine years old, and the average age in 1848 was forty-seven for captains and thirty-nine for first lieutenants, even in the combat units.⁵⁸ Despite their long years of reserve duty, many had not improved on their inadequate training prior to commissioning, a problem related partly to the government's unwillingness to provide adequate financial support, but also to the poor structure of training and the lack of practical exercises. The *Landwehr's* noncommissioned officers exhibited tremendous shortcomings in training and capabilities.⁵⁹ The army found, as many conservative officers had warned during the reform period, that it could not rely on the *Landwehr* for use in either foreign wars or domestic revolution. By the end of these sobering experiences, Prussia had acquired a new king and an aggressively conservative war minister, both bent on a thoroughgoing reform of the army's basic structure and its officer corps.



The Roon Reform of 1860

In October 1858 Prince Wilhelm of Prussia assumed the regency in place of his brother, King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, who had suffered a complete mental collapse.⁶⁰ Though a royal prince, Wilhelm had been a real officer for decades. A die-hard conservative, he had been forced to flee to England during the revolutions of 1848–1849. He was determined to effect a major change in the army and in October 1857, while not yet officially the regent,

he requested the War Ministry to prepare a proposal to deal with the deficiencies revealed by the recent crises and mobilizations.⁶¹ The war minister, Count Friedrich von Waldersee, responded with a memorandum dealing primarily with changes in the conscription system, an expansion of the army, and a reduced reliance on *Landwehr* soldiers to fill out active units during mobilization, while maintaining the two-year service obligation for conscripts.⁶²

Prince Wilhelm also asked for a reform proposal from his old friend Count Albrecht von Roon, then commanding an infantry division in Posen. Roon's reply, one of the most important documents in Prussian military history, became the basis of what is known as the Roon reforms of 1860.⁶³ Most historians have seen these reforms primarily as military efforts to improve the army's ability to mobilize its forces and to wage war, despite the fact that they clearly strengthened the monarchical and conservative nature of the army. Roon no doubt was equally interested in the external and domestic significance of his concepts.⁶⁴

The essential features of these complicated proposals were a moderate increase in the standing army, the abolition of the *Landwehr* as established by Napoleonic era reformers, the creation of a new reserve system, and the introduction of a three-year term of service for most conscripts. Roon saw the *Landwehr* as one of the main roots of the army's problems. It was, he wrote, a "politically false institution because it no longer impressed foreign powers and was of doubtful significance for both external and internal policy." It was, he went on, equally false on military grounds because it lacked the "firm soldiers' spirit" and "the certain disciplinary control necessary in a dependable military organism."⁶⁵ Roon proposed a substantially new basis for the army by ensuring that the active army and its officer corps were firmly in control of the state's armed forces and that these forces possessed an organization that could effectively organize the nation's resources for war.

In 1860 the army enacted this great reform proposal as Roon became war minister.⁶⁶ New reserve units, up to corps size in wartime, became the primary second-line military force. The *Landwehr* as a semi-independent force primarily loyal to the middle-class strata of society disappeared completely. Roon replaced it with reserve units that were an extension of the active army. These new reserve units, commanded by regular officers from the rank of major upward, would take the field with the active-duty army. The younger groups of the *Landwehr* entered the new reserve units, while the older reservists became members of the downgraded *Landwehr*.

The latter, along with the *Landsturm*, consisting of the oldest men still eligible for military duty, was intended only to perform garrison duty in rear areas. Introduction of the three-year service commitment and an overall increase in the size of the active army produced more trained enlisted men for the reserve units.⁶⁷

Although the Prussian parliament refused to approve the army's budget, the king continued to command the army independently of any parliamentary or other governmental limitations, ignoring the fact that, in theory, no funds were available. During the great constitutional conflict between 1860 and 1866, the king and his chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, ruled without a budget when the Prussian parliament refused to grant annual appropriations because of its hostility to Roon's reform program. Using his "constitutional gap" theory, Bismarck simply announced that the government would continue to collect taxes and provide funds for the army. After the victorious war against Austria, the parliament conceded the government's right to conduct the army's business in this manner.

The shadow of this confrontation, based on the king's right to command the army (*Kommandogewalt*), hung ominously over subsequent discussions of the military budget. After 1870, when the military budget became an imperial matter, the practice of granting multiyear appropriations, frequently for seven years in advance, effectively limited all but the most determined criticism of the army. While great controversies arose in subsequent years over the size of the army, neither the Prussian parliament nor the German Reichstag ever seriously challenged the king's right to command the army as he saw fit. As a result, many measures that would require parliamentary sanction in a democracy rested solely on orders of the king. The parliaments of Prussia and Germany had no voice in critical personnel matters or in internal army affairs such as doctrine and unit structure.

The Roon reforms changed the structure of the army in several less controversial ways. The final version increased the mobilized strength of the field army by some 32,000 officers and men, from about 335,000 to 367,000. Total wartime strength, including replacement and fortress units, rose from approximately 532,000 to 637,000. The active officer corps grew by about 1,200 to a total of 8,000. To overcome the resulting shortages, the army allowed selected *Landwehr* officers to join active units and shortened the courses of senior cadets and officer candidates in the war schools. At the end of the reform the active army had eighty-one regiments of infantry and forty of cavalry.⁶⁸

Finally, it should be noted that, after the reforms, the active Prussian army was basically an army of cadre units, a mobilization base to bring substantial elements of the citizenry into existing units upon mobilization. Active units were not at full strength in peacetime; they relied on reservists, all of whom had previously served two or three years on active duty, to reach wartime strength. Active officers commanded the new reserve units above the company level and in some cases at that echelon. The highest reserve rank was captain, and all reserve officers and officers of the new *Landwehr*, a second-line reserve force relegated to rear-area duty, had previously passed through the active army. The old *Landwehr* officer corps ceased to exist. All officers therefore had active or reserve commissions conferred through the regular army.⁶⁹ All this put the officer corps on the path it would follow with few exceptions or changes until the outbreak of war in 1914.

Most historians agree that King Wilhelm I pressed for the reforms primarily to bolster his army and state against potential rivals in European power politics rather than to mount an attack against his internal political enemies.⁷⁰ However, the reforms certainly bound the bulk of Prussia's armed forces more closely to the monarch and promised to make the reserve officers and their units more reliable in case of a political crisis, a fact that the opposition political parties clearly recognized at the time.⁷¹

The Officer Corps

Ideology

The Prussian army proudly displayed its conservative ideology on numerous political and social questions. This basic orientation survived the fall of the monarchy and remained intact until the rapid expansion of the army prior to the Second World War, when the substantial influx of young officers with a strong National Socialist orientation reduced traditional Prussian conservatives to isolated segments of the high officer corps. This conservative worldview had a definite impact on the army's approach to war and its relation to Prussian and German society.

The key to this conservatism was the officer corps and its ideology, recruitment process, and social position. As previously mentioned, officers took an oath to the king of Prussia rather than to any written constitution or set of basic national values beyond those traditionally associated with the Hohenzollern monarchy. This link to the Hohenzollerns was the ba-

sis of the officer corps' homogeneity and exclusivity.⁷² Prussian monarchs realized that the army and its officer corps were the ultimate guarantors of their positions. Friedrich Wilhelm IV stated this unequivocally when he said that his army was the necessary condition of the existence of the throne. In a similar, almost prophetic, vein, Bismarck once reminded Wilhelm II that as long as he had his officer corps he could do anything he wished, but should this cease to be the case, the entire situation would be different.⁷³

The officer corps, for its part, developed an allegiance to the monarchy that transcended the temporary lack of respect that emerged when kings such as Friedrich Wilhelm IV or Wilhelm II seemed hesitant or less than royal in their conduct or strength of will. Many officers retained their personal loyalty to Wilhelm II even after the disasters of the First World War, when the kaiser became a passive observer in the shadow of the semi-dictatorship of Hindenburg and Ludendorff.⁷⁴ This loyalty to the monarchy began in the cadet corps, which, in the words of one admiring general, sought to instill feelings of awe and respect for the ruling houses not only of Prussia but also of other German states and some foreign nations.⁷⁵ In return for their unquestioned loyalty, officers were generously rewarded with the prestige reserved for the highest echelons of Prussian society. The army's social standing, moreover, rose substantially during the latter decades of the nineteenth century as it basked in the glory of the wars of unification.

The commissioning process was one of the primary means of ensuring the ideological basis of the officer corps. The army desired educated officers only to the extent that this would reinforce its social basis and produce a sufficient number of officers with the skills necessary to master advances in applied technology and mathematics. The Prussian officer corps was not an educated group by the standards of modern armed forces, although it made important concessions to education over the course of the nineteenth century. The army wished to establish educational standards that would exclude the sons of lower-class families while admitting the sons of landowners, officers, lower civil servants, and other social groups deemed desirable in the officer corps.⁷⁶

Education

Although some have noted improved educational levels after the reform period, for at least the first half of the nineteenth century, the army was

sorely lacking in real educational standards for its officer corps.⁷⁷ Even as late as midcentury, numerous sources attest to the presence of many poorly educated men in an army that profited from the presence of Clausewitz, Moltke, and other talented and literate officers. Count Wrangel's boast that he conducted war with the sword and not with the pen found wide endorsement in the army.⁷⁸

Efforts by Napoleonic era reformers to establish rigid examinations to determine eligibility for commissions resulted in an 1808 regulation that affirmed the principles of knowledge and education as fundamental requirements.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, conservatives in the army frustrated all efforts to use educational requirements to transform the officer corps. In 1816 the army established "division schools" to provide rudimentary education for socially acceptable youngsters who aspired to become officers. The curricula of these schools consisted of simple mathematics, a little history and geography, and some German grammar. They had separate classes for students who wished to take the officer candidate examination and for those who hoped to pass the officer examination.⁸⁰

Prince Wilhelm (later King and Emperor Wilhelm I) headed a commission in 1825 that recommended the elimination of these miserable excuses for schools and the use of scholarships to enable the sons of poor officers to attend *Gymnasias*. The government did not accept this proposal and allowed semiliterate officer candidates to join the army if they could find regiments to accept them. Subsequent efforts by Boyen to require that all officer candidates possess a certificate of eligibility for higher schooling also failed. The first major step in raising educational levels came in 1854, when the army abolished the division schools, notorious for their low standards. In place of the nine divisions schools, General Eduard von Peucker, the general inspector of military training and education, established the first three war schools at Neisse, Potsdam, and Erfurt. Not to be confused with the *Allgemeine Kriegsschule* (the old name of the War Academy), these centralized institutions remained key components of the commissioning process until 1914.⁸¹

By the mid-nineteenth century, those who argued for improved educational standards for commissions had begun to make some progress. Peucker's efforts in 1856–1857 to impose the *Primareife* (equivalent to a high school diploma) as the minimal educational requirement failed, but a few years later the Roon reforms nearly succeeded on that point.⁸² In 1862 Wilhelm I accepted Roon's proposal in principle but balked at implementation.⁸³ This only delayed the inevitable, and in 1870 a cabinet order