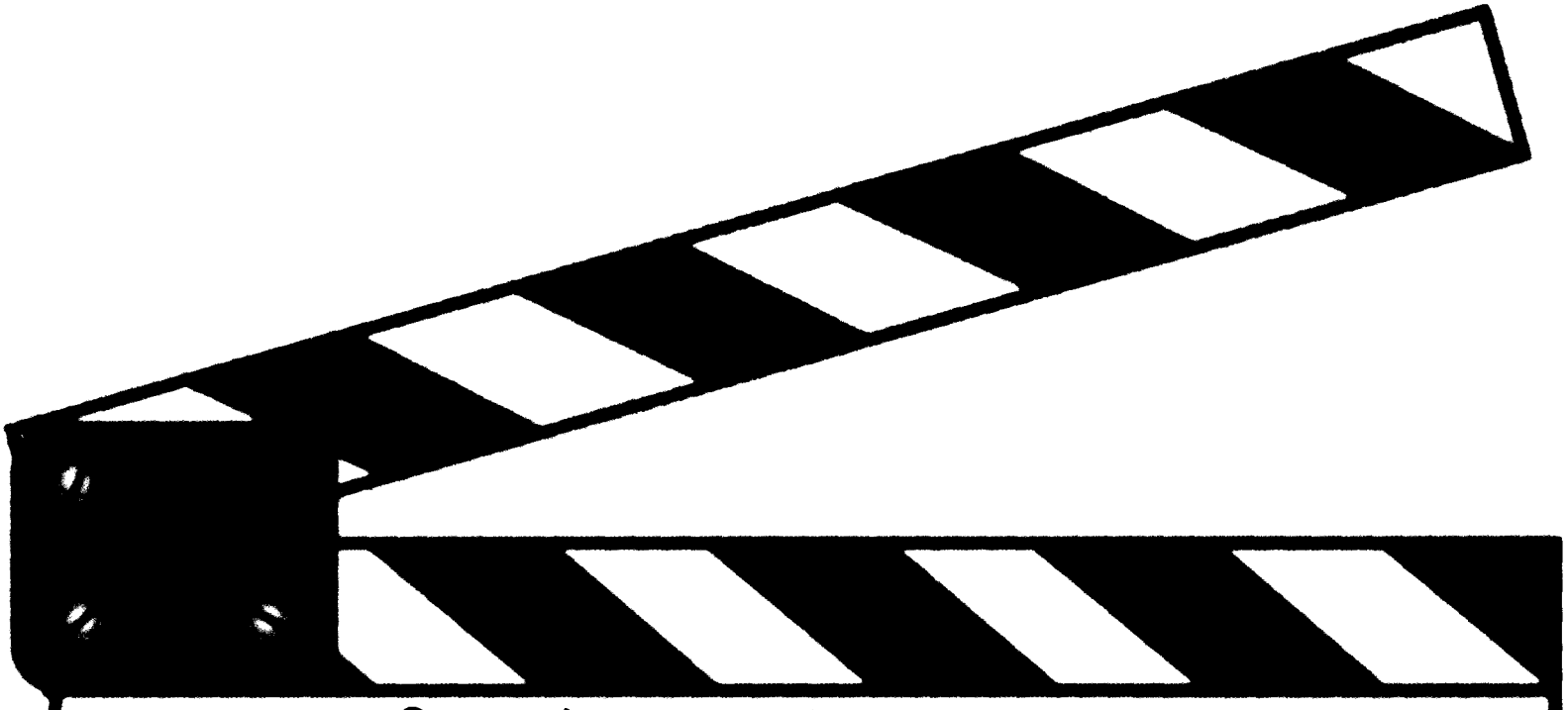
8-1997

"An ill-timed conservatism": tactical instruction at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, 1874-1914

Joseph David Prestia



Project Name: Prestia_Joseph_1997

Date:	**Patron:**	**Specialist:**
7/17/15	DTP	Jackie

Project Description:

Master Thesis

Hardware Specs:

this fact, British leaders tried numerous ways to make the realities of the Great War "fit" the theories they learned at Sandhurst.

I certify that I have read this thesis and found that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

John D. Treadway, Thesis Director

John L. Gordon, Jr.

William H. Thorn

"An Ill-Timed Conservatism": Tactical Instruction at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, 1874-1914

By

JOSEPH DAVID PRESTIA

A. B., Colgate University, 1994

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the University of Richmond

in Candidacy

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in History

August 1997

Richmond, Virginia

Table of Contents

List of Maps

Acknowledgements

As with any great endeavor (using the word "great" as an adjective of size, not necessarily of quality), this paper is not the work of solely the person whose name appears on the title page. Many people have assisted me with this project and this stage of my education. I would first like to thank my family, especially my parents, Joseph Prestia and Laurette Anne Riggio-Prestia. Of course, my teachers have been an invaluable source of information, ideas, and assistance. I would especially like to thank Professor John Treadway who has devoted many hours of his time editing countless drafts and has offered tremendous insight into the process of constructing a work of this size. I also wish to extend my appreciation to Professors John Gordon and William Thorn who contributed their time to this endeavor as readers on my committee.

Additionally, several people outside of the realm of family and university have donated time in helping me with various research questions and sources. I very much would like to thank Ms. M. De Lee, office of the Archivist, Royal Military College, Sandhurst for allowing me to search the records at the College and aided my efforts to find material which would further my research. I would also like to thank the anonymous, although patient, people at the Imperial War Museum, the British Library, and the Public Records Office, Kew.

Not least of all, I would like to offer my thanks to my friends, both at the University of Richmond and elsewhere, for their tolerance of my worries, whining, moaning and groaning. I am sure that I have tested everybody's patience, and I thank all for being as rich in that virtue as they have been.

Introduction:

"Something of the Ways of the Military World"

"...A writer in a recent number of a popular military journal complains that the Gentleman Cadet has become a somewhat pampered individual.... Yet the same writer admits that, in spite of being 'dry nursed,' and provided with 'scrumptuous [sic] meals, including a dinner of courses at eight o'clock, with wine and cigarettes,' there has not so far been any apparent deterioration on the part of the officers of our Army."[1]

— Maj. A. F. Mockler-Ferryman, quoting Col. R. H. Rosser, *United Service Magazine*, February 1899.

From a military and strategic standpoint, the First World War was, for the British and most other belligerents, a disaster: economies were pressured to their limits and few events exemplified tactical, operational, and strategic futility more than the Western Front. Since 1918, politicians, journalists, and historians alike have endeavored to assess the reasons for the catastrophe that was the Great War and to place blame on anyone's shoulders but their own. Although the British government made an inquiry into the adequacy of training at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, shortly after the war, historians have largely forgotten military education as an important element of the

[1] Major A. F. Mockler-Ferryman, *Annals of Sandhurst. A Chronicle of the Royal Military College* (London: William Heiemann, 1900), 65.

Crown's strategic position.[2] The failure of historians to examine the intellectual preparation of the British military leadership is peculiar, especially as writers have often addressed the "incompetence" of the officer class. What was taught at Sandhurst influenced the way military leaders thought, especially in matters of artillery preparation, rapid tactical deployment, and unit mobility. In these and other matters, the professors, by way of the curriculum, established a series of pseudo-scientific military "laws" and "proved" their validity through the use of historical examples. The importance of the Royal Military College and its curriculum grew tremendously in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In many ways, Sandhurst was more important to the British army at the turn of the twentieth century than at any other time since its founding.

Exasperated by the low level of officer expertise exhibited by those commanding the King's land forces against Napoleon, the British government established the Royal Military College, Sandhurst (RMC), in 1802 in order to improve the quality of infantry and cavalry officers.[3] The RMC was the second of three British institutions of military education that would constitute the intellectual backbone of the army by 1914. The oldest was the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, founded in 1741 to train the "technical" arms of the artillery and engineering corps. "The Shop," as many military men called it,

---

[2] Great Britain, War Office, Board of Education, *Report of an Inspection of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, Held by the Board of Education on the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, and 24th October 1919*, WO 152, Sandhurst Collection.

[3]Brian Bond, *The Victorian Army and the Staff College, 1854-1914* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), 17, 51.

continued to train the officers of these two branches until after World War I.[4] In 1858, the Crown established the Staff College to train qualified commissioned officers of all arms in staff duties and strategy.[5]

Unlike the Staff College, Sandhurst and Woolwich had no system of competitive admission when they were created. Although "The Shop" instituted a restricted system of admission in 1863, Sandhurst remained an optional avenue for prospective officers who desired to enter the cavalry or infantry. By far the greatest number of officers purchased their commissions. Over three thousand of the officers appointed in 1860 bought their posts; only 836 did not.[6] The army abolished the purchase of commission in 1871, and in 1874, after many reversals of policy, the Royal Military College became the sole means of acquiring a cavalry or infantry commission and instituted a competitive examination for admission.[7] With all of the army's new infantry and cavalry officers passing through the RMC on the way to their commands, the curriculum of the College took on new importance.

---

[4] Ibid., 11, 55. For more information about the Staff College and the Royal Military Academy, Woolich, see Captain F. G. Guggisberg, *'The Shop': The Story of the Royal Military Academy* (London: n.p., 1900); Colonel K. W. Maurice-Jones, *The Shop Story, 1900-1939* (Woolich: n.p., 1955); Michael Yardly, *Sandhurst: A Documentary* (London: Harrap, 1987); and Brevet-Major A. R. Godwin-Austen, *The Staff and the Staff College* (London: Constable and Company, 1927).

[5] Ibid., 74.

[6] Ibid., 17, 29.

[7] Mockler-Ferryman, *Annals of Sandhurst*, 65-6.

The "Gentlemen Cadets" of late-nineteenth-century Sandhurst studied Military Engineering, Military Administration, Military Law, Topography, French, German, Military Exercises (Drill, Gymnastics, and Riding), and Tactics.[8] Well-placed people in Britain questioned the rigor of the academic coursework. A 1902 Committee of Enquiry believed Sandhurst's examination system "[encouraged] the custom of idleness with a brief period of cram" and the Gentlemen Cadets knew more about cleaning their boots than cleaning a rifle.[9] Unofficial publicists like Major A. F. Mockler-Ferryman did not aid the RMC's academic reputation by devoting only three pages of a 318-page book on Sandhurst to academics. The rest of the volume described the cricket matches, amateur theatrical productions, and such. For many, the most important part of the Sandhurst experience was to be found in the social connections made among the Gentlemen Cadets. To be sure, at least according to Mockler-Ferryman, the student "will have learned something of the ways of the military world," but it was the social element which saved a marginal "G. C." from "[wasting his] time."[10]

The social significance of the Sandhurst experience notwithstanding, what the cadets learned and what the professors taught them influenced the military mind-set of the generation of officers that would lead the British Expeditionary Force during the First World War. Sandhurst, however, was not the only place in the United Kingdom whose

---

[8] Ibid., 65-7, 284-92.

[9] Bond, *The Victorian Army and the Staff College*, 184-5.

[10] Mockler-Ferryman, *Annals of Sandhurst*, 66.

professors used historical events as part of the curriculum. The RMC participated in a trend in British higher education which attempted to deduce the "lessons of history" to "scientifically" proven fact. This process, coupled with the nature of the tactical curriculum, created officers ill-prepared to modern war and unable to adapt to battlefield reality.

Chapter One:

Sandhurst and the Science of History

"All successive historical situations are only transitory stages in the endless course of human society from the lower to the higher. Each stage is necessary, and therefore justified for the time and conditions to which it owes its origin. But in the newer and higher conditions which gradually develop in its own bosom, each loses its validity and justification."[1]
— Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*

The mainstream vogues of the British intelligentsia strongly influenced the development and outlook of the Royal Military College's tactical coursework. Although it would be erroneous to assert that the methods and products of British intellectual life represented an all-pervasive mental monolith, the historian would be equally ill-advised to argue that the curriculum at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, operated within a vacuum, uninfluenced by the events in Britain and Europe at large. The tactical curriculum at the RMC fell victim to the trend of applying scientific methods — especially the formulation of "laws" and "theories" — to the study of events ultimately decided by human frailty or a one-time combination of factors which could never be reproduced. This method was not part of a recent fad, although the practice acquired a new batch of followers after mid-century. The "scientification" process had existed for decades. For example, Auguste Comte wrote about the continuity and development of all

[1] As quoted in Maurice Mandelbaum, *History of Man & Reason* (London; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 67-9; Greta Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought. The Interaction between Biological and Social Theory* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980), 67.

elements of Man and emphasized the connections between past and future and that these junctures could be discerned by the application of scientific principles.[2] The thinkers who most encouraged the application of theory to history were Charles Darwin (albeit indirectly), G. W. F. Hegel, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels.

Late-nineteenth-century philosophers applied Darwin's theory of evolution and auxillary concepts to a plethora of social phenomena which they desired to explain. In his *Principles of Economics*, Alfred Marshall drew parallels between economic and biological development. In fact, many defenders of free trade policies, imperialistic practices, and the social order based their arguments upon natural selection. Although many present-day historians agree that a doctrine resembling Darwin's would have found inevitably its way into the intellectual's repertoire (both Comte and Herbert Spencer sought to find applications of scientific theory to social development) Darwin became the focus of much attention.[3] By 1894, W. H. Mallock asserted that Darwin's natural selection

> provided sociologists with a fundamental and general principle by means of which social changes could be seen ... and, above all, it supplied them, by its account of the struggle for existence, with a theory which enabled them to reduce to some common and intelligible process the apparently endless varieties of social change and action. It seemed as

---

[2] Mandelbaum, *History of Man & Reason*, 67-9; Greta Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought*, 3-4.

[3] Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought*, 4, 21, 35.

> though suddenly it had made social science vertebrate, giving it some framework round which to group its details.[4]

Some historians argued their thesis along Darwinian lines, such as Walter Bagehot in his book on liberal political systems, *Physics and Politics*.[5] Although Darwin's natural selection was an influential and widely imitated hypothesis, theories of the dialectical progression of history — such as those espoused by Hegel, Marx and Engles — eventually gained more long-term acceptance than biological axioms transposed onto social events.

Some scholars like D. G. Ritchie combined the Hegelian dialectic with Darwin's natural selection.[6] More historians tended to subscribe to the Marxist rendition of historical development. To Engels and others, "Marx discovered the law of development of human history" in the same way that Darwin established the laws surrounding the evolution of the human species.[7] Hegelian and Marxist dialectics — as well as the use of biological laws (like natural selection) as analogies — were attempts by historians and other intellectuals to discern some sort of scientific explanation for the social, economic, and political evolution.

---

[4] Ibid., 4.

[5] Ibid., 42.

[6] Ibid., 47.

[7] Mandelbaum, *History of Man & Reason* , 76.

A more notable champion of the scientification of history was Leopold von Ranke. Ranke advocated the methodical use of documentary sources in an effort to discern the "facts" surrounding an event. When one composed history, the author should abstain from distorting the self-evident truism by injecting information based upon non-verifiable evidence, such as material extracted from folk tale or legend. Only the primary source could lead the historian to the realities of the past beyond the fact into the realm of credible interpretation and to show "what actually happened [*wie es eigentlich gewesen*]."[8] Once the historian identified the fact and the surrounding meaning, Ranke demanded that the author's telling of the tale have literary merit. History was to be both "art and science," accurate and well-written.[9]

Ranke's exact meanings of "science" and the "science of history" are quite problematic. On the one hand, he certainly believed that much about procedure could be learned from the natural sciences: the careful examination of evidence, the testing of a hypothesis, and the reliance upon experimental results (i.e., facts) to determine the resulting theory. There was no laboratory for "testing" historical hypotheses, and few (if

---

[8]Quoted from Leopold von Ranke, "Introduction to the *History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations*," in *The Secret of World History*, ed. & trans. Roger Wines, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1981), 58; Leonard Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 2.

[9]Rudolf Vierhaus, "Historiography between Science and Art," in *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, eds.Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 199), 61. (Quoted from Ranke's "Analecta" to the *Französische Geschichte, vornehmlich im sechzehnten und siebzehnten Jahrhundert.*)

any) objective incidents that could be considered as "facts." Ranke ignored this problem. Inherent in his writings about history and past events is the belief that one could ascertain an absolute truism from a document. There was in Ranke's mind only one set of facts. Those which were not part of this collection were mere distortions. The object of the historian was to identify that "one idea, which refers to the authentic life of the world, the inner life of nations, and therewith to God."[10]

Whether society, humankind, or the past developed with or without divine intervention, the belief that an absolute, discernable truth was widely held by intellectuals of the day and was spread to others through educational institutions. Maurice Mandelbaum has asserted that two general trends of teaching and thinking about institutional and social development existed in the late-nineteenth century. The first style involved viewing happenings as a series of "individual changes" where the only "object of historical investigation may be regarded as constituting a whole only to the extent to which there existed a particular sequence of events which were causally related."[11] The other vogue, according to Mandelbaum, was more determinist. To other historians, incidents occurred in a predestined pattern, normally to the betterment of society.[12] This

---

[10]Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History* , 13-5.

[11] Ibid., 109.

[12] Ibid.

second intellectual current was prevalent in the history curricula at Oxford and Cambridge.

History instructors at the British universities in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries did not encourage the liberal questioning of "facts" and interpretations as they presented them to their students. Instead, the study of history — which included almost exclusively the Classic civilizations and the development of the British political system — became a religious pursuit, deifying the "broad Victorian consensus about God, country, and good."[13] University students learned that these basic "English" beliefs in monarch, God, country, and fair play helped to propel the United Kingdom to the forefront of world economic and military power and would maintain the realm's position at the forefront of the world's stage. Historians argued in their classrooms that these patriotic and moral values represented all that was honest and true in Britain, and employed historic examples as their evidence. Because historians at Oxford and Cambridge were spinning a patriotic yarn, a student would not and could not question what was being taught lest he seem "un-British."[14]

In essence, the lecturers taught history as an ultimate truth with lessons to be learned by any who sought to heed the message inherent in its presentation. "Historians," according to Reba Soffer, "believed that in their teaching and writing they were

---

[13]Reba N. Soffer, *Discipline and Power. The University, History, & the Making of an English Elite, 1870-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 3, 9-12.

[14] Ibid., 5-6, 11, 21-2.

continuing a tradition which ... led to a discovery of truth proven by historical events."[15] The "sense of inevitableness" conveyed in the explanation of the historical development of this "truth" was due in large part to the fact that the instructors, through the coursework, illustrated that the basic moral virtues which made Britain and the British strong for centuries had changed little, if any, over time.[16] The curricula at the universities represented a trend of scientific historical thought like Darwinian analogies and the Marxist theory of historical evolution, but Mandelbaum did not identify one additional trend, the broad explanation of the unchanging "morals of history" with historical events as the evidence behind these static theoretical truisms.

This method of teaching history was founded upon the scientific method of research, formulation of a hypothesis, experimentation, and the creation of a functioning theory. In the discipline of history, however, "experimentation" represented the examination of various events to prove the hypothesis; a moral which, once sufficiently "proven," became an ultimate truth of history, equally applicable at any time or in any place. Many students recognized that all of the various factors surrounding the specific events could never be replicated, and, therefore, the occurrences could not be duplicated like a laboratory experiment. This manner of teaching history was, albeit dubious, fairly benign so long as it was employed at the civilian universities.

---

[15] Ibid., 5. The curriculum itself was a tradition; it changed little from 1870 to 1920. Ibid., 12.

[16] Ibid., 3-4, 32-3.

When instructors at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, employed this technique of using historical events as evidence to prove an all-encompassing thesis, the "truth" of which was unquestionable, they unwittingly elevated history and its "lessons" to divine law. Unlike the similar teaching styles at Oxford and Cambridge, the practice was hardly harmless. Military history, in contrast to the general British history taught at the universities, was an applied science; the "theories" resulting from its study formed the basis of British military doctrine. The British military leadership's guiding principle — that military history was a faultless arbitrator and muse — was perhaps best expressed by Colonel George F. R. Henderson, professor at the Royal Military College from 1889 to 1892, and at the Staff College from 1892 to 1900:

> ...Military history offers a more comprehensive view of those processes than even active service; the platform is loftier, and every phase of warfare, from the marches of the great armies to the forays of the guerrilla, comes under observation[.] ... The art of war ... is crystallised [sic] in a few great principles; and it is the study of military history alone that makes such principles so familiar that to apply them, or at all events to respect them, becomes a matter of instinct.[17]

In short, history was the best instructor of the tactical axioms in which every British officer should be well-versed. To be sure, the Sandhurst version of military history also emphasized certain moral and psychological virtues every officer needed — "courage,

---

[17] George F. R. Henderson, *The Science of War. A Collection of Essays and Lectures, 1891-1903* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1916), xxv, xxvii, xxxv, 48.

stamina, enthusiasm, determination, [and] disciplined obedience."[18] These moral qualities, although normally receiving only oblique references in the textbooks, formed a major element of tactical doctrine as it was expressed by its authors. Generally the textbook authors stressed historical examples to illustrate tactical fundamentals and reinforced the seemingly unchanging nature of warfare from the 1740s to the turn of the twentieth century.

Between the time Sandhurst attendance became mandatory for an infantry or cavalry commission and the outbreak of the Great War (1874-1914), the College utilized two textbooks in its tactics courses.[19] From the beginning of the period until 1899, Major-General C. Francis Clery's text, *Minor Tactics*, was the volume of choice. A great number of editions later, the faculty at Sandhurst dropped the Clery work from the curriculum and began using C. M. DeGruyther's *Tactics for Beginners* commencing in the 1900 academic year.[20]

Many of the tactical principles which pupils read and were tested upon were from the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries seemed to reappear in more recent conflicts. Of particular interest to Clery, DeGruyther, and the faculty at Sandhurst were the two

---

[18] Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground. The British Army, the Western Front, and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 87.

[19] Bond, *The Victorian Army and the Staff College*, 29. This is not to imply, however, that these two textbooks were the only military theories printed and possibly employed at the RMC. See especially E. A. Altham's *Principles of War Historically Illustrated*, which will be addressed in a later chapter.

[20] Mockler-Ferryman, *Annals of Sandhurst*, 289; *Synopsis of the Course of Instruction at the Royal Military College, 1888*. The author found no information about the exact reason for the change.

greatest military minds of post-Louis XIV era: Frederick the Great and Napoleon Bonaparte. The tactical principles employed by these two innovative and successful battlefield leaders were the foundation of the British tactical doctrine. Teachers employed historical examples from Frederick's and Napoleon's wars as well as from the Seven Weeks' War (Austro-Prussian War) of 1866 in order to illustrate certain tactical principles. Thus, these conflicts came to influence strongly British military thought.

Sandhurst professors participated in the ongoing trend of attempting to apply a scientific theory or process to the study of history. By doing so, they elevated military doctrine to scientific theory, a truth cogent for all eras of modern warfare. Although the they did not specifically apply a Marxist dialectic or a version of natural selection, the officer-instructors of Sandhurst proved the validity of tactical principles by illustrating their relevance in the late-nineteenth century as well as in the campaigns of Napoleon and Frederick the Great.

Chapter Two:

A Tale of Two Burkersdorfs: Tactics of Offense and Defense

"... The object of the assailant's manœuvres will be to place portions of his force on the flank, or flanks, of the position he is attacking. If he can accomplish this, the effect, moral and physical, of the enfilade fire he brings to bear upon the enemy's front will be far greater than which attended a similar operation when fire was of less account. In short, the process of envelopment is easier than it used to be; and envelopment, which means that the enemy is under fire from several directions, is much more effective than in the past."[1]

- Col. G. F. R. Henderson
The Science of War

Sandhurst professors had many battles to choose from in order to "prove" adequately the "truth" of the various military principles they wished to teach. The vast majority of the selected examples came from the mid-eighteenth century, the Napoleonic era, or the Wars of German Unification. When discussing methods of conducting a proper and effective attack and defense, the teachers selected two battles at the otherwise insignificant and forgotten village of Burkersdorf in Silesia in order to illustrate the necessity of quick maneuver, well-directed mass fire, and high troop morale. The first of these contests at Burkersdorf was in 1762 during the Seven Years' War (1756-63).

[1] Henderson, *The Science of War*, 74.

Of European land forces that have taken the to field of battle since the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), the small British army of the Victorian and Edwardian age had the most in common with the Prussian military of the famed soldier-king Frederick II (1740-86), better known to history as Frederick the Great. Both Great Britain and Prussia had a small population base in comparison to the other powers of their days (Austria, France, and Russia) and, therefore, had fewer men available to bear arms in service of the monarch. This demographic factor forced both Victorian Britain and eighteenth-century Prussia to maintain small, highly-trained armies[2]. As a result, both states had to adopt strategic and tactical doctrines which attempted to minimize casualties while still achieving the desired objectives in the shortest war possible. Even had the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) of the First World War not been a small, highly-trained unit like Frederick's army, the Prussian monarch's battlefield innovations were worthy of note because of their success within the necessary strategic limits. Frederick's skill as a tactician became apparent to his contemporaries during his wars for Silesia, especially the Seven Years' War.

Frederick's Prussia had acquired Silesia from Austria in the War of Austrian Succession (1740-42). Additionally, Frederick thwarted the ambitions of the new Austrian Empress, Maria Theresa, when she attempted to regain the resource-rich region

---

[2]It is worth noting that the curriculum designers did not choose Napoleonic France, a more common basis for analogy in the French and American traditions, because of the differences in population and army composition. Napoleonic France had mass constription (*levée en masse*) where Britain did not.

in a war lasting from 1744 to 1745. With Prussia's membership in the elite clique of Great Powers (albeit the "least" of the *Grossmächte*), along with its annexation of Silesia confirmed by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen) in 1748, the other Powers of Continental Europe (France, Russia, and Austria) became concerned about this new state near the geographic center of the continent which could threaten the interests of any one of them at any time.[3] In the summer of 1756, the governments of Russia, Austria, Sweden, Saxony, and France decided to maim Prussia while its power could still be challenged.[4] Frederick, learning of the plan, decided to launch a preemptive strike, invading Saxony in August. By 10 September 1756, he had captured Dresden, the Saxon capital. Britain, already at war with its ancient enemy France in India and North America, decided to align itself with Frederick and sent Prussia financial assistance. Even with this British aid, however, the tide soon turned. Prussia faced the tremendous problem of being geographically surrounded.[5]

---

[3] R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History*, 4th. ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 690-4. For further information on the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle and the First and Second Silesian Wars see Gerhard Ritter, *Frederick the Great: A Historical Perspective* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970) and Dennis E. Showalter, *The Wars of Frederick the Great* (London; New York: Longman, 1996).

[4] This was the so-called "Diplomatic Revolution of 1756." Until this point (with the possible exception of Richelieu's diplomacy), relations among states were largely a function of dynastic rivalries and considerations. Beginning in the years surrounding the Diplomatic Revolution, the rise of actual foreign policies based upon security and monetary factors emerged as well as relations conducted by diplomats (largely glorified spies at this point in time) based upon a certain *raison d'état*.

[5] Ibid., 730.

Although Frederick enjoyed some victories during the initial months of the war — most notably at Prague on 6 May 1757 — Prussia's precarious strategic position became glaringly exposed. By September 1757, the Austrian, French, and Russian armies had encircled Berlin; some Austrian detachments even plundered the Prussian capital. Although Frederick won some glorious victories, for example at Leuthen (6 December 1757), the Prussian army was losing men at an alarming rate and the army as a whole was growing tired. Some time later, on 12 August 1759, Frederick suffered what was perhaps his greatest defeat at the Battle of Kunersdorf. The Prussian army sustained over 19,000 causalities and lost 172 cannon.[6] Following the battle, Frederick told his foreign minister that the government in Berlin "ought to be thinking of [its] safety."[7] The government had reason to worry. On 9 October 1760, Berlin was again sacked, this time by Austrian and Russian detachments. The war which had been raging since 1757 had challenged Prussia's resources, both financial and military. By the end of 1761, the British government was threatening to cut off Prussia's financial support and an Austro-Russian force had successfully outmaneuvered Frederick in Silesia and burned part of the Prussian capital. The Sword of Damocles hung over the Great Frederick's head; Prussia needed a miracle to survive.[8]

---

[6] Ibid., 732-6.

[7] Christopher Duffy, T*he Military Life of Frederick the Great* (New York: Atheneum, 1986), 189.

[8] Ibid., 730-8. For further information about the Seven Years's War see the following: Thomas Carlyle, *History of Friedrich II of Prussia, called Frederick the Great* (various editions) and Dennis Showalter's *The Wars of Frederick the Great.* For information about the fascinating Anglo-Prussian connection, see Karl W. Schweizer, *England, Prussia, and the Seven Years' War: Studies in Alliance*

On 5 January 1762, the "miracle of the House of Hohenzollern" came in the form of the death of the Russian Empress Elizabeth, a woman who detested Frederick and Prussia for any number of reasons. Peter III, Elizabeth's nephew and successor, on the other hand, held Frederick in esteem "bordering on idolatry."[9] One of his first actions as tsar was to apprise Frederick of Russia's receptiveness to any peace overtures which the Prussian monarch might make. Frederick, seeking to improve his international position any way possible, released Russian prisoners-of-war. Peter, delighted that his idol seemed to be reciprocating his desire to end their hostilities, pulled Russia out of the anti-Frederick bloc and aligned his empire with Prussia, signing the Treaty of St. Petersburg on 15 May 1762. Sweden followed Russia's lead and used this moment to bow out of the increasingly frustrating and financially debilitating war.[10] With Prussia's northern and eastern frontiers now secured — and a British force preoccupying the French in the West — Frederick was able to focus on driving the Austrian army out of the Silesian territory it had succeeded in reoccupying. [11]

Policies and Diplomacy (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1989) as well as Schweizer's, *Frederick the Great, William Pitt, and Lord Bute: the Anglo-Prussian Alliance, 1756-1763* (New York: Garland, 1991).

[9] F. W. Longman, *Frederick the Great and the Seven Years' War* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1881), 219. Information about the intrigues in Russia at this time is readily available. See Herbert H. Kaplan, *Russia and the Outbreak of the Seven Years' War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); R. Nisbet Bain, *Peter III, Emperor of Russia; the Story of a Crisis and a Crime* (Westminster: A. Constable & Company, 1902).

[10]Ibid. The Treaty of St. Petersburg (5 May 1762) established Russia's alliance with Prussia and the Treaty of Hamburg (22 May 1762) confirmed Sweden's exit. See William L. Langer, *An Encyclopedia of World History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 504.

[11] Dupuy & Dupuy, *Encyclopedia of Military History*, 738.

Commanding the Austrian army in Silesia was Field Marshal Leopold Daun. Daun was a marginally competent military leader who had acquired a reputation for an over-cautiousness often bordering on strategic inertia. Following Frederick's disaster at Kunersdorf, Daun had failed to exploit his advantage by not pursuing the Prussians.[12] Daun, however, recognized Frederick's recently improved strategic situation and formulated a new defensive strategy centered on the fortress of Schweidnitz, a heavily fortified position which Austria had taken from the Prussians in 1761. Schweidnitz guarded the mountain passes leading to the county of Glatz and was an excellently located supply depot less than fifty miles from the pre-1756 Austrian border. Daun concluded that the army that controlled the fortress of Schweidnitz would have the greatest leverage at the negotiating table. Determined to protect Schweidnitz, Daun placed his army in a number of fortified locations in the hills and mountains surrounding the fortress. For his part, Frederick also realized the importance of Schweidnitz, but understood that his smaller Prussian army could not take the stronghold directly. He therefore decided to attempt to outmaneuver the Austrians in hope of drawing part of Daun's army away from Schweidnitz. Eventually, Frederick expanded his plan and wanted to place his army astride the Austrian lines of communication. Daun learned of the Prussian leader's intentions and began to shore up his positions to the south of

---

[12] Stephen Crane, *Great Battles of the World*, 2nd. ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1901), 102; Duffy, *The Military Life of Frederick the Great*,, 189.

Schweidnitz, including a previously prepared fortified camp in the Waldenburg Hills near the village of Burkersdorf.[13]

The Austrian position at Burkersdorf was impressive. The fortified camp rested atop a steep series of heights overlooking the village. The only potential topographic weakness was a valley which separated the eastern-center of the army from its far eastern wing. In order to compensate for this potential danger, the slopes overlooking the valley were fortified by four redoubts and numerous tightly constructed palisades. The center of the camp was surrounded by a large abatis and much of the slope was covered with dense brush. When the armies met each other 19-21 July, the Prussians had one further disadvantage: the weather. It had rained the evenings of the 18-20 July. Not only did Frederick and his officers have to contend with the heavily fortified Austrian position — entrenched just below the apex of a steep slope, surrounded by various other field fortifications — but the ground leading to the top of the heights was wet and slippery. A traditional direct assault would have been futile.[14]

Frederick, however, was anything but a conventional warrior. Indeed, he was innovative to the point of daring. Part of the reason for his habitual use of experimental tactics was because Frederick was both chief military officer and the head of state.

---

[13] Duffy, The *Military Life of Frederick the Great,* 234-5. For more information, see also Ulrich Freye and Helmut Schnitter, "Reflexionen über die 'General-Principia vom Kriege' Friedrichs II von Preussen," *Militärgeschichte* 1990 29(2):194-98; and Siegfried Fiedler, "Die Menschenführung in der Armee Friedrichs des Grossen," *Zeitschrift für Heereskunde* 1982 46(301): 61-4; (302-303): 100-4; (304): 141-5.

[14] Crane, *Great Battles of the World*, 102-4; Duffy, *The Military Life of Frederick the Great*, 237-39.

Without the concern of military shortcoming affecting his military position, his standing at court, or his life and property, Frederick could tinker with tactical convention without fear of professional or personal repercussions.

The Prussian King's most famous tactical innovation was the oblique order of battle. At the onset of his reign, most European generals deployed their armies in a standard line formation. The oblique order was really a set of two configurations which was most effective against an enemy whose brigades were configured in a line abreast layout. The first was called "attack in echelon." The name of the plan described what it was — an advance of a body of infantry in echelon, with the most forward end of the construction stronger than the aft, and with the reinforced side outflanking the enemy army. The second element of the oblique order, "marching by lines," involved an initial arrangement of the army in a line, but the soldiers then had to perform a series of maneuvers to extend the line into an echelon extending outward from the original line. The Prussian army was now configured to strike at the enemy's flank.[15]

Both elements of Frederick's frequently employed oblique order were designed to facilitate the Prussians' ability to assail their enemy's flank. The "marching by line" order had the further advantage of discouraging Frederick's enemy from advancing on the Prussian ranks by placing any army's flank in danger from the moment it stepped forward. For either the "march by line" or "attack in echelon" to be effective on the

---

[15] Brent Nosworthy, *The Anatomy of Victory. Battle Tactics, 1689-1763* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1990), 192-3, 371; Jeremy Black, *European Warfare, 1660-1815* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1994), 64.

battlefield, the Prussian army had to finish its maneuver before the opposing army could advance on Frederick's brigades. Both actions required Prussian brigades to assume their proper place in good order as rapidly as possible. Frederick knew that he had to train his army to execute his tactical formations almost automatically. The Prussian infantry was intensely drilled to maintain cohesion of its ranks and files while expeditiously shifting formation. In addition, the king ordered his infantry units to advance with the bayonet as their principal weapon because firing — especially with muzzle-loading muskets — required stopping, which delayed the execution of his tactical formations. Infantry could fire only when they were exceedingly close to their enemy, about forty or fifty paces away. Frederick's infantry was highly trained to maintain cohesiveness and to execute its orders rapidly.[16]

By way of his complex battlefield maneuvers, Frederick had created a problem for his army's effectiveness. The level of training required for both his infantry and cavalry to perform his tactical procedures was such that men could not be trained quickly. Although maintaining a well-drilled army was relatively easy in peace, in war the proportion of highly skilled soldiers in the brigades declined as casualties mounted. As the Prussian ranks were increasingly filled by green troops, combat speed and, therefore, effectiveness declined.[17] As a result of this predicament, Frederick concluded that

---

[16] Black, *European Warfare*, 64-5; Nosworthy, *Anatomy of Victory*, 191.

[17] Nosworthy, *Anatomy of Victory*, 189-90.

Prussia's wars must be "short and lively."[18] "A war of any length would bring about a slow destruction of our admirable discipline; it would depopulate our country, and sap our resources."[19]

Great mobility was Frederick's method of maintaining unit integrity and reducing the element of chance in warfare. Loss of unit cohesion decreased the firepower of musket-armed infantry and reduced cavalry action to a series of individual skill matches where "officers become no more valuable than simple troopers."[20] By keeping brigades or platoons as solid as possible, the firepower of the infantry and the shock value of the cavalry increased. To Frederick, cohesion and battle losses held an inversely proportional relationship: the greater the cohesion, the fewer casualties, and the best way to maintain cohesion was through a vigorous attack.[21] As added insurance against pitched losses, Frederick wanted to outmaneuver his adversary, thus depriving the enemy army and its commander of the will to fight. Skillful maneuvering was a key element of Frederick's battle plan at Burkersdorf in 1762.

Frederick could not risk a direct assault against the heavily fortified heights overlooking the village of Burkersdorf. Such an assault would have cost him the lives of a large portion of his force. In addition, a number of Austrian grenadiers occupied a

---

[18] Quoted in Duffy, *Military Life of Frederick the Great*, 78.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Quoted in Nosworthy, *Anatomy of Victory*, 168; Black, *European Warfare*, 60.

[21] Duffy, *Military Life of Frederick the Great*, 78.

castle sitting in the midst of tall poplars just east of the village. Frederick's first task was to expel the grenadiers from this excellent forward position, which was done with some difficulty on the evening of 20 July. While the bulk of both armies slept, a detachment of Prussian soldiers, presumably engineers, constructed a breastwork extending out from the east side of the castle.[22] Behind this improvised fortification, Frederick assembled one of the largest single batteries ever seen — fifty-five guns, including "forty-five 7- and 10-pounder howitzers, and ten heavy 12-pounder cannon."[23] The cannon were aimed at the valley to prevent Daun receiving any reinforcements; the howitzers were pointed at the field fortifications on the heights above Burkersdorf.[24] Shortly after dawn, the Prussian battery opened fire. The bombardment continued for hours and the Prussians had included some blank cartridges in the battery in order to "shell shock" the Austrians by the deafening gunfire and thereby erode their morale.[25] The results, both physical and psychological, were crushing. One Austrian officer wrote that the cannonade "wrought terrible devastation" and the noise made cavalry horses break their halters and run for "half a league."[26]

---

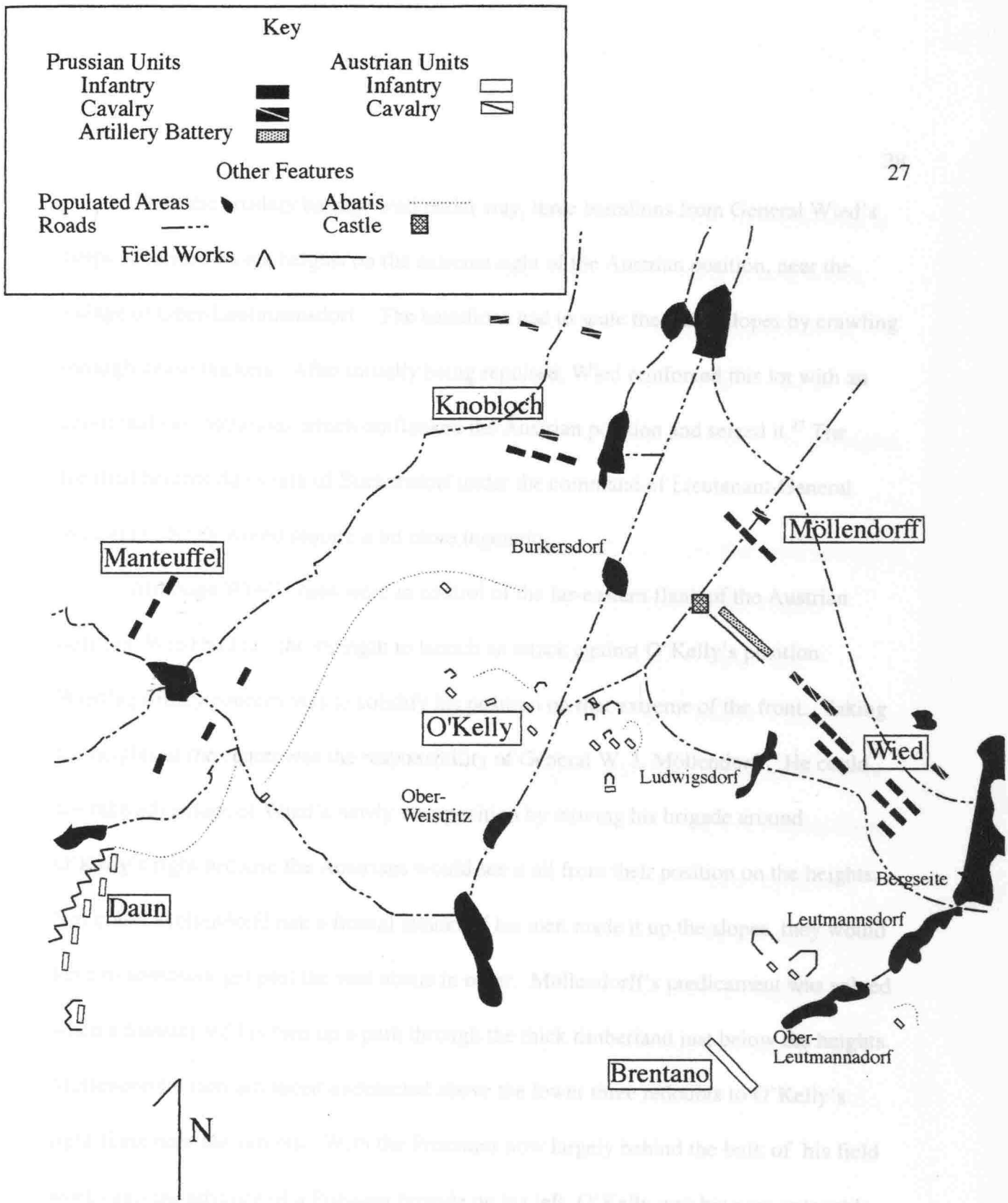
[22] Ibid., 238.

[23] Ibid.; Black, *European Warfare*, 61.

[24] Duffy, *Military Life of Frederick the Great*, 238.

[25] Crane, *Great Battles of the World*, 108-9.

[26] Quoted in Duffy, *Military Life of Frederick the Great*, 239.



Battle of Burkersdorf, 1762

With the artillery barrage well under way, three battalions from General Wied's corps advanced on the heights on the extreme right of the Austrian position, near the village of Ober-Leutmannsdorf. The battalions had to scale the damp slopes by crawling through dense thickets. After initially being repulsed, Wied reinforced this lot with an additional two battalions which outflanked the Austrian position and seized it.[27] The fortified heights due south of Burkersdorf under the command of Lieutenant-General William O'Kelly would require a bit more ingenuity.

Although Wied's men were in control of the far-eastern flank of the Austrian position, Wied had not the strength to launch an attack against O'Kelly's position. Wied's primary concern was to solidify his position on that extreme of the front. Taking the heights at the center was the responsibility of General W. J. Möllendorff. He could not take advantage of Wied's newly won position by moving his brigade around O'Kelly's right because the Austrians would see it all from their position on the heights. Nor could Möllendorff risk a frontal attack. If his men made it up the slopes, they would have to somehow get past the vast abatis in order. Möllendorff's predicament was solved when a forester led his men up a path through the thick timberland just below the heights. Möllendorff's men advanced undetected above the lower three redoubts to O'Kelly's right flank near the summit. With the Prussians now largely behind the bulk of his field works and the advance of a Prussian brigade on his left, O'Kelly quit his now untenable

---

[27] Ibid., 238-9; Crane, *Great Battles of the World*, 110.

position. Daun, soon thereafter, ordered his army to retire.[28] Frederick had succeeded in driving a numerically superior foe from a fortified position by opening a battle with a large artillery barrage and then maneuvering his infantry to a location superior to the Austrian's. The characteristics of Frederick's army and the nature of his tactics as exemplified at Burkersdorf became an easily applied classroom example of the principles behind British military doctrine.

The British General Staff recognized that their army had traits that were analogous to the Prussian army of Frederick the Great. Like Frederick's Prussia, the United Kingdom relied upon a small, highly-trained land force. Because of these basic similarities, the elders of British military education believed that Frederick's tactical doctrines were the most sound given the army's characteristics and, therefore, should be emulated. The Prussian king's "sound" tactical axioms "and his mode of applying them was good when compared with the capabilities of his opponents for opposing [them]."[29] Although Major-General C. Francis Clery conceded that Frederick's tactics would have been hopelessly "clumsy" for the late-nineteenth century, his enemies displayed an "utter want of manœuvring power."[30] Although future British officers were admonished not to

---

[28] Duffy, *Military Life of Frederick the Great*, 239-40.

[29]Major-General C. Francis Clery, *Minor Tactics*, 13th ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., Ltd., 1896), 122.

[30] Ibid., 121.

attempt Frederick's actual tactics on the battlefield, the tactics instructors advocated Frederick's general procedures and axioms.

According to late-nineteenth-century tactics, one characteristic a military unit should have in order to be effective — perhaps the most important — was Frederick's hallmark: maneuverability. Frontal attacks, as was the case in Frederick's day, were enormously costly, especially if launched against a fortified position. Frederick's solution, and the preferred action of the British military hierarchy, was to outflank the enemy. By launching an attack against one of the enemy's flanks, the attacker would suffer fewer losses than if he assaulted the enemy line head-on.[31] A successful flank attack, however, could only be attempted if the opposing army's flank was not shielded by a natural obstacle and if the army wishing to outflank had superior maneuverability. Without superior collective dexterity on the part of the attacking forces, the defending army could counter any attempt to turns its end(s).[32]

Great mobility, however, was not the only requirement for a successful assault. An army required great firepower to carry a position. To a certain extent, this meant that the attacking force had to be numerically superior; in short, more men equals more weapons.[33] British officers-to-be were taught that "all attacks once entered on to be

---

[31]Captain C. M. DeGruyther, *Tactics for Beginners*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, Ltd., 1902), 163.

[32] Ibid., 163, 184-5.

[33] Henderson, *The Science of War*, 75.

vigorously carried out, and with adequate forces."[34] Having more men than the defender was only half of fire doctrine. The other portion of the doctrine dealt with the artillery.

The doctrine of heavy artillery bombardment by a "superiority of fire" had as one of its objectives the softening the enemy's defenses prior to an infantry attack and to provide infantry support once the foray began. Apparently seeing actions like Frederick's opening bombardment of the Austrian entrenchments at Burkersdorf as the preferred way of handling field fortifications, both Clery and DeGruyther could not have been more adamant about artillery preparation. Clery insisted that "[t]he conditions of modern fighting require, more than ever, that all attacks be opened by a heavy fire of artillery. Until a considerable effect has been produced by this fire no position should be assaulted by infantry."[35] The procedure for the massive artillery shelling was clear and well-defined: a commander should direct his guns against the enemy's artillery first in an effort to destroy it and/or keep it distracted. Once enough of the enemy's guns have been silenced (and both authors say the more pieces one can eliminate the better), the artillery should concentrate its fire to the point in the enemy line which was about to be assaulted in order to create a sufficient weakness in both men and in any fortifications.[36] Once sufficiently "softened" and when the artillery could no longer fire without risk to its own

---

[34] Clery, *Minor Tactics*, 188, 190-3.

[35] Ibid., 170.

[36] DeGruyther, *Tactics for Beginners*, 184.

infantry, the guns should increase their range in order to cut off any possible reinforcement which might be moving to the front.[37]

Some officers like Henderson realized that enemy officers might pull their troops into bombproof shelters during the bombardment. To such officers, the infantry had to advance during the artillery preparation; otherwise, the attacker would suffer unnecessary casualties.[38] Regardless of the timing of the infantry attack, most military thinkers believed that envelopment reduced the attacker's casualties, while inflicting upon the defender great losses of both men and much-needed material. The combination of great mobility and superior fire power was the method by which the attacking body could successfully turn the enemy's flanks.

In addition to the quantifiable advantages of speedily attacking an enemy's flank, Sandhurst instructors believed that a well-constructed flanking maneuver, including a superiority of fire, did tremendous damage to the enemy's *élan*, or fighting spirit. The defenders' collective psyche would become rattled by the combination of the artillery preparation, the rapid advance of attackers around their flanks, and the vast number of their comrades falling as a result of the onslaught. Similar to the motives behind Frederick's inclusion of blank shells at Burkersdorf, the British military instilled in their cadets the potential virtues of battlefield sound effects, arguing that the thunder of

---

[37] Ibid., 187.

[38] Henderson, *The Science of War*, 78.

artillery and the rattle of machine guns could demoralize enemy troops quickly.[39] With its will marred and its nerves shaken, the enemy force was more likely to succumb with the next onslaught. The loss of *élan* made the foe's marksmanship "wild and inaccurate" by awakening each man's consciousness of his own mortality, thereby making his hands tremble and his aim hurried.[40]

This cult of mobility and the seeming necessity to envelop the enemy army produced some rather illogical tactical doctrines. When an officer gave the order for the infantry to advance (whether in attack or counterattack) the standard procedure was for the infantry firing line to advance within six hundred yards of the enemy and then "[endeavor] to crush and demoralize the enemy by fire."[41] Oddly enough, as Frederick educated his officers in the earlier part of his reign over a century before, infantry and infantry officers were trained to make this advance without firing a shot because discharging their weapons would slow an advance and expose the unit to higher casualties. "*An advance without firing should be maintained as long as possible*" because "all fire materially retards the advance, and ultimately produces a more or less prolonged stationary fight." [42] The thought of creating a "prolonged stationary fight" did

---

[39] Ibid., 71, 79.

[40] DeGruyther, *Tactics for Beginners*, 163, 184-5.

[41] Ibid., 157. There were three general groupings of infantry in the advance: scouts, firing line, and supports. Scouts perform reconnaissance; the firing line's responsibility is to make the advance to that six hundred yard line; the supports plug gaps in the firing line and "give confidence to those in front by the feeling that there is a body of comrades following to assist them." Ibid., 157, 159.

[42] Clery, *Minor Tactics*, 131[Clery's italics]; DeGruyther, *Tactics for Beginners*, 158.

not seem to bother British tacticians once the firing line came to within six hundred yards of the enemy and stopped nearly one thousand yards within the rifle range they deemed "effective."[43] Momentarily grasping reality, instructors did concede that an officer would have a devilish time trying to keep his men from not firing back, and did tell new officers to allow their firing line to open fire occasionally during the advance. These pauses, however, should be of very short duration because the primary objective of the firing line was to get to "decisive" range — that six hundred-yard mark — as quickly as possible.[44] Generally speaking, officers were trained not to halt their men and present a stationary target to the enemy, but to reach "decisive" range as quickly as possible before stopping.

Although military theorists preferred the offensive because it allowed the selection of time and location of action, teachers of grand tactics advocated the aggressive mobility principles of Frederick's movements in the defense as well. Clery best sums up the attitude of the day regarding the defensive: "A *defensive* attitude should only be assumed with the intention of converting it into an *offensive* one during the course of the action."[45] Even when on the defensive, mobility should not be forsaken. An army defending a point should prepare to capitalize on any momentary weakness in the attacker's formations and to launch a counterattack because "a purely passive defensive

---

[43] DeGruyther, *Tactics for Beginners*, 152.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Clery, *Minor Tactics*, 184.

defense may check the enemy's advance, but can never result in his defeat."[46] Should an officer commanding a unit be forced to take a defensive posture at the onset of hostilities and wished to fortify his position by digging entrenchments, he should not construct the fortification in any way which might inhibit his ability to launch a speedy and effective counterattack.[47]

Even with the great emphasis on mobility, tactical theorists and instructors had not lost touch with the actual advancement of military technology. They recognized that smokeless powder made locating an enemy's location more difficult. They understood that "the precision and rapidity" of the rifles then in service made "manœuvering under fire at 'effective' range impossible," that shock tactics were no longer possible, and that all of these developments favored the army on the defensive.[48] At the same time some Sandhurst instructors, such as Henderson, told their students that the new technology made "the process of envelopment ... easier than it used to be."[49] Most teachers told their pupils to have their men close their ranks and make their firing line more dense — a move reminiscent of eighteenth-century platoon musket volley tactics, although with ranks not compressed that tightly.[50] A certain cult of eighteenth and early-nineteenth-

---

[46] DeGruyther, *Tactics for Beginners*, 172.

[47] Ibid., 192.

[48] Ibid., 150, 152, 176.

[49] Henderson, *The Science of War*, 74.

[50] Ibid., 150.

century warfare existed, filtered its way into the textbooks, and, as a result, perpetuated itself. Frederick's techniques and battle at Burkersdorf were not the only examples used to illustrate tactical principles of "offense and defense" (although defense, seemingly, was rarely discussed at length). Another battle of Burkersdorf, conducted only yards from the 1762 clash, was fought during the 1866 Austro-Prussian War. The Sandhurst professors exploited this battle beyond its significance in order to demonstrate that the theories of Frederick's day were still applicable under modern battlefield conditions.

In the summer of 1865, Austria and Prussia, recent allies in a war against Denmark over the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, came to an agreement on the administration of the two areas. This Convention of Gastein stated that Prussia would govern the northern duchy of Schleswig and Austria would supervise the southern duchy, Holstein. Almost immediately after the conclusion of the Gastein Convention, relations soured between Austria and Prussia. The principle cause of the deterioration was related to the political geography resulting from the Convention: Holstein was an Austrian island in a Prussian "sea."[51] Prussia could handicap Austria's ability to administer Holstein, while Holstein could serve as a base for anti-Hohenzollern activity and literature. This unworkable settlement was largely the construction of Prussian Minister-President Otto von Bismarck and intended to provoke war with Austria. By October 1865, Bismarck began securing French neutrality in the event of a Prussian war against Austria. The

---

[51] Langer, *Encyclopedia of World History*, 729.

Austrian government quickly realized that armed conflict with Prussia was a distinct possibility and by 16 March 1866, Count Mihály Károlyi, the Austrian ambassador to Berlin, believed war was "inevitable."[52]

When the Austrian General Staff began its preparations for war, it made some assumptions which would probably not have been questioned by any other general staff in Europe. The General Staff concluded that in any conflict between Austria and Prussia, Austria was the stronger of the two powers and more likely to prevail. Prussia, according to the Austrians, was too involved with domestic disputes and its army lacked a well-trained soldiery. Prussia would then be obliged to garrison many of these men in its many forts, leaving a very small force capable of advancing into Habsburg domains.[53] As a result of the belief of Prussia's offensive impotence, the Austrian military decided to strengthen the Empire's fortresses in order to contain any Prussian assault. In addition the armies in Bohemia were reinforced so they might be able to hold a Prussian advance and, eventually, counterattack. The Austrians also secured the loyalties of many of the minor states of the German Confederation. With the added numbers of their armies, the anti-Prussian coalition seemed quite formidable.[54]

---

[52] Colonel G. B. Malleson, *The Refounding of the German Empire 1848-1871* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1893), 101. In addition, Bismarck secured a military alliance with Italy on 8 April 1866. See Langer, *Encyclopedia of World History*, 729.

[53] H. M. Hozier, *The Seven Weeks' War. Its Antecedents and Its Incidents* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1867), 1:25-7.

[54] Ibid., 1:27.

The Austrian General Staff, however, over-estimated its own army's abilities while underestimating those of their potential enemy. Albrecht von Roon, the Prussian minister of war, reformed the *Landwehr* making it an efficient fighting force. The army was highly drilled and employed the new breech-loading rifle and the artillery had better guns than their Austrian counterparts.[55] Although Helmuth von Moltke, chief of the Prussian general staff, positioned his forces in a defensive layout, concentrated on the provinces most likely to be invaded, the *Landwehr* was prepared to assume the attack with little notice.[56] When the order was given, the First Prussian Army was to march through Zittau and Gorlitz to Reichenberg; the Third Army had to advance to Gabel via Neustadt and link with the first army at Gitschen. The Second Army had the most difficult task. It had to strike through mountainous terrain to Trautenau and Nachod and join the First and Third Armies on the right bank of the Elbe.[57]

With the onset of the war in mid-June 1866, the Prussian plan unfolded and, despite its reforms, the Prussian *Landwehr* suffered some early setbacks at the hands of the Austrians armed with less efficient muzzle-loading rifles. In house-to-house fighting, Freiherr von Gablenz's X Corps stopped the I Corps of the Prussian Second Army on 27

---

[55] Malleson, *The Refounding of the German Empire*, 111.

[56] Hozier, *The Seven Weeks' War*, 1:32; Malleson, *The Refounding of the German Empire*, 112.

[57] Colonel O. R. Middleton, *Outlines of Military History* (London: Mitchell & Company, Military Publishers, n.d.), 274.

June at Trautenau. At the conclusion of the fighting, Gablenz stationed his advance guard in Trautenau to hold the position and awaited further orders.[58]

Early in the morning of 28 June, Austrian Army Headquarters ordered General Gablenz to take his X Corps from its position at Trautenau and to establish it at Prausnitz-Kaile where there was (he was told) a "strong Austrian detachment" keeping open his lines of communication with the communications center of Josephstadt until his arrival.[59] When he arrived at Burkersdorf, Gablenz received a message from his flanking party that there was a body of Prussian troops not a mile distant attempting to flank his column. Gablenz immediately broke column and began forming his army in the hills around Burkersdorf. His first task was to get the leading battery assembled and in action against the Prussians to cover their advance. He had three additional batteries assembled on the slopes north of Burkersdorf and two more slightly to the rear at Granner Koppe.[60] Gablenz set up his infantry in a position to properly defend the guns, with the bulk of his force (two battalions plus one reserve) on his left flank near the three batteries north of Burkersdorf, and one battalion on his right flank to support the one battery there. The remaining one battalion was placed on the plantations east of Burkersdorf and to cover the entire center of the Austrian position.[61]

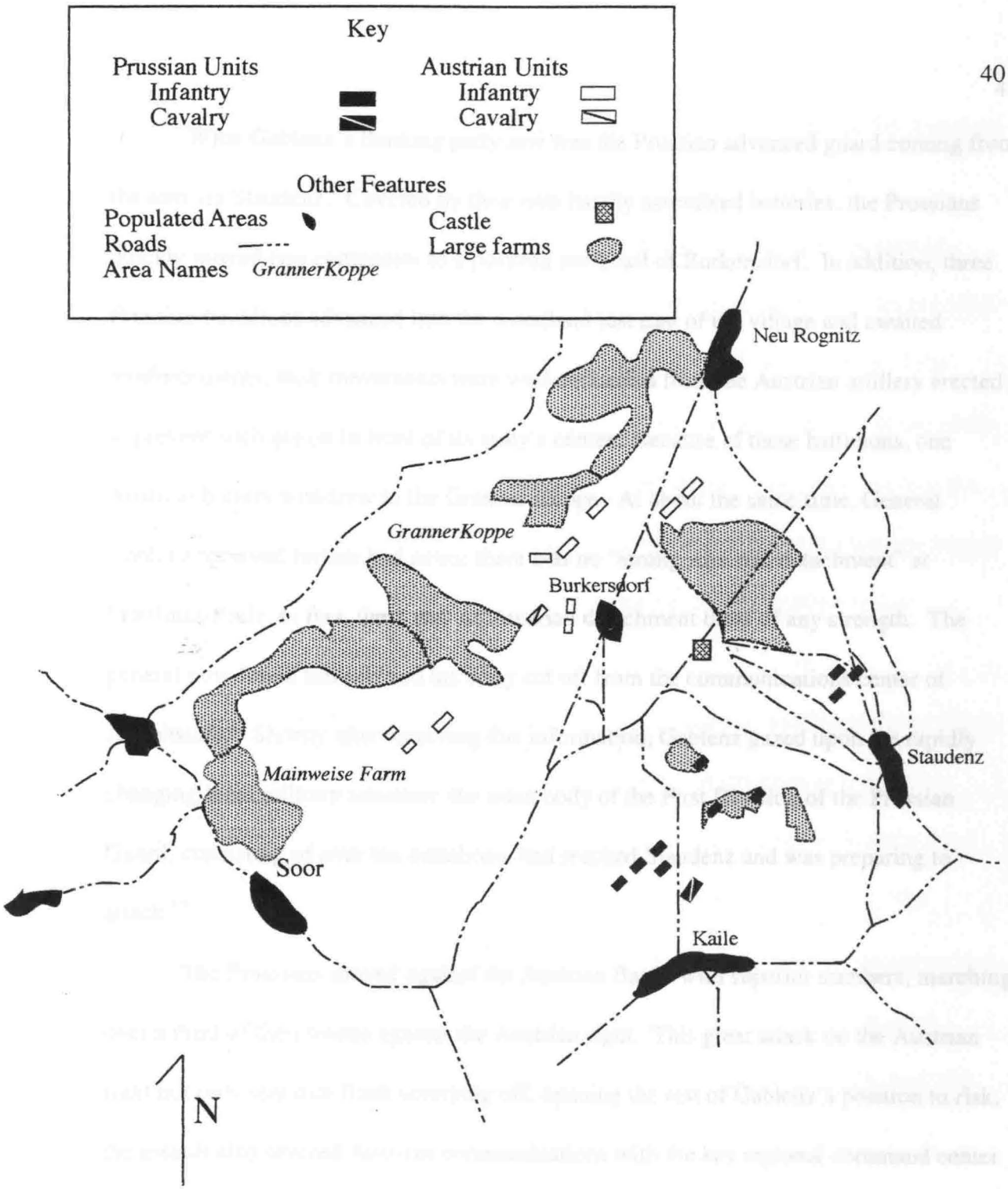
---

[58] Hozier, *The Seven Weeks' War*, 1:263-9; Middleton, *Outlines of Military History*, 275.

[59] Clery, *Minor Tactics*, 199-200.

[60] Ibid., 200, 204.

[61] Ibid., 200, 204-5.



Battle of Burkersdorf 1866

What Gablenz's flanking party saw was the Prussian advanced guard coming from the east via Staudenz. Covered by their own hastily assembled batteries, the Prussians quickly moved two companies to a position northeast of Burkersdorf. In addition, three Prussian battalions advanced into the woodland just east of the village and awaited reinforcements, their movements were well-concealed from the Austrian artillery erected to prevent such action in front of its army's center. Because of these battalions, one Austrian battery withdrew to the Granner Koppe. At about the same time, General Gablenz received further bad news: there was no "strong Austrian detachment" at Prausnitz-Kaile, in fact, there was no Austrian detachment there of any strength. The general now found himself and his army cut off from the communications center of Josephstadt.[62] Shortly after receiving this information, Gablenz gazed upon the rapidly changing local military situation: the main body of the First Division of the Prussian Guard, consisting of over ten battalions, had reached Staudenz and was preparing to attack.[63]

The Prussians moved against the Austrian flanks with superior numbers, marching over a third of their troops against the Austrian right. This great attack on the Austrian right not only sent that flank scurrying off, opening the rest of Gablenz's position to risk, the assault also severed Austrian communications with the key regional command center of Königenhof. To complete the defeat of his foes, the Prussian commander launched

---

[62] Ibid., 201-2.

[63] Ibid., 201-2, 207.

What Gablenz's flanking party saw was the Prussian advanced guard coming from the east via Staudenz. Covered by their own hastily assembled batteries, the Prussians quickly moved two companies to a position northeast of Burkersdorf. In addition, three Prussian battalions advanced into the woodland just east of the village and awaited reinforcements, their movements were well-concealed from the Austrian artillery erected to prevent such action in front of its army's center. Because of these battalions, one Austrian battery withdrew to the Granner Koppe. At about the same time, General Gablenz received further bad news: there was no "strong Austrian detachment" at Prausnitz-Kaile, in fact, there was no Austrian detachment there of any strength. The general now found himself and his army cut off from the communications center of Josephstadt.[62] Shortly after receiving this information, Gablenz gazed upon the rapidly changing local military situation: the main body of the First Division of the Prussian Guard, consisting of over ten battalions, had reached Staudenz and was preparing to attack.[63]

The Prussians moved against the Austrian flanks with superior numbers, marching over a third of their troops against the Austrian right. This great attack on the Austrian right not only sent that flank scurrying off, opening the rest of Gablenz's position to risk, the assault also severed Austrian communications with the key regional command center of Königenhof. To complete the defeat of his foes, the Prussian commander launched

---

[62] Ibid., 201-2.

[63] Ibid., 201-2, 207.

seven companies against the Austrian center and over two battalions versus the Austrian left. This distribution of force convinced Gablenz to withdraw his corps.[64]

Instructors at Sandhurst used the 1866 battle of Burkersdorf as the historical example of proper principles of attack and defense.[65] The axioms derived from the 1866 confrontation were the same as those admired in Frederick the Great's system. Like Frederick's methods, artillery attempted to prepare the way for the infantry. In the 1866 clash, the artillery of both armies assembled quickly and dueled each other. In fact, the first activity of both the Austrian and Prussian leadership was to order at least one battery to assemble and rain fire upon the other army even before their own infantry was assembled.

The speed with which both armies gathered and acted was another element which was the same in both the 1866 and the 1762 battles. Both the Prussian and Austrian armies required significant mobility to attain two different ends. The Prussians needed superior quickness in order to execute their flanking maneuvers to any effect. The numerically inferior Austrians needed great agility to change from column formation to a defensive configuration in order to avoid a rout and to attempt to repel the Prussian attack. When analyzing the causes of the Prussian victory, cadets were taught that "the

---

[64] Ibid., 202, 207.

[65] Great Britain, War Office, Royal Military Academy, "Director General to Governor," 2 November 1887, WO 152 (Sandhurst Reference: 88-1218).

turning of the Austrian right, coupled with the attack on its centre, entailed the retreat of the left...."[66]

The tactical curriculum at Sandhurst emphasized both Frederick the Great's tactical style and the comparatively recent experience of the Seven Weeks' War. Both systems highlighted an army's need for artillery preparation, maneuverability, rapidity of execution, and the importance of morale. By accenting both Frederick's tactics and those employed at the 1866 battle of Burkersdorf, the Sandhurst syllabus stressed the *continuity* of military tactics over time. By using a battle from the mid-eighteenth century and one from the recent past — both demonstrating the same tactical axioms even though the technology of warfare had changed drastically in the interim — the Sandhurst instructors reduced tactical practices to pseudoscientific law which would stand constant through future ages. With the curriculum illustrating the lack of change over time, the Cadets had no reason to expect future warfare would be any different. Perhaps what historians living in the post-World War I era recognize as the most glaring example of the persistence of eighteenth-century mentality in warfare was the presence of significant bodies of cavalry in the armies of Europe, including the United Kingdom. As illogical as it may seem, the officers of the British military firmly believed that cavalry would occupy a significant role in future conflicts, albeit as a primarily strategic arm as opposed to the largely tactical arm of Frederick's day.

---

[66] Clery, *Minor Tactics*, 207.

Chapter Three:

"*Toujours Confondre*": Curriculum and Employment of Cavalry

"The force of a cavalry soldier dwells in his horse, and its application in the impetuosity of the charge. Clearly, therefore, fire-arms would here be out of place, and 'cold steel' the only weapon a cavalry soldier should rely on. For the efficacy of fire-arms depends on fairly accurate aiming, and aiming with accuracy is incompatible with motion. But motion being the very life of its fire action, the *raison d'être* of cavalry disappears when motion ceases."[2]

— Maj.-Gen. C. Francis Clery,
Minor Tactics (1896)

"Until quite recently the firearm was considered an auxiliary weapon, and the force of cavalry was considered to lie entirely in the combined action of the man and horse at the moment of collision with the enemy. Smokeless powder, magazine rifles, and quick-firing guns have, however, revolutionised the tactics of cavalry, and, as with infantry and artillery, is now the predominant factor."[1]

— Capt. C. M. DeGruyther,
Tactics for Beginners (1902)

Since man first took up arms to slay his fellow man, military professionals have engaged in a number of methodological debates about how to improve the lethality of their fighting forces given the weapons at hand. One of the more famous debates, for example, was over which technique of swordplay was the most lethal, the broad-stroke (the cut) or the jab. After firearms dominated infantry tactics, this debate was largely confined to the officers of the one remaining branch which widely employed the *arme*

[1] DeGruyther, *Tactics for Beginners*, 120.

[2] Clery, *Minor Tactics*, 139.

blanche: the cavalry. In the closing years of the 1800s, the question of mounted arm's battlefield employment and effectiveness firmly supplanted the comparatively trivial sabre discussion. In fact, cavalry doctrine was the only area of the Sandhurst curriculum which did not remain perfectly consistent from 1874 to1914. Although the coursework lacked the apparent unanimity of thought as infantry instruction, this does not mean that there was active classroom debate where one doctrine might supersede another. Instead of a development of a new set of axioms regarding mounted troops, an already blurry cavalry curriculum slowly slipped even more out of focus not because of the creation of a new set of principles, but through the grotesque and fundamental ambiguity rising from the attempt to demonstrate the applicability of both shock and fire tactics in the military environment of the time.

Curricular consistencies, however, were not absent. The Sandhurst instructors explicitly agreed on what kind of ground was preferable for cavalry operations. According to the tactical theorists of the day, cavalry was most effective on unobstructed terrain, but with topographical features, such as ravines, which offered some cover for the horsemen when not directly engaged. A gently rolling landscape allowed cavalry units to maneuver without being in direct view of the enemy, thus adding the element of surprise to the tactical equation.[3]

---

[3] Clery, *Minor Tactics*, 140-1; DeGruyther, *Tactics for Beginners*, 121.

The crux of the debate and the source of the addled nature of the cavalry coursework was in the various properties and characteristics of the mounted arm. Specifically, officers discussed what the best use of the cavalry's speed and maneuverability. Clery and others believed that the velocity inherent in cavalry charges was best applied in the form of shock tactics, as in Napoleon's day. Battlefield commanders should direct their troopers to attack the enemy at the gallop, using "the impetus derived from motion" and the "weight" of its men and horses to break the enemy formation and cause a withdrawal, if not a rout.[4] The collapse of the foe's order was the key to success in this style of cavalry deployment. Officers who subscribed to this theory seemingly viewed "order" as a zero-sum-game: one army or the other would break with the "collision" of the cavalry; therefore, the cavalry needed to be a highly trained and disciplined unit. Additionally, shock action — especially in cavalry versus cavalry scenarios — meant swordplay and hand-to-hand combat would decide the engagement.[5]

In many ways, this vision of mounted warfare was little different from the way cavalry fought decades and centuries before. Tactical instructors illustrated their axioms by painting scenes from Napoleonic battles such as Austerlitz, Leipzig, and Quatre Bras.[6]

---

[4] Clery, *Minor Tactics*, 138.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 140-3.

Teachers used a more recent battle from the Seven Weeks' War to illustrate further the above principles.[7]

On 27 June 1866, the advanced guard of the Prussian Fifth Corps was moving out of its position at Nachod when it unexpectedly came into contact with two regiments of Austrian cuirassiers, arguably the best cavalry in Europe, and their horse artillery. With shells raining upon his men, the Prussian commanding officer sent infantry into the adjacent woods and his cavalry headlong into the Austrian center. The Prussian troopers, although outnumbered eight to one, "cut clean through the centre of the line of Cuirassiers."[8] The apparent success, however, was short-lived as the Austrian horsemen regained the initiative and turned on the Prussian cavalry's rear and forced them to seek protection under the fire of their infantry positioned in the woods. The Prussians held up among the trees and waited for reinforcements.[9]

The additional man- and firepower was not long in coming. With the Prussian guns and wagons came a regiment of dragoons and another of Uhlans. With the future of the Prussian advance depending upon their action, the Uhlans charged the Austrian line. Again, the Austrian cavalry met the charge, but the result was different. The pure shock

---

[7] Great Britain, War Office, Royal Military Academy, "Director General to Governor," 2 November 1887, WO 152 (Sandhurst Reference: 88-1218).

[8] Hozier, *The Seven Weeks' War*, 1:279.

[9] Ibid., 1:278-9.

power of the fresh Uhlans broke the Austrian cuirassiers.[10] Actions such as this comparatively recent clash at Nachod proved to many in the British military hierarchy that the future of cavalry was "more brilliant than ever."[11]

Other officers begged to disagree with the bright future of shock cavalry. While some tacticians, such as Clery, asserted that "fire-arms are unsuitable to the action of cavalry," others noted that shock action was generally ineffective.[12] Henderson was one of the more vocal detractors to shock action, saying that the swift charges of cavalry relying on the *arme blanche*, although "the one ideal of cavalry action" rarely produced the desireed results of sending the enemy army fleeing in panic.[13] While many of his colleagues explained this repeated failure as the result of "inferior" commanders and troopers, Henderson wondered, "how often were the cavalry dashed vainly in reckless gallantry against the hail of a thinline of rifles!"[14] "Men are not cattle," Henderson maintained; therefore, "defending troops will [rarely] dissolve into an uncontrollable and

---

[10] Ibid., 1:280-1.

[11] Lieutenant-General Sisson C. Pratt, *Précis of Modern Tactics* (London: HMSO, 1892), 59.

[12] Clery, *Minor Tactics*, 151.

[13] Henderson, *The Science of War*, 51, 65.

[14] Pratt, *Précis of Modern Tactics*, 64; Henderson, *The Science of War*, 54.

terrified mob."[15] The future of cavalry action to Henderson and like minds was to be found on the other side of the Atlantic in the American Civil War.[16]

The American "War of Secession" proved to Henderson and others that cavalry's greatest asset was as a strategic arm which had the speed and mobility to harass the enemy's flanks and rear, thus dispruting that army's lines of communication and retreat. Additionally, the American cavalry could dismount and fight as effectively as the infantry, and, as a result, became a not only a highly mobile force, but an exceedingly flexible branch of the army. "The Americans," said Henderson, "struck the true balance between shock and dismounted tactics."[17]

At the same time, Henderson had doubts that any European cavalry could hope to attain the level of accomplishment of the Union and Confederate troopers. Cavalry of the future needed accurately and efficiently placed fire in order to succeed, and Henderson had little confidence that British troopers could handle a firearm effectively without significant loss of morale. Training future cavalrymen to use a rifle with better proficiency might diminish their ability as horsemen and reduce the soldiers to mounted infantry, unable to perform shock action because they lacked "all spark of chivalry."[18] Henderson's generally accepted solution was to include a force of mounted infantry or

---

[15] Henderson, *The Science of War*, 65.

[16] Ibid., 55.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 60-1.

cyclists with each cavalry brigade and division. By this method, the attached companies would support the troopers with fire, without taking away the inherent strategic abilities of the cavalry or breeding the necessary panache out of its ranks.[19]

This apparent conflict between shock or fire tactics was not debated in the classroom. By the time Henderson was teaching at the turn of the twentieth century, instructors were already telling their gentlemen-cadets that both methods of cavalry employment were acceptable. Fire tactics were no longer a secondary element of cavalry warfare, but one of two primary means of defeating an enemy. Because professors and textbooks presented both methods as acceptable, the handbooks' cavalry chapters are often confused and ambiguous. The student at the Royal Military College was perhaps more confused by cavalry warfare at the end of the course than he was at its outset.[20]

Just because the RMC taught both doctrines as valid, however, that does not mean that all officers in the army believed both were equally relevant. Henderson, of course, believed that fire action was superior doctrine to shock tactics. Major-General Douglas Haig continued to advocate the role of shock cavalry on the battlefield, enumerating a number of factors including how "modern guns" will contribute to a foe's exhaustion, thus making them ripe for cavalry attack; that the extended range of modern weapons made the cavalry's mobility more essential; and that "the introduction of the small-bore

---

[19] Ibid., 63.

[20] DeGruyther, *Tactics for Beginners*, 120.

rifle, the bullet from which has little stopping power against a horse" would continue to justify shock tactics.[21]

Although the nature of cavalry instruction was quite addled, all parties continued to base their assessments upon various historical events, whether from the Age of Napoleon, the American Civil War, or from the Seven Weeks' War. In many ways, the British officer corps became like a body of scientists, trying to prove their tactical axioms in the laboratory of history for the purpose of applying them in the crucible of modern war. The greatest potential unknown was the effect of modern weaponry on tactics. There again, however, battlefield experience seemed to confirm the persistence of the accepted tactical principles.

---

[21] Major-General Douglas Haig, *Cavalry Studies, Strategical and Tactical* (London: Hugh Rees, 1907), 8-9.

Chapter Four:

Technology and Tactics: Interpretations of the Manchurian War

"The moral of all this would appear to be that it is not only the Russian army, but all European armies who are incapable of profiting by the experiences of others, be the writing of [it] never so clear on the pages of history."[1]

— General Sir Ian Hamilton,
A Staff Officer's Scrap-Book

To historians writing in the post-1918 world, the tactics of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) was a clear precursor to the instances of the First World War. Both the Japanese and Russian armies made extensive use of the spade to dig shelter trenches, and both sides widely employed new advances in weapons technology, such as smokeless powder and the machine gun. Writing long after the ink had dried on the Peace of Paris, these authors had the benefit of hindsight, knowing what had already transpired at places like Passchendaele, Verdun and the Somme. In the wake of the Russo-Japanese War, however, the men who created tactical doctrine found different military lessons in the Manchurian conflict.

---

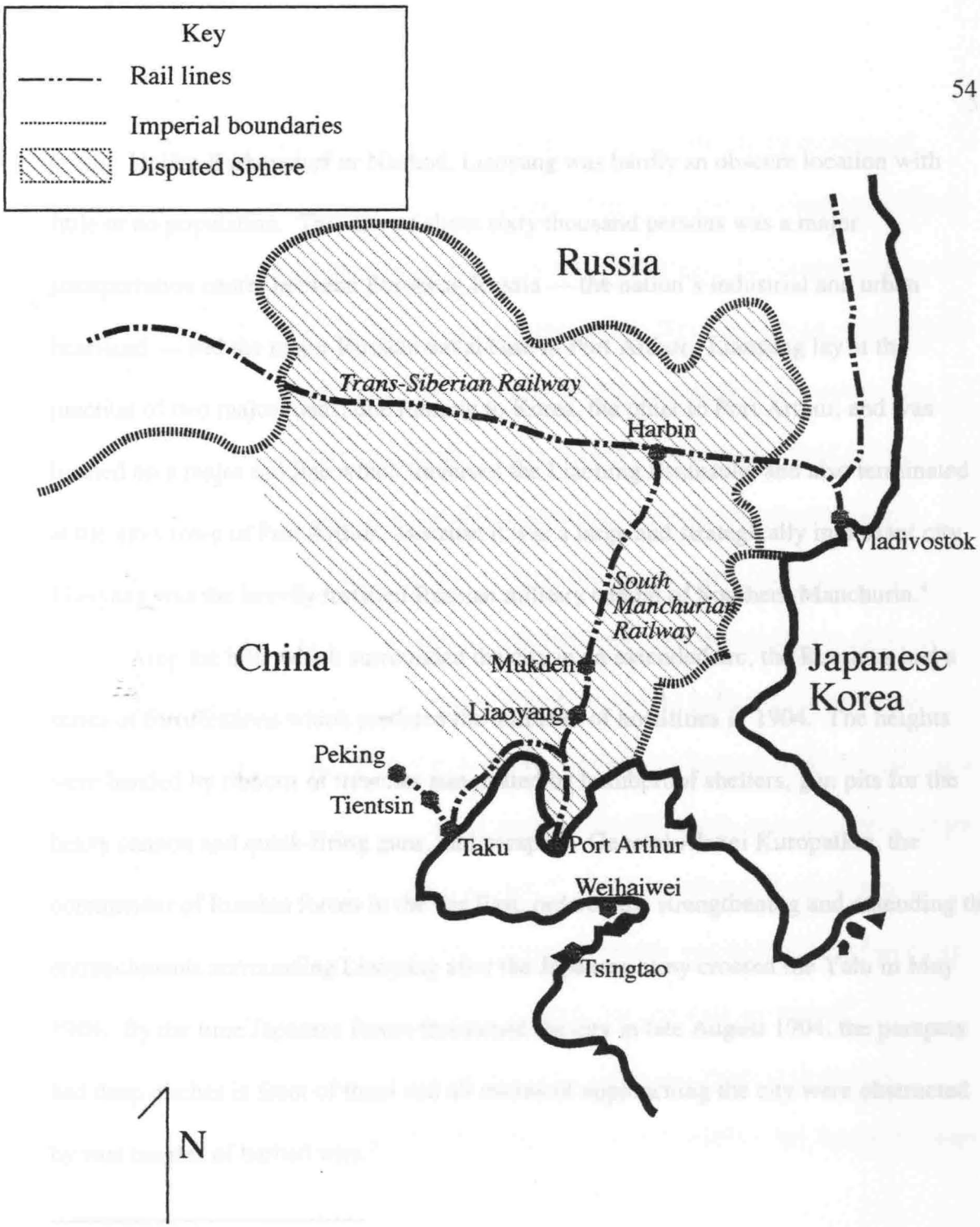
[1] Lieutenant-General Sir Ian Hamilton, *A Staff Officer's Scrap-Book during the Russo-Japanese War*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Arnold, 1907), 1:129.

Like the other nonbelligerent European Powers, Great Britain dispatched a number of military observers to the rugged terrain of Manchuria. These officers traveled with the various armies and recorded their comments about what tactics both parties employed and how the warring parties employed various weapons. Perhaps most importantly, these observers made judgements about what maneuvers and pieces of military hardware were most successful given the circumstances at hand and occasionally hypothesized what the tactical, operational, and strategic implications would be for future conflicts. Like all storytellers, these observers included the information which they believed to be most trivial while dismissing other occurrences they deemed trivial. The Russo-Japanese War confirmed to the readers of the reports that the nature of warfare was left unchanged and that the pseudo-scientific laws of war Sandhurst professors were teaching their Gentlemen Cadets were just as true in 1908 as they were in 1888, 1805, or 1762. In fact, the Russo-Japanese War seemed to confirm the continued primacy of the tactics employed in the eighteenth century. For example, both armies widely utilized the bayonet in the attack, most notably by the Russians at the battle of Sha Ho (12 October 1904).[2] One battle in which military theorists found continued application of their military axioms occurred at Liaoyang between 25 August and 3 September 1904.[3]

---

[2] Captain J. B. Jardine, "Battle of Sha Ho. First Japanese Army. Operations of the 12th Division, Umezawa Brigade, and 2nd Cavalry Brigade, from the 2nd to the 15th October 1904," in *The Russo-Japanese War* (London: HMSO, 1908), vol. 1, *Reports from British Officers Attached to Japanese and Russian Forces in the Field*, 661-2.

[3] Dupuy & Dupuy, *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History*, 1012.



Russo-Japanese War Theater of Operations

Unlike Burkersdorf or Nachod, Liaoyang was hardly an obscure location with little or no population. This city of about sixty thousand persons was a major transportation center between European Russia — the nation's industrial and urban heartland — and the major Russian naval base in Port Arthur. Liaoyang lay at the junction of two major roads, one running to Korea, the other to Port Arthur, and was located on a major rail line which traversed the Liaotung Peninsula, and also terminated at the navy town of Port Arthur. Because it was a large and strategically important city, Liaoyang was the heavily fortified Russian military capital of Southern Manchuria.[4]

Atop the hills which surrounded the city in an extended arc, the Russians had a series of fortifications which predated the outbreak of hostilities in 1904. The heights were banded by ribbons of trenches punctuated by bombproof shelters, gun pits for the heavy cannon and quick-firing guns, and parapets. General Alexei Kuropatkin, the commander of Russian forces in the Far East, ordered the strengthening and extending the entrenchments surrounding Liaoyang after the Japanese army crossed the Yalu in May 1904. By the time Japanese forces threatened the city in late August 1904, the parapets had deep ditches in front of them and all means of approaching the city were obstructed by vast tangles of barbed wire.[5]

---

[4] Charles à Court Repington, *The War in the Far East* (London: John Murray, 1905), 298-301. For more information about the Russo-Japanese War see R. M. Connaughton, *The War of the Rising Sun and Tumbling Bear* (1988); David Waller, *The Short Victorious War: The Russo-Japanese Conflict, 1904-05* (1973); Michael Perrins, "Russian Military Policy in the Far East and the 1905 Revolution in the Russian Army," *European Studies Review* 1979 9(3): 331-49.

[5] Ibid., 300-2; Dupuy, *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History*, 1009-1010.

After the Japanese First Army took the Russian positions on the outskirts of Liaoyang on 23 August, the three Japanese armies under the supreme command of Field Marshal Iwao Oyama concentrated on the city's outer defenses. The Russian army under Kuropatkin outnumbered Oyama's forces, 158,000 to 125,000 men. Faced with the vast and formidable Russian defenses, Oyama employed the same tactical procedures that Frederick the Great utilized a century-and-a-half before. The Japanese field marshal assembled a titanic collection of artillery: six batteries of howitzers (about 48 guns), "some 10.5 Krupp cannon," and the field artillery of five divisions. All in all, the Japanese aimed 220 cannon at the Russian fortifications.[6] On 29 August, the Japanese guns began firing at the Russian positions. The Russians did not have the intestinal fortitude to withstand such artillery preparation. Lieutenant-General Ian Hamilton noted, "before a dozen rounds burst, I saw, to my surprise, the [Russian] occupants clear out [of their trenches] and bolt back over the crest line."[7] The Japanese could not occupy the vacated trenches for sometime, however, because their path was riddled by enfilade fire from Russian trenched to the east. By three o'clock, the Japanese advanced.[8]

The Japanese advance was in a wide order, oftentimes seeming to have no particular logic or organization. Hamilton could not discern whether the Japanese troops

---

[6] Dupuy, *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History*, 1012-13; Repington, *The War in the Far East*, 302-3.

[7] Hamilton, *A Staff Officer's Scrap-Book*, 2:77.

[8] Ibid.

were firing as they advanced, although he observed that they shot "little" if they discharged their weapons at all.[9] The Japanese infantry occupied the empty Russian trenches, although they had to retire a few yards shortly after taking the position.[10] Regardless of the temporary withdrawal of the assailants, Oyama followed all of the accepted military laws regarding the assault of a fortified position and the axioms proved to be successful. His artillery drove the Russian infantry — which was numerically superior locally as well as on the field as a whole — from an entrenched location.

This instance at Liaoyang was not the only time an attacker compelled a body of infantry to withdraw from their trenches. A reinforced Russian regiment drove a detachment of three Japanese battalions from their trenches at Sha Ho and they had to evacuate another entrenched position a few days later.[11] With 36 small calibre mountain guns (which were, according to Hamilton, "insignificant little toys") the Japanese drove a body of well-entrenched Russian infantry and three batteries of heavy calibre field guns from their trenchworks at the battle of Chaotao.[12] During the Russo-Japanese War, attackers often forced the defenders of field fortifications to evacuate their positions. The theories of warfare as taught by the professors at Sandhurst — and as practiced by Frederick the Great — were, in fact, confirmed by the events of the Manchurian War.

---

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 2:78.

[11] Captain J. B. Jardine, "Battle of Sha Ho," 1: 653-54, 659.

[12] Hamilton, *A Staff Officer's Scrap-Book*, 1:288.

The apparent affirmation of the doctrines taught at the RMC was not limited to the thunder of artillery as it "softened" the enemy positions before the infantry advanced. The conduct of the actual charge was the same as the seemingly odd practice of advancing to a decisive range before coming to a stop and firing so advised by Clery and DeGruyther. Additionally, many military thinkers found the Japanese warrior spirit of Bushido to be a prime reason why a numerically inferior Japanese army could defeat the Russians in so many engagements.[13] The Japanese army, in Hamilton's words, was "inspired with a most tenacious courage ... and [displayed] as chief and winning characteristic a combination of very great mobility with a wide extension."[14]

In addition to what many observers accepted as the superior Japanese *élan* in both the men and officers was the timidity of the Russian leadership. Hamilton asserted that the Russian officer corps was "constitutionally disinclined to display initiative" and "had the Russian forces been boldly led ... then ... the Russians much have pierced the Japanese line at some point or another."[15] Repington found the actions of the Russian officers ineffective and "passive."[16]

---

[13] Michael Howard *The Lessons of History* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1991), 109-11.

[14] Hamilton, *A Staff Officer's Scrap-Book,* 1:265-6, 277.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Repington, *The War in the Far East,* 550.

The vices of Russian "passivity" extended beyond the actual battlefield conduct of the army and into the realm of battle planning. The Russians were on the strategic defensive and disinclined "to show much flexibility, dash, or initiative."[17] It was the Japanese, after all, who opened hostilities in an attempt to gain control in what many accepted as the tsar's sphere of influence. When the two armies met on in battle, the Russians tended to occupy the entrenched positions and held the defensive for much of the battle. The Russian tendency to hold a purely defensive posture was cynically attacked by Captain Sedgwick:

> On the Russian side the ordinary tactical procedure was to occupy and strongly entrench a position, and after holding it passively till dark to retire to another one further back under cover of night. In the scheme for the occupation of their positions, the idea of, and careful preparation for, a grand counter-attack was lost sight of.[18]

All elements of the general conduct of infantry and artillery coordination — including *élan*, assertiveness, mobility, and flank assaults — were confirmed by the events in the Far East. The events in Manchuria demonstrated to the British military hierarchy, including the faculty at Sandhurst, that all of their beliefs about the future military conflict were true, at least insofar as the infantry and artillery were concerned.

At the outbreak of hostilities between Russia and Japan, the officers in the British army had differences of opinion about the most effective means of employing cavalry.

---

[17] Hamilton, *A Staff Officer's Scrap-Book*, 1:265-6, 277.

[18] Captain F. R. Sedgwick, *The Russo-Japanese War on Land* (London: Forster Groom & Company, 1906), 130.

Henderson's vision of cavalry as the primary strategic service of the army was vindicated in Manchuria. The Russian army often harassed the Japanese flanks, but more important, was the effectiveness of the Japanese troopers in disrupting the Russian lines of communication and transport, as demonstrated by Naganuma's raid in February 1905.[19]

In the early weeks of 1905, with his army steadily marching northward deeper into Manchuria, Major-General Akiyama dispatched a select detachment from the 8th Cavalry Regiment "to cut the railway and telegraph lines," to destroy any ungarrisoned bridge, and to provide any information about Russian troop numbers and concentration.[20] Just over one mile from the Han-chia-wan-tzu railway station, the Japanese detachment cut down a number of telegraph poles, sliced many telegraph lines, and destroyed sections of the railroad. As they were nearing the completion of their task, a small Russian detachment opened fire, prompting the Japanese cavalry to withdraw. The principle objective of the mission had already been accomplished, however. The Japanese had succeeded in disrupting the Russian means of transportation and communication.[21] This, and other such cavalry episodes in the Russo-Japanese War, solidified the place of cavalry in British tactical doctrine as the professors taught it at Sandhurst. If the doubts of cavalry's future functions dissipated, questions about the impact of novel technology still plagued the

---

[19] Captain J. B. Jardine, "Battle of Sha Ho," 1: 659-60.

[20] Lieut.-Col. A. L. Haldane, "Japanese Cavalry Raid against the Russian Lines of Communication in January, February, and March 1905,"in *The Russo-Japanese War*, 2: 67; Capt. J. B. Jardine, "A Japanese Cavalry Raid before the Battle of Mukden,"in *The Russo-Japanese War, 2*:59.

[21] Jardine, "A Japanese Cavalry Raid before the Battle of Mukden," 2: 62.

British officer corps and the professors at Sandhurst. Although new achievements in weapons science have been briefly mentioned above (see Chapter 3), one piece of military hardware lacked a definite place in the army, in tactical doctrine, and in the Sandhurst curriculum: the machine gun.

Although the machine gun had its most basic origins in the sketches of the Renaissance inventor and artist Leonardo da Vinci, the seed of the rapid fire weapon's development was the Gatling Gun, which was first used in combat by Federal troops in the American Civil War. By the late-nineteenth century, more "fully automatic" weapons were in production: the *mitrailler* (used in the Franco-Prussian War), the Maxim (c. 1885), and the Hotchkiss (1897) models could fire about 30 rounds per minute.[22] Since few major wars occurred since the weapons' development, the leaders of most armies, including the British army, did not know what the best means of employing these weapons would be.[23]

As Tim Travers has asserted, the Manchurian War demonstrated that the machine gun was a lethal and potentially useful piece of hardware.[24] During the conflict, however, the machine gun found its way into a variety of tactical situations. The Japanese 2nd Cavalry Brigade included a battery of six machine guns which they used in a support

---

[22] Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Evolution of Weapons and Warfare* (New York: Da Capo, 1984), 215; Travers, *The Killing Ground*, 63.

[23] Travers, *The Killing Ground*, 62-5.

[24] Ibid., 64.

role.[25] The Russians used machine guns in their defenses, but tended to group them in batteries like field guns, howitzers, or mountain artillery and/or formed separate machine gun companies.[26] As late as 1910 the British military, still had no official policy regarding the placement of machine guns or their most effective tactical value.

Even though the Russo-Japanese War did not answer the continued questions about the most effective ways the British army should employ machine guns, the conflict solidified tactical doctrine on all other levels and "proved" the continued relevance of the tactical theories taught at Sandhurst 1874-1905. As a result of the enduring applicibility of the curriculum and the doctrines which comprised it, the Sandhurst instructors of the 1905-14 era did little to change their lectures except to add examples from Manchuria.

---

[25] Captain J. B. Jardine, "Battle of Sha Ho," 1: 662.

[26] See Lieut.-Col. A. L. Haldane, "Second Japanese Army. Operations from the 4th August to 4th September 1904,"in *The Russo-Japanese War, 2:* 239, 248; Gen. Aleksei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin, *The Russian Army and the Russo-Japanese War* (London: John Murray, 1909; reprint Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1977), 2:136-7.

Chapter Five:

From Manchuria to Flanders: Curricular Paralysis, 1905-1914

"The teaching of modern history is, then, so clear on the fatal consequences of defensive tactics (except, of course, for a local and temporary purpose), that it is unnecessary to labour a point now universally accepted."[1]

— Maj.-Gen. E. A. Altham
The Principles of War Historically Illustrated (1914)

When the military observers returned to Britain from their travels in the Far East, they submitted their reports to the War Office. Once handed in, the General Staff had the responsibility of studying the observations and determining the new developments in warfare and how the British Army should adjust its tactical and strategic doctrine. Rather than discovering a drastic change in how combat was waged, the staff officers' beliefs about tactical "realities" were reinforced by the conduct of the Russo-Japanese War. These conclusions were then passed from the General Staff to the instructors at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, who had also examined the observers findings.

---

[1] Major-General E. A. Altham, *The Principle of War Historically Illustrated* (London:MacMillian and Company, 1914).

As evident by one of the last tactical handbooks published before the onset of attrition on the Western Front, Major-General E. A. Altham's *The Principles of War Historically Illustrated* (1914), Sandhurst professors were convinced by both historical precedent and the recent Manchurian conflict that the axioms of war generally accepted since the mid-eighteenth century were just as relevant in the early-twentieth century. Altham frequently cited the events in the Far East in his text, often directly quoting the war reports and the official histories. These documents clearly demonstrated to Altham and the British military intelligentsia that Frederick the Great's "combination of fire development with a mobility which enabled the attack to strike quickly and hard at a decisive point" remained the guiding principle of warfare.[2]

Like the professors argued before the Russo-Japanese War, the enemy's most vulnerable and "descisive" point was often to be found on his flank. The Manchurian campaigns confirmed this belief, even if that position was often entrenched. As the Prussian soldier-king acted centuries before, both the Russian and Japanese armies were able to drive the enemy from their field fortifications with superior firepower. Altham and the Sandhurst professors observed this continuity and persisted in proclaiming the wonders of an opening artillery bombardment, instructing the Gentlemen Cadets that the

---

[2] Ibid., 205; Lieut.-Col. A. L. Haldane, "Second Japanese Army. — Operations from 20th October 1904 to 29th January 1905, including General Mishcenko's raid and the Battle of Hei-kou-tai,"in *The Russo- Japanese War,* 2: 14-15. In addition, Altham refers to Haldane's report in his text.

artillery should bombard the enemy and offer close infantry support as the foot-soldiers advanced. Such artillery action "[characterized] every daylight attack of the Manchurian War."[3] In addition, Sandhurst faculty continued to instruct their students that infantry should advance to a "decisive range" as quickly as possible before they should establish their firing line, preferably at 600 yards from the enemy's location. Once the enemy's position was sufficiently weakened by artillery fire and the infantry firing line, the troops would then attempt to drive off the enemy with the bayonet. To Altham and the instructors, rapidity of movement was of the utmost importance and "the Manchurian campaign ... wiped out the mistaken inference ... that bayonet fighting belonged to the past."[4] In the areas of coordinated infantry and artillery attack, the Russo-Japanese War confirmed the "absolute" tactical "truths" held by the British military, and the Sandhurst faculty continued to teach these theories to the Gentlemen Cadets.

Although the Manchurian campaign confirmed infantry and artillery doctrine, the battlefield tenets on the employment of cavalry remained as muddled as they had been prior to the conflict. Major-General Douglas Haig, the future commander of the B. E. F., advocated the continued necessity of cavalry in the modern army. In fact, he asserted that

---

[3] Altham, *Principles of War*, 167.

[4] Ibid., 205.

the larger the army, the greater the need for an effective mounted arm. Haig continued to argue that the need for cavalry shock action had not dissipated (see Chapter Three above), in fact he maintained that the prolonged artillery bombardment inherent in modern warfare would break down an enemy's morale all the more quickly, thus exposing the foe's army to the possibility of collapse at the brisk approach of attacking horsemen.[5]

Beyond the need to strike rapidly at the enemy's front and transforming a withdrawal into a rout, Haig also recognized what Henderson had contended not many years prior: cavalry was largely the strategic arm. Haig claimed that two of the primary roles of cavalry were intelligence gathering and disrupting the enemy's lines of communication and supply. Sandhurst professors continued to instruct the G. C.'s about the importance of cavalry in these two functions. The capacity of mounted units as the eyes and ears of an army was nothing new; the role of cavalry as the arm of strategic penetration, disrupting the efforts of the enemy's high command to communicate with its army in the field, was reinforced by the events in Manchuria. Actions like the raid on the Han-chia-wan-tzu station (see above, Chapter Four) and others demonstrated the power of horsemen to wreak havoc upon the enemy by upsetting his lines of communication and supply. Although events confirmed the need for troopers to be as skilled with a firearm as the *arme blanche*, the recent effectiveness of cavalry in action countered the arguement

---

[5]Haig, *Cavalry Studies*, 4, 8.

of those who claimed that "the day of Cavalry is past."[6] Professors at Sandhurst continued to teach the methods for employing cavalry because the events in the Far East demonstrated that the mounted arm was as useful in 1914 as it had been in earlier years.

The Sandhurst faculty and the British military hierarchy-at-large continued the extoll the virtues of high *élan* regardless of the arm of service. The Japanese warrior spirit of Bushido was not only effectve, but also contagious. To be sure, high troop morale was a key element of the Prussian army in 1866 and 1870, and that army was rapidly victorious in both instances. In fact, Altham in particular placed much weight to the role of the spirit and battlefield assertiveness in the Prussian victory over France in 1870.[7]

Although decisiveness was a much desired quality that military leaders should possess, the Sandhurst faculty was still waffling on the most effective (i. e., lethal) manner to employ machine guns in the British tactical doctrine. British tacticians thought about attaching machine guns to cavalry, thus employing that arm's great mobility to move the guns to a location on the flanks or firing line (when attacking) or to reinforce a position (in defense). Others desired to replace some field artillery pieces with machine

---

[6] Ibid., 8-9.

[7] Altham, *The Principles of War*, 228.

guns because the latter was more effective at close range. One point of agreement, however, was that the weapon should not be clustered in batteries like the Russians had done in Manchuria. This practice had the tendency to draw enemy artillery fire on that position. Because of the general disagreement on how machine guns were to be employed, the professors at Sandhurst viewed them as "weapon[s] of opportunity." The Crown's officers should use machine guns wherever and whenever they found the "opportunity" to do so, and they could be of great benefit if properly protected.[8] Machine guns were such a recent technological development that there had been insufficient "experimentation" in the laboratory of history for the Sandhurst faculty to compose a lucid and coherent doctrine.

By the onset of the Great War, the principles championed by the faculty at Sandhurst had ceased to be axioms; they became an ideology based upon pseudo-scientific historical "experimentation." The tactical doctrine of Clery and DeGruyther — founded on the postulates employed by Frederick the Great and confirmed by Napoleon, Moltke, and Akiyama — was reiterated in the works of Altham and Haig. In fact, the tactical axioms became so embedded in the British military mind, instructors dismissed any examples of military history which seemed to challenge the veracity of the "law" by illustrating the principle was incorrectly applied. The doctrine etched upon the minds of

---

[8] Ibid., 313-4, 317-9, 321, 324; Travers, *The Killing Ground*, 64-5.

the men who passed through the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, did more than feed the fires of historical speculation. British military thinkers applied their tactical theories to the battles of the past. About Pickett's Charge, one of the most glaring examples of artillery shelling preparing the way for infantry which advanced a great distance without firing (and a glaring example of how disastrous the assault could be), Altham wrote

> The attack failed, but it failed not by reason of its daring, but for lack of artillery support and for lack of Longstreet's cooperation. Had Lee's design been carried out in all respects as originally conceived, Pickett's infantry's heavy sacrifice would not have been made in vain.[9]

Their impressions of how warfare was *supposed* to be and how combat should be conducted left the future officers unable to practice what was a central part of an officer's plan: flexibility. Sandhurst professors indoctrinated their students to believe that if their military maneuvers were going to be successful, the G. C.'s would have to follow the rules of warfare.

The Gentlemen Cadets were very familiar with "playing by the rules." Besides spending their lives operating within an intellectual environment which neatly packaged ideas into "right" and "wrong," students unintentionally reinforced this rigid system of thought in their recreation. Diversions such as sports consisted of rules which the pupils followed quite willingly. Because of the students' comfort with performing under a set collection of parameters like the rules of different games and activities the concept of

---

[9]Altham, *Principle of War*, 317-8.

organized violence having regulations seemed less foreign; therefore, sports assumed an supplemental role to the in-class curriculum at Sandhurst.

Chapter Six:

"No Brighter Scene": Sport at the RMC

"The Sports have, however, become a most popular institution, and perhaps it is no exaggeration to say that no brighter scene can be imagined than the annual gathering on the picturesque cricket-ground of the Royal Military College in May"[1]

— A. F. Mockler-Ferryman,
Annals of Sandhurst

Although most sports were not a formal part of the tactical curriculum, the principles embodied in organized physical activity fit in well with the values of the Royal Military College's coursework. Sport required mental and discipline and, perhaps even more importantly, forced the participants to operate within a given set of rules and parameters. Athletic competition stressed thought and activity within a certain collection of boundaries and, therefore, reinforced the rigid tactical laws learned in the classroom. To be sure, the faculty of Sandhurst probably did not intend the games and activities which took place on the RMC's grounds to be further strengthening of classwork. At face value, the workouts were nothing more than entertaining diversion which had the added benefit of keeping the future officers of the army physically fit.

Of course, the Gentleman Cadets did not learn most of their physical pursuits at Sandhurst. Activities such as cricket, football (or, in American English, "soccer"), or

[1] Mockler-Ferryman, *Annals of Sandhurst*, 185.

horseback riding were a part of almost every cadet's life since boyhood. Additionally, most of the students at Sandhurst attended one of the great public schools such as Eton, Rugby, Harrow, or Repton. These institutions stressed leadership, "loyalty, honour, chivalry, Christianity, patriotism, [and] sportsmanship."[2] By the time the young man arrived at Camberly rail station to attend their first day at the Royal Miliary College, many sports were a significant part of his life. Because of the great physical and moral value of physical activity, the Governors and Commanders-in-Chief of Sandhurst did not want to discourage the G. C.'s in their athletic pursuits.

The Royal Military College encouraged the participation in a various number of activities and provided some facilities for their pursuit. Of course, not all of the athletics were extra-curricular. The cadets had to perform parade ground exercises in their drill requirement. Additionally, every student at the RMC had a riding requirement (since the General Staff expected all officers to know how to ride and lead from horseback, especially in a war of motion) and the faculty strongly encouraged gymnastics.[3] Winston Churchill, who graduated from Sandhurst in 1894, especially enjoyed the riding, more so than any other activity at the College.[4]

---

[2]Peter Parker, *The Old Lie. The Great War and the Public School Ethos* (London: Constable, 1987) 17. In American parlance, the British public school is an elite private school.

[3] Mockler-Ferryman, *Annals of Sandhurst*, un-numbered appendix.

[4] Winston Churchill, *My Early Life* (New York: Scribner's/MacMillan: 1930; 1987) 45-9.

Predictably, Churchill was not alone in his love for the non-book element of the curriculum. Sport was very popular among the Gentleman Cadets and many of the young men participated in a variety of activities. Some of the events were clearly designed for fun. For example, the faculty and Gentleman Cadets of Sandhurst turned the civility and grandeur of riding on its ear in the annual Costume Donkey Race. During this popular contest, several donkeys and their riders were clad in various attire. Although the Honorable Secretary of the College had to step in occasionally and "supervise" the naming of the animals, the event was obviously almost pure fun. Some of the races more celebrated participants were H. H. Aspinall and his pseudo-steed "Ass-pin-all," J. Shakespear riding "Ass You Like It," and the obvious francophobe H. Rose on "*Gloire de Dijon.*"[5]

Obviously, not all of the well-attended events were as deliberately silly as the Costume Donkey Race. In fact, some of the club events at the Royal Military College had a definite battlefield applicability. A group of students formed the Cadets' Rifle Club in 1881. The club was so popular with the students and the faculty that the Governor of the College requested from the War Office 17,000 rounds of ball shot and 10,000 rounds of powder for the exclusive use of the Rifle Club. The army was never the first concern of the War Office. The Royal Navy was always Whitehall's first military concern and the budget for the army was never great. As a result, the War Office was reluctant to supply the RMC with such a volume of ammunition for the use of a Rifle Club, even if it did

[5] Ibid., 211.

mean the Crown's future officers were going to use it to improve their marksmanship. As a result, the Rifle Club received 6,000 rounds of ball shot, enough for only twenty rounds per cadet. This allotment from the War Office never increased, even as the organization expanded in size and even when the club's members paid dues to defray the cost of the rounds. When musketry became part of the required curriculum in 1893 (it had not been required up to this year), the supply of ammunition to the club dropped off until 1896 when the War Office allotment dried up all together.[6]

Although the Rifle Club had difficulty receiving all of the material it desired, the Royal Military College did expand its athletic facilities, much to the delight of the Gentleman Cadets. In 1880, the College built a cinder track for its runners (in 1883 the college even found the ammunition to start its track races with a pistol); a six-hole golf course was built in 1890, even though it was relatively simple since it shared the terrain with the football field and could not have any water hazards or sandtraps as a result; and squash courts were added in 1898. In fact, the Royal Military College — the supposed training ground for the Realm's officers — resembled a gentlemen's club judging from some of its activities. The RMC had a polo club, but the Commander-in-Chief of the Army abolished it in 1894 because "the game encouraged extravagance." He had no

[6] Ibid., 214-5.

problem with the continued actions of the Officers' Sporting Club as they continued to hunt on the College's properties stocked with rabbit, pheasant, and "groundgame."[7]

Football and cricket were more mainstream sports and were so popular that Mockler-Ferryman in his chronicle, *The Annals of Sandhurst*, simply recorded the results of the contests between the RMC and the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich. The athletic contests, although fun for the Gentleman Cadets and a source of friendly rivalry with Woolwich, the sports honed the student's skills in achieving victory within the accepted set of rules. The reader will probably accept the assertion that all games have rules. Players in a football match have to achieve victory in the contest while obeying the rules of the game. For example, a striker cannot pick up the ball, run with it, and throw it into his opponent's net. (Only the goaltenders have the ability to touch the ball with his hands.) A striker, the fullbacks, and the halfbacks have to move the ball, develop a strategy to advance the ball, penetrate the opponent's defences, and score a goal. The plan and its execution had to comply with the rules. In essence, the sports and activities at Sandhurst subliminally reinforced the general principles the professors taught in the classroom: that in all contests, whether on the cricket field or the battlefield, had a certain set of parameters that had to be observed — a *structure*.

The student life at the Royal Military College tended to dominate the writings of those who attended their officer training there. As mentioned above, Churchill wrote

---

[7] Ibid., 256-7, 261.

about the physical aspects of his life at the College. Mockler-Ferryman, who was a professor of Military Topography in the late-nineteenth century, spent few pages talking about the academics and almost three hundred discussing the athletics of the institution. Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery (later Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, K. G.), who attended the RMC in 1907, wrote only of the College's defeat of the Woolwich rugby team in December 1907 and of the time he was demoted from Lance-Corporal to Gentleman Cadet for lighting another student's shirt tail on fire, badly burning that chap's hind quarters.[8] With the great importance of athletic competition in the lives of the students who attended the RMC, the impact of the lessons of sport — playing by "the rules" within a structured and fair enviornment — assumed new importance. The lessons of the playing field and of the classroom were soon tested in Flanders.

---

[8]Montgomery of Alamein, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, K.G.* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1958), 23-6.

Conclusion:

"This isn't War"

"I don't know what is to be done — this isn't war!"[1]

— Field Marshal Lord Kitchner after the
Battle of Aisne and the "Race to the Sea" (1914)

On 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated in Sarajevo. Within five weeks, Europe tumbled over the precipice of disaster into the Continental conflict many could see coming amid the many diplomatic crises since the turn of the century. From the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia on 28 July 1914 until the first days of August, most governments of West-Central Europe wondered about whether the British government would commit the Crown's forces to the conflict brewing across the Channel. When Germany declared war on Belgium on 4 August, all questions were dispelled by Britain's entrance into the war the same day. This was the moment for which the professors at Sandhurst had been preparing their students, many of whom were now officers in the expeditionary force to the Continent.

The British Expeditionary Force consisted of 80,000 men, 315 field guns, 125 machine guns, and approximately 30,000 horses (for both transportation and cavalry

[1]J . F. C. Fuller, *The Conduct of War, 1789-1961* (New York: Da Capo, 1961;1992), 159-60.

duty). [2] The body was divided into two corps. The I Corps was under the command of General Douglas Haig; General Horace Smith-Dorrien was in charge of II Corps. Sir John French, a man who had a reputation as an intrepid and resourceful leader, was the Force's commander.[3] In comparison to the other major land forces on the Western Front, the BEF was minuscule. At the outbreak of hostilities, the French mobilized five armies consisting of a total of about 1.1 million men and the Germans put seven armies (about 1.3 million men) on their western frontier.[4] Additionally, the British General Staff had no formal war plan, at least not in the same sense as the Schlieffen Plan or Plan XVII. As a result of the Anglo-French staff conversations in 1910 and 1911, the BEF would place itself on the extreme left of the French position adjacent to the French Fifth Army. The deployment in the opening days of August 1914 was nearly flawless. Even the officer's sabres were sharpened according to schedule.[5]

---

[2] Martin Gilbert, *The First World War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 35.

[3] Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: MacMillan, 1962), 198; James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1981), 43.

[4] Brigadier-General Sir James E. Edmonds, *A Short History of World War I* (New York, London, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1951), Map 1.

[5] Ibid., 18. The Schlieffen Plan was the military strategy of the German Army, designed by Count Alfred von Schlieffen (Chief of the General Staff, 1891-1906) to face the growing prospect of a two-front war. Germany would mobilize the bulk of its armed forces on the western frontier, sweep through Belgium and Luxembourg, take Paris, and trap the French army on the Alsatian frontier. Schlieffen assumed that the French would direct the bulk of its army to Alsace and Lorraine in an effort to retake those provinces which were lost to Germany in the Treaty of Frankfort (1871) as a result of the Franco-Prussian War. The German army would then be transported to the Eastern Front, where Russia would just be getting its troops to the field, and knock them out before the Romanov army would have a chance to adequately organize.

Plan XVII was the French strategy to send the bulk of its army into Alsace-Lorraine and break the Germans there, forcing the Kaiser's forces to fall back and cover Berlin. For more information about war planning, see A. J. P. Taylor's *War by Timetable.*

The BEF headquartered itself at Le Cateau, made contact with the French Fifth Army (commanded by General Charles Lanrezac), and advanced to the Belgian village of Mons, taking a position parallel to the Mons-Condé Canal. Haig's I Corps was on the right flank, Smith-Dorrien and his II Corps occupied the town and the left. The men dug defensive positions on 22 August 1914 and waited for the German First Army, under the command of General Alexander von Kluck, to approach. His army was advancing rapidly through the Belgian countryside, and already trapped an Anglo-Belgian force in Antwerp, cut off from the main Allied position. Kluck was not expecting to meet the British at Mons, in fact he thought he was in a position to move around the *French* left flank, but his First Army ran right into the British II Corps on 23 August. Kluck had no idea the British had even disembarked in France.[6]

The German commander, of course, had no difficulty reaching a decision about how to handle this unexpected encounter: Kluck would attack that "contemptible little army," sweep it aside, and continue his drive though Belgium and into the French industrial heartland.[7] The BEF, however, was not a hastily assembled body of conscripts, but paid professionals, volunteers who had been honing their rifle skills for years. The battle opened with clash of the British cavalry with a group of German Uhlans in what would be one of the last major clashes between horsemen in European history. Soon Kluck's infantry came forward and began its attack. As wave after wave of Germans fell

---

[6] Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I*, 43-4.

[7] Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, 248.

in the face of Smith-Dorrien's infantry Kluck wondered what he was up against. His officers reported that every British infantryman was armed with a machine gun, although Kluck probably doubted this claim to a certain extent. All the general knew was that his troops were taking heavy losses, but they were inflicting heavy casualties as well. Smith-Dorrien knew, as the German general launched attack after attack, that his II Corps was outnumbered. He held out as long as possible, but as the Germans entered the town, Smith-Dorrien withdrew his troops in good order reconcentrating them three miles to the south. Eventually, Lanrezac sent word to the British generals that he and his French army was retiring. The BEF, having to maintain contact with the French left flank, also withdrew.[8]

On the evening of 25 August, the BEF established a defensive perimeter around Le Cateau, again with the II Corps on the left and the unengaged I Corps on the right. The French, however, had no intention of stopping there. They intended to reform a defensive line further to the rear and informed General French about this decision. General French, ordered Smith-Dorrien and Haig to continue to withdraw while maintaining contact with Lanrezac's Fifth Army. Haig receive the command and withdrew. Smith-Dorrien, on the other hand, did not receive the order until well after midnight. His troops were exhausted and could not be made to withdraw in good order with no rest in the middle of the night. He decided, therefore, to remain where he was

---

[8] Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I*, 44.

and meet the Germans the next day, "give [them] a bloody nose," and retreat while Kluck's army reformed itself.[9] Smith-Dorrien and his II Corps spent the night mining the bridges over the canal and waiting of the silhouette of attacking German infantry to appear on the horizon.[10]

At 9:00 A.M., Kluck's artillery began raining shells upon the British position. To the entrenched II Corps, the assaulting German troops made "the most perfect targets."[11] Many of Kluck's attacks failed against the well-trained British infantryman whose rapidity of fire again made the German general wonder how many machine guns he was facing. Smith-Dorrien, however, was suffering from want of numbers. As the battle raged into the evening hours, he ordered the destruction of the bridges and withdrew with some help from a detachment of French cavalry. In its efforts to "bloody Kluck's nose," the II Corps sustained 7,800 casualties and the loss of over thirty guns.[12] As the Anglo-French armies continued to retreat, and through the Allied counterattack which began with the series of confrontations known as the Battle of the Marne (September 1914), the conduct of the engagements remained the expected war of motion. The way the war was being fought

---

[9] Ibid., 47.

[10] Gilbert, *The First World War*, 60.

[11] Tuchman, *The Guns of August.*, 256.

[12] Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I*, 47; quote from Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, 255-6.

was in line with the way the professors at Sandhurst said it would be. That changed on the banks of the Aisne.

On 14 September, after a week of pursuing the German army, the BEF and the French army encountered the Germans entrenched on the heights just beyond the north bank of the Aisne. The weather had been foul for days, raining heavily much of the time, tuning the ground soft and difficult for troops to maneuver. For four days, the Allies — especially the British — attempted to take the heights, but the German defenses punctuated by machine guns proved impregnable. The Allied advance came to a sudden halt. Both the German and the Allied armies tried to out-flank the other in what has become known as the "race to the sea." The Western Front settled into a war of attrition and the war that many, including the Sandhurst faculty, had come to expect sank into the mud of Flanders' Fields.[13]

Both the German and the Anglo-French armies were confronted with the same tactical nightmare. Against entrenched German positions heavily fortified with machine guns, the BEF's offensive tactics of mobility were of little use and the officers had to exercise the necessary military attribute of flexibility and improvise a way to achieve a victory. Initially, British and French commanders interpreted their inability to lead their armies to tactical victory to be as the result of their misapplication of the battlefield "laws" taught to them at their military academies, rather than any defect in the principles

---

[13] Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I*, 47.

themselves. Throughout 1915, the officers tweaked plans of attack in a trial-and-error effort to discern what they as leaders were doing wrong and/or what tactical shortcoming caused the assault to fail. The Allied leadership most often concluded that the artillery preparation in any given attack was not severe enough, and would have to be made more lethal in the next advance. This practice of creating variations on the general themes taught at Sandhurst (in the British case) continued through 1915 and early 1916, reaching their apex along the River Somme.

The Somme itself was more a stream than a river and of little strategic significance. It was, however, where the British and French armies met on the Western Front and lent itself well to a coordinated, multinational attack. French General Joseph Joffre and British General Sir Douglas Haig planned to launch the joint offensive in the summer of 1916. As the German attack on the French at Verdun — an assault which began in February — continued into spring and summer, Joffre had to reallocate troops slated for the Somme operation to the beleaguered fortress in the south. Although some French troops would be involved, the advance at the Somme would be largely a British operation.[14]

Haig composed the broader generalities of the assault, but left the details of the planning to General Sir Henry Rawlinson. Unlike Haig, who was a cavalry officer, Rawlinson was an infantryman. When given the outline of the plan, Rawlinson had some

---

[14]Ibid., 148-9.

concerns. His doubts were not the result of a belief that infantry could not take a fortified position by frontal assault. (These misgivings would have been justified given the conduct of the war since the Race to the Sea.) His skepticism came from the composition of the attacking force. Unlike the initial units of the BEF, the men who would participate in the battle were volunteers, not professionals. Rawlinson told Haig on 19 April that he was concerned that the new troops would be easily flustered by the horrors of war and would become disorganized in the advance.[15] He was unsure whether a "green" force of amateurs could take the position. Implicit in his comment to Haig was the belief that a professional force *could* be victorious if all battlefield "truths" were followed properly: he did not question the feasibility of the plan, only the qualifications of the men selected to carry it out.

To compensate for the inexperience of the troops and the strength of the German position, Rawlinson extended the duration of the artillery preparation to one week. As with other attacks in the war, the British leadership planned a general barrage which would disrupt communication between the front line and the German command centers, eliminate the barbed wire perimeter, and inflict heavy casualties. Just before the attack, the artillery would shift from a general to a zoned barrage, starting from the front-line trench, then moving toward the German rear as the infantry made their advance across no-man's land. After such careful and extensive preparation, Rawlinson and Haig believed

---

[15]Johnson, *Breakthrough!*, 102.

that the infantry would have to do little more than "walk over" and take the enemy position.[16]

The artillery began its preparatory barrage on 24 June 1914. When the infantry went "over the top" on 1 July, little went according to plan. The German barbed wire that was supposed to be destroyed by the artillery was intact. The Germans occupying the trench were in their bombproof shelters and manned their positions when the British infantry advanced. When the attackers tried to cut the German barbed wires, they came to the frightening realization that the wire was of heavier gauge than their cutters could handle and many died in their efforts to penetrate the barrier. The first day of the Somme was the bloodiest day in the history of the British army. They lost over 57,400 casualties, over 19,000 of them were killed.[17] The first day should have proven to any remaining doubters that the intensification of the artillery assault, in an effort to "force" the absolute tactical "truths" as they were taught at Sandhurst to function as they were "supposed" to, would not alter the face of the war. Another solution had to be created.[18]

The British officer corps, however, came up with no solution. Their instructors at Sandhurst indoctrinated them with the belief that battlefield tactics were unchanging. Given the static nature of tactics over the 150 years preceding the First World War,

---

[16]Ibid., 101-3; Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I*, 150-1.

[17]Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I*, 154.

[18] Ibid., 148-56.

combined with the pseudo-scientific method of "proving" the continued relevance of those doctrines, the Royal Military College at Sandhurst all but destroyed the ability, and, to a certain extent, the desire of the British officer corps to adapt to the altered nature of warfare. Attempts to achieve a breakthrough were tried again and again at Ypres, Aisne, and Arras because the commanders believed that their methods *should* be working and all it would take for the assault to be successful was greater artillery preparation. The use of new tactical and technological advances, such as the tank, was delayed for months because British officers believed that a breakthrough was imminent, and they continued to believe so through 1917. While the British officers were bound in their inflexibility, the German officer corps was busy innovating.

In 1917, the German army on the Eastern Front had been laying siege to the Baltic port of Riga for nearly two years. As the stalemate continued, General Oscar von Hutier led an effort to re-evaluate the successes and failures of the belligerent powers since 1914. As a result of his mental flexibility and willingness to accept the fact that the old ways of warfare had past, Hutier developed a new system of tactics. Hutier's plan consisted of the employment of fresh, highly-trained "stormtroopers" — deployed at the last possible moment — to carry out a variety of specialized objectives at key locations: cutting telegraph lines, disrupting supply, destroying depots, &c. The attack was concentrated on the weaker points of the enemy line, bypassing the strongpoints, and was preceded with a very short artillery barrage (since prolonged cannonades had become a virtual announcement that an attack was about to take place). The results in Riga were

astounding. The Germans launched their attack on the Baltic port on 1 September 1917. Within two days, the Imperial German flag flew over the city. "Hutier tactics," as they have since been called, were enormously successful and produced comparatively low attacker casualties.[19]

As Hutier tactics continued to prove their effectiveness — including producing fantastic results at Caporetto (1917), Cambrai-St. Quinton (1917), and during the Spring Offensive (1918) — British commanders maintained their adherence to the old tactics of Frederick the Great. Although the British experimented with the tank, most notably at Cambrai (1917), it was too awkward, too underdeveloped, and too unconventional for the traditionalists, and was under-employed as a result.[20] The combination of the rejection of the tank and the inability to create new tactical doctrines demonstrated the way in which the British officer corps clung to the tactics taught at Sandhurst, assuming that, eventually, they would "work." By way of their curriculum, the Sandhurst professors argued that battlefield innovation itself was a thing of the past. The recent examples of Hutier tactics at Riga and the success of the tank at Cambrai were no match for the weight of centuries of military history and tactical "law" and the British officers' strict adherence to the principles taught at the RMC caused many a young man to perish on the Western Front.

---

[19] Ibid., 212-3.

[20] Ibid., 246, 249-50, 259-80.

As the rosters of casualities grew ever longer, one would think that the British public would clamor for a re-evaluation of the effectiveness of the British Army, including officer training. Apparently, no such public outcry took place. *The Times* of London contained no articles about an investigation of Sandhurst (or Woolwich, for that matter). In fact, the majority of the press about the two institutions was limited to the list of Gentleman Cadets who had sucessfully completed their courses. Although *The Times* mentioned no investigation, this does not necessarily mean that a discreet re-evaluation did not take place. The papers mentioned that more science would be added to the curriculum and that future students would spend eighteen months at the College, rather than one year.[21]

Following the war, a confidential commission under the chairmanship of R. B. Haldane investigated the curriculum at Sandhurst which many officers viewed through hindsight as ineffective and "a jest."[22] The Haldane Commission determined that the course should be extended to two years and "that a certain amount of History (say two hours a week) should be given to all."[23] This course should stress events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and should include the connections between historical events and

---

[21] *Times* (London), 6 Jan 1916, 4(E),and 10 May 1918, 5(D).

[22] Great Britain, Board of Education, "Report of an Inspection of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, held by the Board of Education on the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, and 24th October 1919, Sandhurst Collection.; Major-General J. F. C. Fuller, *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, Limited, 1936) 5-6. Fuller (Sandhurst, 1898) described the courses so boring that the Gentleman Cadets "either destroyed Her Majesty's property with out pen-knives or twiddled our thumbs."

[23] Board of Education, "Report of an Inspection of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst," 1, 3.

geography. The curricular content of the tactics courses received no mention in the report.

Although the historian would be ill-advised to assert that the faculty that taught tactics and the curriculum which they employed was solely responsible for the military disaster of World War I, it did play a great role in creating the inflexible tactical mindset which plagued the British officer corps as a whole. Rather than teaching how warfare changed over the centuries, or showing how great commanders adapted to warfare as well as their tactical doctrines, the Sandhurst professors demonstrated the continuity of tactics over time. Additionally, by showing how these doctrines were still being employed by generals in "more recent wars" like the Seven Weeks' War and the Russo-Japanese War, they reinforced the belief that these principles were "absolute truths" that, if properly applied, would be effective. When wave after wave of British and Commonwealth troops fell in a hail of rifle and machine gun fire, the battlefield commanders believed that they were not "correctly" implementing their Sandhurst-taught "laws," rather than doubting the validity of the axioms. Although no institutional learning facility can teach a person how to think, the Royal Military Academy's curriculum trained its Gentlemen Cadets that, if their tactical precepts were properly applied, the creation of a new method of waging war was not necessary. By teaching the operational *science* as opposed to the operational *art*, the Sandhurst faculty and their curriculum ill-prepared the future officers of the Crown for the unpredictable nature of warfare, leaving them unable to adapt to "the fog of war."

Bibliography

Unpublished Documents

Great Britain. Board of Education. *Report of an Inspection of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, held by the Board of Education on the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, and 24th October 1919.* Sandhurst Collection.

Great Britain. War Office. Royal Military College. "Director General to Governor," 2 November 1887. WO 152 (Sandhurst Reference: 88-1218).

Published Documents

Great Britain. War Office. General Staff. *The Russo-Japanese War. Reports from the British Officers Attached to the Russian and Japanese Forces in the Field.* 3 vols. London: HMSO, 1907.

Great Britain. War Office. Royal Military College. *Course of Instruction at the Royal Military College.* London: HMSO, 1888.

Memoirs and Diaries

Churchill, Winston. *My Early Life.* London; New York: Scribners/MacMillan, 1930; 1987.

Fuller, J. F. C., Major-General. *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier.* London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, Limited, 1936.

Montgomery of Alamein. *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, K. G.* Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1958.

Robertson, William, Field Marshal. *From Private to Field Marshal.* London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1921.

Tactical Textbooks, Military Theories, and Military Histories Contemporary to the Period (1874-1914)

Altham, E. A., Major-General. *The Principles of War Historically Illustrated.* London: MacMillan and Company, 1914.

Bird, W. D. *Lectures on the Strategy of the Russo-Japanese War.* London: Hugh Rees, Ltd., 1911.

Crane, Stephen. *Great Battles of the World.* Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1901.

Clery, C. Francis, Major-General. *Minor Tactics.* 13th ed. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Limited, 1896.

DeGruyther, C. M. [Cuthbert Montague], Captain. *Tactics for Beginners.* 2nd ed. London: Gale & Poden, Ltd.; Aldershot:Wellington Works, 1902.

Henderson, G. F. R., Colonel. *The Science of War. A Collection of Essays and Lectures, 1891-1903.* London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1916.

Longman, F. W. *Frederick the Great and the Seven Years' War.* London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1881.

Malleson, G. B. *The Refounding of the German Empire, 1848-1871.* New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1893.

Middleton, O. R., Colonel. *Outlines of Military History; or A Concise Account of the Principal Campaigns in Europe Between the Years 1740 and 1870, being Those Generally Referred to in Our Military Text Books.* London: Mitchell & Company, Military publishers, n.d.

Palat, Général. "Les manoevres de Languedoc en 1913." *Revues des Deux Mondes* 30 (1 December 1915): 698-708.

Pratt, Sisson C., Lieutenant-Colonel. *A Précis of Modern Tactics.* London: HMSO, 1892.

War Reports

Hamilton, Ian, Lieutenant-General. *A Staff Officer's Scrap-Book During the Russo-Japanese War.* 2 vols. London: Edward Arnold, 1907.

Repington, Charles à Court. *The War in the Far East.* London: John Murray, 1905.

Sedgwick, F. R., Captain. *The Russo-Japanese War on Land.* London: Forster Groom & Company, 1906.

Other Sources

Bellamy, Christopher. "The Russian Artillery and the Origins of Indirect Fire, Part II." *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal* 112 (3): 330-7.

Black, Jeremy. *European Warfare, 1660-1815.* New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1994.

Blanchon, Georges. "La guerre nouvelle." *Revue des Deux Mondes* 31(1 January 1916): 82-119.

Bond, Brian. *The Victorian Army and the Staff College, 1854-1914.* London: Eyre Methuen, 1972.

Cornwall, Mark, ed. *The Last Years of Austria-Hungary.* Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990.

Cox, Gary P. "Of Aphorisms, Lessons, and Paradigms: Comparing the British and German Official Histories of the Russo-Japanese War." *Journal of Military History* 1992 56(3): 389-401.

Duffy, Christopher. *The Military Life of Frederick the Great.* New York: Atheneum, 1986.

Dupuy, R. Ernest, and Trevor N. *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History.* 4th ed. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

Eckert, Helmut Alexander. "Bildnis und Lebensgang eines Friederizanianischen Offiziers kuno Friedrich von der Hagen." *Zeitschrift für Heereskunde* 46 (302-303; 1982): 115-7.

Edmonds, James E., Brigadier-General. *A Short History of World War I.* London: Oxford University Press, 1951.

Fiedler, Siegfried. "Die Menschenführung in der Armee Friedrichs des Grossen." *Zeitschrift für Heereskunde* 46 (301; 1982): 61-4; (302-303; 1982): 100-4; (304;1982): 141-5.

Freye, Ulrich and Helmut Schnitter. "Reflexionen über die 'General-Principia vom Kriege' Friedrichs II von Prussen." *Militärgeschichte* 29 (2; 1990): 194-8.

Fuller, J. F. C., Major-General. *The Conduct of War, 1789-1961.* New York: Da Capo, 1961; 1992.

Howard, Michael. "Men against Fire: Expectations of War in 1914." *International Security* 9 (1; 1984): 41-57.

Hozier, H. M. *The Seven Weeks' War. Its Antecedents and Its Incidents.* 2 vols., London: Macmillan and Company, 1867.

Iggers, Georg G. , And James M. Powell. *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990.

Krieger, Leonard. *Ranke: the Meaning of History.* Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Langer, William L. *An Encyclopedia of World History.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978.

Mandelbaum, Maurice. *History, Man, & Reason. A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought.* Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971.

Marolz, Josef. "Die Entwicklung der Verteidigung seit 1900." *Osterreichische Militarische Zeitschrift* 26 (1; 1988) 22-30; (3; 1988) 211-18.

Mockler-Ferryman, A. F., Major. *Annals of Sandhurst.* London: William Heibemann, 1900.

Nahm, Andrew C. "Russia's Policy toward Korea, 1854-1904: A Re-examination." *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 64 (1986):1-48.

Neilson, Keith. "'That Dangerous and Difficult Enterprise': British Military Thinking and the Russo-Japanese War." *War & Society* 9 (2; 1991):17-37.

Nosworthy, Brent. *The Anatomy of Victory. Battle Tactics, 1689-1763.* New York: Hippocrene Books, 1990.

Pozefsky, Peter. "Aleksei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin and the Imperial Russian Army." *UCLA Historical Journal* 6 (1985): 50-82.

Ranke, Leopold von. *The Secret of World History.* Edited with translations by Roger Wines. New York: Fordham University Press, 1981.

Ritter, Gerhard. *Frederick the Great: A Historical Portrait.* Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970.

Scott, H. M. "Frederick the Great and the Defence of Prussia's International Position, 1763-1786." *German History* 12 (3; 1994) 286-307.

Stoddart, D. R. "Geography and War: the 'New Geography' and the 'New Army' in England, 1899-1914." *Political Geography* 11 (1; 1992): 87-9.

Travers, Tim. *The Killing Ground The British Army, the Western Front, and the Emergence of Modern Warfare.* London: Allen & Unwin, 1987.

Vita

Joseph David Prestia completed his A. B. at Colgate University in 1994. He plans on entering in a doctoral program where his primary research field will be European Diplomacy, 1854-1945 with a special focus on Eastern Europe's relations with Western European states. Additionally, he is interested in institutional education and decision making in European diplomacy from 1854 to 1949.