Naval War College Review

Volume 29
Number 3 *Summer*

Article 8

1976

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Recommended Citation
Rosinski, Herbert (1976) "Scharnhorst to Schlieffen: The Rise and Decline of German Military Thought," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 29 : No. 3 , Article 8.
Available at: https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol29/iss3/8

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Napoleon Bonaparte's spectacular and dazzling series of victories not only made him for a while the master of continental Europe, but they also provided the impetus for a remarkable development in military thought in Germany. Starting with Scharnhorst, reaching its zenith with the profundities (and obscurities) of Clausewitz, German military thought was further influenced by the elder Moltke and reached a dead end in the concepts of Count Alfred von Schlieffen. The author did not have the opportunity to revise this essay for publication during his lifetime. The only editing has been to eliminate obvious inaccuracies and to insure grammatical clarity.

Herbert Rosinski (1903-1962) was born and educated in Germany. He taught at the German Naval Staff College and left Germany in 1936, a victim of Nazi persecution. For the remainder of his life, he lived in England and the United States. He is author of The German Army and Power and Human Destiny, in addition to many articles published in the United States and abroad. Ed.

SCHARNHORST TO SCHLIEFFEN:

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF GERMAN MILITARY THOUGHT

by

Herbert Rosinski

I

At the same time that in France Jomini reassembled the various strands of the French School in his interpretation of Napoleon's unprecedented series of overwhelming successes, a new school of military thought arose in Prussia under the leadership and guidance of Scharnhorst; comprising, together with himself and Clausewitz, two other military thinkers, well known and highly esteemed in their own day, but long buried in complete oblivion from which they have been rescued only during the last few years: F.K. von Lossow and Rühle von Lilienstern.[1]

The peculiar characteristic of the German school was its combination of wide practical experience with a strongly pronounced philosophical spirit, reflecting the double influence of Napoleon's revolution of strategy as well as the deep speculative tendencies of German thought in this, its classical age. With Scharnhorst the practical aspect predominated; his wide acquaintance with contemporary literature (hardly philosophy) served only as a general stimulus and leaven. In Lossow and Rühle a dilettante acquaintance with philosophy led partly to excessive skepticism and partly to speculative aberrations, without theoretical or practical value. Only in Clausewitz, at once a passionate soldier, consuming himself all his life in the vain quest for a sphere of activity commensurate to his high gifts and aspirations, and a natural-born theorist, a profound grasp both of the

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empirical substance and of the philosophical implications met in perfect balance to produce the only truly comprehensive theory of war, in which all the conscious and subconscious aspirations of his school found their classical fulfillment.

The great inspiration and theme of Scharnhorst and his circle was the revolution in the art of war brought about by Napoleon. It was Scharnhorst's outstanding achievement that he grasped this unique phenomenon in the history of warfare in its essential features in the very beginning, in the early years of the war in Flanders, and, moreover, from the beginning in a manner incomparably more radical and therefore freer and less dogmatic than Jomini. The development of these profound insights into a detailed analysis was the patient labor of a lifetime, by no means completed at his death. They were the basis of his own widespread and vitally important activities as well as the common source of inspiration for his school.

Yet, this endeavor to grapple with the secret of the new warfare and reduce it to a clearly reasoned theory formed only one aspect of the work of Scharnhorst and his disciples. No less important in their own consciousness was their pronounced opposition to all preceding theories, which Lossow brusquely pushed aside as "nothing but sheer folly," which Rühle considered "wholly inadequate and hardly worth taking note of," while Clausewitz waxes eloquent at their sophisms and trivialities. This antagonism was not confined to the denunciation of those late 18th century writers like Lloyd, Dumas, and Venturini, reflecting by their one-sided "systems" in the theoretical sphere the reduction *ad absurdum* of the old form of warfare just before the transformation; nor to such fantastic speculators as Bülow, but extended even to so prominent an interpreter of the *new* warfare as Jomini, against whose dogmatism not only Clausewitz but Rühle as well felt impelled to raise their pens in the name of the common heritage of their great master.

Thus their opposition to the older theories was directed not only against their *substance*—the older 18th century conception of warfare—but above all against their theoretical *form*, which Jomini, although a representative of the *new* warfare, shared with his predecessors. That is, they opposed the fundamental tendency to see the task of military theory as the establishment, through isolation and abstraction, of a number of basic elements or forms which were claimed to be absolutely valid for every situation, sphere, or age.

Against this hitherto unchallenged procedure, Scharnhorst and his school raised the objection:

> All these attempts at a theory can be considered advances in the sphere of truth only in their analytical aspect; in their synthetic aspect, that is, in the prescription and rules based upon them, they are wholly useless.
>
> They strive towards the establishment of fixed quantities, whereas in war everything is indefinite and the calculation must be based wholly on variable factors.
>
> They concentrate their attention only upon material factors, whereas the whole act of war is permeated with spiritual forces and effects.
>
> They consider activity in war only as onesided, whereas war is a continuous reciprocal intersection of opposed activities.*

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*Based on his knowledge of German military thought, particularly the writings of Clausewitz, Rosinski's quotations from *On War* are reliable. However, he was not satisfied with published English translations of *On War*, and thus he may well have provided his own. For the convenience of our readers, citations to the Jolles translation of *On War* (Washington, D.C.: Combat Forces Press, 1953) are provided. This quotation is from bk. II, chap. 2, sec. 12. Ed.

To which we may add as a fourth objection that they tend to overlook and obscure the differences between the different stages in the evolution of warfare.

As against these "rigid formulas," such as Jomini's preference for the advance on interior lines, or Bülow's one-sided emphasis on the security of the basis, or Lloyd's no less one-sided predilection for key points, Scharnhorst and his circle endeavored to go back to the "new rationality" ("innere Gesetzlichkeit") of the various elements. Deeply imbued with the idea, so characteristic of German thought at that age, of the world as a cosmos permeated by spiritual forces, they believed that by going back from accidental deceptive manifestations of the military elements to what could be deduced "out of their nature" ("aus der Natur der Sache"), controlling and modifying their results wherever necessary by the teachings of practical experience, it would be possible to reach this "new rationality" or "essence" and thereby gain a direct, intuitive insight, making it possible to deal with the ever changing concrete situations in war elastically, according to their "spirit," not by the mechanical, stereotyped application of cut and dried, rigid, unchangeable formulas and precepts; to "act according to the inner nature of the circumstances" ("den Umständen gemäss handeln"), as was Scharnhorst's famous injunction.

In this opposition to all "rigid" concepts and rules, Scharnhorst and his adherents found themselves deeply fortified by the most vivid tangible impressions which they themselves had received of the profound, often paramount influence of the "spiritual forces": on the French side, the overwhelming, sweeping impulse of the national rising in the Revolution, the military genius of Napoleon, the "esprit de corps" of his army; on their side only too often the reverse; again of the element of surprise, deception, and generally psychological preparation in Napoleon's strategy, which Jomini in his dogmatic restriction to the "external forms" had so largely overlooked but which struck a deep answering chord in Scharnhorst's breast;[2] finally, of the unpredictable play of chance and friction, threatening at any moment to transform war almost into a game of hazard, which the older theorists had striven as far as possible to eliminate, but which Rühle and Clausewitz hailed on the contrary as the true "atmosphere" of war, a sphere of freedom in which the strong spirit, rising above its vicissitudes, would find the opportunity to prevail over his less "sovereign" opponent.

Thus, under the combined overwhelming impact of the New Warfare called into being by the genius of Napoleon and of the "idealist" atmosphere surrounding them, with its conception of the world as a network of huge supra-individual forces (the spirits or ideas of the State, Religion, Law, as well as of the concrete historical collective individualities of the various nations, epochs, and civilizations), war to Scharnhorst and his friends became the vision of a gigantic demoniac force, a huge spiritual entity, surcharged with brutal energy; and the revolution Napoleon had wrought in it—not the change of technical details, nor, as for Jomini, the energetic application of certain particularly successful forms—was seen primarily and principally as a radical transformation in the fundamental outlook, a wholly new spirit of waging war, transforming the whole element down to the smallest detail.

In thus shifting the emphasis of their theory from the study of the *conduct* of war to the prior understanding of "War as a Whole"[3] as the indispensable presupposition for the appreciation of its intelligent and successful direction, Scharnhorst and his school ran, however, into a new problem. For, as soon

as they endeavored to pass from the individual elements to "War as a Whole," it seemed that this Whole could not be encompassed by any valid theory; that each war represented so unique a case, that the peculiar circumstances that conditioned it could not be subsumed under any general theory; that the immense role played in it by the imponderable spiritual elements—the subjective qualities of the commands and the balance of moral forces and effects—as well as by the unpredictable play of incertitude and chance (Rühle, Clausewitz) made the whole too utterly incalculable; that the few generalities that could be deduced would amount to hardly more than mere platitudes (Lossow, Clausewitz). Theory, Lossow claimed, might determine individual steps in war, but its findings were valid only within their particular field. A general comprehensive survey was impossible. "The idea of war (Der Begriff vom Kriege), immensely varied and capable of innumerable different applications, is the basis of all military thought. Beyond it no human ingenuity is capable of erecting a complete structure. Only this idea itself must be clear, distinct and complete: This is my opinion."[4] He continued: "Only the spirit in war remains the same. But to attempt to grasp it in a systematic theory is impossible. Therefore there will be no textbook for war and it will be impossible, despite all human ingenuity to study it in books.[5]

Thus, it seemed as if military thought, unable to proceed beyond the elucidation of the abstract idea or concept of war to its systematic comprehensive theory, would forever find itself restricted to the emphasis upon the need of concentrating all forces upon a great objective, pursued without consideration of detail, that formed the kernel of Scharnhorst's teachings, or to the personal inspiration and wholly intransmissible genius of the great commander, the "Feldherr" as Lossow and with him Clausewitz were inclined to believe.

Whether Scharnhorst himself would have succeeded in rising above these limitations and penetrating beyond the collection and consolidation of his fragmentary and widely scattered teachings to a new, systematic survey of the whole, if he had been permitted to complete the study on "War and Its Conduct" which he planned in 1811, it is impossible to say. In the light of what we know of the eminently concrete direction of his mind and of what has come down to us of his writings and his lectures, it does not seem likely.

Lossow and Rühle, on their part, under the influence of their surroundings as well as their own philosophical inclinations, tended to deviate into speculative discussions, which, while here and there producing a novel and striking idea, not infrequently ended in empty and sterile distinction and disquisitions; making their works difficult to read and explaining why, with so much sound substance to their credit, they should have been so completely eclipsed by the incomparably profounder effort of their great colleague.

II

That Clausewitz alone succeeded in transforming the imposing but wholly fragmentary and "aphoristic" vision of Scharnhorst and the diffuse aspirations of Lossow and Rühle into the fully matured and balanced, all-embracing and closely articulated study of the "Whole of the War," which he left to us in his great treatise, was the result of his unique appreciation of the theoretical problems involved; above all, his realization of the vital necessity of determining exactly the point of view from which the matters have to be envisaged and judged and then to keep fixed to that point; for from one point only, as he pointed out, shall we be able to grasp the mass of phenomena in their inner

unity and "only the unity of our point of view can preserve us from contradictions."

Originally, as we have seen above, he yielded to no one in the vehemence of his emphasis on the impossibility or, worse, the platitudinous character of any systematic theory of strategy. Even as late as 1812, when he crystallized the work of this early period in his *Principles of War,* he devoted the major part of them to tactical considerations, restricting his observations on strategy to a few admonitions (along Scharnhorst's lines) on the necessity for concentration of effort and asserting: "If we know how to fight and how to win, little more is needed. For it is easy to combine fortunate results."[6]

Side by side, however, with such denials of the possibility, and value, of a "systematic" theory of war and strategy, we find already in his earliest writings other observations showing him groping for a more comprehensive approach.

As long, however, as, like Lossow and Rühle, he tried to find a foundation for his thoughts in an existing philosophy, grown in an alien soil, as in his early endeavors to model his conceptual framework upon the contemporary theory of aesthetics, he met with but scant success, although he kept some of the ideas thus evolved to the very end. But it was only when in the end he turned his back upon all such "extraneous" aspirations to seek his foundation in the "inner logic" of his subject itself that he finds himself on firm ground at last.

Lossow had claimed that the brutal force of Napoleon's strategy, overthrowing the calculable "rules of convenience" of 18th century warfare, had left no other guide than the intuitive perception of the "spirit" of war by the military genius. Clausewitz, on the contrary, found precisely in this brutal energy the rock upon which he started to found his systematic theory of war.

In 18th century warfare—where nothing was unequivocally determined by inner necessity, where the commanders on both sides tended to act according to the conventional rules instead of the strict military logic of their situation; where the attack, leaving off from the strict logical necessity of its advance toward its goal, preferred to saunter through the campaign almost like a loafer, searching right and left for the chance of picking up cheaply the fruit of a good opportunity; where battles, instead of being sought as the decisive climax in the destruction of the enemy's power of resistance, were taken on for inconsequential reasons, such as a birthday gift to a sovereign, a vindication of the honor of arms, or the mere satisfaction of the vanity of the commander, and at other times were shunned or at best waged only as an "emetic", a last desperate effort in an otherwise hopeless situation; where fortresses, instead of fulfilling their natural functions of relieving the field armies of part of the enemy's pressure, served, on the contrary, as a drag and fetter on their movements—in this type of warfare, theory found no foundation to build on and could do little more than refer to these conventional rules, with a general caution not to be lulled into security by them or accept them as absolute truths.

In contrast, the new strategy inaugurated by Napoleon, by its direction of the entire effort from the outset upon the one aim of the speediest and complete overthrow of the enemy's power of resistance, endowed the "act of war" with a directness of purpose, a coherence and consistency, an "inner logic" that gave theory the firm foundation which it needed to build upon. Because in this form of strategy, the "Act of War as a Whole" was directed upon its "natural" or "logical" aims, and not upon any arbitrary or pusillanimous objective, as was so frequently the case in the 18th century, neither leeway

nor indecision was possible. Every step toward that aim was clearly prescribed to the commander by the inherent military logic of his situation. That aim acted like a powerful magnet pulling the "Act of War as a Whole" into a straight line and every element within it into its proper place and function. The "inner necessity" imparted by that "logical" aim not only fused the "act of war" into a closely knit coherent whole, in which everything was done for compelling reasons, everything was in rapid interaction, no, so to speak, neutral, indifferent interval occurred; where there was only one success, to wit the final, and war became an indivisible whole, the individual links of which possessed value and a significance only with respect to that whole. It also determined the logical function of every individual element: fortresses, battles, flanking positions, attack, defense, space, time, et cetera. From this determination (that is, the direction of the act of war upon the ultimate objective, the final result, which is the overthrow of the enemy's power of resistance), one can see how all threads which run through the conduct of war as a whole take their departure, how from it all individual actions will receive their determination and direction—and that is what is meant by the New Standpoint of Theory.*

III

Clausewitz was that rare phenomenon, a natural born theorist. Whatever he touched revealed under his hands its hidden secrets. In his very first public effort, the trenchant criticism with which he demolished Dietrich Heinrich von Bülow's *Spirit of Modern War*[7] – he introduced that fundamental delimitation between strategy and tactics that was to form the basis of all his subsequent work and through it decisively to condition German and other, military thought down to the present day. The intensity with which he devoted himself to his subject and imbued himself with its exigencies and implications was so acute that he felt any mishandling of it almost as a personal injury. Throughout the whole of his work he could never rest satisfied merely with setting out what he considered the right solution, but, again and again, had to give vent to his indignation at the manner in which its most obvious aspects and necessities seemed to him to have been overlooked and mishandled; thus earning for himself a reputation for haughty arrogance, of which only his intimate friends knew how little it was deserved.

For, at the same time, Clausewitz was anything but a pedant, a self-centered egotist, wrapped up in his abstract, academic reasoning. First and foremost he was a practical soldier who had experienced the reality of war long before he ever sat down to reason about it, and, in his *conscious* evaluation at least, that practical aspect definitely prevailed. All his life we find him striving for a field of activity commensurate to his gifts and considering his theoretical work as a stopgap and makeshift for the more direct usefulness persistently denied him. Yet it was the balance between these two equally well developed aspects of his nature that gave him his unique stature and position in the development of military thought. If his instinctive insight into the nature and exigencies of his subject, his thorough acquaintance with contemporary thought in all its aspects raised his approach high above that of all naive empiricists, such as Jomini, as well as over speculative theorists, like Bülow, his practical commonsense served, on the other hand, to keep his ideas close to the ground and to check his deductions about the "nature of War" continuously against the wealth of practical experience which he had accumulated as the result of his own campaigns, many

*See *On War*, bk. VIII, especially chaps. 2 and 3A.

years of intimate intercourse with prominent soldiers, and a lifelong study of military history. Above all, it gave him a unique understanding of the practical significance of military theory, its possibilities no less than its limitations. The remarkable manner in which we find him continuously applying the general concepts developed in his theoretical analyses to the solution of the concrete practical issues, with which he is simultaneously dealing in his memoranda, is one of the aspects of his work that has failed so far to receive anything like the attention due to it.

It was this fundamental balance of his outlook that, above all, enabled Clausewitz alone among the German school successfully to apply the philosophical tendencies of his age to his subject. Berenhorst, Lossow, and Rühle were all men well conversant with contemporary ideas who had tried to utilize them in their own investigations. But as they had tried to graft them readymade into their subject, the result had been either to confirm them in their skepticism as to the possibility of a general theory or else to mislead them into vacuous, highflown speculations without either theoretical or practical value. Clausewitz alone, after his initial errors in that direction, realized that the only proper application of philosophical methods to the study of war was not to impose upon it from without ideas grown in an alien soil, but to develop by a truly philosophical *procedure* its own specific theory out of its own peculiar nature.

What he learned from philosophy was above all the significance of carefully establishing our fundamental point of departure. Hitherto, military theorists had been accustomed arbitrarily to pick out of the baffling multitude of military phenomena an aspect or several aspects that happened to catch their attention, naively convinced that what appeared to them paramount must necessarily prove the hub of the matter. Clausewitz realized that with so complex a phenomenon as war, only the careful, systematic choice of the logical line of approach could identify the decisive strands and issues. Clausewitz pointed out in his great treatise that nothing in fact is so important in life, as to determine exactly the point of view from which the matters have to be envisaged and judged and then to keep fast to that point; for from one point only shall we be able to grasp the mass of phenomena in their inner unity, and only the unity of our point of view can preserve us from contradictions.

Above all, however, it gave him a unique insight into "War as a Whole," the fact that over and above all individual aspects and elements of its conduct, war constituted a process with its own peculiar issues and problems: a process in which the actions of both sides interweave, like woof and warp, to form something transcending both their individual efforts; now concentrating in acute crises, in which every action assumes highly increased significance and vital decisions fall one way or the other; now, through the ignorance of one and the timidity of the other side, or simply through the common exhaustion of both, relapsing into those prolonged spells of suspense and often almost complete inactivity so strongly at variance with the fundamental vehemence of its nature. A process in which, on both sides, the original political situation out of which it had arisen and the will that called it into being continue to influence and even to interfere in its conduct all through its course; in which the positive or negative aims on either side, the advantages and weaknesses of attack and defense, above all, the vital question which side had "time in its favor" combine into a complex clockwork, pushing or arresting now one and now the other side or both simultaneously.

It is this sphere of "War as a Whole," touched upon, but fundamentally

unexplored by men like Guibert, Jomini, Scharnhorst, and Rühle, that forms the special discovery and preserve of Clausewitz. It is the core of his achievement, the most characteristic, as well as the most original part of his great treatise, the one in which he has most to give us today, partly because these issues have never been discussed with anything like the same comprehensiveness and appreciation, even after he had opened the way to them, partly because of their predominant importance.

This peculiar sphere of "War as a Whole" did not, however, reveal itself to Clausewitz all at one blow. Its discovery and exploration were rather in the nature of a prolonged process that began with his first conscious efforts and had just begun to reach his conclusion, when he had to take leave from his papers. Its first step was made already with the constitution of strategy into an independent and coherent sphere of the "higher conduct of war," over and above all isolated tactical actions; but it was only when he returned to his studies at the end of the Napoleonic Wars that this aspect seems to have impressed itself upon his attention with ever increasing force. First he was struck by the curious anomaly of those spells of simultaneous arrest on both sides in war, the explanation of which continued to preoccupy him until the very end; then he found in the concept of Absolute War, or the inner coherence of the Act of War, the comprehensive framework for his theory. But that framework, in its turn, proved too narrow and too rigid, and as his work progressed new aspects revealed themselves: the manifold influence of the "time factor," the problem of "limited war," finally, the most important of all, the discovery that war was "nothing but the continuation of politics with other means."

This process of the gradual elaboration of the complex structure of the War as a Whole is, however, but the one side of Clausewitz' work. The other, so intimately tied up with it that it is hard to separate, is the continuous integration into this framework of the loose bundle of ideas with which he originally started out and which we still find in his *Principles* of 1812. Thus his most famous single contention, that defense constituted the stronger form of war, originating as a mere bald statement of fact in 1811, was later adduced by him in order to explain those curious periods of mutual arrest; then correlated with its opposite member, attack, to explain that peculiar phenomenon of the "culmination point" of the attack, of which Clausewitz had witnessed so striking an example in Russia in 1812. Finally, it was to serve a decisive role in the determination of the various forms which the planning and conduct of war as a whole would have to consider.* This concept was so closely tied up with these other aspects that General von Caemmerer was perfectly right in asserting that one could as well try to remove it from the body of his work as to remove the heart of a living organism and expect it to live on.

What is true of his famous thesis about the defense is true of all the major elements of Clausewitz' theory. They are all so closely integrated one with the other, and all together in the whole, they "modify," "control" each other so closely, that they form a whole in which no single item can be changed without immediately affecting all the rest.

IV

But, this shifting of the basis of his theory from the parts to the whole, while on the one hand enabling him to arrive at both a perspective of the whole and a far more differentiated and flexible appreciation of the parts, involved

*See *On War*, bk. VIII.

him, on the other hand, in a peculiar problem of which his predecessors (precisely because of their less ambitious approach and aim) had known nothing. As long as the "essence of war" was considered to reside in its individual elements, the universal validity and applicability of these, or of the "principles" based upon them, was no problem. Bourcet's plan with "alternative objectives," Jomini's strategic forms, Scharnhorst's concentration of effort and spirit of the commander could and did recur in every general pattern, whatever the nature of its "inner structure." But, when the essence of war was found to reside not on any of these "permanent" elements, but precisely in the inner structure of the whole, and not *any* "inner structure," but only a peculiarly intense form of it—that tense, purposeful concentration of the whole into a single coherent action, directed upon the speediest and complete overthrow of the enemy's resistance, that had characterized Napoleon's campaigns—this particular form of the *whole* was found to be not only impermanent but not even prevalent. Without the practical confirmation which it had received at Napoleon's hands, one might even have doubted whether it had any claim to reality at all. Under Napoleon, war had indeed approached that "absolute" vehemence, energy, and concentration of purpose which characterized its "true nature"; but the vast majority of wars, 41 out of 50 since the days of Alexander and some wars of the Romans, revealed no such determination and consistency, differing from the "Napoleonic" or "Absolute" form so radically that any reconciliation appeared out of the question. Clausewitz in 1817 first seems to have realized the importance of that issue. Campaigns where the course of events was swift and irresistible, where the clockwork of operations ran as rapidly as the natural friction would permit (for instance 1706, 1751, nearly all campaigns of Bonaparte), are so rare and are accompanied by so peculiar circumstances that one is at loss whether to erect them into a rule or to consider them, on the contrary, the exceptions, that is, the opposite of the rule. To Clausewitz this was a truly maddening alternative for theory. Yet, up to his day nobody had even posed himself that question, not to speak of having investigated and answered it. To him this proved what the theories hitherto put forward were worth.

In the theory of Absolute War, Clausewitz had tried to cut that knot by making the consistent type of war his standard, but he had not solved the problem. As he proceeded with the elaboration of his theory along the lines of the "Absolute" model—passing from strategy as a whole (bk. III) to its fundamental tactical and strategic factor, battle (bk. IV), the organization of forces (bk. V), the two main forms of strategy, defensive (bk. VI) and offensive (bk. VII), and finally gathering up all these individual elements and aspects, so far considered by themselves, in book VIII, "Plan of a War." This problem did not cease to dog his steps, thrusting itself again and again upon his mind. At first he tried to brush it brusquely aside by noting that in the Wars of the Revolution and in particular the campaigns of Bonaparte the conduct of war reached that absolute degree of energy which he considered the natural law of that element. That degree being therefore possible, it was also necessary.

But the issue was not to be shaken off easily. If it had been quieted down one moment, it promptly came back again the next. For, what guarantee was there that, despite the new standard set up by the Emperor, such incoherent wars might not recur again, and where then would be a theory that had concentrated exclusively upon the Napoleonic type? And Clausewitz, although convinced that the door opened up by the Revolution and Napoleon could

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never again be shut as tightly as it was before war had gained full consciousness of its powers, was, on the other hand, just as firmly persuaded that such a high standard could not be maintained indefinitely and that less consistent wars *would* occur again.

In order to appreciate the full significance of this dilemma, one has to understand exactly where the difficulty lay for Clausewitz. It was not—as it was later misinterpreted by Hans Delbrück—in the fact that here were two parallel *empirical* types of war, differing from each other in certain material aspects (their means and objectives), but otherwise equal and, so to speak, *on the same plane.* If that had been all, Clausewitz would have seen no insuperable difficulties in coordinating them within a single doctrine. But even *on the empirical plane,* which was the only one Hans Delbrück and with him all later commentators have seen, their difference for Clausewitz was not relative, but absolute. In respect to the one aspect which he considered paramount, that is, the inner coherence and consistency of the whole, they were, as we can plainly see, not parallels but diametric opposites, mutuallv excluding each other.* And, what was even more important, this difference in their empirical structure made them to Clausewitz radically *unequal* above all *before theory.* Unequal, as we have tried to explain, not only in the sense that the one type, as exemplified in Napoleon's campaigns, conformed to the essential logic of war as an act of violence, while the other did not, but unequal also even in their inner consistency. For the Napoleonic type was not only more true to the real nature of war, but in consequence was determined by an inner necessity that made possible its reduction into a single clear-cut theory of Absolute War. The non-Napoleonic type, in contrast, not only was far removed from that true nature of war, but for that reason was so deficient or lacking in its inner consistency, so much at the mercy of the most unpredictable personnel factors and contingencies, that, as Clausewitz expressly emphasized, it was not possible to grade the many different forms which it assumed according to any scale of objective excellence and hence not possible to reduce this non-Napoleonic form to any single pattern at all.

One has to realize these profound differences which Clausewitz found between the Napoleonic and the other forms of strategy, both on the empirical and even more on the theoretical plane, in order to understand why to him the two were not on the same platform at all and why he found it so extraordinarily difficult to find any common basis that would permit including them within one and the same theory. Unfortunately, it is not possible in this place to demonstrate in detail how the necessity of coping with this ever more insistent problem became the driving force behind the development of his mature theory nor to follow step by step his successive attempts to achieve a satisfactory solution. That would mean writing a running commentary on all the more important sections of *On War.* It must be sufficient to restrict ourselves to the end result of that process; the fact that the impossibility of coping with the problem *within* the rigid framework of his original concept of Absolute War finally led Clausewitz in the last stage of his work to break away completely from the purely *military* theory of war and to merge its results in the incomparably broader *political theory of war* which we find sketched out in the later sections of his great treatise, *On War,* notably in book VIII. Here his theory no longer restricts itself only to one type of war, the Napoleonic, or even merely sets it up as a standard, but approaches all types and forms of war, whether more coherent or more loosely

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*See *On War,* bk. VIII, chaps. 2 and 3A.

knit, whether determined by strict military rationality or by political necessities and considerations, with the same open mind. It is radical only in one aspect: its refusal to set up any consideration as an absolute, rigid standard.

Before Clausewitz could, however, reshape his work in the light of this broader concept, he was forced to leave it, as it turned out, forever. In the "Note" which he wrote apparently at the time of the sealing of his papers, he stresses this wholly unsatisfactory state of the bulk of his manuscript:

> The manuscript on the conduct of Great War, which will be found after my death, can, in the state in which it is, be considered only as a collection of materials out of which a theory of Great War was to have been constructed. Most of it has not yet satisfied me and the sixth book (on Defense) is to be considered as a mere attempt; I would have completely recast it and sought a different solution . . .
>
> The first Chapter of the first book is the only one which I consider complete; it will at least render that service to the whole, to indicate the line, which I had intended to carry through everywhere.*

Unfortunately, this warning to study the torso of his work with due discrimination was either completely ignored or else not taken as seriously as he himself had meant it. For this, Clausewitz himself was not a little to blame. Out of the best of motives he had kept his work entirely to himself, firmly resolved, as his wife informs us in the introduction with which she accompanied its publication, not to publish it during his lifetime. Completely devoted to his subject, he fell into the tendency not uncommon in Germany of writing his book as he felt the subject demanded, not as his prospective audience would best be able to grasp it. He forgot that what was perfectly clear to him need not necessarily be so to readers lacking his unique command of all the deeper intricacies and implications of his field. Never exposing his ideas to public discussion, he lacked the beneficial shock of even "unique" criticism and, hence, never realized where he was obviously talking "above the heads" of his audience and where his theories needed amplification or clarification in order to make their meaning and significance crystal-clear. The result was that his work imposed upon its readers strenuous effort not only where this was unavoidable, but very frequently also where it was by no means necessary. If this is ture even of many of his discussions of *concrete* issues, it is doubly and trebly the case with his all too rare attempts to give his readers an insight into the general scope and purpose of his inquiries. Intelligible only where systematically pieced together *and* supplemented by a detailed analysis of the unexpressed implications of his procedure, these scattered hints, sandwiched in here and there into his concrete discussions, have either failed to arouse any attention whatsoever or have been brusquely pushed aside as useless and outdated philosophical speculations.

The result has been that all the deeper aspects of his work—its basic presuppositions and problems that had preoccupied him so profoundly; the evolution of his fundamental ideas, which we have tried to trace in outline; above all, the reflection of that evolution in the different parts of his great treatise—have been completely overlooked for over a hundred years. In consequence, appreciation of his work has been reduced to but a fraction of what he had achieved and had to offer. It was perhaps inevitable that this appreciation should be greatest precisely with respect to those aspects in which

*Author's note, *On War*.

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Clausewitz was least original, most representative of the common tendencies of the Scharnhorst school, such as his emphasis on the so-called "moral or psychological factors." It was his discussion of the "military genius," of the "atmosphere" of war with its peculiar "friction," the value of "surprise," of the *"esprit de corps"* of an army, the martial instincts of a nation; it was, above all, his emphasis upon the energetic pursuit of war, its direction primarily upon the supreme tactical decision, battle, that first won for his work the enthusiastic applause of its adherents and to this day continue to dominate its appreciation. Far less unqualified, and far less fruitful, was the reception accorded to the second aspect of his teachings, that group of extensive analyses of the basic elements in war—attack, defense, the influence of policy—in which he had definitely risen superior not only to his school but to all previous theory. The systematic energy with which he had undertaken their radical clarification, the dogged pertinacity with which he had followed them into their most extreme ramifications failed to receive the attention which it deserved. The result has been that to this day nobody has ever felt impelled to take up a single one among them again with anything like the same exhaustive thoroughness Clausewitz had originally applied to them. Judgment on them, as is most characteristically evident in the long drawn-out discussion about the defense, was based on isolated statements torn out of context and subjected to the most absurd and palpable misrepresentations, with the result that issues that could have been easily cleared up in a few hours have in some cases been agitating and confusing military thought for well over a hundred years without achieving a final, universally accepted clarification.

It is, however, in respect to the third aspect of his achievement and the one which we have tried to expose above as the most original and the most pertinent—in the analysis of the "Whole of the War"—that Clausewitz' heritage suffered most deeply.

So great was the absorption in his individual topics that the total behind them was hardly perceived, far less realized in its dominating significance. Even men like General von Caemmerer, while insisting upon the essential unity of his work, nevertheless continued to treat the individual elements of his theory as so many isolated, self-contained factors, even when their contents, as in the "Dual Character of War," obviously referred to the "Whole of the War." It is only since the inauguration of a systematic and scholarly study of Clausewitz in recent years, beginning with Hans Rothfels' pioneer efforts,* that the broader aspects of Clausewitz' theory of war have begun to receive some belated recognition, though by no means as yet anything as much as their significance would demand.

Yet it would be a most serious mistake to assume from this that those elements of Clausewitz' theory that have received but scant explicit recognition have therefore remained without influence upon the subsequent development of German military thought. Clausewitz is so utterly and absolutely German in every aspect: in his background, outlook, method, and style, that he exercised an almost irresistible subconscious appeal even where his contentions have been criticized and rejected. As Max Jähns, for many years librarian of the Military Academy and one of the pioneers of the history of military thought, expressed it, there was about his influence something really miraculous, almost mystical. Few actually had ever read him; far fewer certainly than

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*Cf. Hans Rothfels, "Clausewitz" in Edward Mead Earle, *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp. 93-112.

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the extravagant lipservice paid to him after 1870 would ever lead to suspect. And yet in some mysterious fashion his ideas had spread through the whole army and exercised an immeasurable influence. It was as if the wind had scattered the fine seeds of his ideas and where they fell to the ground they had struck root and prospered.

Through this process of almost untraceable infiltration that carried the reflex of his ideas down to the last regulation, Clausewitz' direction of military thought upon the "Whole of the War," even where unrecognized or imperfectly appreciated, profoundly molded the entire German military outlook. The mere scope and disposition of his great treatise, concentrating attention almost exclusively upon the higher conduct of war, had an immense effect in turning German military thought to that "broad approach" to warfare and, in particular, that preoccupation with strategy, amounting at times almost to an obsession, that have been its characteristic features ever since. Even the famous "Strategie-Streit" between Hans Delbrück and the General Staff–begun in 1878 and by no means concluded at the outbreak of World War II–with all the confusion it revealed on *both* sides was eloquent testimony to his success in focusing discussion upon the fundamental questions of strategy; contributing in its turn, by its very inconclusiveness, to keeping the interest in these matters alive and active.

V

The underlying trend toward an appreciation of war in its broadest aspects, which originated with Clausewitz, was all the more important in view of the very pronounced narrowing that his teachings experienced on the surface at the hands of his two main successors: Moltke and Schlieffen.

A psychological study of Moltke would point out that he was through and through a man of action. Even where his ideas assumed didactic form, they were always bent upon action, not upon theory as such. He was always more concerned with the development than with (static) being. Therefore, he was in everything far less a teacher than a living example.

Such an appreciation, inspired by profound insight born of a fundamental affinity of outlook, illustrates both the radical difference of approach as between Clausewitz and Moltke and the sense in which in at least a limited way, the work of the former was carried on by the latter.

Moltke was, indeed, still deeply rooted in that great movement of German thought around the turn of the 19th century out of which Scharnhorst and Clausewitz and their whole circle had drawn their inspiration. But, born into a later generation, ripening into manhood at a time when that movement was already well past its apogee, his attitude toward it was necessarily different, more that of an appreciative enjoyment of its fruits than of active participation.

In the same sense, he was satisfied with adopting and utilizing the broad foundations laid by Clausewitz without feeling the urge to carry on where he had left off. Every line of his lifework reflects that influence, but his references to it are few and far between and always to specific, limited issues only: Clausewitz' ideas on flanking positions, his discussions of the "Dual Character of War," of the strategic issues of a Russo-Austrian conflict, his plan of campaign against France of August 1830. In one important point, the point that touched the core of Clausewitz' teachings more closely than any other, the question of the intervention of policy into the conduct of operations, he not only acted directly counter to all of Clausewitz' most solemn injunctions in his famous conflict with Bismarck before Paris, but

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even undertook expressly to justify his attitude in the little essay "On Strategy" written under the still vivid impression of that conflict.

In general, however, Moltke's development of German military thought was, as Seeckt very rightly emphasized, more through the example of his campaigns and his practical training of the General Staff than through his teachings. In his writings he showed a pronounced preference for the more concrete and lively historical analysis of past and, above all, contemporary campaigns, as compared with those general theoretical discussions in which Scharnhorst and his circle had excelled. His own rare pronouncements of a more general character, insofar as they were not simply strewn into some of his great historical studies, were invariably *ad hoc*, such as his papers on Fire Power, on Flanking Positions, the "Instruction for the Higher Commanders" of 1869 summed up the lessons of 1866, or the essay on "Strategy" that crystallized the experiences of 1870/71.

No less marked than this narrowing down of Clausewitz' vast edifice, embracing war in all its aspects and all its varied types and forms, to the comparatively small precinct of the technique of operational strategy as inaugurated by Napoleon and modified by the advent of mass armies and the means for their direction—railways, modern roads, the telegraph—was the change in approach and treatment. In contrast to Napoleon's superb self-confidence, Moltke's whole outlook was profoundly influenced and colored by a deep-rooted reticence, almost diffidence, partly the result of his natural modesty, partly that of his painful youthful experiences in the Danish cadet school in Copenhagen.

In the field, this led to a pronounced, at times excessive, disinclination to interfere too much with the course of events and the actions of subordinate commanders; a tendency to pick up the tangled threads and patiently rearrange them according to some new pattern that had begun to evolve; a strategy bent not so much upon forcibly imposing its will upon the opponent as to watch for the openings offered by his movements in order to turn them against him to his own discomfiture. Thus Moltke's two main campaigns, that of 1866 and that of 1870, were both conducted by him on lines differing widely from the objectives originally contemplated.

This cautious, almost hesitant approach to strategy, this profound respect for its incalculable and unpredictable vagaries, this reluctance to intervene in its course beyond the absolutely necessary are clearly reflected in his theoretical discussions. Everywhere we find Moltke confining himself to the barest outline, setting forth the essential considerations with clearness and firmness, but extremely careful not to exclude any possibility and to leave the issue as open as possible for decision according to the inspiration of the unpredictable concrete situation; putting forward his opinion with a studied moderation almost excessive in its qualifications and its restriction of its claims and objectives to the average and reasonably expectable. Typically, he writes,

> Nevertheless, the conduct of war is not helplessly surrendered to blind chance. A calculation of probability would result in demonstrating that all these interferences of chance have, in the long run, redounded as much to the damage, or advantage, of one part as of the other. Thus the commander who in every single instance, does not the best but something reasonable, has still a good chance to reach his goal.

Again, from "Prescript for the Higher Commanders": "In military action it is frequently less important what one does than how one does it. A firm decision

and the pertinacious prosecution of a simple idea will best lead to the goal"; and again,

> The teachings of strategy do not greatly surpass the most elementary considerations of sound common sense; it is hardly possible to claim them as a science. Their value lies almost completely in their concrete application. It is necessary to envisage the situation, changing its outlook with every moment with the right intuitive appreciation and therefrom to adopt the simplest and most natural course with firmness and circumspection.
>
> No calculation of time and space assumes success, where Chance, Error and Deception form part of the factors. Insecurity and the danger of failure accompany every step to this goal, and only by virtue of a less than complete inclemency of fate will it be possible to reach it; but in war everything is insecure, nothing without danger and hardly is one going to reach great results by any other way.[8]

With all of their fundamental similarity of general conception and flexibility of outlook, it is difficult to conceive a greater contrast than that between these elliptic utterances, outlining with a few swift strokes the highlights while barely indicating the ground—so similar to Moltke's own pale and tenuous pencil sketches, with which, wherever he went, he tried to uncover the secret of the landscape—and Clausewitz' massive foundation, broad approach, majestic sweep, and detailed and careful delineation.

In this reduction to little more than the readiness to meet each concrete situation with perfect openness of mind, Moltke's strategy represents the utmost conceivable compression of the German school. Yet even in this extreme reduction, its innermost aspirations toward coherence and flexibility are preserved. For his famous dictum of "Strategy as a system of expedients" does not mean, as it has frequently been misinterpreted, the abdication of any plan or purpose, a muddling through from makeshift to makeshift. It is merely the insistence that in so unpredictable a sphere as war it is impossible to reach one's goal by a straight line laid down in advance, but only by a system of perpetual expedients, found on the spur of the moment, to cope with the innumerable difficulties and obstacles arising now on this side and now on the other.

VI

Reared in the same atmosphere and tradition as Moltke, similar to him in so many externals, Schlieffen in all deeper aspects is almost his exact opposite. Towering above his generation, he stands completely by himself, not only within his time but within the whole stream of the German school of strategy, a silent, strange, intensely lonely figure.

The strength and inspiration that sustained him in this loneliness Schlieffen did not, like all his predecessors from Scharnhorst to Moltke, derive from the great classical tradition of German thought, then almost at its lowest ebb, but from a deeper, incomparably more powerful source: the almost fierce intensity of his religious experience implanted in the deeply evangelical atmosphere of his parental home, strengthened in the years which from 1842 to 1847 he spent with the Moravian Brothers in their school of Niesky in Silesia, and sealed through the influence of his cousin Anna, the long struggle for her possession, and her tragic loss after a few short years of married bliss.

Out of this intense religious feeling that formed the core of his existence, forming itself involuntarily into Biblical

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language at the supreme moments of his life—as in that memorable scene in which at the age of 73, forced against his wish to separate himself from his lifework, he took leave from the General Staff before the Kaiser and all his dignataries with the grim sarcastic reference to the tired and useless servant from whom the burden had been taken—there grew not only an indestructible belief in his "calling," endowing him, once his initial doubts and vacillations had been overcome, with a sleepwalking sureness of his way, a sovereign inner superiority that left him completely indifferent to the opinion of others and the favor of his superiors; but also a dedication to his work, so complete, absorbing, overwhelming that on the rare occasions on which he permitted it to break through the complete composure that normally concealed it, it shook him literally in every limb.

This passion, which only his intimates knew behind the veil of sarcastic coolness that deceived and repelled the multitude, set him apart from all his predecessors. They all, like him, had struggled and often enough exhausted themselves, but they all succeeded in achieving a measure of balance; Scharnhorst in sad resignation, Moltke in serene composure. Even Clausewitz, who with all his struggles never achieved it in his life, at least realized it in his work. Not only did Schlieffen not achieve it, he did not even seek it.

Possessed by his work, he was consumed by the unquenchable thirst for its innermost truth, its last, ultimate reality, so utterly that beside it everything else became of no consequence.

Where Clausewitz strove to do justice to all conceivable possibilities, where Moltke humbly bowed his head before the ultimate unpredictability of all human effort, Schlieffen contracted his whole spiritual energies into the superhuman effort to smash through to the very heart, the "one that matters," the "secret of victory." With an intensity so acute that it hurts merely trying to follow it, he struggled to blast his way through all the confusing appearances on the surface, through all the "unpalatable" external trappings of war to the grim but heartwarming facts at its core, that tell "how everything came and had to come and would come again."

This consuming thirst for the "secret of victory" was further intensified by the change in the conditions of his task with which Schlieffen was faced by reason of the steady deterioration of Germany's external position under Bismark's successors. Where Moltke, enjoying almost throughout the whole of his campaigns a marked numerical superiority, could let the reins slip, sure that even a momentary reverse would be remedied in the long run, Schlieffen had to start from the fact that with exceptional efforts he might at best achieve bare equality, but normally he would have to reckon with a struggle against greatly superior odds. In such a situation, Schlieffen felt, the weaker cannot leave the initiative to his opponent, either by surrendering it deliberately in order to exploit the advantages of the superior strength of the defense, as Clausewitz had urged, or by adapting his own actions to those of his opponent, watching for his errors in order to pounce upon and turn them against him as Moltke had done. On the contrary, the weaker must attack, keep the initiative more than ever in his own hands. He cannot seek to offset his numerical inferiority through a retreat, endeavoring to lead the enemy into a trap which he will probably sense betimes; nor by occupying a defensive position in the hope of counterattacking him as soon as he appears before it; nor by a flanking position, as both Clausewitz and Moltke had suggested for certain cases; nor by relying upon the defensive strength of fortresses, to which he conceded value only as sally ports for a counteroffensive. He must

rely exclusively on redoubled mobility and activity and, above all, on his superior appreciation of the situation and the "decisive" direction of his blows. From there Schlieffen came to his indignant, sarcastic denunciation of all frontal attacks—"ordinary victories" and even pursuits, in which Clausewitz, following Napoleon's example, had seen the main instrument for the destruction of the opponent—and his constant hammering upon the attack against flank and rear as the "whole content of military history."

Schlieffen not only completely ignored the deep, philosophical approach of Scharnhorst and his school, as well as the manifold variety of types and forms of war that shine through in the background of Moltke's strategy (as in his war plan with a limited objective of 1859). He compressed the whole delicate and subtle interplay of attack and defense, initiative and "second hand," greatness and security of success, preserved in his "strategy of expedients," into the one concept of the "relentless quest for the annihilation of the opponent."

Under the impulse of this relentless desire for the annihilation of the opponent, completely consuming any thought of not being beaten by him, the whole act of war was despoiled of all balances, checks, and counterpoises; Moltke's strategy of expedients was turned into its opposite. Instead of seeking to profit from the openings offered by the enemy's mistakes, the latter was no longer to be permitted to develop his will at all; he was to be thrust from the outset into a position of dependency from which he was not to be granted a moment's respite until his end would be fulfilled. Even the unpredictable action of the irrational element was to be seized and turned against him. "Chance, as great a role as it plays in war, has to be seized and utilized." Even space itself was to be mobilized against him.

Thus with Schlieffen the idea of the "decisive" attack in flank and rear developed into the grandiose vision of his plan of 1905, in which the whole Western theater of war, right up to the Channel Coast, was to be encompassed and the enemy denied any riposte by the overwhelming strength of the *bataillon carré* on the right wing. It finally culminated in his last studies (1909-1912) in the idea of the total *encirclement with an inferior force,* the overcoming of the enemy's numerical superiority through the concentric action from all sides, of which he found the first and classical example in Hannibal's annihilating victory of Cannae.

Thus in Schlieffen's hands the all-embracing heritage of the German school of strategy contracted into the one central idea of the coordination of the whole act of war, its direction upon the overthrow of the enemy's power of resistance, its concentration upon that one point even to the total disregard of all distracting side issues; enhanced to a *Strategy of the Absolute,* envisaging from the outset the facing of superior odds; resolved, nevertheless, to impose its will through keener appreciation of the situation as well through the utmost exploitation of the advantages of the strategic forms of the attack in flank and rear and of the total encirclement; determined to eliminate not only all irrational influences but the independent will of the opponent; no longer seeking, like Moltke, the reasonably expectable but, on principle, the utmost conceivable and, to that end, imposing upon the commander's resolution and audacity a strain verging on the superhuman.

To Schlieffen himself, the utmost concentration of purpose did not mean any decrease in the commander's freedom and elasticity of action, but, on the contrary, its highest enhancement: the necessity of clearing his mind from all beclouding, preconceived ideas, of going straight to the heart of every

issue, of seeking its utmost exploitation, not according to any stereotyped method or system, but according to its unique peculiar circumstances. In this sense he could without inner contradiction still feel himself the preserver of the essence of Moltke's heritage, despite the extreme one-sided concentration which it had experienced at his hands. What he forgot was that the sovereign freedom and elasticity of outlook which he demanded was possible to somebody endowed with his exceptional gifts of character, intellect, and will power; but that on all lesser spirits it must impose a strain which, in the long run, could only result in their deterioration into a mechanical application of his external teachings, frozen into a new system.

Thus, against Schlieffen's intentions, the German school of strategy that had begun with Scharnhorst had come in time to a one-sided culmination, an impasse from which no further advance was possible and in which the belief in the power of the spirit to rise superior to all external odds and frictions had been overstrained to such a degree that it could lead in the long run only to a collapse. Small wonder that the majority of the elder generals, brought up, like him, in the incomparably more cautious and less exacting methods of Moltke (Schladiting, Haeseler, Bernhardi, in particular) made no secret of their criticism and apprehension. But their criticisms served only to reveal the profound gap that separated even the best of them from Schlieffen's solitary genius, and the degree to which the intellectual life of the German Army, flowing in so many independent channels at the time of Scharnhorst and of the Reform, had dried up until it had been concentrated on one single dominating personality. Schlieffen himself was painfully conscious of this process. Not only Moltke, he reminded his confident Freytag Loringhoven, but all the generals who had distinguished themselves in 1866 and 1870-71 had been independent thinkers, deeply imbued with Clausewitz' teachings. The younger generation, however, no longer troubled to read him, despite the fact that things were so much easier for it.

Looking back upon the general intellectual impoverishment of German military thought in this period, one of the keenest modern German military writers, K.L. von Oertzen, arrived at an indictment almost shattering in its comprehensiveness and severity.

"It is a curious fact," he wrote in a paper published posthumously early in 1934 (or 1939)

> that in the same days that Clausewitz was given the crown of immortality because to him a great share in the victories of the old Emperor was attributed to him, he thereby began to be neglected. The theoretical training (at the War Academy) was replaced by the so-called applicatory method. For the last fifty years we have had no advance in the theory of war. The struggle for theoretical problems hardly occupied the minds any longer. Strategy is a system of expedients. Nobody is going to deny the truth of this contention of Moltke's. But it was generalized, superficially misinterpreted, and has caused a terrible destruction in the garden of military theory.
>
> Naturally, in Germany we did not cease to teach and learn military affairs during the past fifty years. What we had to say to the pupils we compiled in the regulations; for the military schools manuals were composed. But to formulate theory on a higher level we no longer considered necessary. And yet Clausewitz had taught that "the correct conception is always an indispensable presupposition to success in war even though its share of merit in

extraordinary achievements is always the least.

It is certainly impossible to pass by the fact that this problem was not even posed, that nobody felt the desire, like Clausewitz, to struggle with the deepest problems of our calling: the spiritual, the intellectual, the political issues. And if anybody felt a desire, he was incapable of putting it into words.

We did, indeed, base ourselves upon the philosophy of war of Clausewitz, but we failed to develop it. We did not want any theory, only practice, and we overlooked completely that the practical man too follows a theory, even when he is himself not conscious of the fact, only he takes this theory on without examination, without real understanding, schematically.

The work *On War* itself had before the World War ceased to exercise any direct influence; even though, as Schlieffen writes in his preface, "much of it had percolated into our regulations."[9]

Schlieffen's concept of the elasticity of action *within* the utmost concentration of effort is perhaps the aspect of German military thought most difficult to explain and bring home; yet it is the key not only to his ideas, but to German strategic methods in World War II.

During the First World War, the application of Schlieffen's ideas was still fragmentary and frequently more mechanical than elastic.

In tactical matters, as is well known, one element disappeared most conspicuously: that tendency towards large scale envelopments which, under the influence of the "Cannae-Concept," had developed into a "schema" in all war games, etc. What Schlieffen had fought against continuously, precisely happened—the "keeping together of the forces," the "orientation parallel to the enemy's front line." That this often was a mistake, is certain. For instance, on August 22, 1914, the XVI Army Corps actually had the chance to envelop the southern wing of the French 3rd Army, but instead was directed to keep in close contact with its right-hand neighbor, the V Reserve Corps.[10]

Since 1919, however, the deeper analysis of Schlieffen's ideas, together with the tendency, under the influence of Seeckt, of interpreting him "from Moltke" as the continuator of the latters' ideas,[11] has led mainly to an increasing emphasis on the elastic character of his teachings and to the overlooking or discreet refutation of its more extreme and unbalanced tendencies.[12]

The result has been to make Schlieffen, far more than in 1914, the real inspirer of German strategy in World War II, and this "elasticity raised to a system" its basic tenet,[13] concealing beneath its seeming balance the fundamental one-sidedness and overstrain so dramatically revealed in Russia.

NOTES

All references that follow have been verified except those indicated with an asterisk. Ed.

1. F.K. von Lossow (1767-1848), retired in 1833 as Lieutenant General and Governor of Danzig, seems to have come under the influence of Scharnhorst at the time when they met in the Military Society in Berlin, before which he read papers.

Rühle von Lilienstern (1780-1847), pupil of Scharnhorst and fellow student of Clausewitz in the first course of the Academy for Officers (1801-1804), after 1807 for a while in the service of Saxe-Weimar, returned to Prussia in the spring of 1813, made a much more brilliant career and in

his day was far better known than his more profound but less spectacular colleague. Made Chief of the Historical Section of the Great General Staff in 1815, in which function he founded the famous *Militär Wochenblatt* the following year, he served temporarily, after Grolman's retirement, as Acting Chief of the General Staff (1819-1820); President of the Board of Studies of the Military Academy; 1826, President of the General Commission for Military Studies; 1837, Director of the Military Academy, retaining at the same time the Presidency of its Board of Studies; 1844, Inspector General of Military Education.

That Rühle perceived the group as a unit is shown in the interesting review which he devoted to Clausewitz' great treatise in the "Bar de Jomini, Introduction a l'étude des grandes combinaisons de la Strategie et de la Tactique," *Jahrbücher für wissenscheftliche Kritik.* (The title is in French and the text is in German.) (Berlin, March 1832) in two parts, vols. Nos. 44, 45, pp. 351-359:

> This reviewer, arisen out of the same school and in friendly relations with the author through various official contacts as well as an intimate intercourse of many years standing . . . is inclined to go in his prejudice for the theory of their common teacher so far, as to hold it the only one in which up to now the spirit of the new warfare and of the higher art of war, developed by Frederick, Napoleon, and his opponents has found a place and been developed into a coherent and practically applicable form.

The community of basis, outlook, and language is shown further in such tenets as: the emphasis upon the energy and character of the commander; the conception of war as the continuation of policy; the equilibrium between attack and defense; the picture of war as a combination of art and gambling (Rühle, Clausewitz); the illustration of the military by a medical crisis (Rühle, Clausewitz); as well as such characteristic phrases and terms, habitually connected with Clausewitz but in reality the common property of the school as: "Out of the nature of the matter" (Scharnhorst); "War as a Whole" ("das Ganze des Krieges"), "Military Tact" ("der Takt fur das Anwendbare") (Lossow); "Absolute War" ("Absolute Krieg") (Rühle). Even the title of Clausewitz' famous treatise *On War* was taken over from Rühle's earlier work of 1814.*

2. This element of shrewdness and a certain benevolent cunning, which Clausewitz found so characteristic of his teacher (see Rothfels: *Clausewitz. Politische Schriften** [sic. *Politik und Krieg*] (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmlers Derlagsbuchhandlung, 1920), p. 132, is reflected not only in many of Scharnhorst's papers and lectures, but very pronouncedly in his proposal to strike at the French in their widespread encampments before Jena (1806), as well as, above all, in the famous march by which, as Chief of Staff of l'Estocq's Corps, he brought it in the face of a threefold superiority to the battlefield of Preussisch-Eylau and, at the last moment, deprived Napoleon of a victory that without this intervention seemed already certain; the only decisive action in the field that was ever vouchsafed to him.

3. This emphasis upon War itself, War as a Whole, and not only its conduct, is clearly reflected in the titles of their works: Scharnhorst's last unpublished study was to have been called *War and Its Conduct*; Lossow published in 1815 *War* (*Der Krieg*);* Rühle, 1814, *On War* (*Vom Kriege*);* Clausewitz 1832, *On War* (*Vom Kriege*).

4. Lossow, *Der Krieg*, p. 154.

5. Cf. Clausewitz, "On Abstract Principles of Strategy," No. 29, 1808, at p. 71. *Strategies* aus dem *Jahr 1804, mit Zusaetzen von 1808 and 1809*, E. Kessel, ed. (Hamburg, 1937):

> All that is possible in this part of the art of war is a reasoning about the true spirit of war so that from time to time we are recalled from the mannerisms into which every art easily falls, because the spirit escapes far more easily than the forms, which in the end remains in our hands, we do not know how.

and also No. 33, 1809, at p. 82:

> In this part of Strategy, where it is a question of the combination of combats, there will probably always remain confined to a free (not systematic) reasoning; to individual considerations, capable of indicating the point of view and of leading unto the right path.
>
> If we seek to push theory here further, we shall not only incur fruitless trouble, but desecrate a great subject, make it ridiculous against our will and offend the natural intelligence of all men.

6. "The Most Important Principles for the Conduct of War, to Supplement My Lessons to His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince." The German for this title is "Die Wichtigsten Grundsaetze des Krieg Fuehrens zur Ergaenzung mines Unterrichts by Sr. Koeniglichen Hoheit dem Kronprinzen," translated and edited by Hans W. Gutzke as *Principles of War* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Military Service Publishing Co., 1942), p. 45. Ed.

7. Dietrich, freihen von Bülow (1757-1807), *The Spirit of the Modern System of War. By a Prussian General Officer.* With a commentary by C. Malorti de Martemont (London: 1806).

8. Helmuth von Moltke, *Prescript for the Higher Commanders.**

9. This vehement denunciation by von Oertzen of the complete "sterility" of German military theory in the period from 1880 to 1930. ("Der Feldherr in Freiheit and Bindung," *Wissen und Wehr*, 9, 1934, pp. 564-584 at p. 579) is all the more remarkable in view of the great external development which military writing took in Germany under the influence of Moltke's victories and the high esteem which it enjoyed at that time throughout the world. But despite the voluminous treatises which still encumber the shelves of our libraries, the Verdy du Vernois, Blue, Schlichting, Scherff, Bronsart von Schellendorff, Meckel, Bernhardi (Father and Son), von der Goltz, Boguslawske, Falkenhausen were in truth second-hand, second-rate compilators and commentators, incredibly pompous and stuffy, almost wholly devoid of any original inspiration of their own and largely concerned with hairsplitting controversies about the subtleties of Moltke's strategy and its difference, or not, from that of Napoleon.

10. General Frederich H. Marx, "What Disappears in Wartime," *Militär Wochenblatt*, 13, 1939, p. 775.*

11. General Hans von Seeckt: *Moltke, ein Vorbild* (Berlin: Verlag Für Kultur, 1931), pp. 146-154.

12. Among significant pronouncements in this sense, see Muller-Loebnitz: "Graf Schlieffen und der Geist deutsche Feldherrntums," *Wissen und Wehr*, 11, 1938, at p. 806; Dr. Kurt Hesse in his discussion of Hindenburg-Ludendorff in Foerster, *Heerführer der Weltkrieges* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Son, 1939), p. 280; General Wetzell in his review of General Zoellner's study, "Schlieffens Vermachtnis" emphasizing its clear elaboration of his "flexibility" (*Militär Wochenblatt*, 1939);* General Ludwig, "Franzosisches Feldherrntum" *Militär Wochenblatt*, 13, 1940, p. 612; Lieutenant Obermayer, "Gedanken zur soldatischen Tradition: Friedrich der Grasse–Moltke–Schlieffen–Seeckt," *Militär Wochenblatt*, 3, 1942, p. 64.*

13. Bon General der Infanterie z. B. Crnft. Rablich's significant article on "Systemlose strategie," *Militär Wochenblatt*, 26, 1940, pp. 1234-36.