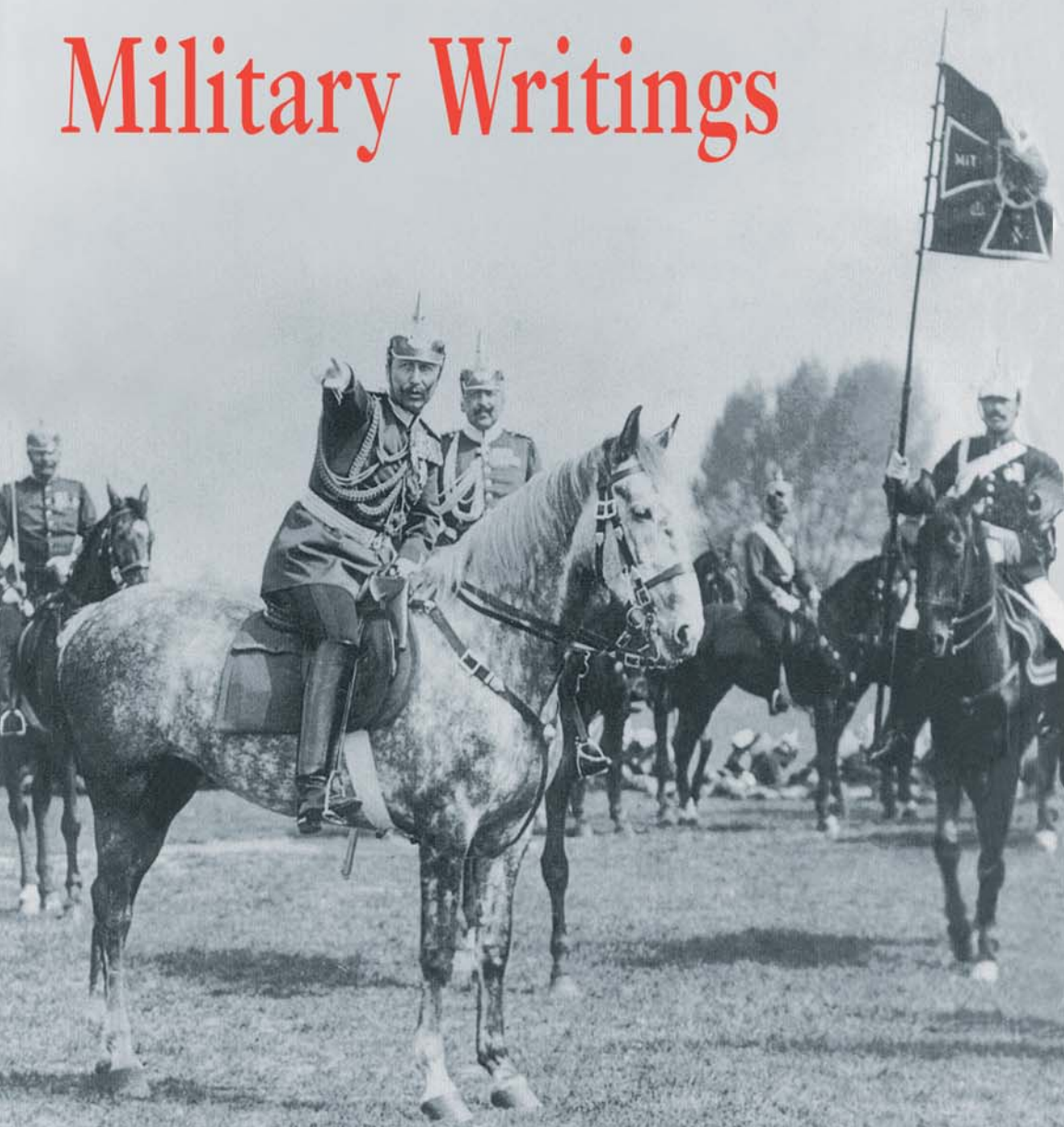


Alfred von Schlieffen's Military Writings



Translated and Edited by
Robert T. Foley

ALFRED VON SCHLIEFFEN'S
MILITARY WRITINGS

CASS SERIES: MILITARY HISTORY AND POLICY

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Translated and Edited by
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Jacket illustrations: (above) Generalfeldmarschall Alfred Graf von Schlieffen.

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Series Editor's Preface

The relationship between military thought and practice has often perplexed historians, indeed soldiers themselves. Those who think about the nature of war are rarely in a position to conduct military operations, and those who do frequently appear incapable of reflecting on their conduct. In one army the connection between thinkers and doers has been closer than in most – the Prussian/German.

The army shaped by von Moltke the Elder (himself a prolific author) produced a range of soldier-intellectuals who held the highest commands. Perhaps the most famous was Field Marshal Graf von Schlieffen (1833–1913). Schlieffen was not a profound thinker but a technocrat. He had attended the *Kriegsakademie* (1859–61) and served as a general staff officer during the Austro-Prussian War (1866) and the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71). Apart from a tour as the commander of the 1st Guard Uhlans (1876–84), his military career was spent on the staff. It was, therefore, the range of a staff officer's problems that gripped his (rather constricted) imagination. In 1891 Schlieffen succeeded as Chief of the General Staff, a post in which he served with dedication and enormous industry for 17 years.

Schlieffen's personal life was bleak. He had no family life to speak of, as his wife had died young. Military professionals can sometimes be obsessive, and Schlieffen was what would now be termed a 'workaholic'. He did nothing in life but work, and regularly set his staff operational problems to be solved on Christmas Day.

The range of Schlieffen's interests and concerns are well conveyed in Robert Foley's fine translation of some of his military writings. It is amazing that they have not appeared in English before. They capture the professional, technical approach of a soldier whose intellectual concerns focused on future planning rather than general reflection. They also enshrine the operational and strategic dilemma that Schlieffen inherited. According to Schlieffen, Moltke had bequeathed a guiding dictum: 'Not *one* method, not *one* means, not *one* expedient, but many' (p. 229). Schlieffen grasped, however, that as armies and the fronts they occupied grew enormously in size, they would have to be controlled,

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and the expedient he chose was intricate planning. To ensure variety of expedient, Schlieffen selected for his subordinates a governing method.

There is a great deal here for today's professional officers to chew over and debate, especially in those papers dedicated to the operational level of war. Schlieffen attached great importance to staff rides, which have undergone a revival. The attention of historians will be probably caught by Chapter 15, 'War Today, 1909'. Schlieffen clearly understood the impact of firepower on the modern battlefield, that 'wide desert' (p. 198). 'No unit in close order', he averred, 'no man standing free and upright can expose themselves to the rain of shot' (p. 195). Schlieffen placed his faith in the power of artillery to ensure a successful infantry advance that could gain the decisive victory he sought. In the long run, he was right, although the tactical equation was more complicated than he imagined. This is just a hint of the diversity of issues central to the conduct of war contained in this important book. Dr Foley's readable translation, informed by an intimate knowledge of the workings of the German army, deserves to be read by the many involved in the study of the oscillating relationship between military thought and practice.

Brian Holden Reid
Series Co-Editor

Preface

The figure of Alfred von Schlieffen featured prominently in the early years of my doctoral studies. Although I was writing about the concept of attrition in German military thought, Schlieffen's writings stimulated me to think about how warfare was viewed in Wilhelmine Germany. As I began to teach German military history, I realized that his writings were not widely available to today's student: Gerhard Ritter's translation of Schlieffen's eponymous plan had long gone out of print and was not widely available.¹ Crucially, most of Schlieffen's other works had never been translated into English. Although a translated volume of some of his theoretical writings had been published by the US Army's Command and General Staff College in the 1930s, this too was long out of print and difficult to find.² Moreover, it contained only a limited number of texts. After reading a lengthy and sometimes ill-informed debate about Schlieffen in the pages of the *Spectator*,³ and after the positive response to my translation of Schlieffen's last *Kriegsspiel* (wargame) in the now-defunct *War Studies Journal*,⁴ I suspected that a more-comprehensive collection of Schlieffen's writings might be welcomed by students of military history and strategic studies.

With the encouragement and support of Professor Brian Holden Reid, I approached Frank Cass Publishers with the idea of bringing out an edited translation of Schlieffen's key texts. When they agreed, the most immediate challenge was which of Schlieffen's many publications to include. His staff rides, staff problems and *Kriegsspiele*, what I have termed here his 'wargames', were crucial to understanding what it was that Schlieffen was teaching his subordinates in the General Staff. However, these covered several hundred pages in two volumes. This has required me to be selective in what I have included. I have translated here that which I felt to be the most important elements of the staff rides – Schlieffen's final critiques. Unfortunately, this means that the detail of who ordered which unit to do what on a particular day in a certain ride has been lost, but at least Schlieffen's ideas have been brought out. Of Schlieffen's staff problems, I have chosen to translate four as a representative sample. His first and last problems give an idea

of how these problems changed over time. Additionally, the four I chose deal with combat on the eastern and western fronts, an invasion of Germany from the north, and an example of how he used history. As Schlieffen's critique to only one *Kriegsspiel* has survived, this made its inclusion imperative.

With Gerhard Ritter's translation of Schlieffen's last great memorandum, the so-called Schlieffen Plan, so difficult to find, I decided to include a new translation of Schlieffen's final version here. While this is not intended to replace Ritter's work, with its translation of all the different versions of the plan, I none the less felt that any volume of Schlieffen's writings would be incomplete without its inclusion. Moreover, I have provided new translations of Schlieffen's addendum to his plan and Helmuth von Moltke the Younger's comments on the memorandum. In addition to these memoranda, I have included two reports to the Chancellor, Bernhard von Bülow, as they cast important light on Schlieffen's impressions of the Russian army on the eve of drafting his plan. Perhaps conspicuous by its absence in this section is Schlieffen's memorandum of 1912. I decided to leave this document out because I wanted to concentrate on those of Schlieffen's works that had significant influence. The 1912 memorandum is largely a restatement of the concepts of the 1905 memorandum and does not appear to have had a great deal of impact on Imperial Germany's decisionmakers.

Given their sheer volume, Schlieffen's writings from his retirement period again offered a challenge. The bulk of his writing, however, consisted of historical studies. As these were not written with the utmost attention to historical methods, I did not think that they would be of interest or of use to most students of the period today. Therefore, I decided to include only portions of one of his historical pieces – the introduction and conclusion from his 'Cannae Studies'. I have included this to give a flavour of his historical writing and also because Schlieffen intended it to serve as more than just a piece of history. With this piece, Schlieffen hoped to prove certain theories about tactical and operational methods. Thus, it was not only historical but theoretical in nature. With his historical studies largely ruled out, the majority of his public writings, this left me with a few pieces that were intended to influence his contemporaries, and I have included translations of these.

Throughout, I have attempted to stay as close as possible in my translation to Schlieffen's original. At times, this has led to somewhat stilted, but I believe still comprehensible, prose. Overall, though, I believe it has worked. In a few other instances, I have regrettably had to change Schlieffen's century-old German words to allow modern-day English speakers to understand Schlieffen's ideas. I have tried to stay as close to Schlieffen's meaning as possible when doing this. However,

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differences of interpretation will inevitably arise. All errors and omissions in this work are, of course, my own.

Of course, a work such as this cannot be completed without the assistance of many others. I have already mentioned my debt to Professor Brian Holden Reid for his efforts in getting this project under way. I must also thank Frank Cass Publishers, and in particular their senior book editor, Andrew Humphrys, for their support and patience throughout the time it has taken me to bring the idea to fruition. I am also grateful to the Imperial War Museum for permission to reproduce photographs from their collection. Additionally, many friends and colleagues have aided me in my work, be it with my translation, with reading and commenting on drafts, or, importantly, with encouragement. Those I wish to thank include: Jim Beach, Stephanie Frey, Marcus Funke, James F. Gentsch, John Greenwood, Bruce I. Gudmundsson, Richard Lock-Pullan, Annika Mombauer, Jon Robb-Webb, Martin Robson and Athena Scotis. However, I am especially grateful to Dr Helen McCartney. Not only did she encourage and cajole me to complete this project, along the way taking time from her own work to read and provide insightful comments on my drafts, but she has also had to share me with the ghost of a long-dead German general throughout the process.

Introduction

On the ninety-fifth anniversary of Alfred Graf von Schlieffen's birth, Hans von Seeckt, a successful chief of staff in wartime and the interwar reorganizer of the German army, wrote a piece commemorating 'Schlieffen Day'. Seeckt warned that, with the passing of time, every great personality changes from the man himself into a pure idea and that this is often less than the man himself. He wrote: 'There exists a danger in this formulation of an ideal: It often does the person an injustice. In the place of a rich life comes a fixed idea. This idea is somewhat one-sided and easily leads to false conclusions about a person.' Seeckt cautioned against Schlieffen becoming such a 'fixed idea'. To him, Schlieffen was 'still alive in the heads and hearts of the German General Staff, the German soldiers and the German people'.¹ Schlieffen's pupil wrote that the German army must continue to learn from its old master, believing that three ideas taught by Schlieffen continued to have relevance for the *Reichswehr*:

The annihilation of the enemy is the goal of warfare, but many routes lead to this end.

Every operation must be governed by a simple, clear concept. Everything and everyone must be subordinated to this concept of operation.

The decisive strength must be placed against the decisive point. The result is only to be achieved through sacrifice.

Seeckt felt that if these three concepts were mastered, then 'the idea of Schlieffen would be the idea of victory'.²

Seeckt's short piece on Schlieffen not only represents well the prevailing interpretation of the former Chief of the General Staff between the two world wars, but also is illustrative of the tensions inherent in this interpretation. On one hand, the former subordinate and pupil of Schlieffen was conscious that, by 1928, Schlieffen the man was being lost in Schlieffen the idea. Yet, on the other hand, the former head of the *Heeresleitung* and the teacher of the *Reichswehr* had been trained by

Schlieffen himself not to seek out historical truths, but rather to use history for specific purposes.

Defeat in the First World War and the subsequent collapse of Imperial Germany had led German soldiers into a period of intense reflection. However, this reflection was guided by their pre-war training as General Staff officers. Although military history had played an important role in officer education in Germany before the First World War, events were more often than not removed from their context and used for the purposes of learning particular lessons, a process known as the 'applicatory method'.³ The study of history was less important for understanding what actually had happened than for providing a means of learning particular lessons. The role history played within the General Staff is shown by the approach taken to the study of Napoleon by one promising General Staff historian:

Which part of this study [of war] is most valuable and improving to the soldier? The fact of knowing accurately the method in which some warlike operation was performed, or of knowing the date of some historical event, cannot be of much advantage to us, for no opportunity is likely to arise to reproduce facts, so to speak, in duplicate; what is of value to the student is to see how things have come to pass and thence to deduce the reason for the results.⁴

Thus it was that the interwar authors, trained as they were in the traditional methods of General Staff history, sought not only the causes for German defeat but, more importantly, lessons from which young officers could learn to fight the next war more effectively. By the time that Seeckt wrote his piece for 'Schlieffen Day', the former General Staff Chief, his ideas and his plan had become a large part of this process. However, the historical context of these factors was increasingly pushed to the background as a Schlieffen myth was developed in interwar Germany.

Indeed, this myth was consciously created to facilitate this process of reflection. First, the members of this so-called 'Schlieffen School' created the idea that Schlieffen had written a perfect plan; a plan that, had it been followed to the letter, would have led to certain German victory in 1914. Taking this assumption as a starting point allowed these authors to lay blame for failure on an individual who had ignored and changed Schlieffen's 'genial' plan (Helmuth von Moltke the Younger, conveniently dead),⁵ and it provided a template against which to measure the decisions of wartime leaders.⁶ In addition, these authors created the myth that Schlieffen had found the perfect operational methods. This allowed them to use Schlieffen's ideas on the conduct of war as

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examples for current practice.⁷ Schlieffen's staff problems, General Staff rides, and his solutions to these were shared around the army and ultimately published as a means of reinforcing his ideas.⁸ The mythical status afforded Schlieffen in the interwar period is perhaps best symbolized by the foundation of a society in 1921 aimed at circumventing the proscription on the General Staff forced on the German army by the Treaty of Versailles. This organization was named the *Generalstabsverein Graf Schlieffen*, the General Staff Society Graf Schlieffen.⁹

The image of Schlieffen produced by this cracked interpretive lens has given us a distorted image of his ideas and his impact upon the German army. Works on Schlieffen in the interwar period were not designed by their authors to give a truthful picture of Schlieffen, his work, or his place in the Wilhelmine army. Wilhelm Groener, a key member of the Schlieffen School, wrote of his works on Schlieffen and the First World War: 'I do not write for history ... I write for the future, because I fear that our hollow-heads [*Hohlköpfe*] will make improvements for the worse in the strategy of the next war, as it happened in the world war.'¹⁰ Yet, despite the clear purpose behind these works, the 'fixed idea' they gave of Schlieffen is still in use today.

Schlieffen's interwar reputation as a master strategist did not survive the Second World War. This war changed the nature of military history writing, particularly in Germany. With the final destruction of the German military came an end to General Staff history writing. Instead of officers writing for other officers, now civilians wrote in search of the true origins of German militarism and of Germany's defeat in the two wars. Freed from the restraints of traditional *Kriegsgeschichte* (war history), German authors turned instead to look at *Militärgeschichte* (military history), and thus to examine German military history from a wider perspective.¹¹ Where once highly trained staff officers would examine the merits of this or that tactical or operational decision or plan, now civilian historians explored wider issues, such as the role of the military in German society or the development of a particular military institution.¹²

Schlieffen and his plan did not escape this shift in methodology. Schlieffen's plan was now viewed against the backdrop of German and international politics, and found wanting. It was dismissed, not without justification, as a 'purely military' creation, a 'gambler's throw'.¹³ Moreover, Schlieffen's strategic planning was seen as inflexible and out of touch: 'The development of German strategic thought [in the nineteenth century] is marked by a slow hardening of a subtle dialectical approach to military problems into a set of unchallenged axioms.'¹⁴ It was not only Schlieffen's plan that fared less well under the harsh light of this new methodology, the efficacy of Schlieffen's views on the conduct of war were also called into question. Where interwar authors had

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seen operational efficiency, post-Second World War observers saw dogma leading to defeat.¹⁵

Indeed, this shift in the focus of military history caused previous writing on Schlieffen to look distinctly parochial. However, despite this, these new military historians relied for the most part on the sometimes simplistic and often distorted image of Schlieffen created by their interwar predecessors. They took for granted the interwar view that Schlieffen's plan of 1905 was the logical and final culmination of years of planning.¹⁶ They accepted, even if they recognized the existence of the Schlieffen School, the interpretation that Schlieffen's fixed views on operational manoeuvre permeated throughout the Imperial army, creating a dogmatic approach to war.¹⁷

It is only recently that this older image of Schlieffen has begun to be questioned by historians. Schlieffen's ideas have been examined in their own rights and in their proper historical context. They have been analysed in comparison to those of other theorists of their day and, more importantly, within the spectrum of development of the General Staff.¹⁸ Moreover, the course of development of Schlieffen's famous plan, as well as its significance and impact have begun to be carefully studied,¹⁹ and the impact of developments within the broader realm of military theory on Schlieffen's ideas has been looked at.²⁰ A more nuanced view of Schlieffen and his ideas is now developing.

However, regardless of their differences, almost all recent interpretations have assumed that Schlieffen and his ideas had a large, if not dominating, impact on the army of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Many have seen in this the seeds of Germany's defeat in 1918, and some have even gone so far as to argue that Schlieffen's influence led to defeat in 1945. This viewpoint stands in contrast to that of the writers of the Schlieffen School, who argued that Schlieffen's influence had not been strong enough in the *Kaiserheer* (Imperial German army), and that this led to Germany's defeat in the First World War. The truth of the matter is that each side has exaggerated its position. Schlieffen's influence and impact was not all-pervasive, nor was it negligible. In fact, the nature and organization of the Imperial German army combined to make his influence more subtle and his impact more discreet than has generally been assumed.

SCHLIEFFEN AS CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF

On 7 February 1891, *Generalleutnant* Alfred Graf von Schlieffen succeeded his mentor Alfred Graf von Waldersee as Chief of the General Staff when Waldersee's political intrigues finally brought him on the

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wrong side of Kaiser Wilhelm II. The selection of Schlieffen for this, one of the top positions within the Imperial German army, was not a surprise, as Schlieffen was well suited to replace the objectionable Waldersee. First, he had the requisite military experience, both in the line and in the staff. As a young *Rittmeister*, he had commanded a squadron in the 2nd Dragoon Regiment, and as an *Oberst*, he had commanded a regiment, the prestigious 1st Guard Uhlans, for eight years. He had served for a number of years in the *Truppengeneralstab* (Troop General Staff), the body of General Staff officers assigned to individual divisions or army corps, and had also served as a section chief in the *Großer Generalstab* (Great General Staff), the body of General Staff officers responsible for Germany's strategic planning. Moreover, Schlieffen had seen service in the Wars of Unification, even winning the Iron Cross, 1st Class, for his efforts in the Franco-German War of 1870/71.²¹

In addition to his military experience, Schlieffen was also seen as a politically reliable choice. He was firmly rooted in the Prussian establishment, coming from a good family and being well connected in the Prussian army and Court. His time as a young officer in Berlin and as commander of a prestigious cavalry regiment in nearby Potsdam had allowed him to build upon family connections and to strengthen ties with leading figures within the Reich's bureaucracy.²² Moreover, Schlieffen was known to have a narrow set of interests outside the army and army life.²³ Thus, despite his closeness to Waldersee, Schlieffen's past and his connections to the establishment made him appear to Kaiser Wilhelm II and his advisers as a safe, more malleable alternative to the politically active Waldersee.²⁴

Indeed, the political activities of Schlieffen's mentor were to have a large impact on Schlieffen's tenure as Chief of the General Staff. Waldersee's long-standing attempt to gain more influence over the foreign policy of the German Reich had upset the delicate balance of power that had grown up between the bureaucracies in the Prussian/German government. His intrigues had caused him to run afoul of the Foreign Ministry, the Chancellory, other institutions within the Army and, ultimately, the Kaiser himself.²⁵ Reaction to these activities would shape how Schlieffen and the rest of the German government and military saw the role of the General Staff and its Chief. Thus, they would have an impact on the direction in which Schlieffen steered the organization throughout his 15 years at its head.

Schlieffen took over one of the German Empire's most important institutions.²⁶ Originally a minor department within the Prussian Ministry of War, the General Staff had, under the leadership of one of Germany's and the nineteenth century's greatest military minds,

extended its influence within the German government and had established its bureaucratic independence within the German army in the years following the German Wars of Unification. With the man largely seen as the architect of the Prussian victories in these wars against Austria and France, Helmuth Graf von Moltke, also known as Moltke the Elder, at its head, the General Staff took over more and more functions of the German army. It had already been responsible for plans for the deployment of the Prussian army. However, after the experiences of the Danish War of 1864 and the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, Moltke became the King's prime adviser on military operations, with the authority to issue orders in the King's name during wartime. Thus, the General Staff Chief became the *de facto* commander of the Prussian, and later German army in time of war. The central role played by Moltke and his organization in the Wars of Unification ensured that it would have a more important role in peacetime. In 1872, the *Kriegsakademie*, the War Academy responsible for providing higher education to German officers, fell under the control of the General Staff and slowly began to focus on providing training in the tasks of General Staff officers. Finally, in 1883, the General Staff achieved formal bureaucratic independence from the Ministry of War; it was created as an independent office within the Prussian government roughly on a par with organizations such as the Foreign Office. With this, the General Staff Chief was granted right of access to the Kaiser, an important right in Imperial Germany.²⁷ The General Staff had become a major player within the bureaucracy of the ever-growing German Empire, with central roles in war planning and military education as well as at least an indirect impact on German foreign policy.

However, it is important to remember that the General Staff was merely one of many actors in the German government. Hans-Ulrich Wehler has used the term 'authoritarian polycracy' to describe the government of Wilhelmine Germany with its many different centres of authority under the Kaiser competing with each other for influence and power.²⁸ This was mirrored within the army as well. Although under Moltke the General Staff had gained independence from the Ministry of War, this organization still carried out many functions in the army and represented it in financial matters and in the Reichstag. Moreover, the Kaiser's Military Cabinet had authority over promotions and assignments and the commanding generals of the Reich's various corps districts had important powers of their own.²⁹ Thus, not only did the General Staff have to contend for influence with other bureaucracies within the Reich, it faced rivalry from within the army.³⁰ While Waldersee had bridled at these restrictions on the influence of the

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General Staff, ultimately it was these institutions in the army that profited from Waldersee's failed attempts at gaining more political power for himself and his organization.

Symbolically, one of Schlieffen's first acts as Chief of the General Staff was to punish, on the orders of the Military Cabinet, Waldersee's former adjutant, Major Zahn, for his role in Waldersee's intrigues.³¹ Although Schlieffen was able to negotiate a less humiliating assignment for Zahn, the message was clear to Schlieffen and all other observers: the General Staff Chief and his officers were ultimately answerable to the Military Cabinet for their actions. The wings of the General Staff had been publicly clipped.

In place of Waldersee's attempt to gain more power and influence for the General Staff, Schlieffen concentrated on its consolidation and inward development. In contrast to Waldersee's attempts to engage in and to shape German foreign policy, during his time as Chief of the General Staff Schlieffen would quietly influence or passively accept changes. In the post-Waldersee period, Schlieffen would rise again within the General Staff and take as his own Moltke the Elder's expression 'Viel leisten, wenig hervortreten – mehr sein als scheinen' ('Do much, but stand out little – be more than you appear').³²

Thus rebuffed from playing an active role in German policymaking, Schlieffen fell back on his natural inclination and refocused the General Staff on its core activities – the technicalities of war planning and war fighting. This inward focus of the General Staff Chief, ostensibly Germany's top strategic planner, would have important and long-lasting negative consequences for Germany. First, just as Schlieffen was bedding into his position, German foreign policy was changing course radically. Under the influence of his new Chancellor, Leo von Caprivi, in late 1890 Kaiser Wilhelm II had allowed Otto von Bismarck's Reinsurance Treaty with Russia to lapse. With this treaty no longer tying Russia to Germany, France could come to terms with the Russian Empire, and further German diplomatic blundering allowed this to happen.³³ In 1892, France and Russia signed a military convention that called for 1.3 million French and between 700,000 and 800,000 Russian soldiers to be launched against Germany in case either of the signatories was attacked.³⁴ A scenario that had been every German strategic planner's nightmare since the wars of Friedrich II (the Great) had come true – Germany now faced a war on two fronts against enemies with far superior manpower.

One would expect such a scenario to bring the General Staff Chief, Germany's top strategic planner, to the fore. However, this was not the case. Imperial Germany possessed no means for bringing together all agencies with an interest in foreign policy and strategic planning.

Instead, such coordination relied upon individuals to seek each other out to discuss issues.³⁵ As we have seen, Waldersee's meddling had dealt a blow to the General Staff's bureaucratic prestige and Schlieffen's narrow focus had reinforced the General Staff's withdrawal from the policy realm. One factor could have off-set this. In Wilhelmine Germany, the Kaiser played a central role in policy formulation.³⁶ Moltke the Elder was able to bend the ear of Kaiser Wilhelm I, and Waldersee had been close to his grandson, Wilhelm II. Thus, the two were able to have some influence over the course of German foreign policy. However, Schlieffen did not enjoy a similarly close relationship with Wilhelm II. While Schlieffen regularly met the Kaiser, the two were at best on cordial terms and there is no evidence to suggest that Schlieffen was able to exercise any significant influence over Wilhelm's thinking.³⁷ Despite some interaction with the Foreign Office, Schlieffen neither was consulted by nor attempted to influence those who set the foreign policy of the *Kaiserreich*.³⁸

As the foreign policy of successive Chancellors worsened Germany's diplomatic position in Europe by alienating not only France and Russia but also Great Britain, Schlieffen was able only to react. Rather than attempt to alter German foreign policy by discussing its poor strategic situation with Germany's foreign policymakers, Schlieffen remained focused on his military role. During his time as General Staff Chief, all his energies went into developing a plan and an army that would be capable of meeting the challenge of a two-front war. However, even in this important task, he was to have mixed results. Once again Waldersee's actions and the polycratic structure of the *Kaiserreich* and the *Kaiserheer* would limit Schlieffen's ability to carry out even this core function of the General Staff.

Faced with the certainty of a two-front war, Schlieffen responded by attempting to fall back on what he saw as Germany's advantages – interior lines and a good railroad system. From early in his tenure as Chief of the General Staff, Schlieffen hoped to take advantage of Germany's geographic position between its two enemies to defeat one quickly and then make use of Germany's excellent rail system to turn on the other; he hoped to be able to defeat France and Russia piecemeal before they were capable of taking concerted action that would overwhelm a German army inferior in manpower. Almost as soon as he took over his position, Schlieffen focused on first defeating France, the enemy capable of taking the field first and the one he believed to be most dangerous to Germany.³⁹ However, in order to do this in the manner he believed would give Germany the best possible chance of success, Schlieffen required a German army that was larger, better equipped and better trained. This would bring the General Staff into conflict with other bureaucracies within the *Kaiserheer*.

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For Schlieffen, probably the most pressing issue in his planning for a two-front war was manpower. The Franco-Russian Military Convention of 1892 called for the two nations to attack Germany simultaneously with around 2 million men. In 1891 when Schlieffen became Chief of the General Staff, Germany could field an army of around 1.2 million and could rely on its Austro-Hungarian ally for additional support.⁴⁰ However, rough parity would not ensure victory. To defeat France and at the same time provide enough protection against a Russian advance in eastern Germany, Schlieffen needed more manpower.

Most galling for Schlieffen, and indeed for many of his contemporaries, was that Germany did not need to be so deficient in manpower. Since its defeat in the Franco-German War of 1870/71, France had copied Germany and introduced universal conscription. However, although it had been a German strength before 1870, France applied conscription more rigorously than Germany or any other European power. By the early twentieth century, France was conscripting around 80 per cent of its eligible young men, as opposed to around 50 per cent of eligible German males.⁴¹ Thus, a France with a declining birth rate and around 20 million fewer inhabitants than Germany could field an army as large, if not larger, than the German. For Schlieffen, as for many of his contemporaries, the solution to Germany's manpower problems, and hence to Germany's strategic situation, was to increase the number of German men conscripted and with this the size of its army.⁴²

Although additional manpower was crucial to Schlieffen's plan to fight a two-front war, as Chief of the General Staff, he was not in a position to bring about the army expansion he required. The responsibility for the organization of the army fell to the Prussian Ministry of War.⁴³ In order to get his army increases, Schlieffen needed to convince the Minister of War that they were necessary. The Minister of War, in turn, needed to convince the Chancellor and the Reichstag that the increases were essential and that it was worth the additional strain on the Reich's finances and on society. However, in Imperial Germany, army increases were not that simple. Just as there was no unified strategic organization within the *Kaiserreich*, so there was no unified Ministry of War. Although the Prussian Ministry of War was the most important and issued some orders to the other national contingents of the *Kaiserheer*, the Kingdoms of Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg each maintained independent ministries of war, making army increases more difficult. Moreover, any changes to Germany's conscription law would have led to constitutional changes, and this would have involved negotiation with other states within the German Empire. The plans of Julius Verdy du Vernois, the Prussian Minister of War from 1889 to 1890, to increase

the numbers of German males conscripted resulted in a political storm and ultimately in his dismissal.⁴⁴ Thus, despite its undoubted appeal, Schlieffen and each of Verdy's successors were reluctant to take up the idea again.⁴⁵

Instead, Schlieffen pressed for steady growth in the size of the army and for increased combat power within the army. In some areas, he was successful in getting what he wanted from a Prussian Ministry of War reluctant to increase an already high defence budget. Convinced of the need for and the efficacy of mobile heavy artillery, Schlieffen pressured not only the Ministry of War but the Kaiser. With Wilhelm's personal intervention, the heavy guns Schlieffen believed necessary to break into the French fortress line were forthcoming and, by 1914, the German army was the only army equipped with large numbers of mobile howitzer batteries.⁴⁶ However, in other areas, Schlieffen was less successful. In each army law, Schlieffen pushed for greater numbers than the Ministry of War was willing to support, and in every case his advice was ignored.⁴⁷ The General Staff Chief also pushed for the creation of greater numbers of army corps in order to create a larger number of manoeuvre units. These, Schlieffen believed, were essential to fighting the fluid, mobile battle he planned. Here, he met with limited success; between 1891 and 1905 the German army added three new army corps to its peacetime order of battle. None the less, Schlieffen always had to make do with less than he believed he required to carry out his plans.⁴⁸

Rebuffed by a parsimonious Ministry of War, Schlieffen turned to training to make the German army more tactically proficient than its numerically superior foes. Once again, Schlieffen ran into opposition from other institutions within his own army. As Chief of the General Staff, Schlieffen had no formal role in either the formation of German army doctrine or in the training of the bulk of the army's officers. Responsibility for the former fell to the Ministry of War and responsibility for the latter to commanding generals of Germany's peacetime army corps districts. Indeed, Schlieffen found these men to be his most potent enemies in his quest to influence how the German army fought.

Perhaps because they were not a bureaucratic institution like the Ministry of War or the General Staff, the authority and the power of the corps commanders have been largely forgotten by historians. However, as the highest peacetime commanders within the Empire, these men had considerable powers and had considerable influence over the army. As Schlieffen took over as Chief of the General Staff, there were 20 such commands throughout the Reich. By the time he retired in 1905, this number had increased to 23. These generals had responsibility for recommending promotions and advancement for the troops under their command. They had the right of access to the Kaiser, and Wilhelm II

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liked to think of these men as being under his personal command. Crucially for Schlieffen's desire to influence the army's training and doctrine, these generals were solely responsible for the training of their troops, and this was a task that most took very seriously.⁴⁹

A significant number of corps commanders were military intellectuals in their own right, who had very definite ideas as to how they wanted their men to fight. Indeed, it was in the corps that some of the most innovative tactical and operational ideas were formed within the *Kaiserheer*. Some of Germany's best-known military theorists held corps commands, men such as Friedrich von Bernhardi, the author of numerous works of military theory; Sigismund von Schlichting, the author of the *Drill Regulations* of 1888; Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz, a noted author and famous for reorganizing the Ottoman army; Gottlieb Graf von Haeseler, one of Germany's longest serving and most respected corps commanders. Generals such as these stamped their personality on their command and developed subordinates who carried on their ideas after they retired.⁵⁰ With self-confident and able men such as these at the head of Germany's army corps districts, Schlieffen stood little chance of having his operational ideas accepted in the way he wanted, and, indeed, these men offered the most vocal opposition to Schlieffen's tactical and operational ideas.⁵¹

Thus, Schlieffen was blocked by the bureaucratic structure of the *Kaiserheer* from carrying out a number of tasks he believed necessary to prepare Germany for the difficulties of a two-front war. The Prussian Ministry of War thwarted his efforts to increase the size and change the structure of the army.⁵² At the same time, the commanding generals of Germany's 20-odd army corps districts offered serious resistance to his tactical and operational ideas. However, while Schlieffen might have had a limited ability to influence the German army as a whole, his ability to do so within his own organization was much greater, and it was his influence over the General Staff that was to be of the greatest significance and his lasting legacy.

In the 15 years that Schlieffen led the Great General Staff, he was able to build upon the foundations laid by Moltke the Elder and Waldersee. Under his leadership, the General Staff, those serving in the Great General Staff in Berlin and those serving as General Staff officers in the army's divisions and army corps, expanded from less than 300 officers and men to more than 800. When Schlieffen took over as Chief of the General Staff in 1891, the Great General Staff in Berlin, the portion of the organization responsible for strategic planning, consisted of five sections, with the chief of each being equivalent to a regimental commander in rank (*Oberst*), grouped under three *Oberquartiermeisters*, each being equivalent in rank to a brigade commander

(*Generalmajor*). By the time Schlieffen retired in 1905, the Great General Staff had expanded to nine sections under five *Oberquartiermeisters* with remit to cover a much larger area of work than previously.⁵³ Moreover, the General Staff increasingly became seen as a means of gaining added responsibility and accelerated promotion. Completion of the *Kriegsakademie* and acceptance to the General Staff was believed to translate into eight years' seniority on the promotion list for the lieutenant skilled enough to make it. As such, it attracted some of the best minds and most ambitious officers within the army. Competition for entry was fierce, with only about 30 per cent of those who began the course of study at the *Kriegsakademie* being accepted for the organization.⁵⁴

The relatively junior rank of most General Staff officers and their small number belied their authority within the army. As mentioned, Moltke the Elder built the Great General Staff into Germany's peacetime strategic planning body. In time of war, it was designed to form the core of the Royal Headquarters and to assist in the direction of the war's operations. During wartime, the Chief of the General Staff was the Kaiser's prime military adviser and had the authority to issue orders in his name. In addition to the Great General Staff, each division and army corps had a number of General Staff officers attached to it, the so-called *Truppengeneralstab*. As the Chief of the Great General Staff was the Kaiser's primary military adviser, so the Chief of the General Staff of a division or an army corps would be the prime adviser to the commanders of these units. Over time, this system developed into a unique system of 'dual command':

The essence of this system lies in the fact that under it the chief of the staff officers attached to a commander is his commander's 'junior partner' and not a mere subordinate in the direction of operations. The ultimate decisions remain in the hands of the commander himself, but his chief of staff is not relieved thereby of his full responsibility for the results ... [N]ormally the relationship between the commander and his chief of staff is expected to conform to that prevailing in a happy marriage. The two men are expected to form a unity rather than two distinct personalities, supplementing each other, composing any differences that may arise without distinguishing the share which each of them contributes to the common good; if to the commander falls the glory as well as the blame, his chief of staff is expected to find his reward in the confidence of his chief.⁵⁵

Such was the importance of this dual command system that in August 1914 Kaiser Wilhelm II told his son, Kronprinz Wilhelm: 'I have

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entrusted you with the command of the 5th Army. You will have *Generalleutnant* Schmidt von Knobelsdorf as chief of staff. *What he advises you to do, you must do.*⁵⁶ As the war progressed, staff officers increasingly ran the show and when things went wrong, it was not the commanders who were replaced, but their chiefs of staff.

As Chief of the General Staff, Schlieffen played a central role in the careers of these officers. He recommended officers for assignments and for promotions and, importantly, he was responsible for their professional education. This was a role that Schlieffen took very seriously and one that would ensure his influence over the army until long after his retirement.⁵⁷

Unable to change army doctrine because of the power of the Ministry of War and the corps commanders, Schlieffen turned instead to influencing how the army fought by means of educating his subordinates in the General Staff. Throughout his time as Chief of the General Staff, Schlieffen worked hard to develop within his subordinates the skills he believed necessary for modern mass warfare in the knowledge that at least some of these men would one day be in the position to influence how their troops fought.⁵⁸ To do this, he employed the traditional German army wargaming methods – staff problems, staff rides and *Kriegsspiele* – to get across his ideas about the value of flank attacks and envelopments, the need for high-tempo operations, the need for subordinates to understand and work within the framework of a superior's plan and the importance of destroying the enemy's force completely – in short, his ideas about how a commander should conduct his force on the modern battlefield.⁵⁹

There can be no doubt about the success of Schlieffen's stratagem. Hundreds of officers passed through his school throughout his 15 years at the head of the General Staff. Of course, not all of these men agreed with their Chief's ideas about modern warfare. While Friedrich von Bernhardi, the future corps commander and military theorist, was serving in the Historical Section of the General Staff, he clashed with Schlieffen over his ideas about the lessons to be drawn from history. As a result, he was transferred out of the General Staff.⁶⁰ Berthold von Deimling, later the commanding general of the XV Army Corps, suffered a similar fate when he clashed with Schlieffen over strategic matters.⁶¹ However, in part by culling those who disagreed greatly with him, Schlieffen was very successful in creating a following within the General Staff, and these men, as the best and the brightest of the German army, went on to high command and to important staff positions. Thus, at the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, the majority of Chiefs of General Staff of the army's higher commands and a number of the commanders of these units had served under Schlieffen. Moreover,

those who emerged as Imperial Germany's best soldiers during the war more often than not had gone through the Schlieffen school – Erich Ludendorff, Hans von Seeckt, Hermann von Kuhl, Wilhelm Groener and August von Mackensen all later acknowledged their intellectual debt to Schlieffen.

Indeed, it was these men who would ensure that the relatively obscure Schlieffen would be remembered long after the First World War. Ironically, although the Versailles Treaty was meant to limit the influence of the General Staff within the interwar German army, it had the opposite effect. By reducing the German army to just 96,000 men and 4,000 officers, it ensured that only the brightest officers remained, and these were generally men who had undergone General Staff training before 1914. Moreover, the army's limited size allowed men such as Hans von Seeckt and Wilhelm Groener, students of Schlieffen and strident proponents of his ideas, to have much more influence over the *Reichswehr* than Schlieffen had ever possessed within the *Kaiserheer*. These men put this influence to good use, laying the foundation for mobile war in the fashion of Schlieffen, but this time with the use of technology in the form of the tank and aircraft. The concepts underpinning the so-called 'Blitzkrieg' of 1939–41 would have been recognizable to any officer who accompanied Schlieffen on one of his staff rides between 1891 and 1905.⁶²

Thus, that which was denied to Schlieffen by his contemporaries within the German army – the ability to create an institution imbued with his concepts of a mobile war – was granted to his subordinates by the victorious allies in 1918. However, along with this came Schlieffen's narrow military focus – as Schlieffen had concentrated throughout his time as Chief of the General Staff completely on providing battlefield success, on the operational level of war, so his disciples focused their attentions almost solely on the same thing. While they were successful in the short term, conquering France where the Imperial army had failed, the lack of long-term, strategic planning ensured that such operational successes were not translated into permanent gains.⁶³

Note on Equivalent Military Ranks

Portepee-Fähnrich	Cadet
Leutnant/Sekondleutnant	Second Lieutenant
Oberleutnant/Premierleutnant	First Lieutenant
Hauptmann/Rittmeister	Captain
Major	Major
Oberstleutnant	Lieutenant-Colonel
Oberst	Colonel
Generalmajor	Brigadier-General/ Brigadier
Generalleutnant	Major-General
General der Infanterie/Kavallerie/Artillerie	Lieutenant-General
Generaloberst	General
Generalfeldmarschall	General of the Army/ Field Marshal

Part I:
WARGAMES

