FREDERICK THE GREAT

A Military Life

Christopher Duffy

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Volume 9

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1985

This edition first published in 2016
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-138-90784-3 (Set)
ISBN: 978-1-315-67905-1 (Set) (ebk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-92465-9 (Volume 9) (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-68421-5 (Volume 9) (ebk)

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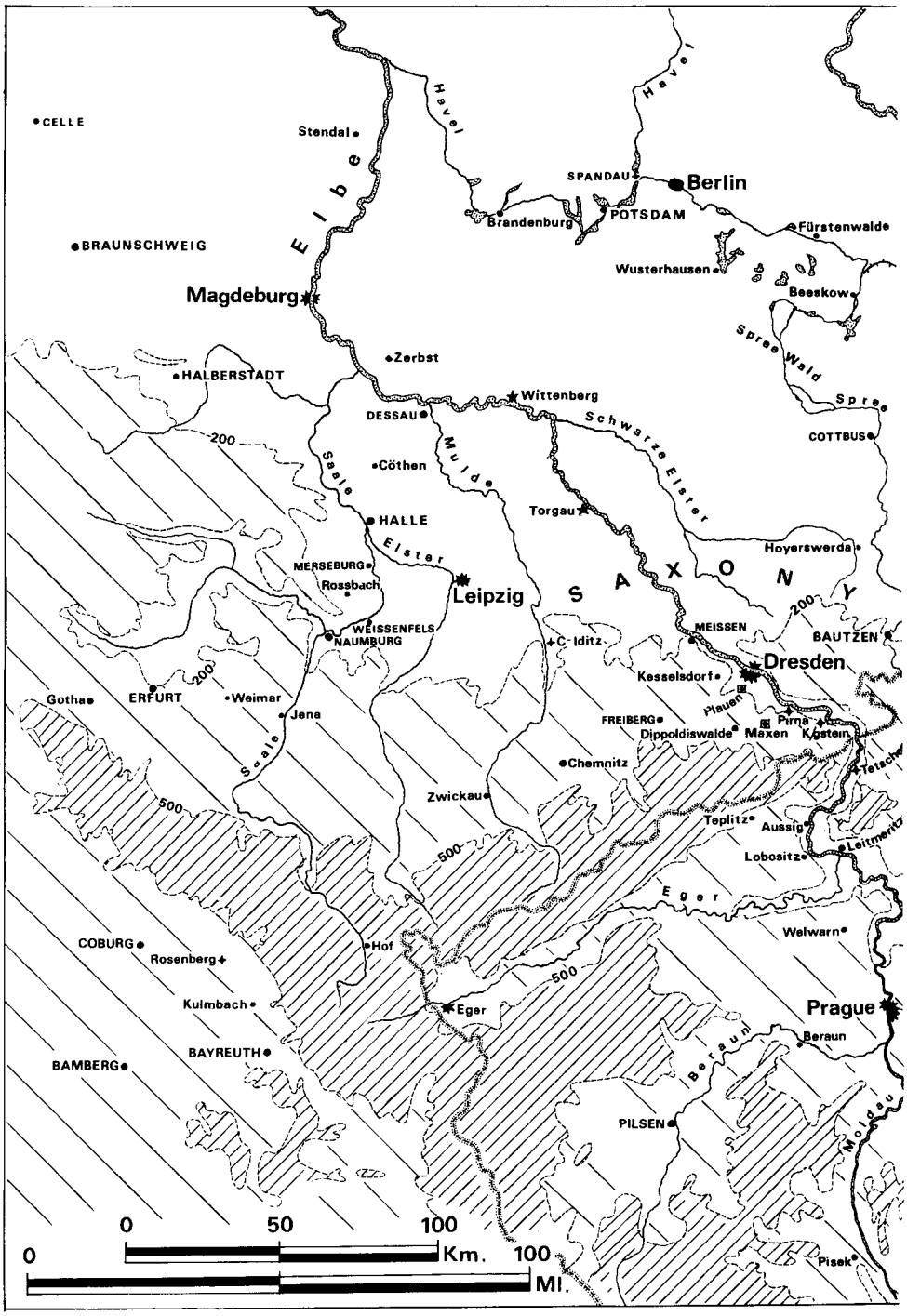
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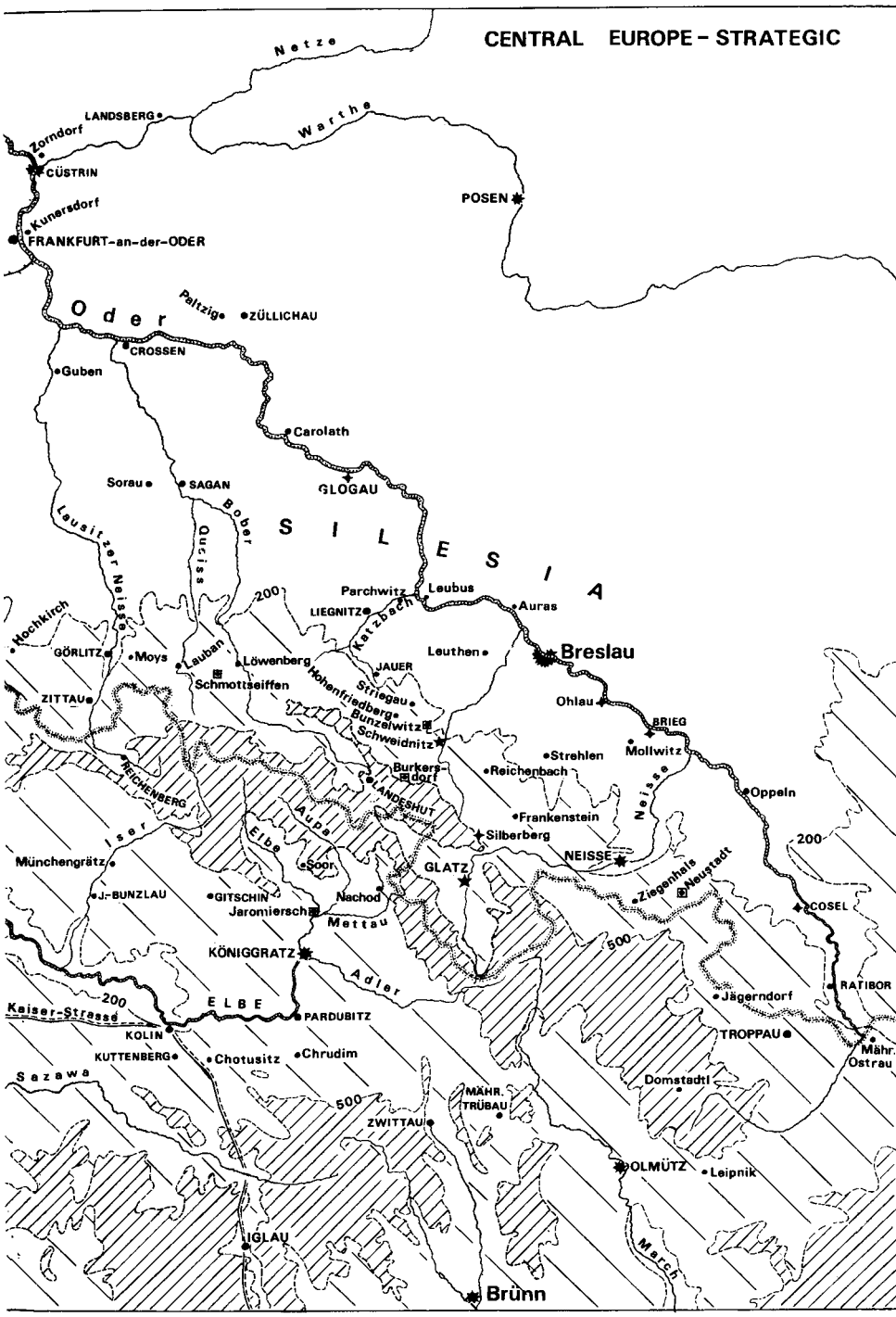
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Routledge
London and New York

First published in 1985
Reprinted in paperback 1988 by
Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Published in the USA by
Routledge in association with
Routledge, Chapman & Hall Inc.
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY10001

Set in Pilgrim 10 on 12pt
by Inforum Ltd, Portsmouth
and printed in Great Britain
by T.J. Press (Padstow) Ltd,
Padstow, Cornwall

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Duffy, Christopher
Frederick the Great: a military life.
1. Frederick II, King of Prussia 2. Prussia
(Germany)—Kings and rulers—Biography
I. Title
943'.053'0924 DD404

ISBN 0-415-00276-1

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Preface

This book is a product of the centuries-old British obsession with that most un-British of creatures, Frederick the Great of Prussia. I am confident that my contribution will rank, if not with Carlyle or Mitford, at least with one of our first essays of the sort, which appeared in 1759: *A Succinct Account of the Person, the Way of Living and of the Court of the King of Prussia. Price Six Pence.*

Here I must establish that I do not propose to offer a solution to The Prussian Question, or build psychological edifices on the supposition that Frederick, at some impressionable age, was frightened by a flute. My work is a narrative biography, albeit one with a strong military emphasis. No other literary form is capable of establishing the vital continuities in Frederick's career, or of addressing the notorious contradictions which draw scholars and the public to this fascinating person – a spiritual Frenchman stranded in the remotest corner of Germany, a ruler who was at once a cynical exponent of power-politics, a prince of the Enlightenment, and a lover of the arts who maintained a distance between his inner self and the bloody work in which he was engaged.

Perspectives of this kind will, I hope, attract readers who otherwise harbour an all too well-founded aversion to military history. For their sake I have reduced technical jargon to the essential minimum. Details of uniforms, weapons, equipment, tactics and organisation will be found in the magisterial tomes by Bleckwenn and Jany, and more accessibly in my *Army of Frederick the Great* (1974).

I must, however, urge the timeliness of some kind of military study of Old Fritz. The nature of his administrative achievements has recently undergone the most searching scholarly investigations, but strangely enough, despite a multitude of military historical monographs and narratives, nobody since Theodor von Bernhardi in 1881 has presented a detailed overview of Frederick's life as a soldier. To that extent the re-evaluations of the king have remained incomplete.

> Without Hohenfriedeberg, Soor and Leuthen, without the conquest and retention of Silesia, Frederick would not be Frederick as we know him, but just one of the more notable monarchs of his time. What made him 'the first man of his century'? Not his witty cynicism, not his ambitious corpus of writings, not his reform of justice – but his bloody battles for the possession of Silesia. (Augstein, 1968, 265)

In the matter of source material, historians suffered an undeniable loss when the Prussian military archives were destroyed in 1945. By then, however, the publication of Frederick's *Politische Correspondenz* had been completed, and this material, together with the king's printed works, makes up no less than seventy substantial volumes. No other monarch has ever written at such length about his doings, or (with the possible exception of Louis XIV) has been observed so closely over such a long period of time. Indeed, it is remarkable to find how few of the sources cited by historians before 1945 are not available to us today.

Another form of evidence, which has survived mostly intact, is the physical setting of Frederick's battles and campaigns. With a certain amount of persistence it is possible to tour the scenes of all of the more important field headquarters and encampments, and every battlefield except the two (Mollwitz and Chotusitz) which lie under aircraft runways. Negatively, this experience helps to preserve the historian from some of the idiocies he would commit if he stayed at home and copied what other people have written on the subject. More positively, it assists him to resolve tactical problems, identify areas of strategic importance, and to re-create the texture of past times.

I must acknowledge the benefit I have derived from conversations or correspondence with Hans Bleckwenn, Hubert Johnson, Jeremy Black and Keith Simpson. In Eastern Europe I received nothing but the most friendly help in all quarters, official and private, but I must make particular mention of the assistance rendered by Dr Miroslav Mudra of the National Museum, Prague, and Lieutenant-Colonel Dr Helmut Schnitter of the Military Historical Institute, Potsdam.

Abbreviations

Forschungen	*Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preussischen Geschichte* (1888 etc), Leipzig, Munich and Berlin.
Gr. Gstb. (1890–3)	Grosser Generalstab (1890–3), *Der Erste schlesische Krieg 1740–1742*, 3 vols, Berlin.
Gr. Gstb. (1895)	Grosser Generalstab (1895), *Der Zweite schlesische Krieg 1744–1745*, 3 vols, Berlin.
Gr. Gstb. (1901–14)	Grosser Generalstab (1901–14), *Der siebenjährige Krieg 1756–1763*, 13 vols, Berlin. Publication of this official history was terminated by the Great War, and coverage stopped just short of the battle of Torgau in 1760.
Oeuvres	*Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand* (1846–57), 30 vols, Berlin.
PC	*Politische Correspondenz Friedrichs des Grossen* (1879–1939), 46 vols, Berlin. According to convention, references are given by document number, not volume or page.
PRO	Public Record Office, London.
Urkundliche Beiträge	Grosser Generalstab (1901, etc.), *Urkundliche Beiträge und Forschungen zur Geschichte des preussischen Heeres*, Berlin.

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CHAPTER ONE

Origins

The rise of the future state of Brandenburg-Prussia is perhaps associated in our minds with blurred images of Teutonic Knights, crested helmets, and bloody crusades against the Slavs. By the early modern period those times were long past. The true founders of the eastern marches were in fact those German colonists who pushed slowly across the glaciated lowlands which extended from the Elbe to beyond the Oder. Many of the original inhabitants remained in place. In the north of the region the folk of Polish blood learned to speak the Plattdeutsch of the newcomers, which resembled a primitive English – '*Wat is o Klok?*' they said, when they wished to know the time. In the centre and south-east were to be found large unassimilated pockets of the Slavonic Wends, who conversed in a language that was preserved as the *Dienstsprache* of seven of the Berlin regiments in the eighteenth century.

It was through inheritance, rather than conquest, that the prolific German noble line of Hohenzollern acquired the Brandenburg heartland and other territories scattered widely over northern Europe. Already by the beginning of the eighteenth century the Hohenzollerns ruled three groups of holdings, namely:

(a) to the east the Baltic duchy of East Prussia, which was separated from the central core by a corridor of Polish territory;
(b) to the west a number of enclaves in Germany, scattered across the Weser, the Lippe and the Rhine, to wit Minden, Ravensberg, Mark and Cleves;
(c) in the centre the electorate of Brandenburg, and the adjacent territories of eastern Pomerania, Magdeburg and Halberstadt.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Brandenburg had known the collective ordeals of north-eastern Europe, experiencing the 'second enserfment' of the peasantry, and the devastations of the Thirty Years War. The Saxons and Poles had been hit just as badly,

but they became in character identifiably different from the Brandenburg-Prussians, who by the 1720s were emerging as folk of a decidedly soldierly aspect. How do we account for the distinction? The answer probably lies in the fact that the Brandenburgers were to a remarkable degree moulded by their sovereigns, as Zimmermann pointed out (1790, III, 219). Frederick put it in a different way in his *Political Testament* of 1752: 'the power of Prussia derives not from intrinsic strength, but from hard work'.

On this reckoning the first 'Prussian' was certainly Frederick William, 'The Great Elector', who ruled Brandenburg-Prussia from 1640 to 1688. He crushed the local feudal assemblies, and won the freedom to set up a standing army of 30,000 troops. Independent military force was now to form the base of Hohenzollern power, and not the shifts of alliance which had served Brandenburg so badly in the Thirty Years War.

The new regular army won its spurs in campaigns against the Swedes, and episodes like the Great Elector's victory at Fehrbellin (1675) became treasured memories in the developing military consciousness of the Brandenburgers. Dutch models influenced the formative years of the army, but after 1685 the most modern military practice of the French was brought to Brandenburg by Huguenot refugees.

The Great Elector was succeeded by his son Frederick William II of Brandenburg, a man who, unusually for the new breed of Hohenzollerns, loved pomp and luxury. On 18 January 1701 he assumed for himself the title of 'King in Prussia', building on the sovereignty he enjoyed in East Prussia, independently of the German Empire. More tangibly, this freshly-minted King Frederick I contrived to increase the military establishment to 40,000 troops, in the face of every difficulty presented by epidemics and his own extravagance. He hired out his army in penny packets to the allies in the War of the Spanish Succession, an experience which proved of decisive importance in the evolution of the Prussian military tradition. Not only did the Prussian troops win acclaim on the battlefield, but officers like Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Dessau ('The Old Dessauer') gained experience of command, and acquired the secrets of the tactics which enabled the Duke of Marlborough to overcome the armies of Louis XIV in their decline.

Frederick I died in 1713, 'and with him all courtly pomp was consigned to the grave, to make way for bourgeois simplicity and military austerity' (Koser, 1921, I, 3). By the age of eight his son, Crown Prince Frederick William, had owned an impressive array of military impedimenta, and two years later he wrote a solemn declaration to the effect that he had put aside all childish things. When he became king as Frederick William I, this formidable individual set

the seal on the character of the Hohenzollern monarchy and its peoples.

In point of size, the Prussian army grew in Frederick William's reign to no less than 83,000 men, which was a remarkably high figure for a population base of about 2,250,000 souls. This achievement was made possible by an increasingly heavy recruitment of foreigners, and by the all-embracing but compact and tightly run administration of the *General-Directorium*, which from 1723 managed both the royal domains and the central and local government.

The material and the symbolic marched side by side in the new Prussia. The Old Dessauer effectively invented the practice of troops marching in step (the 'cadenced step'). It looked good on parade, and on the battlefield it enabled the Prussians to operate in fast-moving and compact formations. The Liège manufacturer François Henoul helped Frederick William to carry out a comprehensive re-arming of the troops, and 1718 saw the introduction of the celebrated Prussian iron ramrod, a device which could be wielded with speed and force, permitting muskets to be loaded much more quickly than with the wooden ramrods of the other services of Europe. In the same year Frederick William accomplished what Hans Bleckwenn has termed the *Stilbruch* in the Prussian officers' uniforms, a deliberate turning-aside from the richly embroidered fashions of western Europe, and the imposition of sober coats of dark indigo blue. Frederick the Great was to retain this weaponry and clothing, and by implication to uphold the values enshrined in them. The new style accorded well with the movement of Pietism which was abroad among the Lutheran people and nobility, and which stressed the virtues of service, honesty and industry.

Brutal, bluff, human and open, Frederick William lent himself easily to caricature. He is known to posterity mainly through the tyrannical treatment of his family, which grew with each re-telling on the part of his daughter Wilhelmine. It is not necessary to repeat what has been written at such length elsewhere concerning the *Tabakskollegium* at Wusterhausen, where the king and his cronies met in an atmosphere reeking of pipe-smoke and cabbage, or to dwell on the giants of the Grenadier-Garde regiment, who lived out their days uselessly in the walled town of Potsdam. Less well known is Frederick William's *Political Testament*, which was opened upon his death, and contained this passage:

> Throughout my life I have been careful not to draw down the envy of the House of Austria on my head. This has forced me to pursue two passions which are really alien to me, namely unbounded avarice, and an exaggerated regard for tall soldiers.

> Only under the disguise of these spectacular eccentricities was I allowed to gather a large treasury and assemble a powerful army. Now this money and these troops lie at the disposal of my successor, who requires no such mask. (Bleckwenn, 1978, 65)

It was not a man devoid of perception who bequeathed to Frederick the finest officer corps in Europe. If a young Prussian officer's mental equipment was supposed to be constructed around 'the most essential and solid categories of knowledge' (quoted in Tharau, 1968, 55), those subjects were understood to embrace politics, geography, history and the law.

As for the common soldiery, Frederick William respected the natural rights of men who had admittedly modest expectations of what life had to offer (see, for example, Frederick William to Colonel von Selchow, in Ollech, 1883, 14). Voices from the other ranks are exceedingly rare in eighteenth-century literature, and it is all the more interesting to hear the Alsatian-born J.F. Dreyer explain that, as a foreigner, he was attracted to the Prussian service by the high standing which its soldiers enjoyed under Frederick William (Dreyer, 1810, 20).

Through the example of the king 'a lazy people . . . a luxury-loving people' was re-fashioned into a new identity (A. Schlözer, 1777, in Volz, 1926–7, I, 91). Indeed, as early as the 1720s a young Magdeburg apothecary was refused permission to trade in the pro-Habsburg port of Lübeck because he looked too *Preussisch*. The sweetness of life in Talleyrand's pre-Revolutionary Europe never extended to Hohenzollern Brandenburg-Prussia. *Commodité* and *Plaisir* were banished altogether from Frederick William's court, and they were always difficult to discover in the provinces (Salmon, 1752–3, I, 469).

To the men of the eighteenth century, there appeared to be an all too direct correspondence between the landscape and the bleak character of its inhabitants. The Austrian general Lacy, who raided Brandenburg in 1760, described the villages around Berlin as standing up in the plain like battalions of infantry. The very name of Prussia, transmuted into 'spruce', applied both to the conifers massed around the sandy fields, and to a somewhat artificial neatness of appearance.

Another name, one that was to prove totally inappropriate, was given to a royal infant who was born on 24 January 1712. This was 'Frederick', a name signifying one who was 'rich in peace'.

Looking back on his childhood, Frederick deplored that so much had been sacrificed to the demands of his father. He never regretted, however, that his earliest upbringing had the character of that of the

eldest son of a modest and strict bourgeois household. His language as a king was shot through with images from the Bible, reflecting one of the principal sources of his first reading.

It was as a six-year-old that Frederick began to make an impression on observers: 'He is an altogether cheerful and lively prince . . . Frau von Sacetot, who supervised his education, speaks of him with unqualified delight. Using an English expression she is fond of exclaiming "He is a little angel!" ' (J.M. von Loen, in Volz, 1926–7, I, 6).

Our little angel had already been introduced to the *Compagnie Cadets* which was set up for his training, and a lively young officer called Rentzel introduced him to the rudiments of drill. Frederick never mastered the technicalities of spelling or mathematics, but his instincts as lover of the arts and as soldier were guided by a gifted band of tutors. His French style was formed by his teacher and true friend, the Huguenot Jacques Duhan de Jandun. His corresponding military development lay in the hands of two soldiers from East Prussia: Colonel Christoph Wilhelm von Kalckstein, and the widely travelled and fine-mannered Lieutenant-General Count Albrecht Konrad von Finckenstein. These officers were told to imbue Frederick with the conviction 'that nothing in the world can endow a prince with more honour and glory than the sword' (Koser, 1921, I, 8).

The celebrated discord between the growing crown prince and his father is recounted in all the biographies of Frederick. The blame must be shared liberally among the circumstances of the case and almost everybody who had dealings with the pair.

In absolutist, hereditary monarchies, where so much of the welfare of the state hung upon the succession, it was not easy for an heir-apparent to live up to all the expectations that were invested in him. The issue was fraught with all the more tension in Brandenburg-Prussia, which was a recent and artificial creation. This having been said, we must agree with Frederick that the demands of the father were extreme. This behaviour might have been forgivable in the case of a grizzled, war-hardened veteran, such as we are tempted to imagine that Frederick William must have been. In fact he had only reached his mid-twenties by the time of his son's birth. His tales of the campaign of Malplaquet might have been, as Frederick complained, as inexhaustible as the mines of Potosí, but his part in the fighting had been little more than that of a spectator.

Frederick William's conduct did not even own the virtue of consistency. What finally broke the son was not an unrelenting harshness on the part of the king, but his passing moods of blubbering remorse. At such moments Frederick would respond with the affectionate and trusting nature of his childhood, leaving himself defenceless against the next blow.

The older females of the royal family only served to widen the division between father and son. The blood of Stuarts and Guelphs mingled in the veins of Frederick's mother, Queen Sophia Dorothea. She called forth his love of the arts, but at the same time she drew him into dangerous entanglements with parties at court who favoured a dynastic marriage for him with a Hanoverian princess.

Frederick's elder sister Wilhelmine was closer to him than any other creature. Three years his senior, she had loved him from the cradle, cementing a relationship in which she became at once a step-mother and a partner in a brother-and-sister alliance against the outside world. Many years separated Frederick and Wilhelmine in their turn from their younger brothers and sisters – August Wilhelm, Henry (the favourite of the father), the simple Ferdinand, and the sisters Ulrike and Amalie.

Undoubtedly there were times when Frederick was cast in the role of purest victim. Years later he was plunged into a cold sweat by the memory of the king bursting into his room and sweeping books, papers and flute into the fireplace. At the same time the prince showed a perverse delight in whatever was best calculated to awaken his father's ire. Such were his diamond rings, his embroidered coat, and his 'long, beautiful hair, hanging down on both sides in loose curls' (Hildebrandt, 1829–35, IV, 37).

Frederick's experience of the wider world was greatly broadened when, in January 1728, Frederick William was persuaded against his better judgment to send for the crown prince to join him in Dresden at the court of Augustus II, elector of Saxony and king of Poland. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the contrast between the two princely residences. Potsdam resembled nothing so much as a Dutch provincial town, with its modest and close-set houses of red brick and its embracing river and canal. In Dresden, on the other hand, the skyline was being transformed by the pinnacles and domes of Italianate churches and palaces. In place of the tobacco-smoked furnishings and dark chambers of the Hohenzollern household, Augustus owned airy apartments, adorned with bejewelled knick-knackery, Chinese vases and porcelain vultures and apes of native Saxon manufacture.

In the matter of morals the court of Augustus was possibly the most corrupt establishment in Europe. An observer might just as well have attempted to define the interrelationships in a warren of rabbits as to give a name to the multifarious couplings of lovers, mistresses, sons and daughters.

The gossips and medical men speculated as to the details of what happened to the sixteen-year-old Frederick during the *chronica scandalosa* of this Dresden visit. It is probable that Augustus furnished the young man with his first mistress. It is possible that on this occasion,

or in some later liaison, Frederick contracted an infection which, as Dr Zimmermann claims (1790, I, 79), was cured by an excessively drastic surgical operation. Surmise must be allowed some place in history, and one may conjecture that some intolerable humiliation connected with the Saxon visit (and not necessarily any of the happenings which have passed into recorded history) helps to account for the extraordinary vindictiveness which Frederick as soldier-king displayed towards the electorate. The recording angel who has the story of Frederick's relations with Saxony probably also owns the key to his character and ambitions.

A pale and shaken prince returned to Brandenburg, only to be overthrown shortly afterwards by his continuing passion for Countess Orczelska, who travelled in the suite of Augustus when that monarch came to Berlin in May at the invitation of Frederick William. A third, and for Frederick utterly intolerable, episode in this sequence of disturbing events was occasioned by the Saxon military festivities at Mühlberg in the early summer of 1730. Frederick attended the event with his father. He was now eighteen, and too old for the public humiliations that Frederick William still inflicted on him. He explained much later that 'with regard to making his escape . . . he had long been unhappy and harshly used by his father, but what made him resolve upon it was, that one day his father struck him, and pulled him by the hair, and in this dishevelled condition he was obliged to pass the parade, that from that moment he was resolved, *coûte que coûte*, to venture it' (Mitchell, 1850, I, 358).

The escape in question was a scheme by which Frederick, assisted by two young officers, was to break free from the royal party as it made a progress through western Germany in August of the same year, and claim sanctuary in foreign territory. The plot was easily discovered, and it became only too evident that Frederick William intended something terrible for the prince, whisking him off eastwards in a sealed carriage, and having him tried as a military deserter. The court martial declared itself incompetent to pass judgment on Frederick, who was left in confinement in the castle at Cüstrin on the Oder. There was, however, to be no mercy for Frederick's fellow-conspirator Lieutenant Hans Hermann von Katte, who was beheaded under the window of the prince's cell on 6 November.

On 19 November Frederick delivered an oath of unconditional loyalty to the king, and two days later Frederick William ordered him to get down to work at Cüstrin in the *Kriegs- und Domänenkammer*, the local organ of the *General-Directorium*. Frederick was learning to put a distance between his public and private personae, and he now applied himself with unwonted diligence to this bureaucratic

drudgery. In time he gained the freedom to ride in the neighbouring countryside of the Neumark, and he sometimes availed himself of the chance to call at Tamsel at the house of Colonel von Wreech, with whose wife he formed a poetically romantic attachment. Tamsel was a little place of one-storey timber-framed houses, straggling between a row of sandy bluffs and the flat wastelands of the Warthe Marshes. It was on land like this that Frederick had the responsibility for establishing lonely outfarms (*Vorwerke*) and clearing or draining the ground for cultivation. This experience brought home to Frederick the extraordinary effort that was demanded to render the lands of Brandenburg-Prussia fertile, and in later years, as director of the state, he was to make it his overriding aim to protect the folk who were engaged in this vital activity.

At the end of November 1731 Frederick was allowed to visit Berlin on the occasion of the marriage of Wilhemine to the Margrave of Bayreuth. The crown prince had been treated as a military deserter ever since his attempt to take flight, but now it was time for him to resume his interrupted military education. Frederick William had told him some years earlier:

> Fritz, pay close attention to what I am going to say to you. Always keep up a good and strong army – you won't have a better friend and you can't survive without it. Our neighbours want nothing more than to bring about our ruin – I am aware of their intentions, and you will come to know them as well. Believe me, don't let wishful thinking run away with you – stick to what is real. Always put your trust in a good army and in hard cash – they are the things which keep rulers in peace and security. (Koser, 1921, I, 8)

He accompanied these words with a series of taps on the princely cheek, which gradually assumed the force of blows.

It is too much to apply the word 'reconciliation' to the new relations obtaining between the king and Frederick. Rather they recognised that their happiness was best served by living apart. On 27 November 1731 all the generals who were present in Berlin, headed by the Old Dessauer, petitioned Frederick William to re-admit the crown prince to the army. The father not only restored to Frederick the right to wear the officers' coat and sword knot, but granted him the colonel-proprietorship of the recently vacant infantry regiment of Goltz. On 4 April 1732 Frederick set off for Nauen to take up his new command.

Frederick entered on his serious military career at a period when armies knew no formal system of officer training. The Prussian

service, like some others, owned a corps of cadets, but such establishments trained only a small proportion of aspirant officers, and in any case they were more concerned with inculcating the accomplishments of a gentleman than giving a thorough preparation in military affairs. Staff colleges, where an officer might have learnt the higher reaches of his art, were not yet in existence.

What did the eighteenth century offer instead? At the lower level, the regimental officer simply acquired his trade by living with it day by day and reading the regulations. At the next stage of their formation, men of intelligence consulted the histories of the wars and the standard texts on artillery and fortification. Here was the limit of what most officers could attain through their own efforts. Successful generalship was assumed to be part of the personal endowment of gifted commanders, something which could be transmitted to the most able members of the next generation only by an almost sacramental process, in which the apostolic laying-on of hands was replaced by direct instruction and the example of the great men. Frederick went through all of these experiences between 1732 and 1740.

The Prussian service was noted for the absolute priority it gave to the first degree of the process: the acquisition of the detail of regimental duty. Frederick put it elegantly in his *Art de la Guerre* (1751), in the first 'song', addressed to ambitious young officers. He reminded them that they must learn to bear the terrible weight of the musket, and acquire an instant and silent obedience. He went on to compare an army to the wonderful hydraulic machinery at Marly, in which every wheel had an appropriate task, and which could nevertheless be brought to a halt by the failure of a single part:

> Aimez donc ces détails, ils ne sont pas sans gloire,
> C'est là le premier pas qui mène à la victoire!

In the early 1730s Frederick was still being reminded of his place of comparative subordination in this hierarchy. He wrote less than two weeks after assuming command of his regiment: 'Tomorrow I am off to Potsdam to see the drill and find out whether we are doing things properly here. I come to the regiment as a new broom, and it is up to me to master my duties as colonel, and show that I am a proficient officer who knows everything that is expected of him' (Becher, 1892, 13). Even in his present rank he had to show due respect to Lieutenant-Colonel Bredow at Nauen and Captain Hacke in Potsdam, who were responsible for reporting on his conduct to the king.

Like the other regiments of foot, the regiment of Prinz von Preussen was a body of about seventeen hundred souls – officers,

NCOs, men and supporting personnel. The two component battalions were stationed at Neu-Ruppin and Nauen, about forty miles north-west of Berlin. This region was to become known as the military heartland of Brandenburg, from its associations with the sacred field of Fehrbellin, the little estate of the Zieten family at Wustrau, and the activity of Crown Prince Frederick as colonel. Towards the south the country was a generally open land of marshy-banked streams, peat bogs, and vast fields that were relieved here and there by billowing poplars. Along the eastern side it was bordered by the reedy lake of Neu-Ruppin. In the direction of Rheinsberg in the north the soil was a deep and fine sand, densely clad in pines – a very forbidding landscape in winter, but dark green and aromatic in the summertime.

Frederick made his headquarters with his first battalion on the fringes of the wooded zone at Neu-Ruppin, at the northern end of the lake. This was a poor and miserable town, where he dwelt in two mud cottages which had been knocked into a single unit. In an attempt to create a more civilised environment he laid out a garden in a narrow tract of dusty ground, extending between the old brick town wall and an outlying earthern rampart. His newly appointed architect, Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff, went on to adorn the scene with an elegant little Temple of Apollo.

Drill and office work filled every morning from daybreak until Frederick stopped for lunch. Afterwards he issued the *Parole* (password) for the next twenty-four hours, an important little ceremony which gave the colonel a regular opportunity to express his opinion on the regiment's performance. Frederick liked to give the impression that he spent every day in unrelenting toil, but in fact he allowed himself ample time for recreation in the afternoons and evenings. We learn of the crown prince playing the flute and reading, of twice-weekly gorgings on hampers of oysters and other delicacies which came from Hamburg, and dark legends of how he and his companions ranged through little villages like Bechlin and Bienenwalde, breaking windows and chasing the girls.

The element of cruelty was openly displayed on one occasion, when Frederick and his young officers revenged themselves on the censorious chaplain of their regiment, 'first smashing the windows of his bedroom, then throwing in a swarm of bees which drove the chaplain and his pregnant wife out of their bed, through the courtyard, and finally into the dunghill. In his old age the king was much given to repeating this tale in a humorous tone of voice, and he was glad when he provoked laughter from his guests, and even among the pages and servants who were standing in attendance' (Büsching, 1788, 20).

We have the most contradictory assessment of the character of

the officers at Neu-Ruppin and Nauen. They were witty and urbane, according to some accounts, but inarticulate and limited on the evidence of others. However, the type was clearly established – it was that of the poorish country nobility, which was valued by perceptive military men wherever it was to be found in Europe, but which in the Prussian service was predominant. Its peculiar qualities lent powerful support to the claim that the landed aristocracy was to be considered the natural officer class:

> Discipline in a German army is best upheld when the officer comes from the highest element in society, and the soldier from the lowest. This reflects the habit of command which the nobility exercises on its estates, and the corresponding habit of obedience among the peasantry . . . Danger loses much of its horror for a young lad who gives full credence to all those tales he hears from his relations about their bloody hunting accidents, who sees their scars and crippled limbs (those tokens of courage), and who notes the light-hearted way in which all these inherently frightening things are brought into the conversation. (Garve, 1798, 161)

To modern eyes, the eighteenth-century officer devoted a remarkably high proportion of his time to the business of acquiring recruits. Frederick William expected foreign cannon fodder to make up about half of the manpower of the army, so as to prevent the military establishment from becoming an intolerable drain on the native population. Hundreds of Prussian officers and agents accordingly ranged over Europe in the search for suitable material, and especially for men of five feet nine inches or more, so as to furnish the first rank in the line of battle. The recruiters did not hesitate to employ force or fraud as necessary – a policy which nearly brought about a war with Hanover in 1729.

Frederick sent one of his recruiting officers to Naples, and another, who was too enterprising, was arrested in French Lorraine. In Holland he purchased a man who stood six feet four inches high, 'a phenomenon as rare and as extraordinary as the passage of a comet' (Becher, 1892, 49). A shepherd, reputed to be equally tall, was discovered in Mecklenburg. Frederick reported to his father: 'Persuasion has no effect on him. But a couple of officers and a pair of reliable NCOs can make off with him soon enough, when he is alone in the fields tending his sheep' (*ibid.*, 44). Frederick William gave his blessing to the enterprise, which was by any measure a strange subject for correspondence between a sovereign and his heir.

Not long after Frederick acquired his regiment the king put the native recruiting of the army on a solid basis. This was accomplished

by the Cantonal System, which was introduced in 1732 and 1733 and created a pool of conscripted native manpower for each regiment.

The Cantonal System attracted the lively interest of political economists and military observers, who attached to it a host of real or supposed advantages. The recruiting of natives now became a controllable process – a matter of administration rather than of the *razzia*-like forays by which the foreigners were still obtained for the service. The element of servitude was ameliorated by the many exemptions, and by the practice of calling up the cantonists for mustering and drill for only two or three months of the year, at seasons when they could best be spared from the land. The damage to farming was therefore minimised, and the economy actually benefited from the systematic way the regiments were stationed in the provinces. The captains liked this arrangement, because an agreeable custom allowed them to keep the pay of such men of their companies as were on leave. Finally the local associations of the cantonal-based regiment helped to promote comradeship on campaign, and the deep reserves of trained manpower rendered units 'immortal', to use Frederick's word, over the duration of long wars.

Every April the cantonists were recalled to the colours. Frederick subjected his regiment to intensive drilling at Neu-Ruppin, and then, like the other Colonels, he had to take his men to Berlin to put them through their paces under the eyes of the king. The process ended in a 'general review' on the Tempelhofer-Feld, when the regiments marched past Frederick William and carried out a number of gruelling joint evolutions. Sagging with heat and exhaustion, the officers finally learnt of the royal judgment at *Parole* in the afternoon.

We can be sure that merit alone could have earned Frederick the praise which his father measured out to him at these annual ordeals. Frederick was promoted to major-general in 1735, as a direct consequence of his performance in the review of that year, but he always awaited the verdicts with trepidation.

By now Frederick's military imagination had leapt over the confines of the drill square. For years now he had been in the habit of making the short journey south from Neu-Ruppin to the battlefield of Fehrbellin, where he sought to re-create the events of 1675 by walking the ground in the company of old men who had seen the Great Elector's famous victory.

Still more of the tradition of the glorious past was transmitted to Frederick through the medium of Leopold I, Prince of Anhalt-Dessau. The Old Dessauer's active service had begun with the Prussian contingent in the Netherlands in 1695. In the war of the Spanish Succession he became a comrade of Prince Eugene of Savoy on the fields of Blenheim and Cassano, and in 1709 he put Crown Prince

Frederick William in his eternal debt by shepherding him on the campaign in Brabant. Prince Leopold was made field-marshal in 1712, and in the following year, as effective chief of staff to the new king, he began to re-work the Prussian army in his own image. Now the officers discovered that they were expected to make military duties their first concern in life, even in peacetime, which was something of a novelty in contemporary Europe.

Prince Leopold wrote compulsively on military affairs. He tore up his manuscript history of the army in a fit of rage, but his historically based *Stammliste* was accepted for nearly a century to come as the definitive text on the lineage of Prussian regiments. He was probably also responsible for expanding Frederick's grasp of the technicalities of warfare. Until the later 1730s Frederick's military education had been oddly thin. His scratchy sketch maps have a vigour of their own, but he never learnt to draw as well as most of his contemporaries, and he showed a positive disinclination towards the subjects of mathematics and geometry, which were then considered the foundations of military training.

The Old Dessauer was an expert in the formation of crown princes, and for the instruction of Frederick he compiled a *Clear and Detailed Description*, which was based on the orders of the day which were issued in the campaigns against the Swedes between 1715 and 1720. The text was illustrated by a set of sixteen huge plans, and this mass of paper was bestowed on Frederick in January 1738.

The Old Dessauer's communications with Frederick, as crown prince and later king, remained elaborate and deferential. To the other military men Prince Leopold addressed himself with a violence that was accepted as part of his style. This self-consciously tough and *altpreussisch* way of Dessau soldiering was perpetuated by Leopold's sons and nephews, and by protégés and admirers like the colonels Friedrich von Manstein and Hermann von Wartensleben, and the generals Winterfeldt and Fouqué.

Another strand in the Prussian military tradition was embodied by Kurt Christoph von Schwerin (1684–1757), who represented one of the ideals of Frederick's youth, and became his mentor on his first campaign as king.

Schwerin was born in Swedish Pomerania, which brought with it a disposition towards international adventuring, and he served in the Dutch and Swedish employ before he entered the army of Brandenburg-Prussia in 1720, as a battle-scarred and highly revered major-general. Schwerin's way of life was associated with gracious manners, a magnificence of food, wine and furnishings, an openness to the French culture, and a willingness to cultivate the society of agreeable civilians. Towards Frederick, Schwerin adopted the affable

tone of a man of the world: 'I am out of wine', he wrote to him on campaign in 1741, 'and have to make do with miserable beer. Your Majesty, be so good as to send me a barrel of Rhenish wine – you have such a lot that you will not miss it. I can then drink your health in the company of our brave officers' (Schwerin, 1928, 105).

Schwerin's school of devotees was still longer-lived than that of the Old Dessauer, and it embraced Frederick's younger brothers as well as celebrated generals like Forcade and Ferdinand of Brunswick. The enemies of the Schwerin manner were inclined to forget that it rested on some firm Prussian virtues. Schwerin prayed alone in his room every morning before he mounted horse. He was at least the equal of the Old Dessauer in fitness, nerve and physical courage, and, as Hans Bleckwenn has discovered, the regiments that were brought up in the Schwerin fashion survived the battering of the Seven Years War much better than did the German princely regiments of the Dessau tradition. Bleckwenn attributes the difference to a more enlightened way of leadership. However, it is worth pointing out that Schwerin was renowned in his own time for the exactitude of the order he maintained among his troops. He meted out death penalties much more readily than did Frederick, and the armies under his command won general admiration for the restraint they exercised in enemy territory, which again offered a contrast to Frederick's way of doing things. Altogether the Schwerin code of discipline appears to have been more effective, more consistent, and less sentimental than the better-known Dessau variety.

In 1734 Frederick made the acquaintance of the greatest of all the commanders of the older generation, and at the same time he had his first direct encounter with active operations. The occasion was the War of the Polish Succession, when a dispute over rival candidatures to the throne of Poland led to a confrontation on the Rhine between the French and a mixed army of the states of the German empire, which stood under the leadership of that celebrated old Austrian war-horse Prince Eugene of Savoy.

As his contribution to the Teutonic host, Frederick William dispatched a corps of 10,000 Prussian auxiliaries, comprising five regiments of infantry and three of dragoons. This force left Berlin in April, and on 30 June Crown Prince Frederick and a small party of officers set off to join the men on the Rhine. The king had furnished him with a long instruction, in which the desire to advance military knowledge was tempered with a concern for the young man's moral welfare.

Frederick reached the army at Wiesental on 7 July. He at once repaired to headquarters, where he exchanged compliments with

Prince Eugene. At noon he dined with General von Groesfeld, and during the meal he heard for the first time cannon being fired with lethal intent. He proposed several healths, and he was delighted when the raising of glasses coincided with the sound of the French artillery.

Frederick had reached the German forces at a not-uninteresting stage of the campaign. The French had clamped a siege on the little Rhine fortress of Philippsburg. They had 95,000 troops in all, but the lie of the ground had forced them to split their men into three parts, leaving only 50,000 men on the 'German' bank of the Rhine. Eugene had arrived on the scene with a respectable army of relief numbering 74,000. He had overcome much greater odds in his famous old campaigns against the Turks, and the expectation was that he would now turn his local superiority to good account.

On 8 July, the day after his arrival, Frederick orientated himself with the progress of operations by repairing to the tower at Wachhäusel, from where he observed the French camp and batteries. He returned to carry out an inspection of the Prussian infantry, and he was halfway through when he encountered Prince Eugene, who invited him to his headquarters for the first of their tête-à-têtes. Frederick now discovered that this ancient, cadaverous warrior was usually plagued with indigestion after dinner, and that it was worth catching him before he sat down to table.

The next day, the 9th, was the most exhilarating of Frederick's expedition. He began by turning back a group of soldiers who were fleeing under fire, and in the course of a mounted reconnaissance he and his party became the target of the French artillery as they rode through a wood. Frederick earned golden opinions for the coolness with which he kept up the conversation, while the trees about him were splintering under the impact of the cannon shot. In the evening Eugene and the Duke of Württemberg came to the tent of our young hero. They talked for a long time, and when the guests were departing Frederick gave the duke a kiss. Eugene turned about and declared: ' "Well now, doesn't Your Highness think my old cheeks are worthy of a kiss?" "Oh, with the best will in the world!" answered the crown prince, and with that he planted several noisy kisses on Prince Eugene. And so they parted' (Anon., 1787–9, XII, 9).

King Frederick William in person arrived at the army on 13 July and betook himself at once to Prince Eugene. After a long conversation the king finally raised the question of whether Frederick would ever make a good soldier. Eugene replied that he could not only reassure him on that point, but declare that his son would be a great general.

To the chagrin of the army, Eugene allowed the French to

prosecute their siege undisturbed, and on 18 July Frederick watched from a house in Wiesental while the garrison of Philippsburg, having surrendered the place to the French, marched out of the fortress with drums beating. Four days later Prince Eugene's army burnt the untransportable equipment and decamped from the scene of its failure. In an atmosphere of confusion the Germans undertook a slow march towards the Neckar, and on 2 August Frederick saw how poor staff work caused the original seven columns to merge into four.

Frederick William left the army on 15 August, now that the campaign was effectively over. People noticed that 'immediately following the departure of his papa, the crown prince of Prussia has fitted himself out with a mass of entirely new and extraordinarily smart gear. Likewise . . . his attendants have been given a fresh and very expensive livery' (Koser, 1891, 226). Significantly, in Frederick's journal of the campaign, the notes and the topographical sketches gave way to ruled staves of music and ideas for compositions.

By now the joint army had spilled in gorgeous profusion into the valley of the Neckar at Heidelberg. The French did not threaten to trouble the proceedings, and the Heidelberg camp became the gathering-place of the gilded youth of Germany. This episode brought home to Frederick how little he shared with his nominal compatriots. He never concealed his contempt for the petty potentates who each strove to build his Versailles, or who, like the Duke of Weimar, maintained an army that was scarcely large enough to put on a stage battle.

Frederick cemented two lifelong friendships during this otherwise frustrating period. Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein was sixteen years older than Fritz, but he was by any standards a worthwhile acquaintance. As a discerning patron of the arts he helped Frederick to build up his collection of paintings, and he maintained a friendly correspondence with him even after, as the reformer of the Austrian artillery, he had destroyed the best of the Prussian infantry in the Seven Years War.

The less responsible side of Frederick's character warmed to François Egmont, Comte de Chasot. This was a renegade Frenchman who had killed a man in a duel and fled to the German camp. He lived as dangerously as ever, and he came to Frederick's attention when he wagered the last coin in his pocket in a game of cards and ended up by breaking the bank. Frederick chose this entertaining individual as one of his companions on his return journey to Berlin.

The Prussians had left with Eugene an impression of their remarkable proficiency, and they confirmed him in his fears that an enemy, potentially more dangerous than the Turks or the French, was arising on the northern flank of the Habsburg empire.

Frederick in his turn had been struck by the muddle and indiscipline that had reigned in the joint army, and by the vision of Eugene as an example of the appalling decrepitude which could overtake military men. Frederick's experience of command gradually ameliorated the asperity of these judgments. He commented in 1758: 'if I understand anything of my trade, especially in the more difficult aspects, I owe that advantage to Prince Eugene. From him I learnt to hold grand objectives constantly in view, and direct all my resources to those ends' (Catt, 1884, 42; also 'Refléxions sur les Projets de Campagne', 1775, *Oeuvres*, XXIX, 80). The term 'grand strategy' had not yet been invented, but it was an awareness of this dimension that was Eugene's legacy to Frederick.

In the high summer of 1735 Frederick's military passions were at a fever pitch, excited by his promotion to major-general and by the prospect of travelling once more to the theatre of operations on the Rhine. His disappointment was all the more acute when, at the beginning of September, Frederick William suddenly withdrew his consent for the journey. Ostensibly the king was of the opinion that it would be undignified for a Prussian prince to be associated with another inactive campaign (it turned out to be the last of the war). In private Frederick William feared that a further spell of service with the Austrians and their allies might give the crown prince an 'Imperial' and un-Prussian perspective on German affairs.

As a partial compensation, Frederick was sent in the autumn to inspect East Prussia. His censorious wit had been sharpened by the experience of the Heidelberg camp, and he conceived a very unfavourable idea of the amenities, climate and character of the people of that isolated land. It was also on the tour of 1735 that Frederick saw the grubby and chaotic court of King Stanislaus Lesczynski, the French candidate for the Polish throne, who had sought refuge in the East Prussian capital of Königsberg. 'The insights, which Frederick gained on this occasion into the intrigues and corruptibility of the Poles, were to colour his opinion of those folk for the rest of his life' (Koser, 1921, I, 99–100).

It is difficult for us to imagine that Frederick was a married man, and that he had lived in that state from the middle of 1732. His unfortunate partner was Princess Elizabeth Christine of Brunswick. She was a good-hearted, ill-educated and passably attractive lady, and never represented for Frederick anything more than one of the keys to his escape from Cüstrin.

In the autumn of 1736 Frederick won a further important degree of independence, when he took up house on the estate of Rheinsberg, which lay close to the Mecklenburg border, at the end of a sandy track

leading through a great zone of resin-scented pinewoods. The old castle was transformed by Knobelsdorff, who ran a colonnade between the two round towers on the open side that faced the Grienericksee, thus framing the view across the water to the magnificent woods of oak and beech on the far side.

The Rheinsberg sojourn lasted until 1740, and it is rightly allowed by the biographers to be the most happy interval in Frederick's life. Rheinsberg lay close enough to the garrison at Neu-Ruppin to enable him to fulfil his regimental duties, but otherwise this blessed place permitted him to indulge all the instincts which had for so long been repressed, and to explore some new ones. Now at last Frederick could launch an assault on his private library, which by 1730 had already amounted to 3,775 volumes. He devoured Caesar's *Commentaries*, Rollin's writings on the wars of the Greeks and Romans, and the histories of the campaigns of Charles XII of Sweden. His non-professional reading ranged through the classics (in French translation), his beloved French dramatists of the seventeenth century, and the philosophical works of Locke and Christian Wolff. Begrudging every hour he spent unconscious, he once drank up to forty cups of coffee every day over a period of time in an attempt to discover whether it was possible to do without sleep altogether. It took his innards nearly three years to recover from the ordeal.

Frederick discovered more pleasure than ever in music, a recreation that was to sustain him through the trials of his military life. As a performer, he was acquainted with the harpsichord and violin, but he showed his greatest accomplishment with the flute. The evening concerts at Rheinsberg were semi-private affairs. Frederick and the little band of musicians would run through three or four concerti by his tutor Quantz, after which the prince played a couple of solos from the growing list of his own compositions.

Much of the life at Rheinsberg was invested with an atmosphere of agreeable mumbo-jumbo. Frederick took it into his fancy to call the place 'Remusberg', to accord with the theories of the early seventeenth-century pedant Eilhardus Lubinus who, as he was delighted to discover, had seriously proposed that it owed its origins to Remus, who was supposed to have wandered there after he had been exiled from the first settlement of Rome. In keeping with the spirit of this happy time Frederick enrolled the closest members of his Rheinsberg circle in the mock-chivalric Order of Bayard. The membership embraced not only Frederick's young associates, but respected members of the older generation like *der alte Major* – the cheerful and one-legged Johann Wilhelm von Senning, who had taught him military engineering. The grand mastership was assumed by Henri-Auguste de la Motte-Fouqué, a youthful officer of Huguenot descent

who was to become one of the most determined and trusted captains in Frederick's wars.

There is no need to look for any change of character or purpose to explain how the crown prince of the Rheinsberg idyll could turn into the author of the aggressions of 1740. The drilling of the blue-coated musketeers at Neu-Ruppin went ahead without a check, and it was to an unreal Frederick that Voltaire first opened his heart in 1736, greeting him in a letter as the type of the philosopher-prince. Frederick was undoubtedly flattered, since Voltaire was already firm in his European reputation, and with this man as his audience and critic he was encouraged in 1739 to compile his first fully thought-out statement on the responsibilities of monarchy, the *Réfutation du Prince de Machiavel*. Frederick re-worked the first draft with the help of Voltaire, and it emerged as the refined and forceful *Antimachiavel* of 1740.

Frederick's tract took its name from his desire to take Machiavelli to task for maintaining that a prince must adopt different standards for his public and private conduct. On the contrary, asserted Frederick, one was inseparable from the other, since it was to the advantage of princes to attract the love of their subjects. Frederick's 'refutation' of the old Florentine was, however, just a single strand in his arguments, and one which, considered in isolation, has accentuated false contrasts between Frederick the crown prince and Frederick the ruling monarch. In fact the continuity is strong.

There were two kinds of princes in the world, wrote Frederick – those who saw and managed everything in person, and those who let themselves be governed by their ministers. Frederick intended to be counted in the first category. The truly sovereign prince would manage his armies in person, and direct the peaceful increase of the state by encouraging the prosperity of manufactures, agriculture and knowledge. The subjects were to be granted the freedom of their religion, and sectarian fanaticism was to be permitted no place in warfare. The soldiers, indeed, were assumed to be motivated by no altruistic force whatsoever, and Frederick was determined to hold them to their task by iron discipline.

In the interest of his subjects, a prince might be justified in going to war in any one of three main eventualities – to fight off an actual invasion, to maintain his legitimate rights, or (most illuminating of all) to anticipate a threatening danger. In the event, Frederick invoked the second argument when he went to war in December 1740, and the third when he attacked Saxony in 1756.

Voltaire as yet had no direct acquaintance with the crown prince. Many of those who possessed that advantage were left in no doubt that one of Frederick's driving principles was the acquisition of

military glory. Dr Zimmermann, who had several long conversations with him in his last illness, draws our attention in particular to the frustrations which Frederick experienced as a young man when he read about the progress that was being made by the Russian field-marshal Münnich in the Turkish war of 1735–9 (Zimmermann, 1788, 198).

Frederick William had already indicated that Prussia's military power might justly be turned against Austria. The Habsburgs had indeed lived in fear of Prussian competition in the German Empire since the early years of the century (Ingrao, 1982, 58), hence Frederick William encountered nothing but obstruction and delay from the Austrians when he pressed the well-founded Prussian claim to the succession to the duchy of Berg in western Germany. Emperor Charles VI accepted Prussian help in the Rhenish campaign with patent reluctance, and in 1735 he suspended hostilities with France without so much as telling the Prussians what was going on. Frederick William pointed to his son as one who would avenge him, all the more so as he knew that Frederick was free of his own crippling reverence for the institutions of the Empire.

The reconciliation of Frederick with his father was completed on 28 May 1740, when Frederick William, already mortally ill, was embraced by his weeping son. The old king, to Frederick's admiration, followed the advance of his illness with the detachment of a doctor, and he died early on the morning of 31 May. 'What a terrible man he was', said Frederick much later. 'But he was just, intelligent, and skilled in the management of affairs . . . it was through his efforts, through his tireless labour . . . that I have been able to accomplish everything that I have done since' (Catt, 1884, 34).

1 Frederick the young king

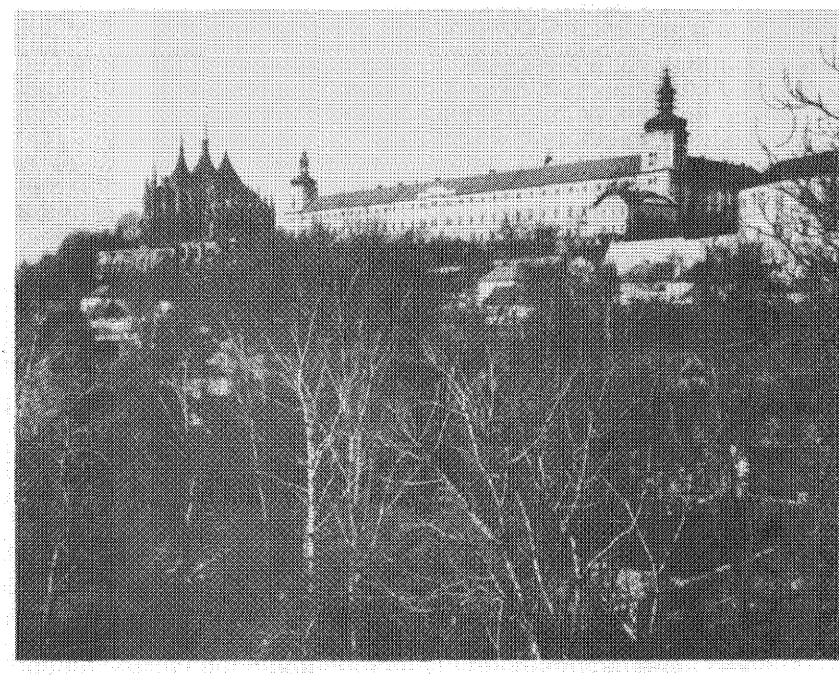
2 Frederick as crown prince

3 Prince Leopold, 'The Old Dessauer' (by Menzel)

4 Prince Moritz of Anhalt-Dessau

5 Hans Joachim von Zieten

6 Kuttenberg. The church of St Barbara (top left) and the great gorge



7 Field-Marshal Otto Ferdinand von Abensperg und Traun

8 Rohnstock Castle. The Bayreuth Dragoons entered by the gate in the centre