

# The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

---

Volume 26  
Number 1 *Parameters Spring 1996*

Article 6

---

3-22-1996

## Moltke and the German Military Tradition: His Theories and Legacies

Antulio J. Echevarria II

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters>

---

### Recommended Citation

Echevarria, Antulio J.. "Moltke and the German Military Tradition: His Theories and Legacies." *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 26, 1 (1996). <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol26/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters by an authorized editor of USAWC Press.

# Moltke and the German Military Tradition: His Theories and Legacies

ANTULIO J. ECHEVARRIA II

© 1996 Antulio J. Echevarria II

---

From *Parameters*, Spring 1996, pp. 91-99.

---

Field Marshal Helmuth Carl Bernard Graf von Moltke (1800-1891), Chief of Staff of the Prussian General Staff from 1857 to 1871, and then of the Great General Staff (GGS) from 1871 to 1888, and architect of Germany's brilliant Wars of Unification (1864-71), remains the historical figure most responsible for shaping modern German military thought.[1] He not only established enduring paradigms for Prusso-German tactical, operational, and strategic thinking during his lifetime, but also shaped many of the political attitudes within the officer corps, particularly in his later years.[2] Numerous attempts at imitation, combined with the spate of hagiographic biographies that followed his death, attest to the reverence that the elder Moltke enjoyed within the officer corps.[3] His nephew, General Helmuth von Moltke (generally referred to as "the younger"), by way of contrast, exhibited indecisiveness and lack of resolve during the critical battle of the Marne in 1914, and consequently has suffered only ignominy in the hands of history.[4] By the end of his long career, the elder Moltke had significantly increased the capabilities, influence, and prestige of the GGS, developing and refining the staff-ride system, demanding the highest standards of professionalism from GGS officers, gaining "direct access" (*Immediatvortrag*) to the Kaiser in 1871, and obtaining direct control over the training program at the War Academy in 1872. In fact, the Prussian army and its general staff system had become the envy of and model for other armed forces both on the continent and beyond. Moltke's military philosophy and strategic approach have survived to inspire successive generations of soldiers. This essay offers an introduction to the great Chief of Staff's significance to the German military tradition.

Born in Mecklenburg in 1800, Moltke served initially in the Danish army, less by choice than through paternal "persuasion," for his father had forced him into the Danish cadet corps. Moltke's quiet nature, gentle disposition, and broad cultural interests had rather inclined him toward becoming a professor of history. In 1822, he enrolled in the Prussian army primarily because it offered better opportunities for promotion. In 1826, Moltke received his first assignment to the General Staff--to its topographical section--where his talents for detail and thoroughness became evident. Between 1835 and 1839, he served as a military advisor in Turkey. Upon his return, he became well acquainted with the Prussian royal family, serving first as an aide to Frederick III and eventually appointed Chief of the General Staff by King, and later Emperor, William I, whom he had greatly impressed. While arguably Germany's most important soldier, Moltke spent only a few years with troops and never commanded a unit before assuming overall direction of the campaign against Austria at the age of 65.

## Military Theories: Moltke and Clausewitz

Although he attended the Berlin War College (or General War School as it was then called) in 1823 while Clausewitz was serving as its director--a purely administrative position which involved no teaching--the two had little, if any, contact. Nonetheless, in an interview in 1890, Moltke reputedly listed Homer's works, the Bible, and *On War* among the five books that most influenced him.[5] Indeed, many of Moltke's writings draw from or paraphrase the great military philosopher.[6] Soldiers and historians of his day wrote that the renowned Chief of the GGS had simply put the master's theories into action: "The intellectual development of our Moltke came to completion under the closest connection with Clausewitz's posthumously published work, *On War*."[7] Sigismund von Schlichting, a devoted disciple of Moltke, declared him the "best student" Clausewitz ever had.[8] The well-known military author and biographer of Clausewitz, Rudolf von Caemmerer, described the great Chief of the GGS as the "most gifted pupil of Clausewitz," and stated that reading the master had taught Moltke how, not what, to think.[9]

Like Clausewitz, Moltke emphasized flexibility in military planning and execution. He eschewed dogmatic thinking, whether tactical or strategic, accepted chance and uncertainty as inseparable from the nature of war, and recognized the often decisive (but incalculable) role that moral factors played in victory. He originally viewed the destruction of the enemy's main fighting force as the proper aim of war, but gradually became less convinced of its genuine decisiveness after the French resorted to partisan warfare in 1870-71.[10] "We want to believe," he later told the Reichstag, "that neither the Thirty Years' nor the Seven Years' War will recur, but when millions of individuals are engaged in a bitter struggle for national existence, we cannot expect that the matter will be decided with a few victorious battles." [11]

Although clearly influenced by *On War*, Moltke's military theories differed from Clausewitz's in one very significant way. Moltke attempted to maintain separate spheres for politics and war, and believed that policy should not influence military operations. "Policy," he wrote, "avails itself of war to attain its aims; it works decisively at the beginning and end of war, [and has] the right to increase its demands or be satisfied with a lesser success," but "in its actions [strategy] is fully independent of policy" for it needs a free hand to pursue that elusive quarry, tactical victory, the attainment of which serves policy best.[12]

Moltke's rejection of Clausewitz reflects the struggle to retain control over the wherewithal that permits decisive victory and brings about the realization of the perfect battle.[13] The dispute between Moltke and Bismarck after the battle of Königgrätz on the third of July 1866 provides a classic example. Following the Prussian victory, Moltke wanted to advance on Vienna and complete the annihilation of the Austrian forces. Bismarck, however, wanted to avoid humiliating the Austrians, for he needed their support (or at least their neutrality) if war against France proved necessary to complete the unification of Germany. Then, a few days after the Prussian victory, the French Emperor, Napoleon III, offered to act as mediator in negotiations with Austria. Bismarck could not refuse such an offer from a European sovereign without risking a war over the issue of honor. Indeed, Prussia had to proceed cautiously, for, as Bismarck wrote to his wife on 9 July, "we don't live alone in Europe but with three other Powers who hate and envy us." [14] Thus, the perfect tactical victory that Moltke desired in this instance would *not* have served policy.

On another level, however, this rejection of Clausewitz amounts to more than a struggle for autonomy. It subordinates diplomacy to strategic thinking, thereby reversing Clausewitz's famous formulation that war is a continuation of policy by other means. This perversion, which appears quite often in the military literature of Moltke's epigones, men like Colmar von der Goltz and Friedrich von Bernhardi, owes much of its popularity to Moltke's powerful influence at the turn of the century. Of course, such interpretations of Clausewitz do not belong solely to Moltke or to the Germans. French, British, and US military writers have cast the master in a similar light throughout much of the 19th and 20th centuries.[15] Indeed, Clausewitz's dictum regarding the subordination of military leadership to political authority remains the hardest for soldiers--who witness firsthand the price of military failure--to accept.

Tactical victory formed the center of Moltke's vision of war. He saw strategy--a "free, practical, artistic activity"--as a "system of expedients" designed to establish, as far as possible, the conditions for tactical success. Strategy must remain flexible to take advantage of unexpected opportunities and to react to unpredictable factors like "weather, illnesses, railway accidents, misunderstandings, and disappointments." [16] Attempting to carry a war plan beyond the opening engagement he considered the greatest of follies, for the first clash of arms brought only new opportunities and necessities to attacker and defender alike. Nonetheless, staff officers should spare no effort in planning for as many contingencies as possible. After 1871, Moltke himself never ceased planning military solutions to Germany's constant strategic dilemma--a war on two fronts. He developed Germany's war plans inductively, changing them according to the evolving military situation in France and Russia, focusing the main effort first on one front, then the other, and back again as necessary.[17]

The last half of the 19th century saw revolutions in communication, transportation, and weapon technologies that would fundamentally alter the conduct of war. Improvements in long-range, rapid-firing rifles and cannon afforded a defending enemy decisive advantages in firepower, and threatened to make the successful execution of an infantry attack, especially a frontal one, impossible.[18] As Moltke wrote in 1858, the universal and fundamental improvements in infantry weapons alone necessitated "a change in the tactics of all branches. . . . The firepower of an infantry platoon [today] surpasses the range and destructive effect of the case-shot of a six-pounder cannon." [19] His response to this general "crisis" illustrates his creative genius--he advocated combining the advantages of flank attacks and the tactical defensive, enticing the enemy to attack, waiting for the right moment to smash his assault with overwhelming

firepower, then finishing him off with an annihilating counterattack.[20] To be sure, this solution had obvious limitations in that it required either an available flank for the assaulting force, or an enemy willing to attack first. Nineteenth-century warfare lacked neither.

## Political Attitudes

Moltke also set the political tone within the officer corps, particularly with his attitudes toward the liberal agenda of the mid-19th century, and toward social democracy thereafter.[21] The famous man of literature and letters who, in the 1820s and 1830s, embraced cosmopolitan and romanticist views, had hardened into a cynical conservative after witnessing the turmoil created by the failed Revolution of 1848.[22] Moltke feared that, like the French Revolution of 1789, the present one would follow the "old course, from monarchy to republic, from republic to dictatorship." [23] By November 1848, however, even as he wrote to his brother that he saw "no choice other than reaction or anarchy," counter-revolutionary forces had already begun to restore order across much of Europe.[24] Two years later, Moltke experienced the humiliating terms of the Punctation of Olmütz, in which Austria forced Prussia to abandon her early plans to unify Germany.[25] Moltke called the agreement a "shameful peace" and considered it further evidence of the bankruptcy of liberal values.[26]

While serving as a member of the Conservative Party in the Prussian Parliament (*Landtag*) and later in the Reichstag, Moltke campaigned repeatedly against the Social Democrats' efforts to abolish the military as a separate and privileged class and to reduce the standing army to a militia.[27] In his 1874 address to the Reichstag, he declared:

Wars conducted by militias have the characteristic of lasting much longer and for this reason costing much more in terms of lives and money than all other wars. I remind you of the recent War of Secession in America, which each side had to wage essentially with militias.[28]

To be sure, the Chief of the GGS did not need to inspire conservative attitudes within the officer corps; its mostly aristocratic members were already predisposed to them. Rather, Moltke's speeches and writings articulated the officers' general apprehensions regarding Germany's future political course, and set the agenda for the military's campaign to preserve its hard-won status and prestige. In the face of newly emerging pacifist and materialistic attitudes, many officers, in fact, took great delight in quoting Moltke's famous statement that "Eternal peace is a dream, and not even a beautiful one; . . . war is an integral part of the divine order of things . . . the fate of humankind, the inevitable activity of nations." [29]

## Legacies

Moltke left positive and negative legacies to German military theory. First, the overwhelming success of his victories against Denmark, Austria, and France encouraged the development of a self-stylized, uniquely German approach to war in the last third of the 19th century. In 1873, for example, the Prussian military periodical *Military-Weekly* published an anonymous essay entitled, "On Military Education and Science," which examined the intellectual and educational climate responsible for the "great successes of German arms." [30] It described the German approach to war as soundly pragmatic and free of abstract, doctrinaire thinking:

The abstract view [of war which Clausewitz] derided now stands discredited in many ways. . . . [A] single conceptual system spanning all time is impossible . . . . The overwhelming successes of the wars of 1866 and 1870-71 encourage this view--that strict discipline, good weapons, effective elementary tactics, good marching orders, railways, practical supply measures, and telegraphs decide everything in war.[31]

By the early 1880s, this free-form approach to war had further established itself as part of the German military tradition, accruing still more Moltkean ideas: simplicity is the essential ingredient of an order; war plans do not endure beyond the first engagement; friction, chance, and uncertainty are inescapable elements of war; and strategy serves policy best when it strives for the highest aim, complete tactical victory.[32] The fact that military writers often accused each other of *Schematismus*--rigid, prescriptive thinking--in Germany's turn-of-the-century military debates indicates that Moltke's ideas had become paradigmatic within the officer corps. Ironically, an inherent contradiction developed in the German view of war at this time--namely, that while war possessed no absolute rules, the destruction of the enemy's forces had to remain its ultimate aim.[33]

Second, Moltke's open, inductive approach to war also helped legitimize a decentralized style of warfighting called (perhaps wrongly) *Auftragstaktik*. Much confusion reigns concerning this concept and its "dubious" historical validity.[34] Military writers on either side of the Atlantic have somewhat abused the term *Auftragstaktik* in an effort to legitimize their own preferred style of command.[35] In fact, *Auftragstaktik* and the meaning behind it surfaced decisively, albeit sparingly, in the debate over tactics that raged for years between the Imperial Army's traditionalists and reformists. In its origins, the concept probably owes more to that leading figure of the Prussian Restoration, Gerhard von Scharnhorst, than to Moltke.[36] But Moltke clearly advocated the decentralization of military effort. He reasoned that war, a product of opposing wills subject to a host of frictions, gives rise to rapidly changing situations that quickly render a commander's decisions obsolete. Hence, subordinates had to think and act according to the situation, even without or in defiance of orders.[37] While Moltke did indeed promote such a style of command, he did not condone willful disobedience. In fact, the Prussian, and later the German, army maintained strict codes of discipline.

On the negative side, Moltke's near-perfect victories at Sadowa (1866) and Sedan (1870), combined with his efforts to avoid the greater accuracy of infantry weapons, actually contributed more to the establishment of the so-called dogma of the "battle of annihilation" and the cult of the flank attack than did Schlieffen's writings. Schlieffen believed that the essence of military history lay in the flank attack, and saw no contradiction between hammering home his message in the pages of the GGS's *Quarterly* and the apparent German tradition of attempting to remain free of doctrinaire thinking.[38] In addition, military genius--shorn of Clausewitz's emphasis on the harmonic balance between qualities of character and intellect--became associated with the ability to execute the perfect battle; indeed, it sometimes served as an underlying, if tacit, justification for the exclusion of political influence from the conduct of war.[39]

In sum, Moltke's 70-year military career indelibly enhanced and legitimized a long martial tradition and shaped an entire way of military thinking. He conducted near-perfect battles at a time when military technology severely challenged traditional procedures and preferred notions. He remained committed to decentralized execution, a creative approach to tactics, an inductive method of strategy, meticulous and continuous war planning, and the ideal of personal and total dedication to duty, perhaps to a fault. Finally, to modern military theory, he contributed merely a few simple principles centered on the principle of simplicity itself.

---

## NOTES

1. Eberhard Kessel, *Moltke* (Stuttgart: K. F. Koehler, 1957) remains the best biographical study. Rudolf Stadelmann, *Moltke und der Staat* (Krefeld: Scherpe Verlag, 1950) and volume two of Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk. Das Problem des Militarismus in Deutschland*, 4 Vols. (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1954) are also important. William O'Connor Morris, *Moltke: A Biographical and Critical Study* (New York: Haskell House, 1893, rpt. 1971) though dated and less critical than its title suggests is probably the best biography in English. The following works address aspects of his military theory: Lothar Burchardt, "Helmuth von Moltke, Wilhelm I. und der Aufstieg des preußischen Generalstabes," and Wilhelm Meier-Dönberg, "Moltke und die taktisch-operative Ausbildung im preußisch-deutschen Heer," in *Generalfeldmarschall von Moltke. Bedeutung und Wirkung*, ed. Roland G. Foerster (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1991), pp. 19-38 and 39-48 respectively. See also: Hajo Holborn, "The Prusso-German School: Moltke and the Rise of the General Staff," and Gunther E. Rothenberg, "Moltke, Schlieffen and the Doctrine of Strategic Envelopment," in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton Univ., 1986), pp. 281-95 and 296-325 respectively; and Roland G. Foerster, "The Operational Thinking of the Elder Moltke and its Consequences," in *Operational Thinking in Clausewitz, Moltke, Schlieffen and Manstein* (Bonn: E. S. Mittler, 1988), pp. 21-40.

2. During Moltke's lifetime, German military theory did not formally recognize an operational level of war. Rather, it viewed the conduct of operations as a sort of applied strategy.

3. S. v. Schlichting, *Moltkes Vermächtnis* (Berlin: E. S. Mittler, 1900); Max Jähns, *Feldmarschall Moltke*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Ernst Hoffmann & Co., 1894-1900); Wilhelm Bigge, *Feldmarschall Graf Moltke. Ein militärisches Lebensbild* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1901); Fritz von der Goltz, *Moltke* (Berlin: E. S. Mittler, 1903); and Wilhelm von Blume, *Moltke*

(Berlin: G. Stalling, 1907).

4. Considerable debate raged after the war concerning the younger Moltke's alleged compromise of the Schlieffen plan through his weakening of the all-important right flank. But these accusations have been laid to rest by the work of Lothar Burchardt, "Operatives Denken und Planen von Schlieffen bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges," in *Operatives Denken und Handeln in deutschen Streitkräften im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Herford, Bonn: E. S. Mittler, 1988), pp. 45-72, and others.

5. Kessel, *Moltke*, p. 108.

6. See especially his essay "On Strategy" (1871) or "Über Strategie," in Großer Generalstab (ed.), *Moltkes Militärische Werke*, 14 Vols. (Berlin: E. S. Mittler, 1892-1912), here Vol. IV, Part 2, pp. 287-93. Reinhard Stumpf, ed., *Kriegstheorie und Kriegsgeschichte. Carl von Clausewitz, Helmuth von Moltke* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1993) highlights similarities in the military theory of each soldier. Jehuda Wallach, *Das Dogma der Vernichtungsschlacht* (Frankfurt am Main: Bernard & Graefe, 1967), emphasizes the differences; and Daniel Hughes provides a good introduction in English in *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1993).

7. See Bernard Schwertfeger, "Die Kriegsgeschichte, ihr Wesen und ihre Bedeutung," *Vierteljahrshefte für Truppenführung und Heereskunde* (Hereafter, *Vjhft*) VI, No. 3, (1909), 498. See also the comments of Herbert Rosinski, *The German Army* (London: Hogarth Press, 1939), esp. p. 127.

8. S. v. Schlichting, *Taktische und strategische Grundsätze der Gegenwart*, 3 Vols. (Berlin: E. S. Mittler, 1898-9), here II, p. 96.

9. R. v. Caemmerer, *Die Entwicklung der strategischen Wissenschaft im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Wilhelm Baensch, 1904), chap. X; and *Clausewitz* (Berlin: B. Behr's Verlag, 1905), pp. 118-19.

10. Stig Förster, "Helmuth von Moltke und das Problem des industrialisierten Volkskrieg im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Bedeutung und Wirkung*, pp. 103-16; "Optionen der Kriegführung im Zeitalter des Volkskrieges--Zu Helmuth von Moltkes militärisch-politischen Überlegungen nach den Erfahrungen der Einigungskriege," in *Militärische Verantwortung in Staat und Gesellschaft*, ed. Detlev Bald (Koblenz: Bernard & Graefe, 1986); and "Facing 'People's War': Moltke the Elder and Germany's Military Options after 1871," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 11 (December 1988), 209-30.

11. Kessel, *Moltke*, pp. 747-48; and *Militärische Werke*, I, 7.

12. Most of these ideas are drawn from Moltke's essay "On Strategy." Similar ideas are expressed in the essay "Krieg und Politik," *Militärische Werke*, IV, 1, pp. 13-40, a composite essay which draws from a number of Moltke's other military writings. As Daniel Hughes has recently pointed out, the essay, "On Strategy," which appears in volume IV, part 2 differs significantly but not substantially (in that the ideas expressed therein remain the same) from that which appears in Generalfeldmarschall Graf von Moltke, *Ausgewählte Werke*, 4 vols., ed. F. v. Schmerfeld (Berlin: Reimar Hobbing, 1925). See Hughes, *Moltke*, p. 17.

13. Frhr. v. Freytag-Loringhoven, *Kriegslehren nach Clausewitz aus den Feldzügen 1813 und 1814* (Berlin: E. S. Mittler, 1908), pp. 15-16. See also: Ritter, *Staatskunst*, Chapter 8, Part 2; Wallach, "Misperceptions of Clausewitz' *On War* by the German Military," and Müller, "Clausewitz, Ludendorff and Beck: Some Remarks on Clausewitz' Influence on German Military Thinking in the 1930s and 1940s," in Handel, ed., *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1989), pp. 213-66.

14. Cf: Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1955), p. 200.

15. See: Douglas Porch, "Clausewitz and the French," in Handel, ed., *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy*; Timothy Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare 1900-1918* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987); and Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz In*

*Britain and America 1815-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

16. Moltke, *Militärische Werke*, Vol. II, Part 2, pp. 33-40.

17. See: Peter Rassow, *Der Plan Moltkes für den Zweifrontenkrieg 1871-1890* (Breslau: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1982); and Förster, "Facing 'People's War,'" pp. 209-30.

18. See, for example: "Aus den Verordnungen für die höheren Truppenführer vom 24. Juni 1869," and "Aufsatz vom Jahre 1871 'Ueber Strategie,'" in Moltke, *Militärische Werke*, II, 2, pp. 175 and 291-93, respectively; and compare Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Book III, Chapter 1, "Strategy."

19. "Bemerkungen vom 12. Juli 1858 über Veränderungen in der Taktik infolge des verbesserten Infanteriegewehrs," in *Militärische Werke*, Vol. II, Part 2, p. 7. See also his essays: "Bemerkungen vom April 1861 über den Einfluß der verbesserten Feuerwaffen auf die Taktik," and "Bemerkungen vom Jahre 1865 über den Einfluß der verbesserten Feuerwaffen auf die Taktik," in the same volume, pp. 27-41 and 47-65, respectively.

20. "Bemerkungen vom 1861," *Militärische Werke*, II, 2, pp. 29ff. Moltke uses the term "crisis" (*Krisis*) to refer specifically to the difficulty of conducting the final assault on the objective, "Verteidigung und Angriff," *Militärische Werke*, IV, 3, p. 213.

21. For a summary of Moltke's political transformation see Azar Gat, *The Development of Military Thought: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), esp. 53-6.

22. Moltke's novelle, *Two Friends*, and his *Letters from Turkey* remain classics in German literature.

23. Letter to his wife Marie, dated 2 July 1848 in Helmuth von Moltke, *Briefe an seine Braut und Frau* (Stuttgart & Leipzig: Deutsche Verlags-Anhalt, 1910), p. 122.

24. Letter to his brother, Adolf, dated 17 November 1848, in Helmuth von Moltke, *Briefe 1825-1891*, ed. Eberhard Kessel (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1959), p. 241.

25. Holborn, "Prusso-German School," p. 285. The Punctuation of Olmütz exacerbated the distrust between liberal and conservative, and liberal and soldier, causing widespread disillusionment in Prussia regarding liberal-democratic ideals. James J. Sheehan, *German History 1770-1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 713-17. For the impact of the settlement of Olmütz on the Prussian officer corps see Craig, *Politics*, esp. pp. 128-33.

26. Letter to Adolf, dated 25 February 1851. Moltke, *Briefe*, pp. 255-56.

27. The liberal cause lost momentum after the Indemnity Act of September 1866 gave retroactive approval to military reforms enacted without parliamentary consent. But a new enemy of the Prussian army and state had emerged in the form of the Social Democratic Worker's Party, later the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The first socialist organization in Germany was the General German Workers' Association founded in Leipzig in 1863 by Ferdinand Lassalle. Members from this group formed the Social Democratic Workers' Party in 1869. Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany 1840-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 288-89.

28. Address to the Reichstag on the Imperial Military Law, dated 16 February 1874. Moltke, *Leben und Werk in Selbstzeugnissen. Briefe, Schriften, Reden*, ed. Max Horst (Brisfelden bei Basel: Verlag Schibli-Doppler, n.d.), p. 412.

29. Letter to Professor Dr. Bluntschli, dated 11 December 1880. Moltke, *Leben und Werk*, p. 351. This phrase and other portions of the letter were used by military writers such as von der Goltz, Bernhardt, and Freytag-Loringhoven. See, for example, Goltz, *Volk in Waffen*, p. 430.

30. "Über Militair-Bildung und Wissenschaft," *Beihefte zum Militär-Wochenblatt*, No. 1 (1873), pp. 1-37, here p. 7. (Hereafter, *Beihefte*.) The article draws from a variety of authorities (e.g. Pascal, Voltaire, Kant, J. S. Mill, and Gibbon), suggesting that officers of the Bismarck era possessed a broad educational background.

31. "Über Militair-Bildung," *Beihefte*, pp. 13 and 29.
32. See, for example, "Die Lehren der Kriegsgeschichte für die Kriegführung," *Beihefte*, No. 8 (1881), pp. 380-408.
33. "Lehren der Kriegsgeschichte," *Beihefte*, pp. 381-82.
34. See Bassford, *Clausewitz in English*, p. 233, n. 46; and Daniel Hughes, "Abuses of German Military History," *Military Review*, 66 (December 1986), 66-76.
35. The US Army's rather free and enthusiastic use of the term *Auftragstaktik* in the 1980s has become something of an embarrassment. An oft-cited source of this confusion is Trevor N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War: The German Army and the General Staff, 1807-1945* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), esp. p. 116.
36. The so-called "mission tactics" embodied Scharnhorst's entire philosophy of command, and provided the foundation for the new infantry, cavalry, and artillery manuals written after Jena. Charles E. White, *The Enlightened Soldier: Scharnhorst and the Militärische Gesellschaft in Berlin, 1801-1805* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1989), pp. 139-40.
37. Nineteenth-century English military writers like F. N. Maude and G. F. R. Henderson argued a similar need for a decentralized approach to warfighting. F. N. Maude, *Military Letters and Essays* (Kansas City, Mo.: Hudson-Kimberly, 1895), p. 40; and G. F. R. Henderson, *The Battle of Spichern* (London: Gale and Polden, 1891), pp. 287-91. Bassford, *Clausewitz in English*, p. 240, n. 23. French authors like du Picq acknowledged that modern war required greater decentralization, but sought measures to retain unit cohesion and control. Du Picq, *Battle Studies*, esp. pp. 152-62.
38. Schlieffen once wrote to Freytag-Loringhoven that "flank attacks were the essence of all military history." Generalfeldmarschall Graf Alfred Schlieffen, *Briefe*, ed. Eberhard Kessel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), p. 312.
39. See for example: Schlieffen, "Der Feldherr," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2 vols. (Berlin: E. S. Mittler, 1913), pp. 3-10; and Freytag-Loringhoven, "Eine Zeit der Rückganges in der Kriegskunst," *Vjhft* II, No. 4 (1905): 597-608. The Second World War witnessed renewed interest in the intuitive aspects of military genius. Famous Wehrmacht officers like Generals Herman Balck and Friedrich von Mellenthin referred to this inner awareness as *Fingerspitzengefühl*, a "fingertip sense" for the terrain and the dispositions of the enemy. See William DePuy, *Generals Balck and von Mellenthin on Tactics: Implications for NATO Doctrine* (Alexandria, Va.: Defense Technical Information Center, 1980). Aspects of Clausewitz's military genius still receive emphasis in the Bundeswehr's *Heeresdienstvorschrift* (HDv) 100/100 VS-NfD *Truppenführung* (Bonn, 7 September 1987), esp. paras. 605-15 and US military manuals like *FM 22-102 Command* (1995, Draft), esp. pp. 10-12; and *FM 22-103 Leadership and Command at Senior Levels* (Washington, D.C., 1987), pp. 11, 38, 39.

---

Major Antulio J. Echevarria II is the operations officer of the 3d Squadron, 16th Cavalry Regiment, Fort Knox, Kentucky. He previously served as an assistant professor of history at the US Military Academy. He holds a B.S. degree from the Academy and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in history from Princeton University. He is an armor officer and has held command and staff assignments in maneuver units in Germany and at Fort Carson, Colorado.

---

Reviewed 27 August 1997. Please send comments or corrections to [carl\\_Parameters@conus.army.mil](mailto:carl_Parameters@conus.army.mil)