

“The Geographic Science of War: the Archduke Carl, Habsburg Military Theory and Reaction to Revolution.”

This paper will explore the theoretical, and in places practical application, of the works of the Archduke Carl as commander of Habsburg forces between 1794 and 1809. It will also look at the broader, systematic writings that he engaged in after his permanent retirement in 1815. These created a measured response that combined geographic and military thinking in a way uniquely suited to the Habsburg political and social reality.

The Archduke Carl of Teschen, the victor of Stockach and Aspern, was the premier commander of the Habsburg military between 1793 and 1809. When actually given interest, he is often misunderstood for his inherent conservatism as a leader, theorist and historian. Too often he is simply eclipsed by the context of his overwhelming contemporaries: Napoleon Bonaparte and Carl von Clausewitz. The reality is that Carl remained an opponent of unlimited war; the type of which he believed had been created by the French Revolution. To counter these new, so-called realities, he wanted to “limit” the impact of war through a combination of rational enlightenment principles, appeals to service, and the tenets of Theresian Catholicism. In the end, Carl was to respond to the “emotional,” nationalistic, forces of the Modern with Habsburg *revanche*. What follows is a brief exploration of the Archduke’s political and military work and the potential impact, both in theory and in practice.

Taking the field against the French for the first time in 1794, the Archduke Carl held the rank of *Feldzeugmeister*, assumed command of the army’s reserve corps in Belgium. The war against Revolutionary France would begin its second year, and despite a great deal of effort, the campaign failed

and the French permanently removed the Habsburgs from the Netherlands, ending Carl's several month career as the province's governor. Claims of poor health and the political intrigues of the Court would combine to keep the archduke from a field command in 1795. Instead, he dedicated the year to the study of what he labelled the "military sciences." During this year of semi-retirement Carl completed his first military treatise, titled: *On the War Against the New Franks*.¹ Measuring the limited successes and glaring failures that the Austrians had experienced up to 1794, he puzzled over how the poorly disciplined and equipped French could defeat professional Austrian troops and commanders. Part of his answer was that the generals had lazily restricted themselves to a defensive war based on lines-of-communication. But that was not the key, for Carl felt that: "...ignorance, indolence, and egotism are to blame for our misfortunes."²

Before moving forward, it is essential to understand Carl's strategic and tactical antecedents. One, in particular, stands out, and was likely first given Carl by his tutor which were the works of Justus Lipsius, the great Dutch Neo-stoic author.³ The Neostoics believed that the state must stand against all the extremes of nationalism and unjust expansion, preferring to take a "cosmopolitan" position. For the Neostoic nothing took place by chance, but rather everything followed Providence in a set scheme, the individual remaining consistent in his service to the state. In sum, Lipsius called for an: "exceedingly severe, controlled manliness in the Stoic mold, in short for a character anchored in reason."⁴ A commander, entrusted with the responsibility of preserving the army, was only to enter battle after great consideration, and then only rarely. The physical representation of self-

control was in Lipsius' insistence that when a general chose battle, he must hold back a strong reserve.⁵ For the archduke the notion of the Neo-stoic restraint seem to have always rung true.

Lipsius, also an important source for the earlier Dutch military reformer Maurice of Nassau, emphasized discipline as the foundation of a professional army.⁶ He classified wars as being either just or unjust, the determining factor resting on whether the instigator had a just cause and a just objective. Justification was secured through opposition to tyrants or the re-conquest of unlawfully taken territories. Because the ruler decided for or against war, it was something he had to weigh carefully, first driving the “war-mongers” from his court. Finally, Lipsius stated clearly that the lone objective of war is peace.⁷ In dealing with the human element of an army, Lipsius upheld discipline as the tonic for the restoration of order and morale. The general achieved this goal through the use of frequent drill, strict regulations, and obedience generated by rewards and punishments. Applied correctly, Lipsius felt this would lead to a “moral regeneration” of the soldiery and a new mentality of service.⁸ This was not, therefore, a “motivation” or “emotional” pitch, but something more scientific – it was to grab men in the fraternal link of “knowing how” rather than being “inspired to.”

Carl's dogmatic Catholicism becomes most evident in his repugnance to war's violence, especially the new, revolutionary notion of unlimited

warfare. On a number of occasions he makes it clear that he neither seeks war nor its glories. The primary example comes at the beginning of the *Fundamentals of the Higher Art of War* where the archduke clearly states that the: “greatest evil that can befall a nation is war,” and it was a crisis that called for the general to act quickly in order to achieve a favorable peace.⁹ Carl supports this assertion with a quote from Tacitus: “only rarely is a bad peace made better through war.”¹⁰ This does not mean that war itself was illegal, or that it could always be avoided, but rather that warfare required limitations that came from a delineating set of principles.

Carl’s first serious work on operations, *The Fundamentals of the Higher Art of War* encompassed the eighteenth century notion of “limited warfare” and the unwillingness to evoke the full physical energies of one state against another. A general did not look to the unrealistic annihilation of an opponent, but to force him into “offering terms.”¹¹ The commander was to obtain success through the application of “decisive blows” (*entscheidende Schläge*) against a specified “decisive point” (*Punkt*). Carl felt this could be best achieved by uniting all available forces, his stated fundamental operational principle in the art of war. This massing of force applied in all circumstances and required scrupulous oversight. On a less strategic note the archduke designated the specific types of troops best suited for varying terrain. He preferred that an army consist primarily of regular infantry, as it was the most flexible among the varieties of geography. Cavalry had the mission of covering the flanks and delivering the “decisive blow” at the end of a battle, while the artillery’s function was to act in a supporting role.¹²

Carl established that there were two forms of war: the defensive and the offensive. The difference was simple. A general that had a superiority of troop strength and a distinct geographical advantage took the offensive. He took the defensive only when placed at a distinct disadvantage. Switching to the offensive later, which was the goal of an active defense, became increasingly difficult as it required a change in the states' "political will" (*politischen Verhältnissen*).¹³ The basis of a campaign was the operation's plan, which determined the "line" of advance and communications, referred to as the "operation's line" (*Operationslinie*). Whether on the defensive or the offensive, the security of this line remained paramount, as it insured the flow of supplies and allowed for a secure withdrawal. If the enemy threatened or cut the operation's line, the army would be forced into a disadvantageous retreat without battle.¹⁴ The goal of the offensive was to thwart the enemy's plans while gaining a clear superiority through the occupation of "key places." These key places were geographic points of significance, such as fortresses or road junctions. The advance was to be cautious, with the operation's line kept short. Because the defender had the advantage of fighting on home terrain, an advancing force required flanking detachments to guard against any "trickery" on the part of the enemy.¹⁵

Carl believed that the fortress presented the best strategic point for the creation of an operation's base, the "key place," whether on the defensive or offensive. Because these structures had such potential, they dominated the placement of base lines. The fortress's great tenability enhanced the defense of the line-of-operations, and in defeat it secured that line. On the defense fortresses covered the main approaches into the state while on the offensive

they acted as a base of operations. If an enemy fortress sat astride the line of advance, or operation's line, the army halted and initiated a formal investment. Because of its utility, states placed fortresses at strategic points, such as the juncture of major road or river networks. The location, size and number of fortresses also determined the offensive capacity of an area, as they provided a pre-made base line. The incorporation of a fortress in the line-of-communications was significant as it provided greater security in retreat and gave the army a point to rally.¹⁶ "Without these cautions," the archduke stated, "the continuation of the advance and the fortunes of war (*Waffenglücks*) would weaken and then dissolve."¹⁷ The emphasis that Carl placed on the use of the fortress was representative of his primarily defensive-oriented mentality.¹⁸

Supply was, for Carl, a critical operational concern that faced a commander in war, and second only to the "key" points. A general's first responsibility at the outbreak of hostilities, even before the creation of a strategic plan, was the preparation and placement of supply depots. The general designated a primary line-of-operations (*Hauptoperationslinie*) that lead back from the army over a good road network to a series of fortresses or protected points. These pre-designated and protected points were the base from which the army operated.¹⁹ Carl believed that the careful accumulation and transportation of stores permitted greater operational flexibility and strategic security.²⁰ The field commander's primary concern was the movement of supplies and the protection of his magazines. As a rule he coordinated his movements to provide for the protection of supply columns and depots. Carl felt that the operation's base should sit parallel to the enemy's position,

which allowed for the fewest possible threats. The army could then advance on a line perpendicular to the opponent's base line. By placing the army between the base and the enemy the general secured his line-of-operations. The archduke generally discouraged broad flanking maneuvers for the simple reason that they exposed one's own line-of-communications.²¹

When the operation's line changed, then the influence of the surrounding region on the army did so as well. This resulted in necessary adjustments to the base line and the line-of-communications. The commander determined if the points once forming the original operation's base remained essential for the rest of the war's conduct, or whether they had only exerted an influence over that operation. Carl labeled the first type of point a "key to the region" insisting the army's permanently sustain a line to it. These points were also crucial in the case of retreat because the army would fall back upon them.²²

In conjunction with these depots the archduke dealt with foraging, which he labeled as the act of acquiring the necessary supplies for men and horses. He drew a difference, however, between supplies taken by foraging and that drawn from the actual magazine, because troops acquired forage locally.²³ Before sending out detachments to forage the exact needs of the army were determined and the region given a thorough reconnaissance. Carl estimated that most theatres of operation would have half of all available land under cultivation and two-thirds of that would have crops. The archduke placed the responsibility for the gathering of forage at the regimental level, with foraging parties to be led by staff officers with strict orders to prohibit

pillaging by potentially licentious troops.²⁴ While local acquisition was always possible, it was best that an army should carry what it could with it, acquiring the rest as it moved forward. Further, Carl emphasized that it was essential to pay with bills or cash for supplies acquired locally, because by using free purchase and quick payment magazines would always be full. This system kept the local inhabitants at peace and avoided exhausting the area in which the army operated. The archduke felt this policy limited the potential for partisans to rise up in the army's rear areas. Carl would write mournfully in his history of the War in Spain of the example of the French, and the disaster that their endemic pillaging brought. Conversely he held up Wellington's very successful example of local purchase of supplies with cash as the ideal.²⁵

An example of the fear of provoking the destructive forces of nationalism came in the Second Reform Period (1805-09) were Carl, again president of the Monarchy's War Department, concentrated primarily on the sphere of tactical and strategic restructuring.²⁶ Despite the changes that the Revolution had apparently brought about in military practice, Carl remained conservative in outlook. At no time did he wish to create or copy the radical changes carried out by the French. To build a national army similar to the one France fielded after 1792 would have required a paradigmatic shift in the political and social structure of the Monarchy.²⁷ Carl's notion of military change remained confined within the limits of in his rational, supra-national dynastic orientation. The archduke's idea was not to replace the old way, but instead to create an improved system, borrowing from the new where possible *or* unavoidable.²⁸ Unwilling to tap into the potential Pandora's Box

of nationalism, Carl preferred to raise morale and motivation among the troops by building upon a combination of “character and education.”²⁹

A single, tactical example of the archduke’s rejection of many of the newer French innovations can be seen in how Carl viewed the rise of open-order fighting, or skirmishing. For him it represented an anomaly of the Wars of the French Revolution. He saw the genesis of these new methods as a combination of necessity and the French “national character.”³⁰ This change resulted from the fact that the French Army had been composed quickly and without the adequate training considered standard at the time, and therefore forced the French to fight in “open order.” Out of this necessity they created a new system, and because of its apparent successes, Carl responded to it.³¹

Carl found this tactical dispersal of strength a violation of the principle of unity, undermining the chance for a decisive victory. Allowing for the use of a large percentage of men to skirmish (*herumschwärmend*) created the danger of being caught dispersed by an attacking enemy.³² Because of this the archduke did not believe that open fighting could be decisive on the battlefield, but he conceded that when facing an opponent using this tactic, one had to counter it with the deployment of skirmishers. The number of men committed would remain small, however, just enough to contain the enemy.³³ Carl saw the dispersal of troops, however few, as a risk because an enemy attack in column would not allow for their return, and might prove overwhelming. The men fighting in open order were useful chiefly in tiring and demoralizing the enemy, but the real decision in the battle would come

in the end from an army's overall strength, types of troops, and use of terrain.³⁴

The difference between open order and the tightly controlled line-of-battle possessed some psychological importance as well. Carl felt the key element in keeping a soldier from becoming crazed or shaken with fear was the imposition of constant and blind obedience (*Gehorsam*). This meant that troops in a sound formation could not be “broken” by the skirmishers, because each soldier gained strength from his comrades. On the other hand the lone soldier was prone to the “emotional” effects of battle, isolated and susceptible to counter-attack. So while the new French system had succeeded in several battles, Carl remained convinced that the ability to replace their losses was the real reason for their victories.³⁵

Carl felt that the Wars of the French Revolution had produced a time when the decisiveness of the strategic advantage was greater than ever before. There was the movement of massed troops in a fashion previously thought impossible, and the ability to replace losses made tactics even more subservient to strategy. Campaigns of a few weeks could produce results that would previously have taken years. Also, that while some traditionally important strategic points had lost their value, others had become more important.³⁶

Despite this the archduke still believed the principles of strategy retained their original spirit (*Geist*), allowing for the design of a specific system for each state. He wanted these principles to provide instruction, but he added that they were not dogmatic, because that would be both wrong and restrictive. Future leaders entrusted with armies needed to have the freedom to act once instructed in the rules of strategy. He emphasized not only the development of a system of fortresses and an effective field army, but also the maintenance of interior lines-of-communication like bridges, roads, canals, depots, and magazines. The close management of these arteries must either be a maxim for an empire, or a matter of decline. The reason, Carl insisted, for France's success during the Revolutionary wars came from its concentration on the "principles of the defensive system" with which it had subjugated all of Europe.³⁷ No doubt that the Archduke would have seen vindication of this in the failure of the Monarchy to build and maintain adequate fortress depots and especially rail lines. The result of this stinginess and lack of foresight would result in Austria's inability to strategically maneuver in both 1866 and 1914.

The outcome of all of Carl's work is hard to accurately measure. It is clear that even without the writings of the archduke, the Monarchy would have gone into the period between 1815 and 1847 with a conservative, if not reactionary mind-set. Who read the archduke and to what degree his ideas were absorbed cannot be given a number. That said, the Austrian military establishment did put its efforts, albeit always limited by financial stinginess of the first degree, into a regular army and traditional fortresses. The army remained multi-national, but not multi-cultural, rather it was something a

“School of the Empire” (versus the “school of the nation” concept). Its fear of nationalism prompted the policy whereby regiments during this time were often located out of the national area recruited and regularly switched billets. As for the fortress, since the Monarchy saw Italy as the key to the future after 1815, it placed its limited spending in the four forts of the “Quadrilateral,” Verona, Legnano, Mantua and Pesciera.³⁸ While several more fortresses existed prior to 1847, they all suffered heavily from any real funding or maintenance.

In the end Carl’s vision of the future of the Monarchy, as well as war itself, was only a slightly altered version of the past. Rather than marked changes, the Archduke looked to reform the military establishment through the application of honest, humane and realistic measures. It appears that Carl did believe that a durable and fairly run institution, based on rational principles, would outlast the mercurial nature of the revolutionary forces unleashed after 1789.

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¹ Walter Nemetz. “Erzherzog Karl.” In Werner Hahlweg, ed., *Klassiker der Kriegskunst*. (Darmstadt, 1962), p. 286.

²Erzherzog Carl von Oesterreich. “Über den Krieg gegen die Nuefranken durch einen österreichischen Offizier.” In F. X. Mancher, ed., *Ausgewählte Schriften*. Vol. 5, (Vienna and Leipzig), 1894, pp. 3-15.

³Justus Lipsius. *Two Books of Constancie*. Translated by Sir John Stradling in 1606, (New Brunswick, 1939), p. 130.

⁴Ibid., p. 42.

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- ⁵Justus Lipsius. *War and Peace reconciled; or, A discourse of constancy in inconstant times*. Translated by ?, (London, 1670), p. 84.
- ⁶Gunther E. Rothenberg. "Maurice of Nassau, Gustavus Adolphus, Raimondo Montecuccoli and the 'Military Revolution' of the Seventeenth Century." Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy*. (Princeton, 1986), p. 35.
- ⁷Lipsius, p. 161.
- ⁸Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*. Translated by David McLintock (Cambridge, 1960) pp. 52-3.
- ⁹Carl, *Grundsätze der höheren Kriegskunst für die Generäle der Österreichischen Armee.*, In F. X. Mancher, ed., *Ausgewählte Schriften*. Vol. 1, (Vienna and Leipzig, 1894), p. 3.
- ¹⁰*Ibid.*, "Aphorismen," p. 543.
- ¹¹Russell F. Weigley. *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo*. (Bloomington, 1991), p. xv.
- ¹²Carl, *Grundsätze.*, p. 4.
- ¹³*Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 6; Manfred Rauchensteiner. "Erzherzog Carl und der Begrenzte Kriege." *ÖMZ*. 4(1988), p. 341. Rauchensteiner clearly states that the ideas of the "base" and the "line" made Carl inherently defensive and traditional.
- ¹⁵Carl, *Grundsätze.*, pp. 7-8.
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.
- ¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 250.
- ¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 31-3.
- ¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 15. Half way between the army and the main magazine were the subsidiary, or relay stations (*Filialmagazine*), that assisted in the movement of materials. In the vicinity of the troops minor depots for distribution (*Consumptionsmagazine*) allowed for immediate access to between eight and ten days supply
- ²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.
- ²¹*Ibid.*, p. 247.
- ²²*Ibid.*, p. 248.
- ²³Carl, *Beiträge zum praktischen Unterrichte im Felde für die Officiere der Österreichischen Armee.(Beiträge)*, In F. X. Mancher,ed., *Ausgewählte Schriften*. Vol. 1, (Vienna and Leipzig, 1894) p. 190.
- ²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 191-8.
- ²⁵Carl. *Uebersicht des Krieges auf der pyrenäischen Halbinsel vom Jahre 1808 bis 1814*. In F. X. Mancher, ed., *Ausgewählte Schriften*. Vol. 4, (Vienna and Leipzig, 1894), p. 402. The payment of locals for the acquisition of supplies was something of an accepted practice at the time, except among the Revolutionary French. An example that Carl would have been aware of was the guerrilla war that began in Spain after 1808 as a result of the heavy-handed practices of the French Army. Payment was intended to maintain friendly relations and avoid this from happening to the Austrians.

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- ²⁶Moriz Edler von Angeli, *Erzherzog Carl von Österreich als Feldherr und Heeresorganisator*. Vol 4, (Vienna 1896-1898), p. 88.
- ²⁷Heinrich Ommen, “Die Kriegführung des Erzherzogs Carl.” In *Historische Studien*, Heft XIV (Berlin, 1900). pp. 1-2.
- ²⁸Guther E. Rothenberg. *The Army of Francis Joseph*. (West Lafayette, 1976), p. 6.
- ²⁹Allmayer Beck. p. 36; Rothenberg, “The Habsburg Army in the Napoleonic Wars.” *Military Affairs*. (February, 1973), p. 3.
- ³⁰Johann Georg J. Venturini. *Lehrbuch der angewandten Taktik oder eigentlichen Kriegswissenschaften*. (Schleswig, 1798-1801), p. 71. Carl gives two references to the distinct influence of “National Character” on the creation of an army. This idea can be seen directly in the work of Venturini. He felt that the overall mentality of a war came from the “character” of both the enemy and one’s own people with the predilection to violence or rational behavior based on a state’s “cultural condition.” Carl believed that the Turks were fanatic and given to extreme violence, while the French “characteristic” of individuality inclined them to open-order fighting.
- ³¹*Grundsätze*., pp. 47-8.
- ³²*Ibid.*, pp. 48-9.
- ³³*Beiträge*., p. 107. Carl’s unity of force at the decisive point(*Schwerpunkt*) was an idea common to all military writers. Although he did not state it directly, the presentation of this idea, which could be seen as both strategic and tactical, was to minimize the effectiveness of open-order fighting. In doing so the archduke remained consistent with the argument he made in the: *Grundsätze der höheren Kriegskunst*.
- ³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.
- ³⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.
- ³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 258.
- ³⁷Carl, *Strategie*., p.259; and his, *Geist des Vertheidigungskrieges*. In F. X. Mancher, ed., *Ausgewählte Schriften*. Vol. 5, (Vienna and Leipzig, 1894), p. 115.
- ³⁸Oskar Regele, *Feldmarschall Radetzky*. (Vienna, 1957), p. 150.