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The Archduke Carl and the Realities of Habsburg Warfare from 1793-1814: Less Change Then You Thought

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“The Archduke Carl and the Realities of Habsburg Warfare from 1793-1814: Less Change Then You Thought.”

The Archduke Carl of Teschen, victor of Stockach and Aspern, and the Habsburg Monarchy’s most famous commander of the age, was an unrepentant opponent of unlimited war; the type of war which he believed had been released by the forces of the French Revolution. To counter these new so-called realities, he looked to “limit” the impact of war through a combination of the Early Modern re-invention of Roman military principles, appeals to service, and the tenets of Theresian Catholicism. In the end, Carl responded to the “emotional,” read nationalistic, forces of the French with Habsburg revanche. This paper will look at two main areas. The first is Carl most immediate intellectual influence and a “snapshot” of his actual work. The second is Carl efforts to reject, or at least control, popular participation in the military (the civilian-soldier – or Landwehr). Evidence for these conclusions will be drawn almost exclusively from primary source material, especially the copious work of the Archduke himself.

Taking the field against the French for the first time in 1794, Carl, holding the rank of Feldzeugmeister, assumed command of the Austrian Army’s reserve corps in Belgium. The war against Revolutionary France would begin again in earnest. However, 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 Imperial Court combined to keep the archduke from a field command in 1795. Instead, he dedicated the year to the study of 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.”³³

A critical intellectual underpinning for much of Carl’s work, and likely first given him by his tutor Sigismund Hohenwart, were the works of Justus Lipsius, the great Dutch Neo-stoic author.³³ The Neostoics believed that the state must stand against all the extremes of nationalism and unjust expansion, preferring to take a “cosmopolitan” (or Imperial) 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.”⁴⁴ 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.⁵⁵ For the archduke the notion of the Neo-stoic and its restraints seem to have always rung true.
Lipsius, also an important source for the Dutch military reformer Maurice of Nassau, emphasized discipline as the foundation of a professional army.\textsuperscript{vi} 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 (the Archduke would restate this in his own work).\textsuperscript{vii} 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 both rewards and punishments. Applied correctly, Lipsius felt this would lead to a “moral regeneration” of the soldiery and a new mentality of service.\textsuperscript{viii}

In the same vein as his Neostoic mentality we find Carl’s commitment to Christianity. Along with the numerous documents concerning military affairs, he also took time to comment on the Gospels in a pamphlet titled “Religious Considerations.”\textsuperscript{vi} This powerful influence came to the archduke from several sources. The first was the nature of the Monarchy’s vision of Catholicism under which he grew up, with its emphasis on the absolute nature of Heaven and subservience to it.\textsuperscript{x} Carl’s tutor Sigismund von Hohenwart would also have conveyed much the same notion, hence his choice for the job by Maria Theresa.\textsuperscript{xi} Finally, the archduke’s Neostoicism meshed with his Christian notions of duty and fatalism. In a detailed fashion, the archduke attempted to provide insight into the fundamental meanings of the four books of the New Testament. The theme of service runs through-out the “Considerations,” instructing the reader in the
importance of obeying God’s “Eternal Law.” This law, according to the archduke, called for one to love his fellow man and attempt to “do right” by him. This, Carl asserted, was the only road to God and a just life, not the existing humanistic spin on religion and especially not the overt secularism of the Aufklärung.\textsuperscript{xii}

Carl’s dogmatic Catholicism becomes most evident in his repugnance at war’s violence, especially the new, revolutionary form of 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 \textit{Fundamentals of the Higher Art of War} where the archduke clearly states that the: “greatest evil that can befall a nation is war,” it was a crisis that called for the general to act quickly in order to achieve a favorable peace.\textsuperscript{xiii} Carl supported this assertion with a quote from Tacitus: “only rarely is a bad peace made better through war.”\textsuperscript{xiv} This does not mean that war itself was illegal, or that it could always be avoided, but rather that warfare required limitations and a delineating set of principles.

Carl’s first serious work on operations, \textit{The Fundamentals of the Higher Art of War} encompassed the Neostoic 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 annihilation of an opponent, but to force him into “offering terms.”\textsuperscript{xv} The commander was to obtain success through the application of “decisive blows” (\textit{entscheidende Schläge}) against a specified “decisive point” (\textit{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 observance.\textsuperscript{xvi}
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*). 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. 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.

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 were so powerful, 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 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.\textsuperscript{xx} “Without these cautions,” the archduke stated, “the continuation of the advance and the fortunes of war (\textit{Waffenglücks}) would weaken and then dissolve.”\textsuperscript{xxi} The emphasis that Carl placed on the use of the fortress was representative of his primarily defensive-oriented mentality.\textsuperscript{xxii}

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 (\textit{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.\textsuperscript{xxiii} Carl believed that the careful accumulation and transportation of stores permitted greater operational flexibility and strategic security.\textsuperscript{xxiv} 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.\textsuperscript{xxv}
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 permanently sustain a line to it. He defended secondary points only when they offered a clear superiority and that single key point was not decisive. These points were also crucial in the case of retreat because the army would fall back upon them.xxvi

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.xxvii 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 set the responsibility for the gathering of forage at the regimental level, with all foraging parties to be led by staff officers in order to reduce pillaging by potentially licentious troops.xxviii 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.

An example of the fear of provoking the forces of nationalism and destruction 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 operational restructuring. Despite the changes that the Revolution had apparently brought about in military practice, Carl remained conservative in his goals. At no time did he hope to create or copy the radical structural 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. 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 looked to create an improved system, borrowing from the new where possible or unavoidable. 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.”

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.” This change resulted from the fact that the French Army had been composed quickly and without the 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.\textsuperscript{xxxv}

Carl found this tactical dispersal of strength a violation of the principle of unity, undermining any chance for a decisive victory. Allowing for the use of a large percentage of men to skirmish (\textit{herumschwärmen}) created the danger of being caught dispersed by an attacking enemy.\textsuperscript{xxxvi} 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 counter the enemy.\textsuperscript{xxxvii} 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 decisive. The men fighting in open order might be 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.\textsuperscript{xxxviii}

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 (\textit{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 a few isolated battles, the ability to replace their losses was the real reason for their victories.\textsuperscript{xxxix}
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 operational 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 taken their place.\textsuperscript{xl}

Despite this the archduke still believed the principles of strategy retained their original spirit (\textit{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 fortresses and the army, but also interior lines-of-communication like bridges, roads, canals, depots, and magazines. The close maintenance of these arteries must either be a maxim for an empire, or a matter of decline. The reason, Carl insisted, for France’s success at the end of the eighteenth century was its concentration on the “principles of the defensive system” with which it had subjugated all of Europe.\textsuperscript{xli}

Having made some sense, hopefully, of Carl’s effort to restrict the nature of unlimited, or perhaps, uncontrolled war that the French had unleashed, through a revitalization of the Army, we can look at a second issue. On the topic of militias, or “citizen-soldiers,” again Carl can clearly be seen in reaction, bowing not to new ideas, but simple, physical necessities.
As stated, Carl was an early modern soldier in all matters. At no time after the French Revolution or the evident successes of Napoleon did he significantly change his point-of-view. In actuality, the excesses of revolutionary war horrified him. This was particularly obvious in the archduke’s observations concerning the German campaign of 1796. The French “citizen-armies,” while capable of swift movement and tenacious fighting, crossed the landscape like psychotic locusts. Even more telling, they failed.

Two things became apparent to Carl by the time that he had successfully repelled the armies of Jean Baptiste Jourdan and Jean Victor Moreau from Germany. First, that an army composed of non-professionals lacked discipline. In addition the French abandonment of secure supply lines resulted in the troops pillaging the countryside with no concern for life or property. Second, that the archduke’s well timed and prepared counter-offensive caught the French by surprise and easily rattled them. The citizen-soldiers, apparently unable to maneuver as did the Austrians, retreated rapidly and nearly disastrously.

With this in mind, and as Carl looked at the disasters that had befallen the Monarchy since 1792, the use of citizen-forces did not appear crucial. Rather, he saw poor leadership and preparation at the heart of Austrian failure, with the French often surviving simply due to superior numbers. So that rather than succeeding due to the use of popular participation, they survived in spite of it. Only the later, undeniable leadership and organizational talents of Napoleon, whom Carl freely admitted a military genius, would save France.

If a state could not allow for the feelings of patriotism based on some form of democratic experience, or the emotional and equalitarian estaticism that Napoleon
indulged, what was there? With the violence and brutality of the Age of Mercenaries evidently over, what would compel a man to stay in the field? For the archduke, due to reasons already discussed, the brutal treatment of the men was anathema, and therefore unacceptable. He looked to reduce the level of coercion with a simple, enlightenment tool. Instead of the rod or lash, a man was to be treated with respect, as a human being. Corporal punishment was eliminated, enhancing rather than destroying a soldier’s concept of personal and therefore group honor. Terms of service were also reduced from what was considered a life sentence to anything from 10 years for infantry to 14 years for the artillery.

This new code, recreated to some extent from earlier drill regulations, appeared at Carl’s direction in 1807. Treated humanely and with an equal sense of justice, one would develop a love of the Monarchy through an honest life lived under the “soldierly virtues” of obedience, loyalty and resolution. Therefore loyalty to the system and élan were products of the pride and security that each man felt in his regiment. Evidence for this would be seen in a willingness to defend the unit’s reputation and to carry out all assigned tasks.

While this notion of the “noble-soldier” represents a certain unrealistic simplicity and perhaps even idealism, it sits at the foundation of the intellectual make-up of the archduke. Carl’s wish to create an army of good men, rather than the Duke of Wellington’s “scum of the earth” cliché, was not new with him, but unique among his contemporaries. Rather than having “citizen-soldiers,” the archduke would wish to create “soldier-citizens.” These men served not for money or to avoid prison, nor from the Romantic notion of nationalism, but due to a committed loyalty to the Monarchy and their regiments. Such a feeling of dedication, if it could be made to exist, would be not only useful but controllable.
The concept of irregular troops: *Landwehr*, *Freiwilligen*, and *Insurrectio*, all conflicted with Carl’s concept of duty, service, and loyalty. This belief was reinforced by the poor performance of many *Landwehr* units in the early stages of the 1809 war. Hastily assembled, with questionable training and motivation, these men remained suspect. How could they understand the soldierly virtues? To the archduke such ideas were best represented in the writings of his favorite author, Tacitus. In Tacitus’s *Agricola* Carl saw the embodiment of his ideal: A man that combined order and discipline with a sense of trust and submission to duty. The archduke, who saw himself as a kindred spirit to Agricola, success belonged to the resolute commander of veteran troops, be they Roman or Austrian.

A fear of brutality and destruction caused by the passions that might be unleashed in citizen-soldiers also frightened the archduke. He saw war as the greatest evil that could befall a state, and that it was a general’s primary duty to achieve an advantageous peace. In doing so a commander, having the mechanism of state power at his disposal, was not to achieve victory by any means but rather through the cool consideration of events. In all of his theoretical writings on the manner of warfare, Carl never mentioned the employment of militia units or even their existence. This despite the fact that his most celebrated work on war, *The Principles of Strategy*, was written in 1813. Perhaps the citizen-soldier was ignored as he cannot be seen as having a place in the scientific theories of war, but instead existed only as an anomaly.

Taken into account as a non-functional part of the military machine that fit Carl’s complex and specific plans for warfare, the omission of irregular units makes sense. At the center of the archduke’s strategic and operational planning was
maneuver, or the need to have troops that could and would march.iii As the Austrian Landwehr showed in 1809, long, tedious marches quickly broke their morale and sent them home. Even when used as replacement units for duty in garrisons on the borders of the Monarchy their usefulness came into question. Since Carl placed great importance on holding his fortresses as key points in a system of depots and base lines, untrained troops that could not be trusted were unacceptable.iv

In the archduke’s revulsion to unnecessary violence; especially that perpetrated against non-combatants, there is a spiritual source. A devout Catholic, Carl held to an “Eternal Law,” as he believed was evident in the Gospels. This Law required one to “love his fellow man” and attempt to “do right” by him.iv Only an army of disciplined and professional soldiers, kept in check by a Neostoic commander, could keep the passions released by war in check.

It is clear that the Austrians, under the leadership and theoretical influence of the Archduke Carl, did not favor militia formations. It was simply not a part of their “way of war.” The creation and existence of large numbers of militia, especially during the Wars of 1809 and 1813-14, was a strictly a matter of necessity. Due to the losses of the previous 15 years of warfare preceding 1808, manpower needs forced the creation of the Landwehr. Militias served, therefore, as filler units for battle losses and wastage rather than for political or social reasons. It is also clear that the archduke, for theoretical reasons as well as personal beliefs, did not see this system as a permanent creation. Because of this the Monarchy’s Landwehr, Freiwillingen, and Insurrectio must be seen as an expedient, never a source of change.
It has become popular, for those with an interest in Napoleonic warfare, to see the Archduke Carl as a reformer and bringer of change. I believe that this is a mistake. Rather, he was a reformer, keen to revitalize and invigorate. He never looked to real change, the sort that required political and social change, and never did. As late as his last year, 1847, he still rejected political change. This paper has hopefully made that case, albeit briefly, clear.

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4 Ibid., p. 42.
5 Justus Lipsius. *War and Peace reconciled; or, A discourse of constancy in inconstant times.* Translated by ?, (London, 1670), p. 84.
7 Lipsius, p. 161.
11 Wolfsgruber, p. 8-12.
12 Ibid., p. 420.
16 Carl, *Grundsätze.,* p. 4.
17 Ibid., p. 5.
Rauchensteiner clearly states that the ideas of the “base” and the “line” made Carl inherently defensive and traditional.


Ibid., pp. 31-3.

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.

Ibid., pp. 17-18.

Ibid., p. 247.

Ibid., p. 248.


Ibid., pp. 191-8.

Carl. *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.


Johann 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.

*Grundsätze*, pp. 47-8.

Ibid., pp. 48-9.

*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*.


Ibid., pp. 109-110.

Ibid., p. 258.


Ibid., pp. 109-110.

Ibid., p. 258.


Ibid., pp. 109-110.

Ibid., p. 258.


Ibid., pp. 109-110.

Ibid., p. 258.


Ibid., pp. 109-110.

Ibid., p. 258.


Ibid., pp. 109-110.