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Storia Militare Moderna (6)

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Stendardo di Lepanto (1570), Lati A e B, Museo Diocesano di Gaeta. Wikimedia Commons. Lo stendardi fu dipinto a tempera su seta da Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta (1521-1575), su incarico del Cardinale Onorato Caetani. L'11 giugno 1570 fu benedetto da Papa Pio V nella Basilica di San Pietro e consegnato a Marcantonio II Colonna ponendolo al comando della flotta pontificia. Partito da Civitavecchia e giunto a Gaeta il 22 giugno 1571, Marcantonio Colonna, fece voto di consegnare lo stendardo al patrono della città qualora fosse tornato vincitore. Il 13 agosto Pio V fece consegnare un secondo stendardo della Lega a Don Giovanni d'Austria, comandante generale della flotta cristiana che, riunitasi a Messina, salpò il 24 agosto verso Lepanto. Durante la battaglia del 7 ottobre i due vessilli sventolarono rispettivamente sull'Ammiraglia e sulla Capitana pontificia e non furono mai centrati dal tiro nemico. Nelle stesse ore il papa ebbe la visione della vittoria e in ricordo rifinì l'Ave Maria nella forma attuale, aggiunse le Litanie lauretane alla recita del Rosario e l'appellativo mariano di *Auxilium Christianorum* e consacrò il 7 ottobre a Santa Maria delle Vittorie sull'Islam, celebrato con lo scampanio al mattino, a mezzogiorno e alla sera in ricordo della vittoria. Papa Gregorio XIII trasferì poi la festa alla prima domenica del mese di ottobre intitolandola alla Madonna del Rosario. Al ritorno da Lepanto, Marcantonio Colonna sciolse il voto consegnando lo stendardo al vescovo Pietro Lunello. Il vessillo fu poi conservato presso la cattedrale dei Santi Erasmo e Marciano.

"Therefore one must deal with the people in a modest and reasonable manner"

The image of the common soldier in the 18th century

by Alexander Querengasser

Abstract: The 18th century is considered a time when the armies of the Ancien Regime were disciplined with the cane and driven into battle out of fear of the officers. The following essay shows that this image requires a fundamental correction. While beatings were a legitimate instrument of sanction for misconduct, they should not be used disproportionately and, above all, not during drill. Even in combat, positive motivation, such as the personal example set by officers, played a more important role than negative ones. However, the sources underscore that normative ideas and guidelines regarding the training of soldiers were not always implemented in practice, and that the cane was used more often in the soldiers' everyday lives than enlightened officers considered appropriate.

Key Words: Enlightement, Corporal Punishment, Motivation, line of battle

Military history research traditionally contrasts the practices of European military affairs during the Ancien Régime with the ideals of the Enlightenment. The actual significance of the Enlightenment in 18th-century military affairs is often limited to its role in officer training and the scientification of war.[1] The image of the soldier, the foundations of his training,

1 See: Hohrath, Daniel / Henning, Rolf, *Die Bildung des Offiziers in der Aufklärung. Ferdinand Friedrich von Nicolai (1730–1814) und seine enzyklopädischen Sammlungen*, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart, 1990; Hohrath, Daniel / Gerteis, Klaus, *Die Kriegskunst im Lichte der Vernunft. Militär und Aufklärung im 18. Jahrhundert*. 2 Bände, Meiner, Hamburg, 1999/2000; Hohrath, Daniel, *Die Kunst des Krieges lernen? Die Entwicklung der Militärwissenschaften zwischen Renaissan-*

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and the nature of his motivation in combat have so far been insufficiently examined by research. The overused dictum of Frederick the Great, according to which a soldier must fear his own officer more than the enemy, continues to dominate this image. Graphic depictions of non-commissioned officers beating their soldiers with sticks reinforce the collective, but also scholarly, notion of the soldier as a mindless member of a „military machine." However, recent research contributions are beginning to break down this image.[2]

Because the nature of the Enlightenment is controversial in research itself and its content is not always clearly defined, it is also difficult to identify Enlightenment currents within the military system of the time. Tendencies towards the scientification of warfare and the centralization of officer training represent only a partial aspect. Despite the studies mentioned, the contemporary image of the soldier still seems to be trapped in the cliché of the mindless „drill machine" subjected to arbitrary discipline by officers and non-commissioned officers. This – according to the widespread view – was necessary from a contemporary perspective for the clockwork-like movements of entire battalions. Now, it cannot be denied that the closer proximity of the infantry, whereby soldiers literally fought shoulder to shoulder, made uniform movements a tactical necessity that simultaneously coincided with aesthetic ideas.[3]

Thus, marching in step is not only impressive, but necessary, as each soldier places his left or right foot where the man in front of him just placed it. However, this drill-technical necessity to align the abilities of the individual with those of the collective and to mechanize physical movements did not necessarily translate into the mental attitude and state of mind of the soldier. The following article

ce und Aufklärung, Katalog zur Sonderausstellung 2003 im Wehrgeschichtlichen Museum Rastatt, 2004 in der Universitätsbibliothek Stuttgart (= *Studiensammlungen und Sonderausstellungen im Wehrgeschichtlichen Museum Rastatt*. Band 1), Rastatt, 2004.

2 See: Möbius, Sascha, *Mehr Angst vor dem Offizier als vor dem Feind?: Eine mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studie zur preußischen Taktik im Siebenjährigen Krieg*, VDM-Verlag Müller, Saarbrücken, 2007. New works on the Enlightenment in European Military: Pichichero, Christy, *The Military Enlightenment. War and Culture in the French Empire from Louis XIV to Napoleon*, Cornell U. P., Ithaca, 2017; Miakinow, Eugene, *War and Enlightenment in Russia: Military Culture in the Age of Catherine II*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2020.

3 Birk, Eberhard, «Die Lineartaktik im Spiegel zeitgenössischer Ordnungsvorstellungen», *Militär und Gesellschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit*, 16/1 (2012), S. 7–40.

aims to examine the image of the ordinary soldier during this period in more detail. It primarily addresses the question of whether the much-used image of the soldier as a mindless part of a machine actually corresponded to the ideal of the territorial rulers and their officers, or to what extent he was also recognized as a rational being. To this end, it is important to distinguish three different phases in the soldier‘s life: training, sanctioning of misconduct,[4] and the and combat motivation. Education, particularly the training of officers and a growing number of military scientific treatises, also represent an important aspect of the Enlightenment movement, but due to space constraints, they cannot be discussed in this lecture. Enlightenment in the sense of a humane attitude that accepts the individual requirements of the recruit – according to the present thesis – is not a process initiated by an isolated group of military outsiders or individuals outside the military, but rather is inherent in the system. The image of the soldier as a fear- and beating-driven machine developed by research does not fully correspond to historical reality. The following statements are intended to demonstrate that large sections of the military elite were already thinking in an „enlightened“ way in the early 18th century, without the term enlightenment having yet become established, just as military personnel could also think strategically without a proper concept of strategy existing at that time.

For these considerations, three types of sources can be drawn upon. The first two are normative in nature, within which a distinction must be made between regulations and, where appropriate, treatises by individual officers, and orders for the explicit implementation of certain behaviors. This corpus will be supplemented by ego documents from both officers and private soldiers, which allow a differentiated view of practice.

1 Training

The instruction of the later Saxon Field Marshal Jakob Heinrich von Flemming to his regiment, established in Dresden in 1706, sheds a significant light on the ideal that some officers aspired to in the training of new recruits:

> „However, the measure is often greatly exceeded here, as almost daily

4 For the Prussian Army see: Rischke-Ness Janine: *Subjektivierungen und Kriminalitätsdiskurse im 18. Jahrhundert. Preußische Soldaten zwischen Norm und Praxis*, V&R Press, Göttingen 2021, pp. 152-162, pp. 182-217.

> experience shows that both in the companies and on the parade ground, the common soldiers are treated badly by beatings and blows due to an occasional misstep, but nothing useful is achieved from this, and the men are often made more stupid and confused. Therefore, one must treat the men modestly and sensibly and stop the habit of beating them on the parade ground."[5]

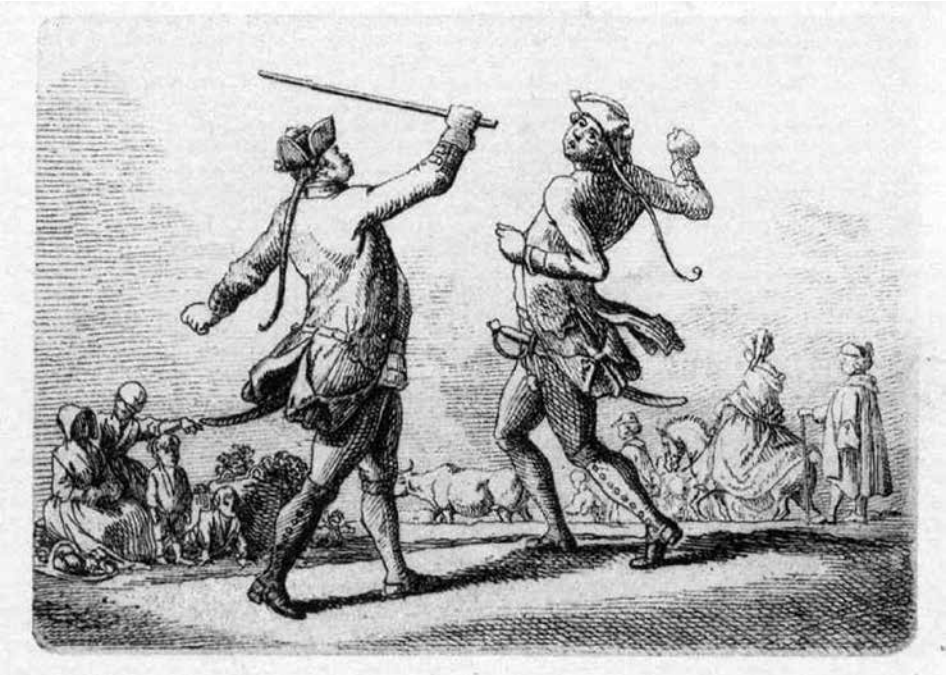
While this criticism underscores that beatings were a common practice during drill, they were anything but desirable on the part of the general. Officers, according to Flemming, should generally refrain from hitting subordinates, as this was beneath the dignity of their rank. While this clearly underscores the social barriers between the (usually) noble officer and the non-noble NCOs and privates, it also acknowledges the ability of ordinary soldiers to use their common sense. Flemming is by no means alone in his demand. Quite the opposite. The Prussian drill regulations of the Frederickian era explicitly stipulated that new recruits were not to be sent on guard duty during their first few weeks, and that the new and understandably unfamiliar musket drills were to be explained to them calmly and understandingly. The Prussian regulations for the infantry from 1750 state:

„A new recruit must not go on guard duty or perform other duties for six weeks. During this time, he must at least learn drill so that he can perform service. So that a new recruit is not made grumpy and timid right from the start, but rather receives air and a love for service, everything must be taught to him through kindly introductions, not scolding and insults. Furthermore, the new recruit must not be subjected to such harsh drills all at once, much less be subjected to harsh treatment with blows and the like, especially if he is a simple and un-German type."[6]

Regulations and manuals are normative sources that set an ideal and thus shed significant light on the military's basic attitude towards training soldiers. However, they say nothing about compliance with these ideals. For this purpose, the evaluation of personal testimonies is important, although these are often difficult to evaluate

5 Quot. after: Querengässer, Alexander: Das Kursächsische Militär im Großen Nordischen Krieg 1700 bis 1717 (=Krieg in der Geschichte 107), Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn u.a. 2019, p. 344.

6 Quot.: Reglement für die Königl. Preussische Infanterie, worinn enthalten: Die Evolutions, das Manual und die Chargirung Und Wie der Dienst im Felde und in der Garnison geschehen soll, Auch Wornach die sämtliche Officiers sich sonst zu verhalten haben. Desgleichen Wieviel an Tractament bezahlet und darvon abgezogen wird, auch wie die Mundirung gemachet werden , Berlin 1750 , IV. Titul, Art. 10, S. 149.



Daniel Nikolaus Chodowiecki (1726-1801), Military punishments. Sheet 1: How a villain receives a beating. (Description according to source), Sheet 1.From *Auswahl aus des Künstlers schönsten Kupferstichen.* 135 Stiche auf 30 Carton-Blättern. Nach den zum Theil sehr seltenen Originalen in Lichtdruck ausgeführt von A. Frisch, Berlin. Neue Folge. Verlag von Mitscher & Roestell, Berlin 1885. (self scanned from book). Wikimedia Commons

from a source-critical perspective, as they are often highly biased with regard to the topic discussed here. Flemming's quoted instructions are therefore particularly revealing, as they lie at the interface between these two sources: on the one hand, they are normative guidelines, and on the other, they clearly indicate that Flemming himself attempted to live up to this ideal. Thirdly – and this is also encountered in almost all sources on this topic – they reveal the discrepancy between this claim and reality, in which this ideal was often not lived up to.

Printed drill regulations repeatedly refer to this aspect, but have rarely been analyzed in this regard,[7] as many historians were only too quick to take the criticism of the late Enlightenment and the reformers of the Revolutionary and

7 Möbius work is an exception.

Napoleonic periods, along with the oft-quoted and overused saying of Frederick the Great, as evidence of the dominance of beating culture. Yet even instructions for Russian officers from 1760 emphasized the importance of positive motivation in the training of newly recruited men,[8] and as early as 1722, in a commentary on the 1716 regulations, Tsar Peter I demanded that his officers care for their soldiers like fathers.[9] They should attend to their needs and not burden them with unnecessary burdens, especially on campaigns. It was not uncommon for officers to feel a kind of paternalistic attachment to their soldiers. Captain John Peebles, a company commander in a British Highland regiment, recorded in his diary the farewell speech he gave to his soldiers after selling ownership of his company in 1782:

> „Royal Highland Grenadiers, I am sorry that I must soon leave you. I very much regret leaving such a distinguished regiment and corps as the one to which I belong, and the company I have had the honor to command, with which I have served so long to my satisfaction and pleasure. If any of you have any claims or demands against me, your captain, I will remain here a few more days and will willingly hear them and do them justice. And since it is my intention to return to my home in Scotland at the first opportunity, if you have any letters to send or anything I can do for you there, I will do so with pleasure. And gentlemen, I earnestly hope that you will always maintain the good name you justly possess, whether in quarters or in the field. And in all future service, I wish you all the honor, success, and happiness that your merits and good conduct so well deserve.“[10]

Detailed instructions for the training of privates often accompanied the introduction of new regulations. Troop training was generally conducted „from top to bottom.“ New regulations were to be imparted first to the officers, the best of whom would then group the non-commissioned officers into a model company and drill them in the new musket grips, which they then passed on to the troops. The famous „Model Company,“ established by Baron Friedrich von Steuben at Valley Forge to teach the American Continental Army, was thus not an invention

8 Black, Jeremy: *European Warfare, 1660 – 1815, Routledge*, London – New Haven 1994, p. 226.

9 Megorsky, Boris: *The Russian Army in the Great Northern War 1700-1721. Organisation, Matériel, Training and Combat Experience, Uniforms* (=Century of the Soldier 1618-1721 23), Helion, Warwick 2018, p. 153.

10 Quot.: Gruber, Ira D. (ed.): *John Peeble´s American War, 1776-1782*, Sutton, London 1998, p. 507.

of the Prussian exile, but a standard widely used in European armies. Thus, in 1739, the Saxon army also introduced a new set of regulations based on this same procedure. After the non-commissioned officers had been trained, the remaining enlisted men were to be familiarized with the new grips. In company training, the officers drilled „*only the most skilled men, and those who had already understood something, while the non-commissioned officers drilled the young men or recruits who had yet to know anything at all*."[11] Subsequently, several companies were to be assembled, and finally the battalion was to be formed. Poor recruits who repeatedly made mistakes were to receive additional instruction from the non-commissioned officers, „*which motivates them more than all the blows given by the major and adjutant*."[12] Even the complex maneuvers of linear tactics required tact, but also discipline, from the officers. The regulations required that

> „when they are standing behind the regiment, they should not let go of their rifles and go together and chat, as is usually done, but each officer should stay behind his platoon and carefully warn those people who are not paying attention (...)"[13]

A typical personal testimony that provides insight into the training of ordinary soldiers is the memoirs of the Russian officer Andrei Bolotov. He recalls practicing the drill regulations drafted by Count Chernyshev in his regiment at the beginning of the Seven Years' War:

> „Our company had to assemble daily in front of our quarters, and here I practiced with them almost day and night. I awakened in every soldier the desire to learn quickly and surpass their comrades. They learned easily, and by treating them with kindness and benevolence, I shared their efforts and, with my words, encouraged them to practice without complaint, even with joy. They agreed among themselves not to give lunch to anyone who hadn't first performed the rifle drills flawlessly. And it was a delightful sight when, after they had cooked their porridge, they lined up around the kettle and voluntarily practiced all the moves. In this way, I trained my entire company in a very short time. The soldiers were very pleased with me; not one could complain of being too beaten or even crippled." Not one escaped. I received public praise from the colonel; he found our company the best trained and praised the prince and me in a regimental

11 Quot.: SächsHstA Dresden 11285 Generalinspektion der Infanterie, Nr. 184 Reglement Exerzieren der Infanterie, fol. 2.

12 Quot.: Ibid.

13 Quot.: Ibid, fol. 8-9.

> order, recommending us as examples to the other companies.“[14]

There‘s certainly a lot of personal idealization in this report, and Bolotov also hints that beatings, even if not „crippling,“ were common in his company. It‘s significant, however, that he elevates positive motivation and an appeal to his men‘s ambition to the guiding principles of his training. He immediately emphasizes that this was by no means standard in his regiment either:

> „This didn‘t please the other company commanders much, but they themselves were to blame; although some of them made no less effort to train their recruits, they were too harsh, doing nothing but beating, which not only led the soldiers astray but also drove many to flee or self-mutilate, which then landed them in the hospital. Others didn‘t fully grasp the new drill regulations themselves and thus were unable to achieve success in training the soldiers.“[15]

Bolotov raises a crucial point, as he had previously mentioned that the new regulations lacked explanatory sketches, which he would eventually draw up for his regiment. This again highlights that the degree of violence used in training depends to a significant extent on the teaching skills of the instructors. However, those who had only a limited understanding of the regulations themselves naturally found it difficult to convey them. Not every non-commissioned officer who mastered the relevant exercises textbook-like possessed the necessary skills to convey their knowledge in a didactically understandable way. The same applied, as Bolotov makes clear, to the officers. The poor performance of some recruits was all too often not the result of poor will or a lack of comprehension, but rather of the non-commissioned officers‘ lack of „teaching skills.“ Thus, beatings were not a principle of discipline, but rather a subconscious expression of their own failure—something that the recruits certainly didn‘t care about in the end.

However, a narrative can be identified in Bolotov‘s memoirs that can be found in many personal accounts of the time. The authors usually portray themselves as particularly popular, caring, and understanding officers, or, to address another topic important for the Enlightenment, as particularly educated officers, and their fellow officers, in contrast, as overly strict—or uneducated. This clearly

14 Quot.: Bolotow, Andrej: *Leben und Abenteuer des Andrej Bolotow von ihm selbst für seine Nachkommen aufgeschrieben 1738-1795. Erster Band*, C. H. Beck, Munich 1990, p. 183.

15 Quot.: Ibid, p. 183.

recognizable narrative pattern urges caution against taking these accounts at face value. What emerges from the sources is the ideal of the officer as a patient teacher. The extent to which they truly represented exceptions within their regiments—in which certainly not every officer conformed to this ideal—should not be determined solely on the basis of their personal accounts.

This ideal is also continued to be advocated in the works of enlightened officers, which increasingly appeared in print, especially in the second half of the 18th century. Baron O'Cahill, who was in French service, wrote in his book „The Perfect Officer" translated into German in 1784 regarding the training of common soldiers:

> "...the young officer must know how to moderate all his vigor and passion, and not abuse the soldier too much with blows; for this only makes him stupid. If, on the other hand, the officer shows the common man all the tempos correctly, clearly, and with patience, the recruit will not be frightened, because he will certainly understand the drill, exert all his diligence, and learn with enthusiasm. Blows should only be given to those who, after being shown how to drill for a long time, behave stubbornly, lazy, rebellious, and maliciously; so that they learn by paying attention and finally understand."[16]

However, this type of source ultimately allows the fewest conclusions about practice, as such works represent ideas for enlightened discourse and are neither binding normative guidelines – like the regulations – nor do they allow any conclusions to be drawn about existing practice.

What Flemming considered to be true for simple musket exercises was, according to Ernst von Rüchel, also relevant for large-scale movements in the field. As a captain at the court of Frederick the Great, Rüchel wrote his – unpublished – „Complete Teachings on War and Military Sciences, both of Infantry and Cavalry" (1795). In it, he calls for strict calm during marching and maneuvering, since

> „excessive shouting during marching or maneuvering, if done with vigor, causes more harm than good, as people are easily either taken aback or start to spit. Therefore, one must try to avoid this as much as possible, and if it should ever be necessary, it must be done in a gentle, lenient tone."[17]

16 Quot.: O´Cahill, Karl Ludwig: *Der vollkommene Officier nach vorgeschlagenen Grundsätzen*, Rastatt 1784, p. 250.

17 Quot. after: Jessen, Olaf: *„Preußens Napoleon"? Ernst von Rüchel. Krieg im Zeitalter der*

What Rüchel describes here are the adjustments that the so-called „file closers“ had to make during movements in the field in order to maintain the formation of the line. The role of these officers and non-commissioned officers will be discussed later.

2 Corporal punishment as sanction

While many officers considered beatings an unsuitable means of teaching new recruits the exercises, they were, on the other hand, certainly applicable as a means of sanctioning misconduct in everyday life. This distinction was made clear, among others, by Maurice of Saxony in his „Ideas on the Art of War“:

> „As soon as troops are established, discipline is the most important thing to consider, for it is the soul of soldiering. If it is not organized wisely and observed with the utmost rigor, one must not believe that one has soldiers, for armies are then nothing but a worthless rabble, more dangerous to one‘s own state than to the enemy.“[18]

According to him, the decisive criterion is not the severity of discipline, but its „wise,“ i.e., moderate, application. The legitimacy of corporal punishment for misconduct was rarely questioned in the 18th century.

For example, the same Field Marshal Flemming, who demanded that the non-commissioned officers of his regiment avoid corporal punishment during training, addressed a warning letter to Colonel von Damnitz, commander of a Saxon cuirassier regiment, which had committed several abuses against the local civilian population during the 1711 campaign of the Saxon army in Pomerania:

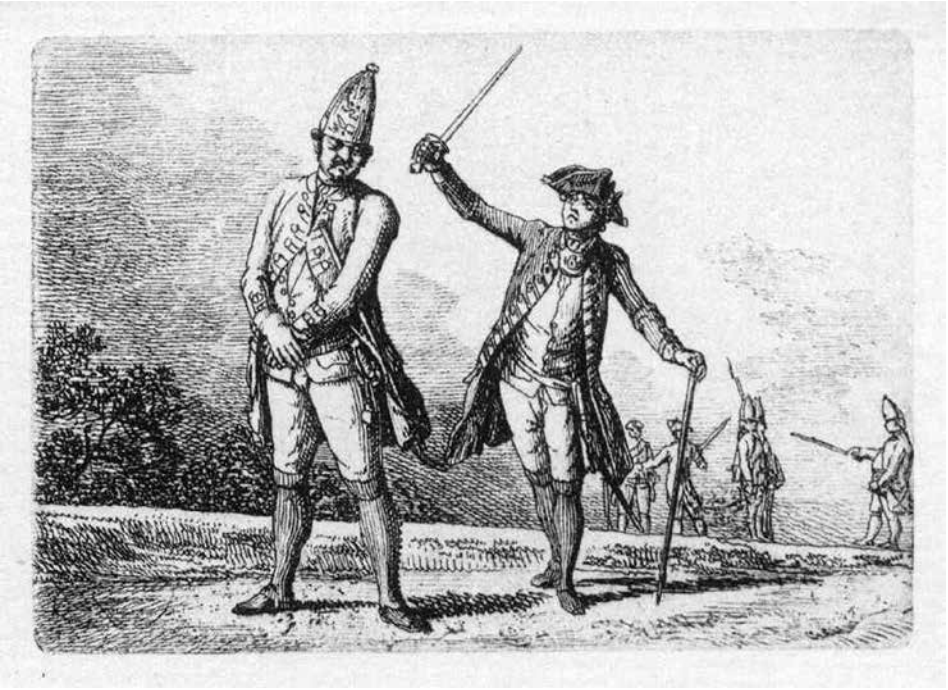
> „As sensitive as I was that complaints had come against his regiment, I am just as glad that it should not be so. You know well that he who loves his child disciplines it and does not turn a blind eye.“[19]

With his comparison, Flemming reminds us that corporal punishment was by no means a purely military sanction. In the 18th century and far beyond, the use of physical violence as a disciplinary or disciplinary measure was widespread.

Vernunft, Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn 2007, p. 92.

18 Quot.: Saxe, Maurice de: *Einfälle über die Kriegskunst: Herausgegeben von [Zacharie de Pazzi de] Bonneville: Aus dem Französischen ins Deutsche übersetzet von G[eorg] R[udolph] Faesch*, Leipzig / Frankfurt 1757, p. 37.

19 Quot. after: Querengässer: Das kursächsische Militär, p. 450-451.



Chodowiecki, Military punishments. Sheet 2: How an honest man receives a beating.

Masters beat their journeymen, lords of the manor their peasants, masters their servants, priests and teachers their children in schools, fathers their children, and husbands their wives, not to mention the way slave owners treated their „property." Shakespeare's famous play „The Taming of the Shrew" was based on the ballad „A Merry Jest of a Shrewed and Cursed Wife" (c. 1550), which was widely read in England and in which a „she-devil" is beaten into submission by her husband. As recently as the early 1960s, the particular joke of the John Wayne comedy „McLintock" was that the well-known cowboy actor beats his wife, played by Maureen O'Hara, into submission with a frying pan after his future son-in-law had previously tamed his own daughter using the same method. This is important to bear in mind when evaluating these events. A modern society that rejects any form of corporal punishment quickly loses sight of how widespread this method was in early modern society and that it was not limited to the treatment of soldiers and slaves. The military was no exception in this context, even though certain forms of corporal punishment, such as the dreaded

gauntlet, represented particularly drastic measures. However, this was only used for serious offenses, such as desertion. Beatings for minor offenses, with the corporal‘s cane and the officer‘s sword, on the other hand, differed little from corporal punishments in the civilian sector. Contrary to what is often suggested, Daniel Chodowiecki‘s two well-known engravings, depicting a Prussian private and an officer each chastising a soldier, do not represent a criticism of corporal punishment, but rather are intended to demonstrate the difference between „how a scoundrel receives a beating“ and „how an honest man receives a beating.“

Nevertheless, contemporary soldiers‘ songs already point out that the excessive use of corporal punishment was a frequent reason for desertion: „*Gentlemen, don‘t be surprised when someone deserts / We‘re being beaten like dogs*.“[20]

Even officers did not attribute desertion solely to the soldiers‘ lack of character. This may have been the case at the individual level, but not when it became a mass phenomenon in certain regiments. The Russian soldier Ivan Menshoy describes in his memoirs how, in 1821, Ivan Ivanovich Kizmer succeeded his regiment after two very popular commanders. „*That man was strict beyond measure,*“ he wrote, but also acknowledged, „*Under the two of them* [Ivanovich and his duty sergeant major, A.Q.‘s note] *we began to bear a heavy burden, but the world is not ours to create*.“[21] Thus, he certainly acknowledges the legitimacy of the situation. Nevertheless, Kizmer‘s excessive strictness—“*never completing a marching or riding drill without someone being caned*“[22]—led to mass desertion, which was eventually scrutinized by higher authorities:

> „The next two years were easier only because there were many inquiries about desertions—for example, thirty men ran off in one night—and from such circumstances it could be observed how our leadership managed us, so we were relieved of our brutal conditions for two years. The higher authorities probably paid close attention to Kizmer and forbade him from abusing the lower ranks from that point onward.“[23]

This example illustrates the complexity of the issue, which defies

20 Quot. after: Sikora, Michael: „Massenhaft Soldaten“, in: Bernd Sösemann/Gregor Vogt-Spira (ed.): *Friedrich der Große in Europa. Geschichte einer wechselvollen Beziehung*. Bd. II, Stuttgart 2012, pp. 216–232, here p. 226.

21 Quot. After: Boland, Darrin (ed.): *Recollections from the Ranks. Three Russian Soldiers` Autobiographies from the Napoleonic Wars*, Helion, Solihull 2017, p. 53.

22 Quot.: ibid, p. 53.

23 Quot.: Ibid., pp. 53-54.

generalizations. At the lowest level, Menshoy was willing to endure the abuse that occurred, but also highlights that it drove a large number of soldiers to desert. This prompted the army command to intervene and not only investigate these incidents, but ultimately impose strict regulations on the regimental commander regarding his leadership. At the same time, Menshoy‘s comparison between Kizmer and his two predecessors in the regimental command highlights the importance of individual factors.

Examples such as those provided in this episode can easily be extrapolated to the 18th century and viewed from „above.“ Even a monarch such as Frederick William I of Prussia, whom later generations have nicknamed the „Soldier King“ and who was considered a strict disciplinarian, both of his own army and family, admonished Margrave Frederick Henry of Brandenburg-Schwedt, commander of a Prussian regiment, that

> “He considered good subordination to be the most important aspect of the service. However, it must be treated in such a way that barbaric and unchristian acts do not occur under the guise of subordination.“ Officers must certainly punish negligence, „but to beat a man or even strike him with a sword so that he draws blood or becomes unhealthy is barbaric.“[24]

This demand clearly reflects that corporal punishment, while an accepted sanction for Frederick William, should not appear arbitrary. Justice arose from moderation. This proper moderation, according to Maurice of Saxony, ultimately strengthened the fighting power of an army:

> „One must not believe that discipline, subordination, and this servile obedience, discourage men‘s courage. For it has always been found that the more strictly discipline has been observed in armies, the greater the undertakings they have been able to accomplish.“[25]

Furthermore, Maurice demands that only serious crimes should be punished harshly, while more lenient punishments should be applied to everyday offenses:

> „For major crimes, only the punishments must be harsh: but the more leniently the other offenses are punished, the more quickly the abuses will be stopped, because everyone will work together to remedy them.“[26]

24 Quot. after: Göse, Frank: *Friedrich Wilhelm I. Die vielen Gesichter des Soldatenkönigs*, wbg Theiss, Darmstadt 2020, p. 247.

25 Quot.: Saxe: Einfälle über die Kriegskunst, p. 37.

26 Quot.: Ibid., p. 37.

Here, too, the count relies more on positive motivation. The importance of a sense of balance is also emphasized by the Swedish hussar officer Maurice Diek when describing a battle with Prussian troops near Prenzlau at the end of 1758:

> „In a battle near Güstow, not far from Prenzlau, I was close to being captured. My horse fell in a skirmish. Enemy Bosnians surrounded me with their pikes, which I resisted on foot, parrying the thrusts with my saber, but I should have soon succumbed when my men, seeing the horse running without me, rushed forward, entered, and freed me. I cannot express the feelings of my tender heart about this demonstration of the love of my subordinates, especially since I was aware that I had earned it only through my behavior and concern for them, and by no means through indulgence of their faults, which I always punished severely.“[27]

Maurice also points to cultural differences in the handling of this practice:

> „The French accuse the Germans of corporal punishment. These punishments are introduced by the latter as a military punishment. An officer who scolds a soldier, slaps him in the face, or even whips him will be dismissed if the soldier accuses him.“[28]

Where Maurice derives this example – which has been refuted many times – is unclear.

> „In France, however, they don‘t care about slapping soldiers in the face, but rather about beating them with a cane, because the pretext of a free, unconstrained life has justified this punishment.“[29]

The fact that discipline with the cane was common practice quickly became ingrained in the collective memory. Nevertheless, Georg Heinrich von Berenhorst, actually a severe critic of Frederick‘s military system, wrote in 1798 in the first volume of his „Reflections on the Art of War“: „*The beatings became less frequent; but I believe, not so much by order, but because of increasing humanity*.“[30]

Such a trend, however, only became apparent after the Seven Years‘ War, from around the 1780s onwards. At the same time, the French Minister of War, Claude-Louis, Comte de St. Germain, attempted to regularize the use of corporal

27 Quot.: Gülzow, Erich: „Lebenserinnerungen des Generals von Dycke“, in: Baltische Studien N.F. 39 (1937), pp. 261-302., here p. 273.

28 Quot.: Saxe: Einfälle über die Kriegskunst, p. 37.

29 Quot.: Ibid, p. 38.

30 Quot.: Berenhorst, Georg Heinrich von: *Betrachtungen über die Kriegskunst, über ihre Fortschritte, ihre Widersprüche und ihre Zuverläßigkeit, Erste Abtheilung*, G. Fleischer der Jüngere, Leipzig 1798, p. 156.

punishment within the French army, following the Prussian model. St. Germain's original intention was to prevent the arbitrary use of corporal punishment, but he faced massive criticism from enlightened military and civilian circles, who were generally critical of the use of corporal punishment.[31] In 1801, Bavaria became the first state in the German Empire to abolish corporal punishment within the military – the right to corporal punishment in schools, incidentally, only came into effect in 1983. Prussia followed suit in the course of the 1807 reforms, but excluded so-called second-class soldiers from this practice.

3 Fear of the enemy: positive vs. negative combat motivation

On December 15, 1745, a Prussian and a Saxon army faced each other on the heights of Kesselsdorf, northwest of Dresden, anticipating one of the few decisive battles of the early modern period. The Saxon army had already been encamped in airy tents on the heights for several days in frosty weather. Despite the proximity to the state's main fortress, Dresden, with its warehouses, food supplies were scarce, and soldiers' morale was consequently low.[32]

After news of the approach of the Prussian army reached the Saxon headquarters during the course of the morning, the regiments were deployed for battle. During this phase, the officers attempted to once again prepare their soldiers for battle, using both positive and negative motivational tactics.

General von Arnstaedt rode along the lines of his cavalry, calling out to them, „*We are going for the fatherland and to avert further fatigue*."[33] Lieutenant Colonel Theodor Oskar von Rheden, commanding the Rutowski Cheveauleger Regiment, delivered an encouraging speech, while Colonel von Nostitz promised his Cheveaulegers 12 ducats from his own pocket for every trophy they captured. It was quite common at the time to pay common soldiers small sums of money for captured cannons, drums, and especially flags and standards, since the 18th century did not yet recognize medals for ordinary soldiers (apart from the fact

31 Pichichero: The Military Enlightenment.

32 Querengässer, Alexander: *Kesselsdorf 1745. Eine Entscheidungsschlacht im 18. Jahrhundert (=Beiträge zur Geschichte des Militärs in Sachsen 4)*, Zeughaus Verlag, Berlin 2020; Brabant, Artur: *Kesselsdorf und Maxen. Zwei Winterschlachten bei Dresden*, Köhler, Dresden 1912.

33 Quot. after: Brabant: Kesselsdorf, p. 48.

that these rewards were probably more welcome to them). Rheden and Nostitz did their best, but also ordered the officers and sergeants standing behind the front as file closers „*not to spare anyone who should look back for an escape, but to drive their swords through his ribs without mercy*.“[34]

This order by no means stemmed from a contemptuous ruthlessness. The dense cavalry formations, riding stirrup to stirrup, as well as the infantry battalions marching shoulder to shoulder, were only as strong as their psychologically weakest link at the decisive moment of battle. As soon as the first man turned to flee, a chain reaction could be triggered that would suck even the most experienced veterans into the maelstrom. Behind this psychological fact lies the meaning of Frederick‘s famous maxim: soldiers must fear their officers more than the enemy. This referred not to training and everyday life, but solely to the critical moment of battle. Soldiers should be aware that flight meant immediate death by the spontoon, sword, or pistol of the officers and non-commissioned officers marching behind the formation to close the gap, whereas a courageous attack only carried the possibility of death or injury. The order of Colonel von Nostitz, as well as the instruction issued to all Saxon infantry officers to “*extricate those who might make a mine before the time, and to strictly observe their devoir, as is usual on such occasions*”,[35] illustrate that the Prussian king‘s statement was neither unusual nor a typical feature of Prussian disciplinary ideas, but was common practice in all modern armies of the period. Ilya Berkovich emphasizes in his study that most soldiers of the Ancien Regime were driven into battle by positive (pull) rather than negative (push) factors. The example cited above illustrates that a mixture of both played a role.

The file-closers following a formation were instructed to use force, if necessary, to prevent any retreating soldiers from fleeing. However, this was also of enormous importance in linear formations, since the flight of an individual could quickly escalate into a mass phenomenon. Positive and negative motivation thus merged, but it was primarily the positive factors that maintained the soldiers‘ morale. The importance of their role in peacetime exercises is underlined by the instructions for the introduction of the new regulations of the Electoral Saxon army in 1739, which require that

34 Quot. after: Querengässer: Kesselsdorf, p. 99.

35 Quot. after: Brabant: Kesselsdorf, p. 49.

Henri-Félix Emmanuel Philippoteaux, *The Battle of Fontenoy*, 1745: The Count d'Anterroches invites Lord Charles Hay to fire the first volley with the famous phrase: «Messieurs les anglais tirez les premiers»

> "When they are standing behind the regiment, they should not let go of their rifles and walk together and chat, as is usually done, but each officer should stay behind his platoon and carefully ward off those who are not paying attention (…)"[36]

Much more important – and this too was long overlooked by researchers – was their role in maintaining the cohesion of the line during formation changes and, above all, in closing gaps created by losses in battle, hence the German term Lückenschließer (gap closer), the English file closer (file closer) or the French serre-file (file closer). This was their actual main task in battle until the middle of the 19th century, as long as linear formations were used. Even during formation movements, such as pivots, they were to ensure that the alignment of the line was maintained, which is also clear from Rüchel's instructions quoted above.

The English general John Burgoyne, who undertook a Grand Tour of continental Europe after the Seven Years' War, came to the following interesting

36 Quot.: SächsHstA Dresden 11285 Generalinspektion der Infanterie, Nr. 184 Reglement Exerzieren der Infanterie, fol. 8-9.

conclusion after observing Austrian troops:

> „They have not yet achieved the extraordinary fighting strength of the Prussians, but they will certainly soon do so, because they are in the fortunate position of being able to achieve their aims with good will and little severity from their superiors. Therefore, their zeal, the imitation of good examples, and honor—with appropriate subordination—will much more readily surpass the zeal of others, which springs from fear of punishment and similar slave-like methods.“[37]

While Burgoyne clearly acknowledges that both methods were used in European armies, he places a much higher value on the importance of positive motivation.

Maurice of Saxony, in whom the young Frederick II had seen a great role model during the first two Silesian Wars, held the view that the soldier is not a machine-like being whose actions are subject to certain laws. Instead, a superior officer must understand the physics, psychology, and heart of the soldier. Maurice wrote down these ideas in military theory treatises, many of which were published posthumously, thus contributing to enlightened discourse. However, it seems doubtful that these views represented the Marshal‘s entirely new and independent reflections. At the beginning of his career, Maurice served for an extended period in the army of his father, Augustus the Strong, whose commander-in-chief was the above-mentioned Field Marshal Flemming, whom Enlightenment researchers have not necessarily considered one of their representatives. However, it is more than likely that Maurice was in close contact with Flemming, both professionally and privately, and that Flemming shared his views on the nature of the soldier with him. An analysis of the extensive private correspondence or a scholarly study of Flemming‘s biography could shed some light on this issue. However, he does illustrate an important fact: Even outside of a self-defined or scholarly Enlightenment movement, military personnel in the early modern period were certainly capable of enlightened thinking. Caution should therefore be taken not to attribute too great an innovative boost to this movement.

The fact that commanding generals relied on positively motivated soldiers is also evident from a whole series of speeches that offered officers or privates the option of not participating in a battle. The most famous of these is certainly the famous „Parchwitz Speech,“ delivered by Frederick II to his assembled officer

37 Quot. after: Duffy, Christopher: *Maria Theresia und ihre Armee*, Motorbuch Verlag, Stuttgart 2010, p. 87.

corps before the Battle of Leuthen.

For Frederick II, such moments were probably the result of a well-calculated self-promotion. For Charles XII of Sweden, however, who enjoyed equally great devotion from his soldiers, they may have been the expression of sincere participation in their everyday lives. His biographer Anders Fryxell reports that before the Battle of Narva, Charles XII delivered his own „Parchwitz Speech," during a church service, granting everyone in the army who feared the march through severe winter weather and the subsequent fighting the option of leaving,

> „without, if any of his men should consider the impending campaign too dangerous and therefore not wish to participate, they should be free to remain behind in Weinsberg without having to fear the king's disfavor. But, encouraged by Charles's courage and determination, they all answered as one that they would fight for their young king to the last drop of blood."[38]

The intention of both monarchs was the same: they attacked their officers' honor, because even though they gave them the freedom to resign, no one could choose this option without losing face. A year later, during the Battle of the Daugava, it was supposedly Charles XII who was the first to cross the river and, on the other bank, called out encouragingly to his grenadiers: „*Well, my lads, we're here now, and God will help us further*."[39]

However, the role of motivating one's own troops was not reserved solely for the roi connétable type.[40] An anonymous Saxon participant in the Battle of Kalisz (1706) recounts how Augustus the Strong, who personally participated in the battle but did not participate in commanding the troops, rode from regiment to regiment before the fighting began. He called on the men who wanted to fight to ride with him, while the others remained with the baggage, „*whereupon a great outcry ensued*."[41]

To this day, military historians interpret the period of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars as a time of radical change, not only in terms of army

38 Quot.: Fryxell, Anders: *Lebensgeschichte Karls XII. König von Schweden. Bd. 1*, Friedrich Vieweg und Sohn, Braunschweig 1861, p. 86.

39 Quot.: Ibid., p. 119.

40 Querengässer, Alexander: „Unnötiges Risiko oder Handlungsvorteil? Der Roi Connétable in der Frühen Neuzeit", in: Clauss, Martin / Nübel, Christoph (Hrsg.): *Militärisches Entscheiden. Voraussetzungen, Prozesse und Repräsentation einer sozialen Praxis von der Antike bis zum 20. Jahrhundert (=Krieg und Konflikt 9)*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt – New York 2020, pp. 313-340.

41 Quot. after: Querengässer: Das kursächsische Militär, p. 324.

structure, recruitment, and tactical concepts, but also in terms of troop motivation. Only a few researchers, such as Berkovich or Jeremy Black, emphasize the strong role of continuities.[42] This watershed character of the era around 1800 was already attributed to it by contemporaries, such as the Prussian reformers, who primarily sought to underscore the significance of change. Nineteenth-century historiography reinforced this image, while art, on the other hand, has certainly provided examples of the importance of positive motivation in the Ancien Régime. Émil Jean Horace Vernet‘s painting „La Bataille du Pont d‘Arcole“ (1826), which shows the young Napoleon Bonaparte with a French regimental flag at the head of his troops on the bridge defended by the Austrians in 1796, is considered a symbol of the supposedly „new“ ideal of inspiring leadership from the front. Very similar scenes were also depicted during this period for battles in the 18th century. Carl Röchling‘s painting „Frederick the Great at the Battle of Zorndorf“ (1904) shows a scene in which Frederick, carrying a regimental flag, is about to lead his troops into an attack. The volume „Der Altes Fritz in 50 Bilder für Jung und Alt“ (The Old Fritz in 50 Pictures for Young and Old), illustrated by Röchling and Richard Knötel, contains two pictures from the Battle of Prague. One shows the death of the Prussian Field Marshal Kurt Christoph von Schwerin, who, at a critical moment in the battle, seizes his regiment‘s flag and is about to lead his retreating troops forward when he is hit by an enemy missile. The second shows Prince Henry of Prussia already waist-deep in the water of a stream, beckoning his musketeers to attack. Of course, artistic depictions of 19th-century history paintings are not photorealistic sources, but all of these images visualize authentic scenes in which military leaders stand at the head of their troops. Such scenes were not uncommon in the 18th century and therefore not a new phenomenon during the French Revolutionary Wars.[43] Even the common soldiers themselves in the 18th century were not mercenaries driven into battle by fear of the culture of beatings, but rather highly motivated professional soldiers. Reports of Prussian regiments marching through northern German cities in the autumn of 1806, on the eve of the Double Battle of Jena and Auerstedt, contradict

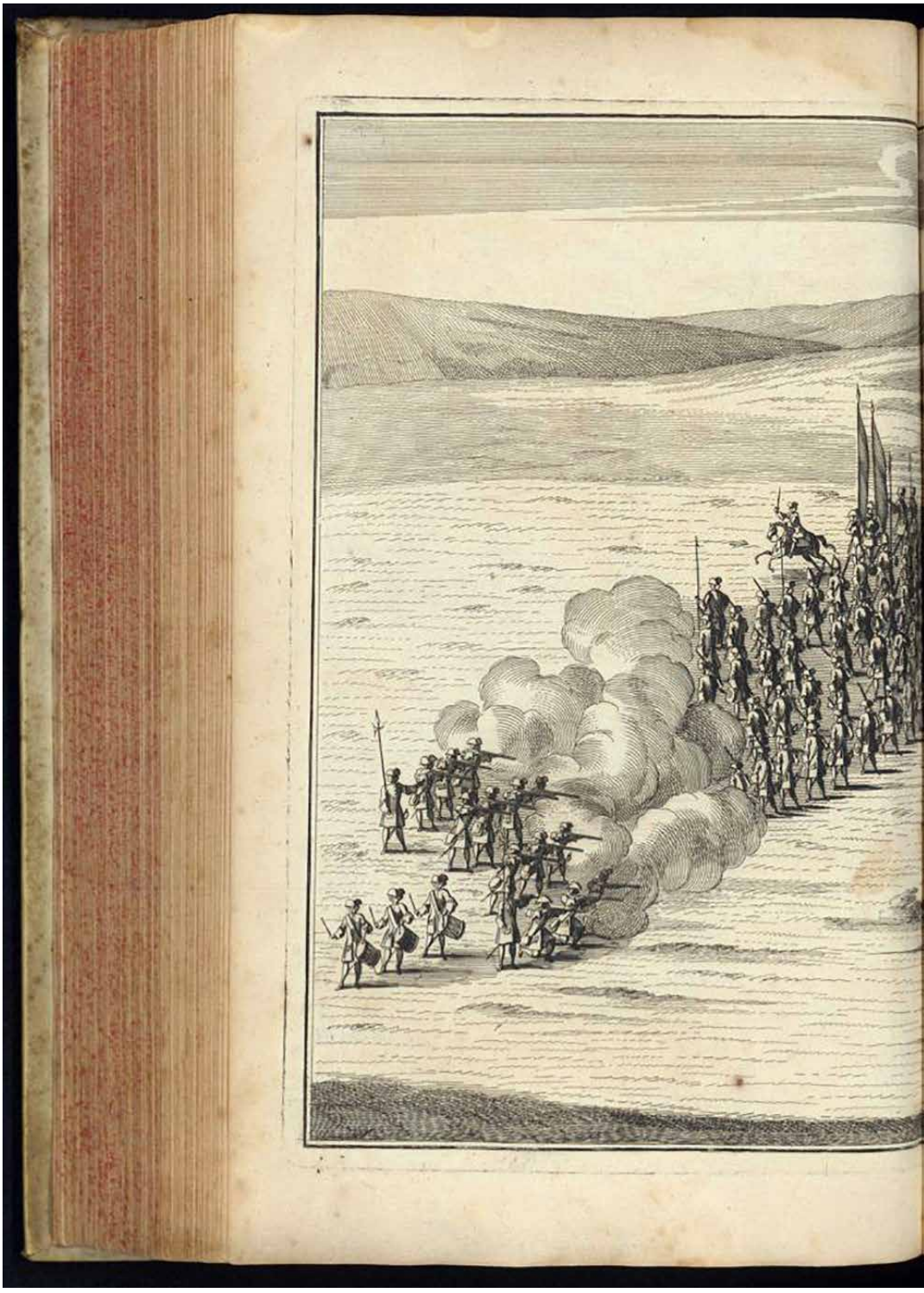
42 Among several works, see: Black, Jeremy: *A short History of War, Yale University Press*, New Haven – London 2021, pp. 158-161; also: Berkovich: Motivation in War, pp. 230-232.

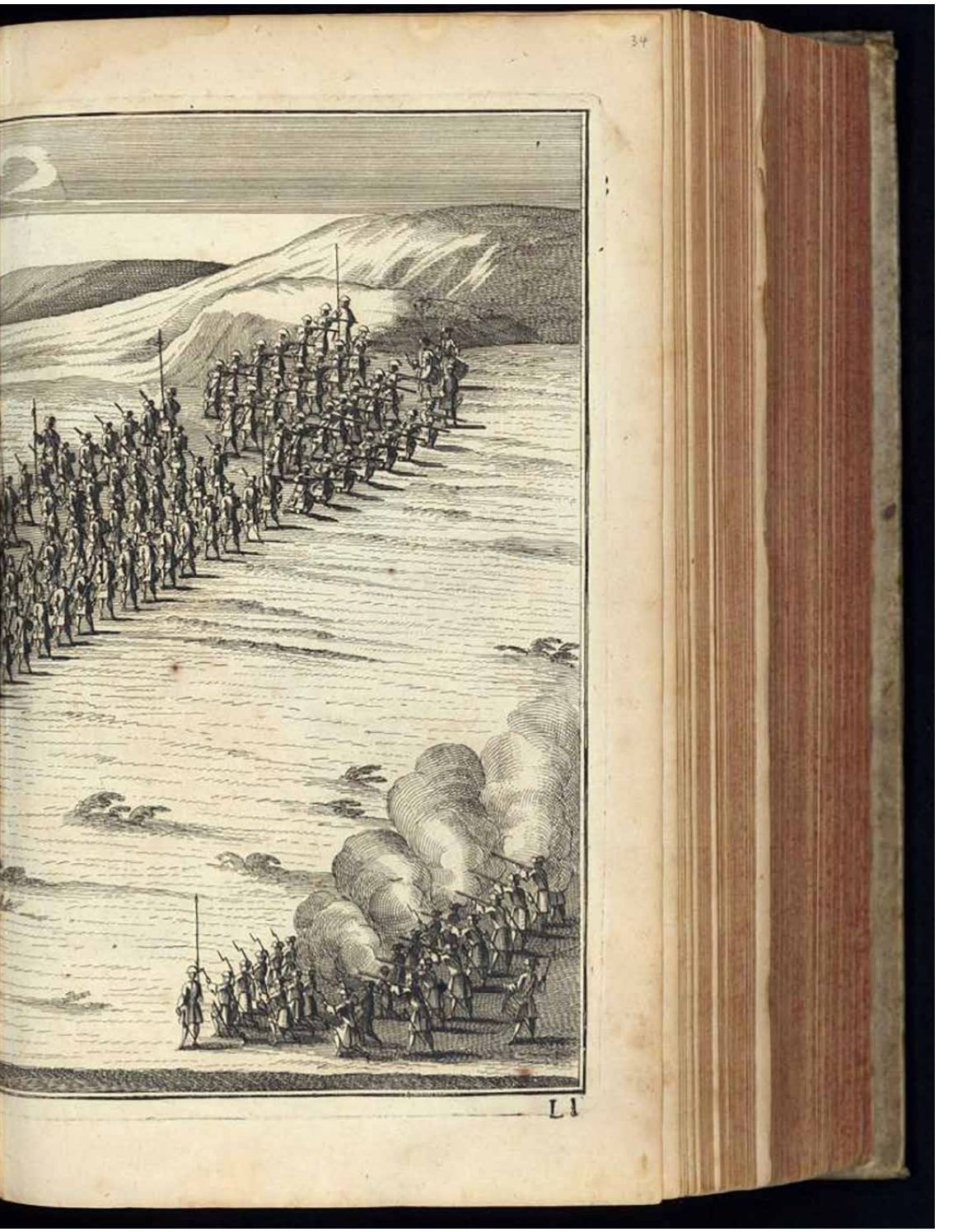
43 Querengässer, Alexander: *Eine militärische Evolution. Militär und Kriegsführung in Europa 1300-1815*, Zeughaus Verlag, Berlin 2021, pp. 242-247.

Jean Alaux (1786-1864), Le maréchal de Villars at the battle of Denain (1839), Versailles Castle, Wikimedia Commons.

this very caricature, which was partly created immediately afterwards by the military reformers themselves. For example, a Prussian officer reported on the passage of Prussian regiments through Göttingen: „*I was able to watch Rüchel's and Blücher's corps here with great pleasure; all the streets were full of singing and music, the crown was full of drinking and gambling*."[44] The fact that Prussia ultimately lost this battle, which would mark the end of the Ancien Regime in the Hohenzollern state, was by no means due to a lack of motivation among its soldiers.

44 Quot. after: Jessen: „Preußens Napoleon"?, p. 272.

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Conclusions

I hope that the foregoing remarks have succeeded in painting a somewhat more complex picture of military culture in the 18th century. The point was not – and this should also have been made clear – to negate the role of corporal punishment in the military. It was widespread. However, the image of the soldier was not as rigid as the image of the army as a machine, established in research, suggests. Linear tactics certainly required a precision of movement that corresponds to this image. However, this does not mean that the recruit was viewed as a soulless being who could be replaced at will. Enlightened officers – and by enlightenment, we mean not affiliation with any movement, however defined, but rather a basic intellectual attitude that was more widespread than long assumed – were willing to recognize the different abilities and prerequisites of their recruits and, to a certain extent, to take them into account during training. In battle, the officer set a positive example – and this ultimately corresponded to the self-image of the nobility – which was intended to have a motivating effect, while negative motivation played a role that was not to be neglected, but was clearly of secondary importance. Corporal punishment was legitimate in everyday military life, as it was in civilian life, even if military punishments were perceived as particularly harsh. It was this harshness that was always criticized whenever it exceeded a certain level. Thus, enlightened thinking often presents itself to us as a contrast between ideal and reality, between discourse and practice. Even though this discourse was increasingly reflected in enlightened debate, especially in the second half of the 18th century, its roots go back further and are probably more accurately viewed as part of a system-immanent process of professionalization within the military.

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