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Ideology and Pragmatism: The Prussian Landwehr and the State, 1813-1819

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Ideology and Pragmatism:
The Prussian Landwehr and the State, 1813-1819

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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the Upper Division Honors Program.

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**Ideology and Pragmatism:
The Prussian Landwehr and the State
1813-1819**

Wade Trosclair

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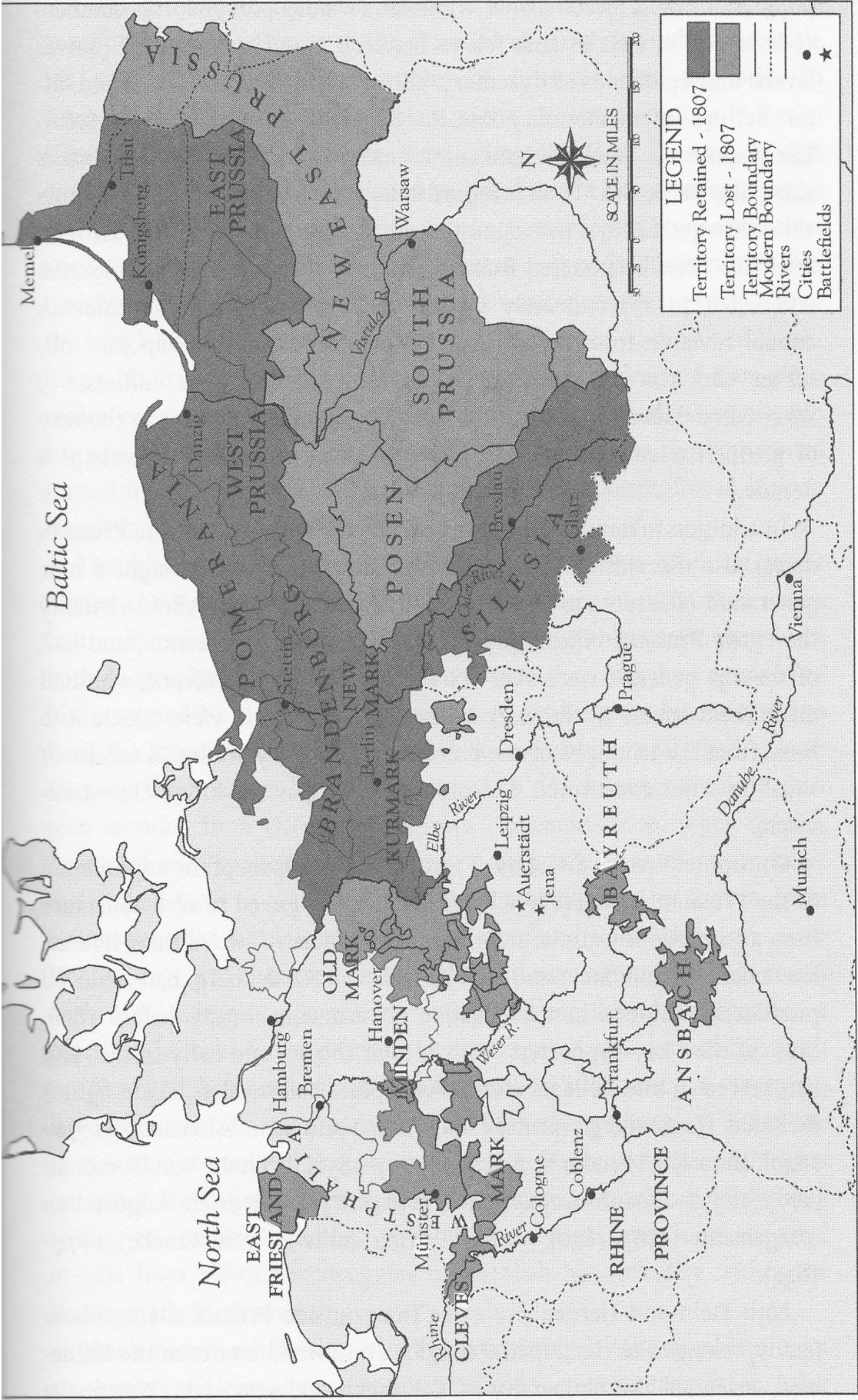
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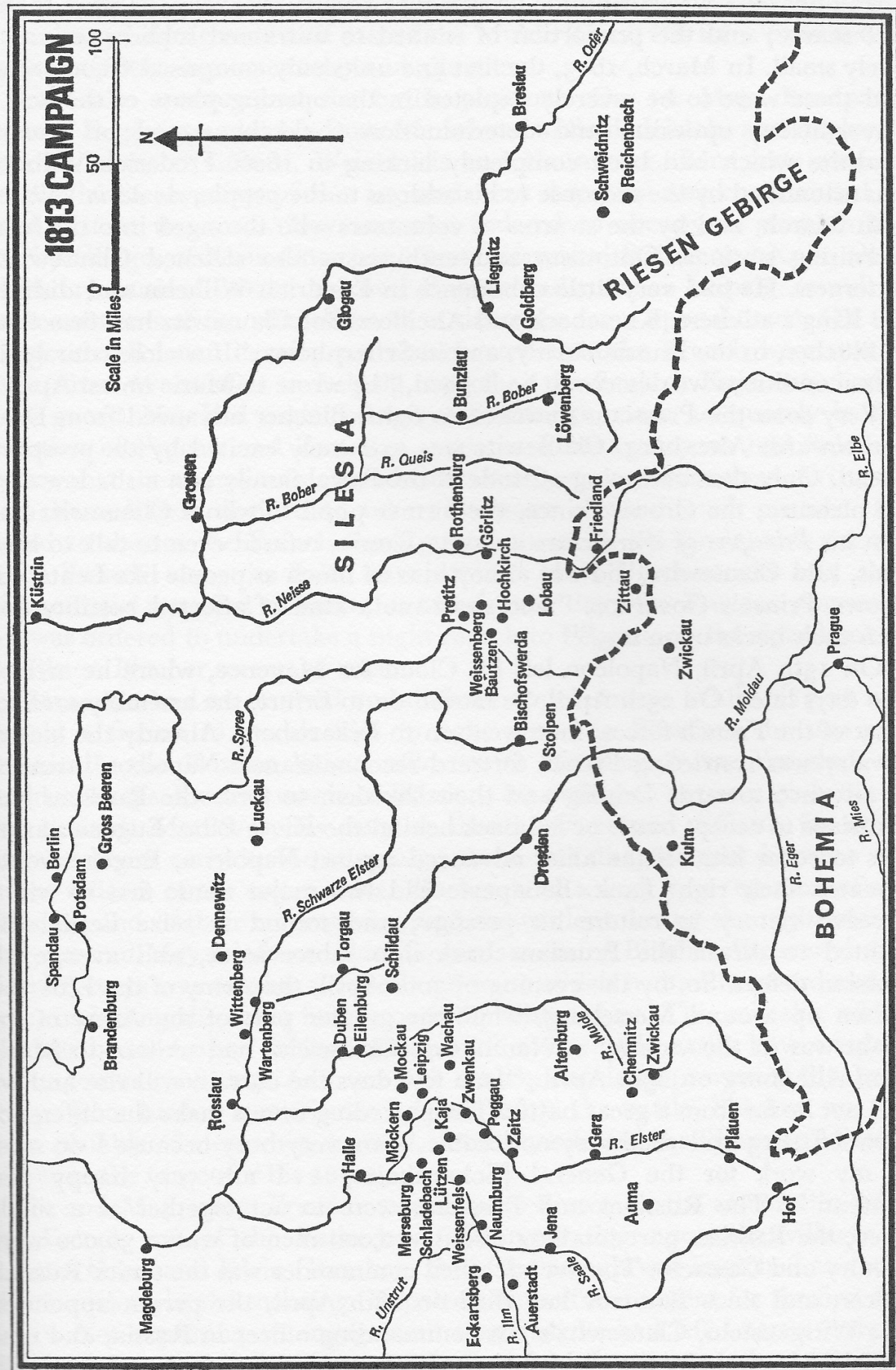


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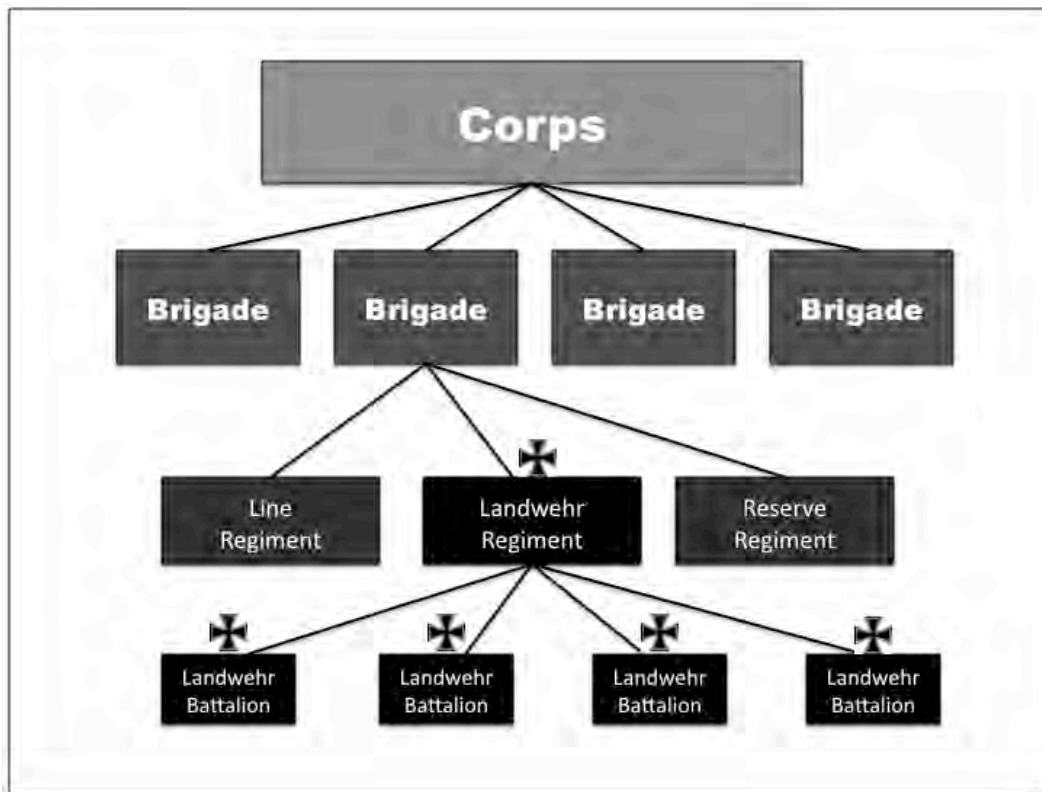


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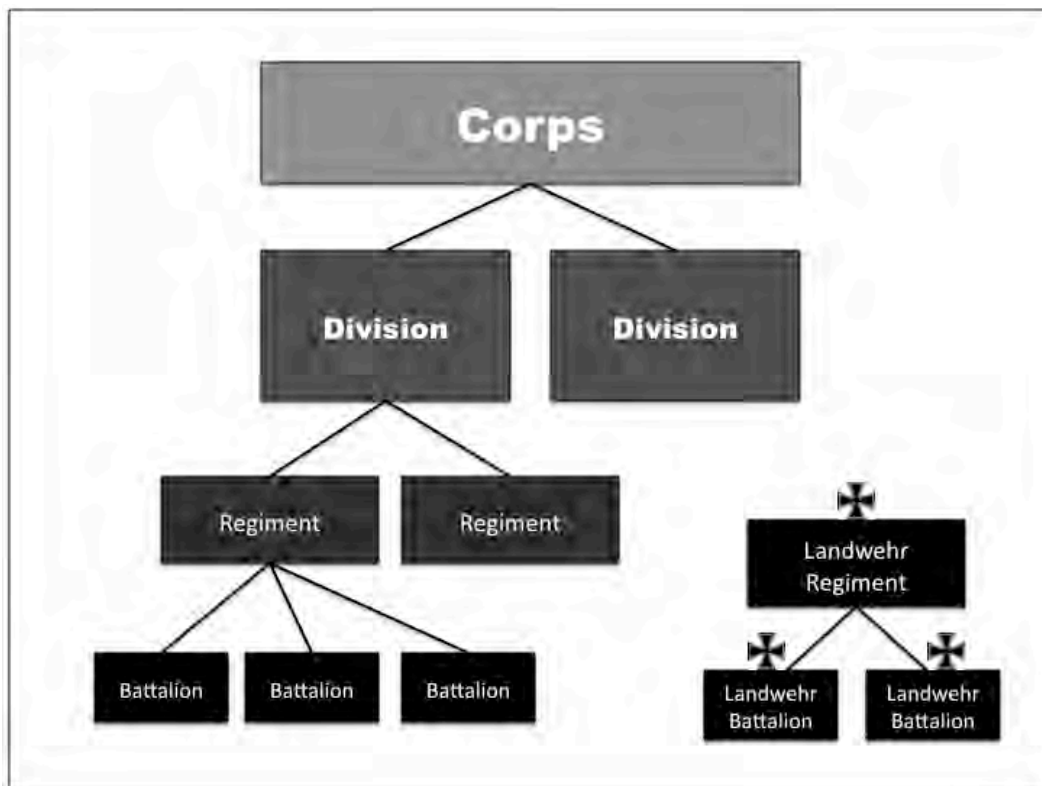


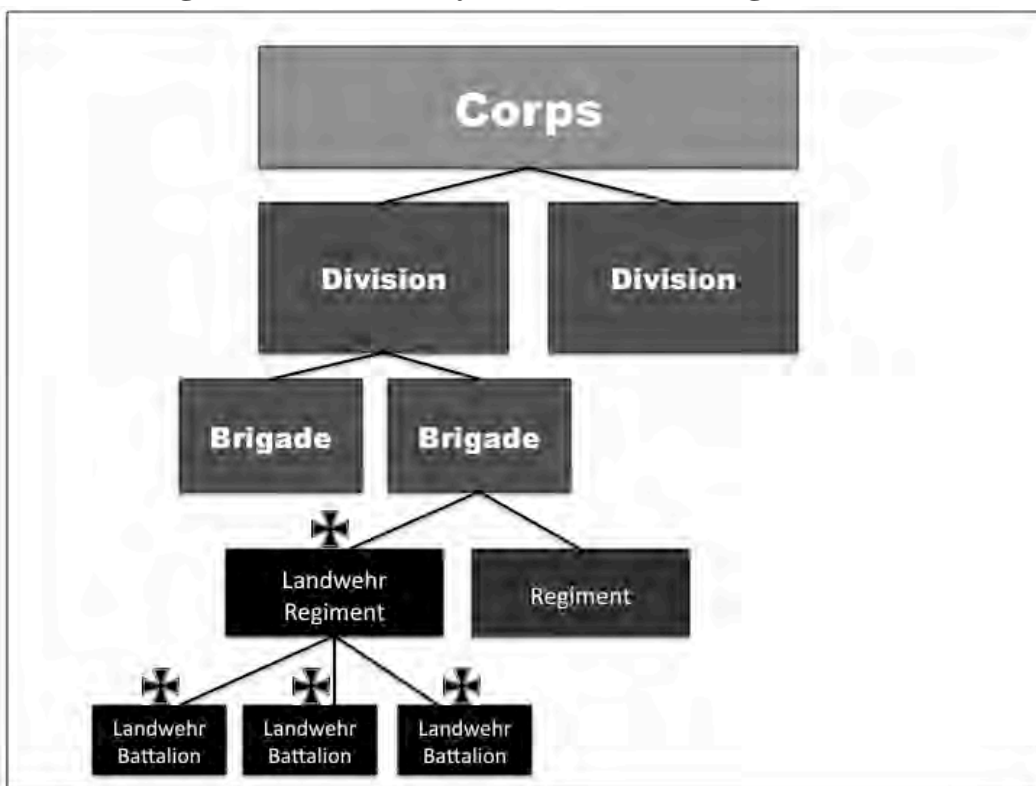
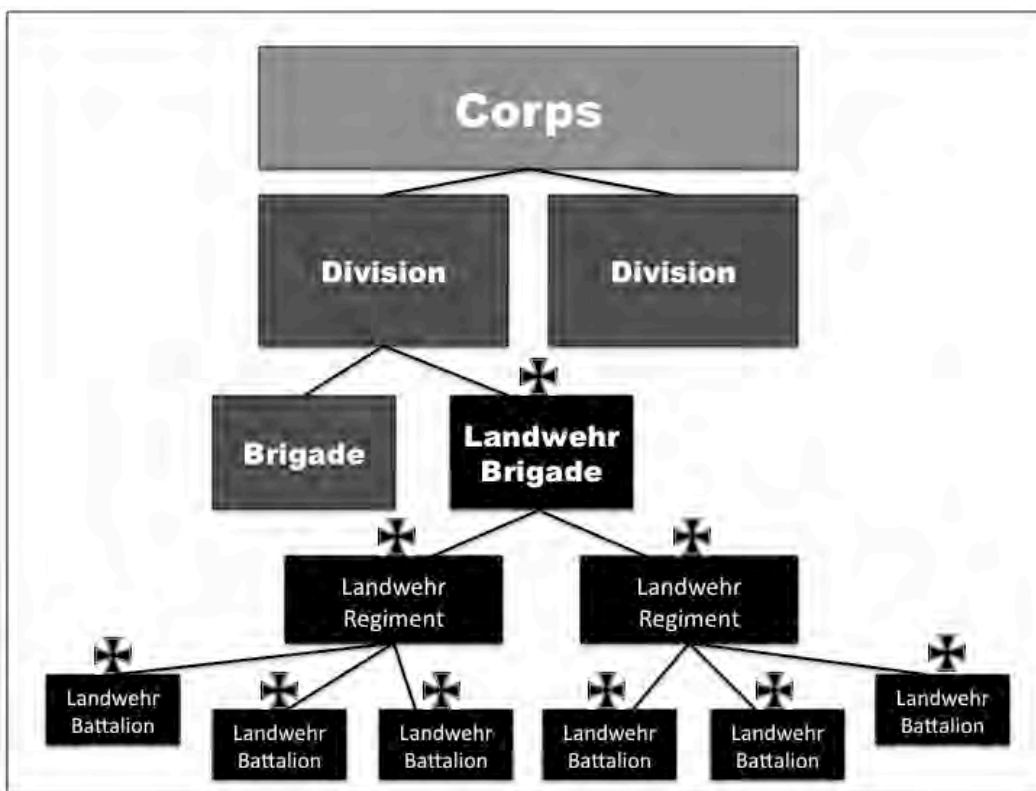
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**Frederick William III
(1770-1840)**



**Baron vom Stein
(1757-1831)**



**K. A. von Hardenberg
(1750-1822)**



**G. von Scharnhorst
(1755-1813)**



**A. N. von Gneisenau
(1760-1831)**



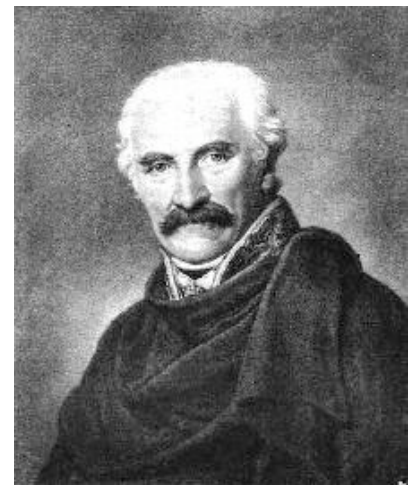
**Hermann von Boyen
(1771-1848)**



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(1759-1830)**



**F. W. von Bülow
(1755-1816)**



**G. L. von Blücher
(1742-1819)**

Introduction

“Prussia was hatched from a cannonball,”¹ claimed Napoleon, according to legend.

Whether or not the French Emperor actually said this, the statement is certainly true. In the early eighteenth century, Frederick the Great turned Prussia’s small army into an effective fighting force. Through victories against much larger and powerful neighbors, Prussia reached the highest tier of European powers. This chapter of Prussian history would begin the rise of Prussian militarism, ending in 1945 with devastation and desolation throughout Germany. As a Prussian minister once observed, “Prussia was not a country with an army, but an army with a country.”²

I have always been interested in the Napoleonic Wars, not just the military aspects, but the political aspects as well. As a student of German history, I decided to focus on Prussia. I had been familiar with the great defeat at Jena-Auerstedt, but I never examined how it affected Prussia’s military and political establishments. I began to wonder: if Prussia is an army with a country, what happens to the country after its military has been totally defeated?

My question led me to the Prussian reform movement. Though there were many critical civil reforms during this period, which were certainly inspired by the defeat at Jena, I decided to focus on the military reforms by asking how the Prussian army would rebuild itself after the failure of the Frederician system. A faction of military reformers would lead the renewal of the Prussian army. Some of their efforts, despite the state’s shock at Jena and afterwards, were still difficult to implement. To many of the nobles and even the king himself, some of the reforms

¹ David Blackbourn, *History of Germany 1780-1918: The Long Nineteenth Century, Second Edition*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 17.

² *Ibid.*, 17.

were too idealistic. By 1813 Prussia was again at war and the greatest military reform became a reality: the Landwehr, or militia. Looking for patterns, I wondered how the idealistic Landwehr became a reality, what happened to the Landwehr after the war, and how did it affect Prussian history.

From Jena in 1806 to Königgrätz in 1866, the arguments for and against the Landwehr and its success as an institution of the kingdom fell along two lines: ideology – the philosophical debate over the role of people in the king's state and army – and pragmatic – doing what is most necessary and beneficial for the state regardless of ideology. Historians have also viewed the Landwehr generally along one path or the other. On one hand, many historians see the Landwehr simply in the light of the ideological conflict in early nineteenth century Prussia. The opening up of the traditional and professional army to middle class civilian-soldiers through the Landwehr became a threat to the conservative and aristocratic elite, who, in the view of these historians, were the main cause of the original Landwehr's demise. On the other hand, some historians have emphasized the Landwehr's military role. In their view, the Landwehr became necessary for Prussia's war effort from 1813 to 1815, but its decline soon after and throughout the nineteenth century provided evidence for the king and the state that the Landwehr was simply not militarily reliable. Though both viewpoints are credible, in this thesis I attempt to bring them together to show how ideology and pragmatism were both important in the rise and fall of the institution. Here I focus on the years 1813 to 1819, the beginning and end of the reformers' version of the Landwehr. After 1806 the reformers fruitlessly attempted to urge the king to allow the creation of an armed civilian force, but it was not until 1813 that the Landwehr would become a much needed and pragmatic addition to the Prussian army. By 1819, however, the

reformers and their version of the Landwehr would be defeated by the institution's shortcomings and ideological opponents.

Various sources were valuable in this study. I began with Christopher Clark's *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947*, which provided a well-written narrative on Prussian history, especially the reform movement. Both *Prussian Military Reforms, 1786-1813* by William Shanahan and *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement, 1807-1819* by Walter Simon were incredibly important during the early days of research for understanding the movement and its individual components. Three other secondary works were also very beneficial. Gordon Craig's *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* was especially useful when looking at the relationship between the military and the state. Michael Leggiere's *Napoleon and Berlin, The Franco-Prussian War in Northern Germany, 1813*, was not only a great narrative, but also a fantastic source of material, especially on the Army of Northern Germany and on the training and combat of its Landwehr regiments. Though many historians have viewed the Landwehr in its political context, Dennis Showalter looks at the Landwehr rather strictly in its military context in "The Prussian Landwehr and its Critics, 1813-1819."

A number of primary documents and sources were also essential and interesting because they provided insightful information about the Reform Era through the eyes of the reformers. Three works, each focusing on the most important reformers, were used extensively throughout the secondary sources: Karl Griewank's *Gneisenau: Ein Leben in Briefen*, Karl Linnebach's *Scharnhorsts Briefe*, and Friedrich Nippold's *Erinnerungen aus dem Leben des General-Feldmarschalls Hermann von Boyen*. In these sources, I saw the relationships among the reformers, their relationships with others, and their relationships to the reform movement. Two sources also supplied important documents of the era. Adalbert Bezzenberger's 1894 collection

of documents from East Prussia provided the law establishing the Landwehr in that region, and Georg Eckert's *Von Valmy bis Leipzig: Quellen und Dokumente zur Geschichte der preussischen Heeresreform* was certainly useful, even though I did not discover it until late in my research.

I begin Chapter 1 with the great catalyst for change in Prussia: the Battle of Jena-Auerstedt. This chapter, "The State's Path to the Nation's War," chronicles the years between 1806 and 1813. Throughout these years, I show how the State (the king and his ministers) tries to rebuild and reform after Jena-Auerstedt, while the Nation (the people) show that they want revenge, ultimately leading to the War of Liberation in 1813. Just as German historian Thomas Nipperdey commences the text of his book on German history, my first section is titled "In the beginning there was Napoleon, 1806-1808." Here I detail the developments leading towards 1806 and the immediate aftermath of Jena, including the rise of the military reformers and the reform movement in general. After Jena, many Prussians were apathetic towards the defeat and the kingdom's situation, but by 1813 there was a significant increase in patriotism, especially amongst the middle class. The next section, "Yearning for Revenge, 1809-1812" describes the events which led to a yearning for revenge against the French and a growth in nationalism. The Prussian king refused to bring his kingdom into conflict with the French and even allowed Prussian troops to be used in the invasion of Russia, much to the anger of the military. As Napoleon's defeated army stumbled westward into Prussia, the leader of the Prussian troops in Russia essentially defected to the Russians, taking his Prussian troops with him. In the kingdom's easternmost region of East Prussia, the general and the regional government created the first Landwehr and prepared itself for war against France, which angered and embarrassed the king who sarcastically asked if the general had become the 'King of the Burghers,' after which this section is titled. The general's action consequently set the kingdom on a path to war,

which the king was not able to avoid. By March the king declared war and appealed to his people in a declaration titled, “To My People.”

In Chapter 2, “Pragmatism vs. Ideology, 1813,” I look at the ideological and pragmatic arguments concerning the Landwehr in the first year of the War of Liberation. On March 17, 1813, the king decreed the creation of the Landwehr throughout the kingdom by volunteerism, then conscription. In “The Troubled Formation of the Landwehr, Spring 1813,” I look at the early problems of the Landwehr, despite the high hopes of the reformers. Though a large arming of the middle class was not popular with the traditional political and military elites, Prussia was at war and needed men to supplement its small army. While there were problems with the Landwehr in the early months, the reformers were able to get the king to issue a decree creating the Landsturm, in which every male in a locality would be called to fight if the enemy was threatening. To the elites, this posed too great a threat to society if it became an unruly mob. Despite the intentions of the reformers, the Landsturm was more ideological and less practical than the Landwehr, thus it was severely curtailed, as I note in the section “The Landsturm – A Degree Too Ideological.” Despite the early problems of the Landwehr, an armistice between Napoleon and the Allies allowed the Prussians to rethink their strategy and better train and prepare their army. In “Pragmatic for King and Fatherland, Summer 1813,” I show how the Landwehr became practical for the Prussian war effort. The demand for more men in the regular army resulted in the Landwehr taking up an active combat role. Because the Landwehr was incorporated into the army’s administration, the Landwehr men were better supplied and trained, thus their quality generally improved. The majority of the Landwehr did not end up in the field army, but kept their original auxiliary role of guarding communications and blockading or besieging enemy-occupied fortresses. The availability of the Landwehr men for this job allowed

more regular troops to fight in the field army. In the final section of the chapter, titled “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly, Fall 1813,” I highlight the role of the Landwehr in the fall campaign in Saxony. Though the Landwehr provided numbers, the Landwehr men greatly varied in quality. Though there were desertions, there were also instances where the Landwehr showed itself to be just as good as the regular army. After the victory at Leipzig, Prussia was liberated.

I continue to look at the Landwehr in the post-war years in Chapter 3, “Ideology vs. Pragmatism, 1814-1819.” Though the war ended and the call for men ended, the reformers institutionalized the Landwehr through universal military service in 1814, as I describe in “The Happy Union, 1814-1815.” Compulsory military service was very unpopular with multiple segments of society and for multiple reasons, which I highlight in the next section, “An Instrument of Revolution, 1815-1819.” Throughout these years, the ideological arguments against the Landwehr increased because it was too revolutionary in a time when conservatives were trying to turn the clock back to before the French Revolution. Though many historians and I see this as a reason that the Landwehr failed, the Landwehr itself also did not maintain its military value. Prussia certainly needed to maintain a large army after the war, but the state wanted one that was reliable and highly disciplined. Many in the military and government saw the Landwehr as having neither quality. The thrill of the war against the French was gone, thus the Landwehr men were more interested in the responsibilities of daily life, and there were problems in obtaining good Landwehr officers. In “The End of ‘Separate but Equal,’ 1819” I recount how the reformers were finally eliminated from the government in 1819, and how the Landwehr was brought closer under the control of the regular army, though it still retained its identity. Though this was the end of the reform period and the end of the reformers’ Landwehr,

the debate over the institution would continue. With the growth of liberalism in Europe and Prussia, the Landwehr began to be seen as a means for keeping a civilian aspect to the army and diluting the influence of the conservative aristocrats. This was unacceptable to the conservative military leaders who essentially ended the Landwehr by greatly decreasing it and using the remainder for auxiliary purposes, as was its original purpose in 1813.

In the conclusion, I argue that though the Landwehr was a pragmatic institution during the height of the war, it did not maintain that practicality, thus becoming a greater target in the ideological struggle. The reformers had seen the Landwehr not just as a military organization, but as a 'school for the nation,' in which citizen-soldiers would become involved in the political affairs of the state. Though the Landwehr provided a powerful image for German nationalists and liberals in later years, the military, a highly disciplined top-down organization, was not a practical vehicle for producing civic engagement.

Chapter 1: The State's Path to the Nation's War

The military reforms implemented in 1813 could not have happened without the great catalyst of 1806: the utter defeat of the old Frederician army at Jena and Auerstedt. The defeat shook the kingdom's political order and allowed reformers to obtain positions of power. Though some of their reforms were put into effect, King Frederick William III prevented the implementation of the reformers' most desired reforms, notably universal military service and a militia. In this chapter I examine how the State (the king and his ministers) determined the path to what would become known as the Nation's (people's) war. After the disaster of 1806, military reformers were able to gain positions of power and attempted to renew Prussia's military through substantial and transformative changes. From 1809 to 1812, Napoleon's dominance in Prussian affairs led to an increase in patriotism in Prussia. Although there were opportunities for the state to oppose Napoleon or go to war with France again, the king remained a reluctant French ally. After Napoleon's disastrous campaign in Russia, the insubordinate actions of General Yorck and the representatives of East Prussia would force the king into the inevitable war he had hoped to avoid. By March, not only was the State at war, but also the Nation. The events of 1806 to March 1813 would climax with the declaration of war against France and the creation of the national militia, the Landwehr.

In the beginning there was Napoleon,¹ 1806-1807

The Kingdom of Prussia could not avoid the French Revolution and the eventual rise of the ambitious and aggressive Napoleon. Beginning with the Treaty of Basel in 1795, the court at Berlin favored a policy of neutrality, and this policy continued under the reign of Frederick William III, who became the king of Prussia in 1797. Despite Prussian hopes to avoid war, it became more and more difficult for the proud and militaristic kingdom to uphold its neutrality policy. In 1803, Napoleon invaded the region of Hannover, ruled by the monarch of England, ending Prussia's aspiration to be the leader of a neutrality zone in northern Germany. In 1804, Napoleon ordered the arrest of a British envoy in Hamburg who was protected by Frederick William III. This incident, known as the Rumbold Crisis, violated Prussia's neutrality and angered the court at Berlin. Further angering the Prussians, French troops, marching in 1805 to face the Austro-Russian alliance, passed through the neutral Prussian territory of Ansbach. It became clear that neutrality was no longer a functional policy.

Prussia's most serious problem was its geographic location between France and Russia. As the neutrality policy was failing, ministers, advisors, and close friends began pushing Frederick William to seek an alliance with France or Russia. The fear of Russian domination gave way to anti-French feelings as Prussia's neutrality was violated. A Prussian envoy was sent to deliver an ultimatum to Napoleon, but the envoy arrived after Napoleon had decisively defeated the Austro-Russian army at Austerlitz. Instead of an ultimatum, the envoy offered an alliance. In the Treaty of Schönbrunn on December 15, 1805, Prussia would get Hanover in exchange for refusing to trade with Great Britain. Though Frederick William approved this

¹ Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1800-1866*, (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1983), 11.

policy, he sent the pro-Russian Karl August von Hardenberg as a diplomat to Russia to begin secretly negotiating for an alliance, though the Russians were still recovering from the defeat at Austerlitz. Baron vom Stein, a minister in Berlin and an Anglophile, did not like the policy of neutrality, which he saw as forsaking the German lands to the French. He believed that the internal rivalry between bureaucrats, advisors, and friends of the king prevented Prussia from developing good domestic and foreign policies, such as the neutrality policy. Though Napoleon had promised the region of Hanover to the Prussians, it became known in August 1806 that Napoleon was looking to trade Hanover back to the British without the consultation or consent of the Prussians. As more resentment against France grew, Hardenberg, Stein, and Queen Louise became the leaders of the war party in Berlin. Though an alliance with Russia was established, its troops were not ready for a war in central Europe. Prussia forced its rival neighbor Saxony into an alliance, but the Saxon army was not a great military asset. Napoleon knew he needed to defeat the Prusso-Saxon army before the Russians arrived. By the time Napoleon responded to a letter of demands from Frederick William, French troops were already crossing into Prussia.

The Prussian army that Napoleon faced had not changed much since the time of Frederick the Great. Frederick's military genius and personal ambition had put Prussia into the top tier of European powers, but the revolutionary spirit and tactics of France's *Grand Armée* were to make this fighting force far superior to Prussia's. Napoleon had divided the French army into corps, consisting of multiple divisions that could act and function independently. The Prussian army's organization and emphasis on discipline discouraged commanders from personal initiative. A majority of the Prussian officers had served under Frederick the Great and were over 50 years old, whereas the French commanders and marshals were relatively young and energetic. The Frederician army was also based on Prussia's hierarchical social structure. The

rank and file soldiers were the peasants who tilled the soil. The commanders were traditionally and by privilege the nobility, who often commanded their own peasants on the field. The middle class and townspeople were exempt from military service. The French army had been purged of its aristocratic officers during the Revolution, and they had been replaced with energetic and talented men, such as Napoleon and many of the men he would promote to the rank of marshal. The rank and file was composed of the citizens of France, conscripted through the *levée en masse*. The French army was very mobile by living off the land for supplies and food, while the Prussians retained long baggage and supply trains.

The old Frederician army would not be able to stand up to the Napoleon's modern *Grand Armée*. On October 14, 1806, Napoleon began his attack from Jena in which he hoped to encircle and destroy the Prussians. Using four corps (75,000 men), he crushed the Prussian force under General Hohenlohe (47,000 men), which actually turned out to be the flank guard of the main army. The Emperor believed he was engaging the main body of the Prussian army, but Frederick William and his generals had decided to pull back the army northwards on the morning of the battle. During the march, the advance guard of the Prussian army encountered the advance guard of the French III Corps under Marshal Nicholas Davout northeast of Auerstedt. Davout and his corps held off a force twice its size. With his officers being killed and wounded and troops fleeing from the defeat at Jena, Frederick William ordered a retreat to Weimar. The retreat disintegrated into a rout, and the Prussian army ceased to be an effective fighting body.

Intact fragments of the Prussian army retreated, but swiftly capitulated on the field and in fortresses to the pursuing French corps. After only three weeks of fighting, Napoleon entered Berlin. With the Emperor refusing to make peace, Frederick William and the court fled to Königsberg in East Prussia, the easternmost province of the kingdom. By 1807, Napoleon was

engaging Prussia's Russian allies in East Prussia at the battles of Eylau and Friedland. Meeting on an elaborate raft on the Memel River, Tsar Alexander I and Napoleon signed the Treaty of Tilsit. Napoleon wanted to cease the existence of the Prussian state, but Alexander persuaded the Emperor to allow the Hohenzollerns to maintain their throne. In the peace treaty between Prussia and France, signed on July 9, 1807, the kingdom was reduced to the size it was in 1772 and had to give up all of its older territories west of the Elbe River. Prussia had lost some of her most productive areas, and her economy was ruined by the movement of hungry armies and forced monetary contributions to France. The once proud Prussia of Frederick the Great was now reduced to a reluctant ally of Napoleon's empire.

The military had played such a fundamental role in Prussia's development that with its utter defeat "a question mark hung over the political order of Old Prussia."² Thus Frederick William turned his attention towards military reform. The king had toyed with the idea of military reforms before 1806, but felt that the old, experienced military commanders would scorn his ideas. Now the army's defeat gave him the opportunity that he did not have before. He established the Military Reorganization Commission in the summer of 1807 and gave its members his recommendations for reform. First and foremost, the commission was to punish those officers whose conduct was improper during the war. The king also listed other reforms: ending foreign recruiting, opening officer positions to non-nobles, and other specific changes to military organization, fighting, and logistics. The Commission was composed of pro-reform officers and those officers who were generally anti-reform. Gerhard von Scharnhorst, the leader of the reformers and chairman of the commission, became embroiled in a very personal dispute with the conservative General von Borstell, who believed that Scharnhorst did not have the

² Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2006), 310.

authority to reject the suggestions of individual commission members. Frederick William removed Borstell from the commission, and eventually the other conservative members of the commission were replaced with reformers who supported Scharnhorst's ideas (See Image 2). Since Frederick William sided with Scharnhorst and the reformers, the Borstell episode became "the turning point not only for Scharnhorst's career but for the course of the military reforms as well."³

In a state where the Prussian nobility traditionally held significant power, the reformers, coming from different states and social levels, would rival the power and influence of the conservative Prussian nobility. They would work together to advocate changes that would not only alter the character of the Prussian military, but also increase the involvement of the Prussian people in the affairs of the state. The leader of the military reformers, the studious and reserved Gerhard von Scharnhorst, was born a Hanoverian peasant, rose through the ranks, and became a well-known military writer and scholar. He was given a patent of nobility when he joined the Prussian army in 1801. He served with distinction as a staff officer during the campaign of 1806 and the East Prussian campaign of 1807. August Wilhelm Neidhardt von Gneisenau followed his Saxon father's military career and became a mercenary, serving Austria in the War of Bavarian Succession and then the British in Canada during the American Revolution, where he developed his reformist ideas. He joined the Prussian army in 1786 and was given the task of training new troops. After participating in the Battle of Jena as a staff officer, Gneisenau gained notoriety for stubbornly leading the defense of the fortress of Kolberg while many other commanders were surrendering fortresses without firing a shot. Hermann von Boyen was the son of an East Prussian officer, joined the military, and attended the lectures of Immanuel Kant

³ William O. Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms 1786-1813* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 127.

in Königsberg. Serving as a staff officer during the 1806 campaign, he was wounded at Auerstedt and joined the Military Reorganization Commission after the war.

At the heart of the whole Prussian reform movement was the desire to connect the Nation and the State by turning the ignorant and indifferent subjects into educated and involved citizens. Stein and Hardenberg led the fight for civil reforms – such as abolishing serfdom, giving self-governance to towns, loosening restrictions on Jews, and creating a modern education system. Their ultimate and most ambitious goal was to produce a constitution with some form of an elected assembly to involve the Nation in the affairs of state.

As part of the overall goal of the reform movement, the military reformers advocated using military service as a vehicle for bringing the State and Nation together. The Prussian army's defeat in 1806 exposed the alarming apathy that the Prussian people maintained towards the state. The military reformers recognized the need for technological and tactical improvements, but they “clearly recognized the deeper causes of Prussia's collapse – the gulf which existed between the state machine and the Prussian people, which made it impossible for the people to identify themselves with their government and which deprived the state of popular support in time of crisis.”⁴ Their reforms focused on turning harshly disciplined and robotic soldiers of the king into patriotic and idealistic fighters of the nation, a model the *Grand Armée* had shown to be effective. The reforms which would make this goal possible would be opening the officer corps to men of talent, reforming the education system, implementing universal military service, and ending the harsh disciplinary tactics of the Frederician army.

The Prussian people, who looked down on the military profession, viewed the officer corps as the cause of the 1806-07 disasters. Frederick William was open towards reform in the

⁴ Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 38.

officer corps because he was upset with his commanders over the 1806 defeat. The reformers believed that officer positions needed to be open to men of talent and not solely men of noble birth, such as a number of the reformers themselves. Karl von Grolman, a general from Berlin and commission member put in charge of reforming the promotion system, wrote, “In order to fight, it is not necessary to belong to a special class. The melancholy belief that one must belong to a special class in order to defend the fatherland has done much to plunge it into the present abyss, and only the opposite principle can pull it out again.”⁵ The conservative nobles opposed this idea, believing that the officer corps was not responsible for the failures of 1806-07 and that non-nobles would not have the ability to lead peasants in battle or appreciate the honor of military service to the king. Nevertheless, an order was issued on 6 August 1808 that opened up the officer corps to any subject of the kingdom through examinations of knowledge in peacetime and courage and ability during war.

Since Prussia was at that time unlikely to declare war, the reformers advocated better military education to prepare potential officers for the examinations. They sought to achieve this by standardizing the curriculum and reorganizing the academies. The erudite Scharnhorst, who had been in charge of the Academy for Officers, designed the program that was not approved until May 3, 1810. William Shanahan asserts that “since the average subject could not fulfill these requirements, the new law did not greatly alter the social composition of the officers’ corps,” and until 1813 there was no need for enlarging an officer corps for an army that was decreasing its strength.⁶ Though the opening of officer positions through examination was not an immediate success, it laid the groundwork for a new post-Frederician officer corps. When

⁵ E. von Conrady, *Leben und Wirken des Generals Carl von Grolman*; quoted in Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army*, 43.

⁶ Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 131-132.

Prussia once again declared war on France in 1813, there would certainly be opportunities for talent-based leadership.

The desire and implementation of a talent-based officer corps was assisted by the purge of the disgraced officers from the disastrous battles and capitulations of 1806-07, the main duty the king gave to the Military Reorganization Commission. In November 1807, the king formed the Superior Investigating Commission to examine each capitulation and decide if the officers involved were guilty of not upholding their honor and oaths to the crown. The reformers were glad they could focus on improving the army and not lead the public spectacle of officer trials, which lasted until 1814 because there was a lack of witnesses and evidence. Every commander that capitulated was found guilty except for Gebhard von Blücher, who had continued to fight the French until his troops' food and ammunition were exhausted. Of the at least 6,500 officers who took part in the 1806 campaign, only 208 officers were found guilty and 4,933 officers retired from the army or were furloughed.⁷ With the rapid expansion of the army in 1813, officers that had once served in the 1806 campaign were needed and called back into service to lead raw troops. The result was that over half the officers in the glorious 1813-1815 campaign were officers in the disastrous 1806-1807 campaign.

Though opening up the officer corps was an important step in reforming the army, the heart of the reform program was universal military service. Since the goal of the reform movement was to connect the State and the Nation, the military was the state's most obvious vehicle in which every male subject could participate. This became the most contentious issue of the reform program for multiple areas of society, because, as Peter Paret points out, "extending the obligation for military service to all classes . . . not only meant a total change in the basis of

⁷ Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 107-108.

Prussia's military institutions, but would profoundly interfere with the economic, social, and political customs of the country.”⁸ There was much disagreement about how universal service could be implemented, but the commission eventually proposed specifics for the new military structure through memorandums.

Recruiting soldiers for the Prussian army was based on the canton system first implemented in 1733. Cantons, or recruiting districts, would supply new recruits to its designated local regiment. Though exemptions were technically not allowed during the Frederician era, in practice the bourgeoisie and the wealthier peasants could afford to be exempted. The result of this system was that the soldiers were recruited from the poor peasants. Since the military was based on the social-agrarian structure, the peasant-soldier received the same harsh discipline in the military as he did on the estate. The desire for subordination and discipline led to a common policy of the officers “to produce a soldier who would ‘have more fear of [his] officer than of the enemy.’”⁹ The necessity of peasant labor on the kingdom's estates often posed a problem for the king when he needed soldiers. Frederick the Great tried to alleviate this problem by recruiting foreigners, but foreign recruiting stopped after 1807 through the reduction in the army, the financial crisis, and the king and military reformers' own desire.

Before the military reformers could propose the elimination of exemptions, they knew they had to make the military's punishments more humane if they wanted the bourgeoisie to accept military service. According to Scharnhorst, “A universal conscription . . . could not be combined with the existing caning system. Military life must be made more agreeable to the

⁸ Peter Paret, *Yorck and the Era of Prussian Reform, 1807-1815* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 133.

⁹ Otto Büsch, *Military System and Social Life in Old Regime Prussia, 1713-1807* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), 23.

nation by removing its hateful aspects.”¹⁰ The middle class would not want to be subjected to punishments, such as running the gauntlet, which they considered appropriate for serfs and foreigners. On August 3, 1808, the new Articles of War contained a more lax punishment policy. Running the gauntlet and whipping would be prohibited, and serious crimes would be punished with imprisonment.

Included in these articles was the announcement that “in the future every subject of the state, without regard for birth, will be obliged to do military service under conditions of time and circumstance still to be determined.”¹¹ This open-ended promise was the furthest Frederick William would go in implementing universal service until 1813. The commission had officially recommended universal service to the king on 15 March 1808; and by December, they specified their recommendation, including the proposal for the creation of a militia. The king refused their recommendations, especially the militia, which he saw as a potential danger to the state. By late 1808, the reformers faced more difficulties. To help prevent a threat to his dominance in central Europe as he meddled in Spain, Napoleon forced Prussia to limit its army to 42,000 men and forbade them from instituting conscription or a militia. Frederick William now had another reason to refuse the reformers’ request for a militia and universal military service.

One of Stein’s last acts was to create ministries responsible to the king.¹² In July of 1808, the Military Reorganization Commission would come to an end and be replaced by the War Ministry, which consisted of the War Department headed by Scharnhorst and the Military Economy Department headed by the conservative Count Lottum. Frederick William wanted to

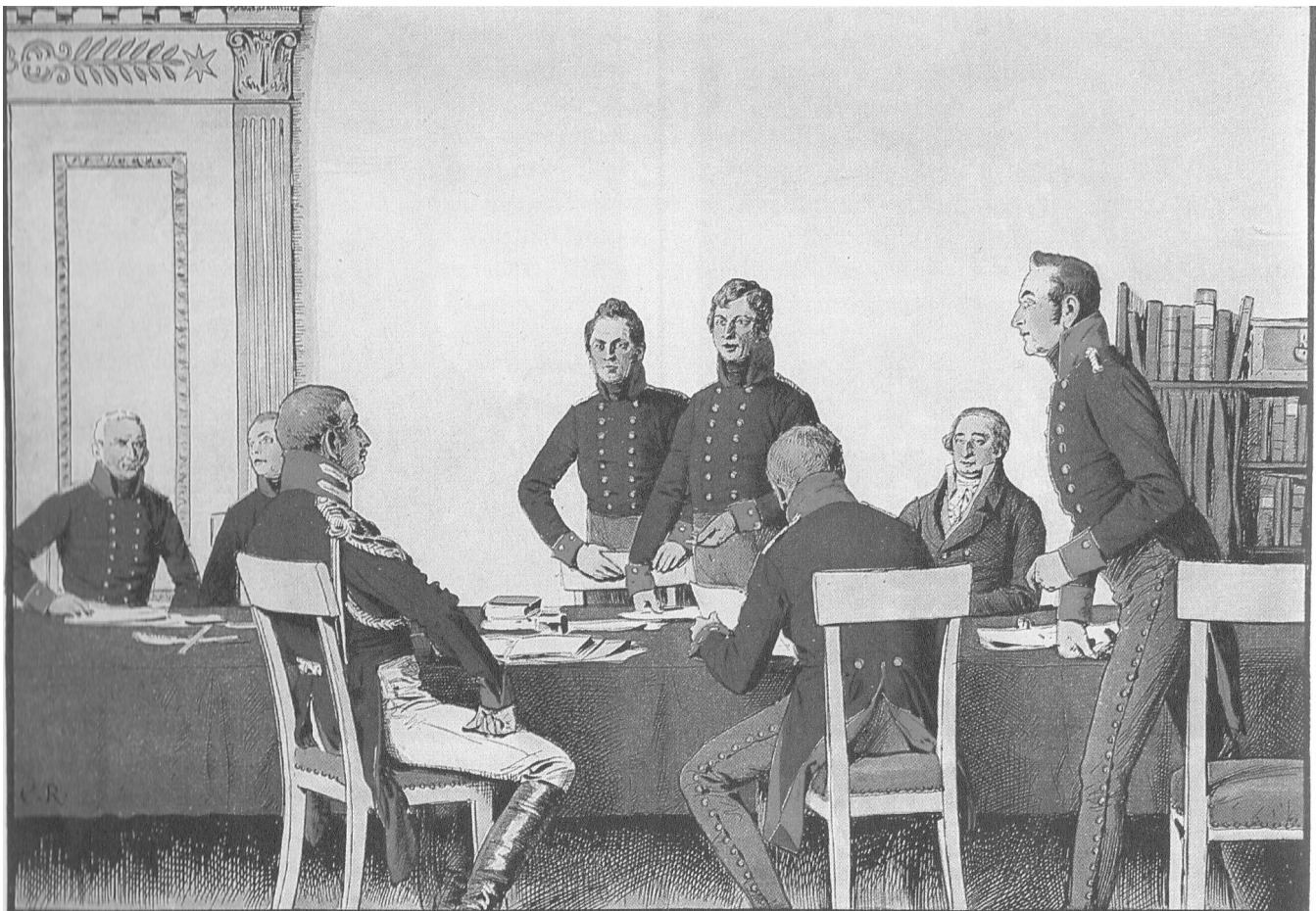
¹⁰ Scharnhorst to Stein, 3 July 1808; quoted in Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 137.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹² The military reformers lost their most consistent and influential supporter in November 1808, when Napoleon forced Stein’s dismissal and declared him an outlaw. Stein, who Napoleon saw as a threat for his anti-French and anti-Napoleon views, would flee to Austria then offer his services to the czar of Russia.

maintain the king's sole right to command the army, and made both Scharnhorst and Lottum equal in rank to show that he was not favoring one side over the other.

Though conflict between the reformers and the conservatives would persist, the defeat at Jena and Auerstedt had convinced the king that things needed to change. He thus offered the reformers the opportunity to propose and implement their ideas, but after 1807, Frederick William became less enthusiastic about reform. The reformers would have to endure more years of the king's indecisiveness and stubbornness before universal military service and the militia, the core of the reform program, could become reality.



Boyen

King Frederick William III

Gneisenau

Scharnhorst

Stein

Image 2: A Meeting of the Military Reorganization Commission

Yearning for Revenge, 1809-1812

The humiliating defeats in 1806 had left the Prussian military seeking revenge, but the reluctant and cautious Prussian king would seek to maintain the peace and existence of his kingdom for as long as he could. Unable to create a militia or expand the size of the army, the reformers considered the idea of a national revolt, even outside the parameters of the army, in order to prepare Prussia for a future war. Gneisenau believed that an uprising of the people was the only way to liberate Prussia from the French, and thus be able to obtain political reforms. Scharnhorst was supportive of a national revolt, but more cautious, hoping to strengthen the current military and retain the support of Frederick William. By 1811 the reformers believed that the army supported by a revolt of the people was the best option for any renewed war against the French, but the king flatly refused to endorse such an option.¹³ Despite several opportunities for revenge and some examples of popular revolts in the years after 1806, Frederick William would not bring the State and Nation to war.

In 1807 and 1808, Napoleon attempted to conquer Portugal and Spain. The Spanish royal family was removed from power and fled, and the French Emperor made his brother King of Spain. Although the Spanish regular army was easily defeated, the Spanish people rose up and began a guerilla war against the French invaders. News of the Spanish atrocities against the French troops and of several French military setbacks were happily received in central Europe. In the Tyrol, a region of Austria that Napoleon had given to his Bavarian ally, wine merchant Andreas Hofer led a successful revolt against the Bavarian occupiers. Encouraged by the French

¹³ Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 186-188.

quagmire on the Iberian peninsula, Austria decided to go to war with Napoleon once again in April 1809, and called on all Germans to help drive back Napoleon across the Rhine.

Austria sought the support of its traditional German rival, but Frederick William refused to participate, much to the irritation of many Prussians. As the provincial president of Brandenburg reported, “The general mood is that now or never is the moment when salvation from dependence and subjection is possible.”¹⁴ The king’s court split into pro-war and anti-war factions, and government officials reported that the army’s officers were impatient and agitated for war. At the end of April 1809, Major Ferdinand von Schill, a well-known Prussian officer, left Berlin with about 500 renegade Prussian cavalymen to lead an insurrection against the French in Westphalia. On May 31 he was killed by Danish and Dutch troops allied to Napoleon, and Frederick William, humiliated by the insubordination and concerned about the French response, condemned Schill’s actions. On July 6, the Austrians were defeated at the Battle of Wagram. Despite the Austrian victory at Aspern-Essling before Wagram, Frederick William would not budge on his position. General Blücher, an advocate of war, asked Frederick William, “Why should we believe ourselves inferior to the Spaniards and the Tyroleans? We are better equipped than they!”¹⁵ Frustrated by the king’s position, Blücher returned to his headquarters in Pomerania. Gneisenau resigned from the army, but became a Prussian agent in London and St. Petersburg. Scharnhorst, who had supported joining Austria, was forced to resign as head of the War Department by Napoleon, but still stayed connected to the military.

Although the Prussian military would have to miss this opportunity to fight, there would be more disappointment for the military and the king. On her deathbed in 1810, Queen Louise lamented Prussia’s situation:

¹⁴ Johann August Sack to Interior Minister Dohna, 15 April 1809; Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 345.

¹⁵ Blücher to Frederick William, 9 October 1809; *Ibid.*, 350.

Divine providence ushers in a new age, and there will be a different order of things, for the old has outlived itself . . . We went to sleep on the laurels of Frederick the Great who, master of his century, created a new age. We have not progressed with it and it has passed us by . . . It is abundantly clear that everything that has happened and is happening . . . is only the beginning of the road to a better goal. But this goal seems to lie in the remote distance; we shall apparently not live to reach it.¹⁶

The events of the next couple of years would certainly make the ‘better goal’ seem far away.

The king was absolutely devastated and depressed over the death of his wife, and his personal mood affected the business of the state. He lost faith in the military reformers and even seems to show some annoyance towards Gneisenau. When it appeared that France and Russia might go to war in the summer of 1811, Gneisenau sent the king a letter asking him to support calling his people to fight if war would develop, to which Frederick William wrote in the margins, “Nobody would come!” and “Good – as poetry!”¹⁷ Perturbed, Gneisenau wrote back that “Religion, prayer, love of one’s ruler, love of the fatherland – these things are nothing else than poetry . . . Upon poetry is founded the security of the throne.”¹⁸

While the reformers were pushing for the creation of a ‘peoples’ war’ within the government, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn was preparing for it by founding the *Turnbewegung* (gymnasts’ movement) in 1811 near Berlin. The goal was to train young men for the coming national war, but the movement had an “anti-military dimension.”¹⁹ The men, as citizen-soldiers, did not adhere to military traditions, such as marching, which “killed the autonomous will and was intended to degrade the individual to the mere tool of higher authority.”²⁰ The gymnasts walked, wore loose fitting uniforms, and referred to each other in the informal ‘du’ as a

¹⁶ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 56.

¹⁷ Ibid., 56.

¹⁸ Ibid., 56-57.

¹⁹ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 352.

²⁰ Ibid., 352.

sign of equality. At what would essentially be gymnastic shows, the movement attracted crowds of spectators, and Jahn became known as “*Turnvater* (father of gymnastics) Jahn.”

By the fall of 1811, Napoleon demanded that Prussia enter into a military alliance with France. The military reformers and even Hardenberg, who had been sitting on the fence, supported rejecting the demand, especially because Russia offered its support, but Frederick William chose to accept Napoleon’s demand in November. This decision led to a new treaty, which was ratified by the Prussian king on March 5, 1812 as French troops stood on the Prussian border. According to the treaty, Prussia was to supply Napoleon 20,000 troops if France went to war with Russia, only Napoleon would be able to call for the mobilization of Prussian troops, and French troops would reoccupy Prussia. The Prussian military was absolutely shocked and humiliated, especially the military reformers, who had struggled to build a revitalized army. Karl von Clausewitz, military reformer and pupil of Scharnhorst, left the Prussian army and declared, “I believe, I must confess, that the shameful blot of a cowardly capitulation is never wiped away; that this drop of poison in the blood of a people is transmitted to posterity and will cripple and undermine the energy of later generations.”²¹ Hermann von Boyen and Gerhard von Scharnhorst also quit their positions, along with 300 Prussian officers, nearly a fourth of the officer corps. Gneisenau grieved, “We shall receive the fate we deserve. We shall go down in shame, for we dare not conceal from ourselves the truth that a nation is as bad as its government. The king stands ever by the throne on which he has never sat.”²² Clearly the anger and frustration of the military had reached its tipping point.

²¹ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 58. Clausewitz would serve in the Russian army until 1813.

²² Michael Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin, The Franco-Prussian War in North Germany, 1813* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 25.

As Napoleon's *Grand Armée* launched its campaign into Russia on June 24, 1812, the French and Allied troops left the region and people of East Prussia without food and supplies. Napoleon's troops had taken as many horses as they could find, and had terrorized the population, leaving the people with "nothing but eyes to weep with in their misery," a Hanoverian diplomat observed.²³ After Napoleon and his troops reached Moscow in September, they found the Russian capital largely deserted and a fire soon spread, which destroyed two-thirds of the city. In October, Napoleon, who had received no Russian response to his peace offer, decided to march his troops westwards. Thousands and thousands of Napoleon's soldiers died from skirmishes, starvation, but especially from the brutal Russian winter. As a number of those who survived straggled back through Prussia, the president of East Prussia reported:

The lowest classes of the people and especially the peasants, permit themselves in their fanaticism [to commit] the most horrific mistreatment [towards] these unhappy wretches . . . in the villages and on the country roads, they vent all their rage against them . . . All obedience to the officials has ceased.²⁴

Just as the anger in the military had reached a tipping point, now ordinary peasants were acting out against the French.

Frederick William had kept his kingdom out of war between 1807 and the invasion of Russia because he feared that one more Prussian defeat such as Jena-Auerstedt would end the Prussian state, yet two important developments took place during these years. First, the military reformers were able to better develop their ideas. Second, the attitude of the Prussian people had generally changed since the apathy of 1806. Young people, intellectuals, the military, and even peasants in East Prussia were now yearning for revenge, and after Napoleon's Russian disaster, a new opportunity became available.

²³ Ludwig Ompteda to Münster, 26 June 1812; Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 356.

²⁴ Report from Theodor Schön, 21 December 1812; *Ibid.*, 357.

The King of the Burghers, January-February 1813

The events of early 1813 would finally bring about the most important reforms that the military reformers had sought to implement. It appeared to many that the time was finally ripe for action, but between two powerful and warring empires, any action would be militarily and politically difficult, especially for Frederick William. The initiative would not come from the cautious Prussian king or the persistent military reformers, but from a general who had been opposed to most military reforms.

Returning to France to raise a new army, Napoleon was determined to maintain his control of Europe. Napoleon ordered Frederick William on December 15, 1812 to increase the number of Prussian troops in anticipation of stopping the Russians. On December 24, Frederick William ordered General Friedrich Wilhelm von Bülow to form a reserve corps on the Vistula River. Bülow decided to move all of his men westwards to the Vistula and away from the French and Russians. Bülow did not want to assist the French and had proceeded to mobilize East Prussia by organizing troops and supplies so they could be protected from both the French and the Russians. The French were suspicious, so Bülow said that his corps was not fit for battle and that he was positioning supplies to keep them away from the Russians.²⁵ The order from December 24 also stated that General Yorck would be governor of East and West Prussia when he returned from Russia. General Hans David Ludwig von Yorck was in command of the 20,000 Prussian troops that Napoleon demanded to assist in the invasion of Russia, but it did not engage in any serious battles and did not go far into Russia. As the remnants of the *Grande Armée* withdrew into East Prussia, the Russians encouraged Yorck to defect. Having received no

²⁵ Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 29.

instructions from the king, Yorck was forced to meet with the Russians after they surrounded his corps. On December 30, Yorck signed the Convention of Tauroggen twenty-five miles east of the border with Prussia. This agreement, which was not approved by the king, neutralized the Prussian corps and allowed the Russians to pass unopposed. There was an immediate military effect. The French could have used Yorck's division to fight the Russians, but now they would have to withdraw across the Vistula, leaving the Russians able to move farther west.²⁶ Bülow was glad yet concerned about the unauthorized agreement because he had been successfully organizing troops and supplies without arousing French suspicion.²⁷ Unlike Yorck, Bülow did not want to publicly neutralize his Prussian corps and thus repudiate his obedience to Frederick William. Just like the king, Bülow remained an unenthusiastic and nominal ally of France and moved his troops farther westwards and away from any conflict.

If Bülow thought he was in a difficult position, Frederick William was certainly facing one of the most challenging diplomatic decisions of his reign. The Prussian king did not approve of Tauroggen and ordered Yorck to be replaced, arrested, and tried before a court-martial. He and other government officials in Berlin had not believed the reports that detailed the troubled state of the *Grand Armée* retreating from Russia. Frederick William still believed that Napoleon could easily come back, defeat the Russians, and reestablish the might of the French Empire. There was also the fear, just as during the years of diplomacy before Jena-Auerstedt, that dependence on Russia would be worse than dependence on France. Though Russians were invading the eastern half of the kingdom, French troops were stationed in fortresses between the Elbe and Oder Rivers and they were also occupying Berlin, further convincing Frederick William that any move against the French would be dangerous. The Prussian king knew that his

²⁶ Paret, *Yorck and the Era of Prussia Reform*, 192-193.

²⁷ Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 34-35.

kingdom was not militarily ready to turn against France, so he and his advisors sought to be a mediator between France and Russia. A proposed plan would have surprisingly given East Prussia to Russia in exchange for peace, showing how desperate Frederick William was to stay out of war.

Though Yorck only neutralized his corps, he was frustrated with his king and became an outspoken patriot for Prussia's liberation. Upon receiving the order for his dismissal, Yorck was infuriated and had had enough of his king's dithering because "the army wants war against France. The Nation wants it, the king wants it, but the king has no free will."²⁸ Claiming that he was acting "as a faithful servant [and] as a true Prussian," Yorck wrote to Bülow:

What are the views held in Berlin? Has [the king] already sunk so deep that he fears to break the chains of slavery, the chains that we have meekly carried out for five years? Now or never is the time to regain our freedom and honor.²⁹

The disobedient general broke his promise of neutrality and refused to step down as commander of his corps and as governor of East Prussia.

On January 8, 1813, Yorck entered Königsberg, the capital of East Prussia, the province most receptive to a war against the French. The region had hosted the Battles of Eylau and Friedland, the hundreds of thousands of soldiers of the *Grand Armée* preparing for the invasion of Russia, and now the Russians and French again. The constant marching and occupation of soldiers left the region and populace depleted of food, horses, and other resources. Though the East Prussians wanted to fight France, they worried about Russian intentions and supporting Yorck, who was legally a traitor to the king.³⁰ Yorck's corps was not strong enough for

²⁸ Rudolf Ibbeken, *Preussen 1807-1813, Staat und Volk als Idee und in Wirklichkeit*, (Köln: Grote, 1970), 379.

²⁹ Yorck to Bülow, 13 January 1813; quoted in Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 37.

³⁰ Paret, *Yorck & Era of Prussian Reform*, 194.

independent action, and possible recruits had gone westward with Bülow. If East Prussia was to defend itself from any French retaliation, troops were needed.

Baron vom Stein had gone to Russia in June of 1812 and had become Czar Alexander's chief advisor for German affairs. After the Russians occupied East Prussia, Alexander made Stein commissar to the province. The Prussian officials and conservatives, who had become familiar with Stein's efforts at reform, were uneasy about his arrival. Stein announced his first goal of raising troops, but this effort would require the participation of the region's leaders. There were questions over the legality of summoning the *Landtag* (parliament), since that authority was reserved for the king, so Stein decided to call an informal gathering of the leaders of the estates, i.e. the different segments of Prussian society, to discuss defense preparations. To draft an official military law, Stein relied on Count Alexander Dohna, the President of the Committee for the Estates of East Prussia and Lithuania and former minister of Prussia. Before the meeting, Stein called on Scharnhorst's former student Karl von Clausewitz, who was then also in Russian service, to assist Dohna with the specific details for raising a militia.

Though both men had differing views of reform, Stein and Yorck both saw the importance of raising a militia in East Prussia and worked together towards that goal. Yorck saw that this was the moment to wage war on Napoleon, and he desperately needed troops for such a task. Stein, who had always believed in German nationalism, saw the opportunity for Prussia to liberate the German lands from French rule. There was clearly a movement underway as East Prussians from various social levels followed the lead of two men, who before 1813 had been on opposite sides of the reform movement. As William Shanahan notes, "that a provincial Landtag

should be called together on command of men either in official disgrace or in the service of foreign governments was a novel element in Prussia history.”³¹

On February 5, the representatives of the provincial nobility, free peasants, and towns met in Königsberg to discuss the Dohna-Clausewitz plan. A junior officer in Yorck’s corps wrote home to his family that day:

Our king sits inactive in Berlin, he pays no attention at all to us here. But I hope General Yorck will act; he is also to assume the planning and organizing of the Landsturm. Everyone watches with high expectations. He is now our king, he concludes peace and makes war. There is already little love lost for our king; if he does not declare against France now, anything can be expected.”³²

Certainly Yorck’s defection had not been expected, and now the East Prussian estates would further pressure the king by calling up a militia, something Frederick William had refused and feared. Yorck declined Stein’s request to open the session, but agreed to make an appearance only if the assembly invited him. Despite being a defector to the king, Yorck was invited, gave an impassioned speech, and after a thunderous applause said, “I hope to fight the French wherever I find them. I count on everyone’s support; if their strength outweighs ours, we will know how to die with honor.”³³ (See Image 3)

The East Prussian estates ratified the militia program on February 7, 1813. The bill began with their rationale:

The experience of these times has displayed in the most striking manner that the freedom and independence of the state can be ideally furthered when an extraordinary army of the population (*Landesbewaffnung*) supplements a large and well-prepared standing army.³⁴

³¹ William Shanahan, *Prussia Military Reforms, 1786-1813*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 195.

³² Letter of E. v. Saucken-Tarputschen to his father, 5 February 1813; quoted in Paret, *Yorck and the Era of Prussian Reform*, 194-195.

³³ Yorck; quoted in Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 361.

³⁴ Adalbert Bezzenberger, *Urkunden des Provinzial-Archivs in Königsberg und des Gräfllich Dohnaschen Majorats-Archiv in Schlobitten, betreffend die Erhebung Ostpreussens im Jahre 1813 und die Errichtung der Landwehr*, (Königsberg: Rautenberg, 1894), 46. “Die Erfahrung der

The reformers had tried for years to get the king to call for a militia fashioned from the formerly exempted classes, and in about a month the East Prussian Landwehr (militia) would be the first formed. It would provide an example of success for the kingdom's Landwehr, which would be called up in March. The estates also approved the Landsturm, the summoning and arming of all local males when the enemy threatened their locality, but there was no specific plan for its implementation. Participation in the Landwehr was required of "all male citizens . . . 18 to 45 years old, without distinction of religion and faiths, with exception for the very frail, crippled, and the incurably sick."³⁵ The goal was to raise Landwehr infantry by calling for volunteers, and if there were not enough volunteers, men would be conscripted. Weapons would have to come from Russia or from those captured from the French. Landwehr men were required to wear a coat and headgear, which they would have to provide for themselves and which their battalion would have to make uniform by choosing a color and emblem.³⁶

Though the creation of an armed force composed of the formerly exempted classes was a victory for the reformers, two aspects of the East Prussian Landwehr were not consistent with the reform agenda. First, the East Prussians amended the Landwehr's purpose so that all units had to stay in the region as a purely provincial militia. Second, the East Prussians permitted substitutions for Landwehr service. Some of the bourgeoisie were not very enthusiastic about the Landwehr. The citizens of Königsberg and other towns wanted a special status in order to be

letzteren Zeiten hat auf die auffallendste Weise unwidersprechlich dargethan, dass die Freiheit und Selbstständigkeit der Staaten vorzüglich dadurch behauptet werden kann, wenn möglichst zahlreiche und vortrefliche stehende Heere von einer ausserordentlich Landesbewaffnung unterstützt werden."

³⁵ Bezenberger, *Urkunden*, 47. ". . . alle männliche Einwohner . . . von 18 bis 45 Jahren, ohne Unterschied der Religion und des Glaubens, mit Ausnahme der wirklichen Gebrechlichen, Krüppelhaften und unheilbar Kranken."

³⁶ Bezenberger, *Urkunden*, 48.

exempt. Seeing the loss of workers as a serious threat to the economy, they claimed that farmers would not be as affected since their work was seasonal.³⁷ Scharnhorst was reluctant to support the East Prussian Landwehr because it did not go far enough in making the force a true representation of the whole nation if it allowed substitutions. In his memoirs, Boyen defended his friend and fellow reformer against the idea that he was now opposed to the Landwehr:

[Scharnhorst] sometimes seemed to Count Dohna an enemy of the Landwehr, whereas on the contrary he was not only its real originator and defender, but sought, besides, to place it on a higher spiritual plane.³⁸

He reluctantly agreed to the substitutions in East Prussia because he was preparing a plan for a Prussian-wide Landwehr that would forbid substitutions and would overrule the East Prussian exemptions.³⁹ The East Prussian Landwehr, though not totally conforming to the reformers' agenda, at least provided a model for the rest of Prussia, one that was supported by the leaders of East Prussia.

Frederick William already had difficulties seeking a solution to the kingdom's crisis, and now the uprising of East Prussia had certainly added to king's frustrations. Upon hearing of the creation of the Landwehr in East Prussia, Frederick William asked sarcastically, "Yorck wears the burgher crown already?"⁴⁰ In March a board of inquiry would exonerate Yorck, but Frederick William would not be able to fully forgive the humiliating disobedience of his general. The cooperation among Yorck, the East Prussian leaders, and the reformers, was a clear sign that the coming war would not be like the older wars fought by the state, but this new war would be fought by both the State and the Nation. The East Prussian Landwehr was a fulfillment of the

³⁷ Simon, *Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 166.

³⁸ Boyen quoted in Shanahan, *Prussia Military Reforms*, 165.

³⁹ Simon, *Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 165.

⁴⁰ Walter Elze; quoted in Eugene Anderson, *Nationalism and the Cultural Crisis in Prussia, 1806-1815* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1939), 290.

hard work of the reformers. Yorck and the Convention of Tauroggen had begun the process of pushing the state to war. According to Clausewitz, “it cannot be denied that the decision of this General [Yorck] had enormous consequences, and in all likelihood very considerably sped up the final outcome.”⁴¹ East Prussia was acting independently, the liberation movement was agitating for war against France, Russian troops were marching west, and Napoleon was rebuilding the *Grand Armée* in central Europe. It was now time for Frederick William to make the inevitable yet difficult decision to declare war on France.



**Image 3: General Yorck's speech to the East Prussian estates.
Königsberg, February 5, 1813.**

⁴¹ Clausewitz; Paret, *Yorck and the Era of Prussian Reform*, 195.

To My People, January-March 1813

Roughly two weeks after Yorck had entered Königsberg, Frederick William and the royal entourage relocated to Breslau, the provincial capital of Silesia, on January 25, 1813. At Breslau, the king would begin taking steps towards war. Volunteers were called to form into Jäger units, and universal service would be declared. While maintaining the nominal alliance with Napoleon, royal officials negotiated with the Russians and formed a military alliance. Despite these developments, Frederick William still waited to declare war until March 16. The next day he would finally call up a kingdom-wide Landwehr, which the reformers had wanted him to do for years. After the extraordinary events in East Prussia, Frederick William would finally put the Prussian state into the war against Napoleon.

Chancellor Karl August von Hardenberg had convinced the king to leave Berlin because there was a concern that the French could potentially take him hostage. The relocation did not mean that Prussia was abandoning her allegiance to France. Gerhard von Scharnhorst asked his daughter in Königsberg to tell Clausewitz, who was still in Russian service, “If we shortly conduct war against one another, we are still the dearest friends; perhaps destiny leads us to each other soon.”⁴² Although Prussia was still in a diplomatic and military limbo, Scharnhorst was once again put in charge of the War Department in Breslau and commenced the army’s mobilization. Since the whole kingdom was not in Prussian control, most of the mobilization was done in Silesia, where the majority of the army had been relocated. Commanders in other provinces, like Yorck in East Prussia and Bülow on the Vistula, would mobilize their respective

⁴² Scharnhorst to his daughter, 2 February 1813; Karl Linnebach, *Scharnhorsts Briefe*, (Munich: G. Müller, 1914), 454. “Wenn wir gleich Krieg gegen einander führen, so sind wir doch die innigsten Freunde; vielleicht führt das Schicksal bald einmal bei einander.”

areas. Two important proposals were enacted on February 9. First, Hardenberg announced that volunteers who were able to clothe and arm themselves would be able to form *Jäger* units, which would remain independent of the regular army units. As a result, many students and other young members of the upper and middle class enthusiastically began organizing in Breslau and other Prussian towns. Second, the long desired goal of universal military service was decreed through the elimination of exemptions for the rest of the war. Scharnhorst and other military leaders pressed Frederick William for this because it appeared that the regular conscription methods would not provide the desired number of soldiers.⁴³ Because of the kingdom's diplomatic and military situation, this order did not have an immediate effect. Frederick Wilhelm would have to resolve the diplomatic dilemma in order to begin a free and effective expansion of the army throughout all of Prussia, but the foundation was being prepared for the expansion of the army.

Napoleon believed that Prussia would continue to fight on his side, but eventually realized that he could not depend on the problematic Prussians. In response to Napoleon's demand for Prussia to increase the number of troops, Frederick Wilhelm had ordered that those soldiers be put under the command of the anti-French, yet cautious General Bülow. Napoleon thus put Bülow's Prussian troops under the command of Eugène de Beauharnais, Napoleon's stepson and the commander of the French forces in Prussia. Bülow responded to his orders by stating that his troops were far too inferior and unprepared and that he would only receive orders from his government. On February 15, Eugène complained about the Prussians to Napoleon:

Your Majesty can see how little one can depend on these troops and, on the other hand, how much to distrust them . . . [Bülow] pushes the limits of imprudence by throwing balls for the enemy's generals and he is continually in negotiations with them; Cossacks camp in the same villages as Prussian battalions.⁴⁴

⁴³ Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 200.

⁴⁴ Eugène to Napoleon, 15 February 1813, quoted in Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 41.

His letter shows just how much Prussia's actions were not matching its king's words. With such an uncertain military situation, Eugène ordered French troops away from the Oder River and towards Berlin. Napoleon had recognized Frederick William as weak since before the Battle of Jena,⁴⁵ and certainly that view must have persisted as the king's indecisiveness continued. Though Frederick William was maintaining a nominal alliance with the French Empire, it was apparent to Napoleon that Prussia would not be reliable.

On the same day Eugène was grumbling to the Emperor about the situation in Prussia, formal negotiations between Prussia and Russia began. The Prussians wanted a written guarantee of their sovereignty because they were concerned about Tsar Alexander's intentions. In August of 1812, Russia had signed the Convention of Abo with Sweden, which, among other things, claimed that the Vistula River was Russia's natural frontier. This certainly caused concern in Berlin over the future of its territories east of the Vistula. In the Russian camp, the generals wanted Prussian military support in driving the French back across the Elbe River. Meeting on February 22 with the Russian general Wittgenstein, Yorck and Bülow agreed to begin moving their troops towards the Oder in preparation for Prussia's expected declaration of war. Relying on Frederick William to make a decision was not satisfactory to the Tsar, who wanted to push across the Elbe and be the liberator of the German peoples. He ordered all operations to halt until the Prussians decided on a course of action. After more negotiation, the Treaty of Kalisch was signed on February 28. This Russo-Prussian military alliance called for Prussia to provide 80,000 soldiers to support a Russian force of 150,000. The alliance was solidified in that neither state would sign a separate peace with Napoleon. War was even more

⁴⁵ Napoleon to Talleyrand, 12 September 1806; Lady Mary Loyd, *New Letters of Napoleon I*, (London: William Heinemann, 1898), 31-35.

inevitable than it had ever been before, but Frederick William delayed formally declaring war on France to give the army more time to mobilize.⁴⁶

Though the king believed the military was not ready for war, the Prussian people seemed to be ready and enthusiastic for the long-awaited war with the French. It was not only aristocratic military commanders like Bülow and Yorck pushing for war as they did in 1806, but also other levels of society that had remained indifferent to the campaign of 1806. In mid-February, the rebellious spirit of East Prussia spread westward, and rumors spread of a revolution if the king did not act more decisively.⁴⁷ Gneisenau returned in late February to Prussia from London via the coastal fortress town of Kolberg, which he had successfully defended in the months after Jena. Upon arriving he wrote: “the spirit of the people is excellent. Upon the first call of the government, students, interns, [and] the sons of the richest families have immediately enlisted as common soldiers in *Jäger* units.”⁴⁸ On March 1 he reports that “the universities have dispersed, the same young people have taken up weapons. The Academy of Liegnitz (in Silesia) has closed, the upper classes of the gymnasiums have deserted.”⁴⁹ Eugène de Beauharnais wrote to Napoleon that even the Prussian peasants were helping the Prussian war effort by offering money, cloth, and low-priced horses.⁵⁰ One of the king’s most submissive advisors wrote to

⁴⁶ Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 45.

⁴⁷ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 362.

⁴⁸ Gneisenau to Graf Münster, 26 February 1813; Karl Griewank, *Gneisenau: Ein Leben in Briefen* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1939), 207. “Der Geist des Volkes ist vortrefflich. Studenten, Referendare, die Söhne der reichsten Familien sind sogleich auf den ersten Ruf der Regierung als gemeine Soldaten unter die Jäger eingetreten.”

⁴⁹ Gneisenau to Graf Münster, 1 March, 1813; *Ibid.*, 212. “Die Universitäten sind auseinandergegangen, die jungen Leute derselben treten unter die Waffen. Die Akademie von Liegnitz ist geschlossen, die oberen Klassen der Gymnasien sind verlassen.”

⁵⁰ Eugène to Napoleon, 28 January 1813; quoted in Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 40.

Frederick William that if he did not respond to the 'general will of the nation' there could be dire consequences.⁵¹

As a patriotic fervor swept through Prussia in January and February, good news came out of Berlin. Frederick William had hesitated before joining Russia because, among other reasons, French forces occupied and were a threat to Berlin and the western areas of the kingdom. This seems to have been a smart decision considering Napoleon's order to Eugène:

Stay in Berlin as long as you can. Make examples in order to maintain discipline. If there is any sign of revolt in any Prussian town or village, even Berlin, have it burnt down. If you are forced to retreat to the Elbe, do not retreat any further.⁵²

Since Yorck's defection in East Prussia, the unreliability of Bülow, and the westward advance of the Russian army, Eugène had been slowly pulling back his troops toward Berlin. After a surprise attack on Berlin by the Russian advance guard, Eugène evacuated Berlin on March 5. For the first time in six years, Berlin was free of French occupation.

There was clearly a growing popular movement, but Frederick William was still slow in officially bringing Prussia into the war. Gneisenau showed his frustration in the beginning of March:

I have written very bitterly to the court. Such a tone will not make my return welcome . . . but if these men soon do not declare [war], I absolve myself of my duties and disassociate myself in order to serve a lord who appreciates and facilitates my efforts and the good cause.⁵³

⁵¹ Stamm-Kuhlmann; quoted in Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 362.

⁵² James Marshall-Cornwall, *Napoleon as Military Commander*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967), 229.

⁵³ Gneisenau to Graf Münster, 1 March 1813; Karl Griewank, *Ein Leben in Briefen*, 212. "Ich habe sehr bitter nach Hofe hierüber geschrieben. Ein solcher Ton wird meine Rückkunft nicht willkommen machen . . . Aber wenn sich diese Menschen nicht bald erklären, so halte ich mich mein Pflichten für entbunden und sage mich los (break away), um einem Herrn zu dienen, der meine Bemühungen und die gute Sache würdigt und unterstützt."

As Eugene Anderson observes, “Just as humiliation at the hands of Napoleon had compelled him to tolerate the reforms and reformers whom he disliked, so in 1813 Russia and his patriotic subjects forced him into a war which he feared.”⁵⁴ On March 15, Czar Alexander arrived in Breslau, and on the next day, Frederick William finally and fully allied with the Russians by declaring war on France. On March 17, he issued his famous declaration, *To My People*, in which he, a Prussian king, defended his actions since Prussia fell to the might of France:

I hoped . . . to lighten the burdens of my people, and even to convince the French emperor that it would be to his own advantage to leave Prussia her independence. But the purest and best of intentions on my part were of no avail against insolence and faithlessness, and it became only too plain that the emperor’s treaties would gradually ruin us even more surely than his wars. The moment is come when we can no longer harbor the slightest illusions to our situation.⁵⁵

Certainly the Prussian people had harbored no such illusions. He then turned towards arguing for the new war. He pointed out the efforts of the Russians, Spanish, Portuguese, Swiss, and Dutch in resisting the French. He also said, that “great sacrifices will be demanded from every class of the people” and that “we must fight to a victorious end unless we are willing to cease to be Prussians or Germans.”⁵⁶ He thus implied that the war would be a national war, a war of the people. By stating that every class would need to sacrifice, he was preparing the Prussian classes for the next memorandum. To facilitate this new national war, he also issued the *Order on the Organization of the Landwehr*, which called for the raising of Landwehr units throughout Prussia. Throughout the kingdom, the middle class and those who could claim exemptions

⁵⁴ Anderson, *Nationalism and the Cultural Crisis*, 291.

⁵⁵ Frederick William III, *An Mein Volk*, 17 March 1813; James Harvey Robinson, *Readings in European History, A collection of extracts from the sources chosen with the purpose of illustrating the progress of culture in Western Europe since the German Invasions*, Volume II. Boston, New York, Chicago, London: Ginn & Company, 1904-06, pp. 522-23, (www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

would need to now take up arms to join in the national fight. Two days later Scharnhorst wrote to his daughter:

I have worked with indescribable effort for king and fatherland. I have turned my most noble attention to the revival of the spirit and obtained my goal through the relationship and enthusiasm of the young men and so connected the interests of all families to the war . . . a Landwehr is being organized of which I alone have developed the plan.⁵⁷

Scharnhorst clearly saw this moment as the culmination of his work, which provided the opportunity for subjects to become involved in the affairs of the state. Throughout the rest of 1813, the Landwehr would organize, train, and fight on the battlefield.

On March 1 Gneisenau had remarked, “the mood is excellent, but there is no galvanizing force to utilize and augment this enthusiasm.”⁵⁸ Now there would finally be a way to unite the strength of the Nation through the organization of the State. The various new units that would augment the Prussian military – Landsturm, Jägers, and Landwehr – would provide a means for ordinary Prussians to be involved in the State. The Nation had been generally apathetic towards the situation in 1806, but now the Nation sought vengeance and liberation. It had taken the renegade General Yorck supported by the East Prussian estates to ignite the process towards war. The necessities of war and the small size of the military would make the arming of the people a logical plan to restore Prussia’s military might and sovereignty. The military reformers had been preparing for this moment. It was now time to put their most desired plans into action. The War of Liberation had begun.

⁵⁷ Scharnhorst to his daughter, 19 March 1813; Karl Linnebach, *Scharnhorsts Briefe*, 462. “Ich habe mit unbeschreiblicher Anstrengung für Augenmerk auf die Belebung des Geistes gewandt und durch die Herbeiziehung und Enthusiasmierung der jungen Männer meinen Zweck erhalten und so das Interesse aller Familien an den Krieg gekettet . . . eine Landwehr wird organisiert, von der ich den Plan selbst und allein ausgearbeitet habe.”

⁵⁸ Gneisenau to Graf Münster, 1 March 1813; Griewank, *Ein Leben in Briefen*, 212. “Der Geist ist vortrefflich, aber kein Geist vorhanden, um diesen Enthusiasmus zu benutzen und zu steigern.”

Chapter 2: Pragmatism vs. Ideology, 1813

The creation of the Prussian Landwehr on March 17, 1813 was a vital program to strengthen Prussia's military and diplomatic role in the War of Liberation. Though Gerhard von Scharnhorst had sought to establish a militia and universal military service before 1813, even the reformers did not foresee the important and necessary role the militia would play in the Prussian army. The events in East Prussia and Breslau had given the military reformers the opportunity for which they had been striving for years. As I explain in this chapter, the Landwehr became a pragmatic solution for restoring the Prussian military to its former glory and honor; but turning middle class men into effective soldiers would certainly not be a swift and easy task. In the spring, there were numerous problems in turning the new volunteers and conscripts into an effective auxiliary force, especially when many men were opposed to conscription. The reformers were also able to create a Landsturm, but this 'arming of the peasants' was one step too many for the State, and the original plan was eventually ended. The problems of the spring generally improved during the summer armistice when many Landwehr units became part of the field army, drastically increasing the Prussian army's size and potential in the field. These raw citizen soldiers were then put to the test in the fall and helped liberate Prussia by the end of 1813.

The Troubled Formation of the Landwehr, Spring 1813

Throughout the spring of 1813, the Landwehr would not seem promising. There was a serious shortage of weapons, well-qualified officers, and equipment. There were also not nearly enough volunteers to create the desired number of Landwehr battalions. Patriotism and

volunteerism, and especially the willingness to leave one's family and livelihood to answer the call of duty, would have its limits among the Prussian subjects, but there was certainly enough evidence of patriotism throughout Prussia in 1813 to pressure the king to declare war.

Compared to the king's 'cabinet war' in 1806, Prussia's second war against France was evolving into a 'national war,' a war supported by popular patriotism. Even Frederick William, who had so often neglected the opportunities for liberation and had cautiously joined the war after Tauroggen, now proclaimed: "My cause is the cause of my people."¹ After news had spread in Berlin of the French retreat from Moscow, a French diplomat commented that he had never seen "such intense hatred and open rage" from the Prussian people, who "no longer concealed [their] desire to join with the Russians in exterminating everything that belongs to the French system."² Authorities were able to seize on the upswing in patriotism to support the war. The state raised 6.5 million thalers by sponsoring a campaign in which women donated their gold and received an iron ring on which was inscribed, "I gave gold for iron."³ The women of the royal family issued an appeal to the women of all classes throughout Prussia to contribute gold or labor to the war effort. As a result, about 600 women's associations were formed during the war. On March 10, 1813, Frederick William introduced the Iron Cross, which could be awarded to a soldier of any rank to be a reminder of "the steadfastness, with which the people endured a compelling evil in a time of iron."⁴ In memory of his beloved wife, Queen Louise, who had died in 1810, Frederick William created the Order of Louise on August 3, 1814, which was awarded

¹ Frederick William III, *Order on the Organization of the Landwehr*, 17 March, 1813; *Das Preussische Heer der Befreiungskriege, Grosse Generalstabe, Kriegsgeschichtliche Abteilung II*, (Berlin: E.S. Mittler, 1912-1914), 406.

² 12 November 1812; Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 356.

³ "Gold gab ich für Eisen"; Ibid., 374.

⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm III, *Urkunde über die Stiftung des eisernen Kreuz*, 10 March 1813; Hans-Peter Schmidt, *Schlesien und Preussen* (Erkrath: Schweitzerhaus, 2007), 22. "... die Standhaftigkeit, mit welcher das Volk die unwiderstehlichen Uebel einer eisernen Zeit ertrug."

to any Prussian woman for an extraordinary contribution to the war effort. On February 9, upper class men, who were wealthy enough to supply themselves and impassioned to fight for the fatherland, formed into Jäger units, but many men joined a *Freikorps* (free corps). The most famous of these was the Lützow Freikorps under the command of Major Ludwig Adolf Wilhelm von Lützow. Gathering in Breslau, it totaled 3,000 men, including some of Prussia's celebrities, such as the gymnast "Turnvater" Jahn, poet Theodor Körner, and the poet/songwriter Joseph von Eichendorff.

The greatest expressions of change towards the 'national war' were the introduction of universal military service and the Landwehr, which would accomplish the Prussian reformers' goal of bringing the State and Nation together. In the *Order on the Organization of the Landwehr*, issued on March 17, 1813, Frederick William, recognizing that youth from all the estates were volunteering for service, argued that the independence and honor of the Prussian people "will only be secure, if each son of the fatherland shares this struggle for freedom and honor."⁵ Though Scharnhorst had finally achieved his goal, there was still much work to be done.

The establishment of the Landwehr and the end of exemptions, which had been the way for the middle class to avoid military service, were certainly victories for the military reformers, but they also provided challenges for the overall program of strengthening the Prussian army, which was the first objective of the military reformers. Since the official end of exemptions on February 9 was intended to provide men for the army's reserve units and made all men eligible for the regular army, Gerhard von Scharnhorst drafted the details of the national Landwehr based on the East Prussian model, so that formerly exempted middle class men could be conscripted

⁵ Frederick William III, *Order on the Organization of the Landwehr*, 17 March 1813; *Das Preussische Heer der Befreiungskriege*, 405.

into the Landwehr. The Landwehr would first rely on volunteers, but then men would be called to serve through a lottery system operated on the district level to fulfill the kingdom's goal of 120,000 Landwehr men for infantry and cavalry units. Conscription would only apply to those males between the ages of 17 and 40, and exemptions were given to clergymen, teachers, civil servants, and men who were the sole breadwinners for their families or dependents.⁶ Organizing men on the district level also allowed neighbors, friends, and relatives to serve together, thus giving the unit more cohesion. Following the military reformers' idea of the militia, the Landwehr men came from the middle class and the ranks of the well-to-do peasants, those who were traditionally exempted from the Frederician army. The professions of volunteers were not proportional to their percentages in the Prussian population. Educated males comprised 2% of the population but provided 12% of the volunteers; artisans comprised 7% of the population and provided 41% of the volunteers; and peasants comprised 75% of the population, but contributed just 18% of the volunteers.⁷ These statistics show that the vast majority of rural Prussians were not enthusiastic enough to volunteer, and those who did volunteer were those who would most likely come from towns or those who were educated and idealistic, such as students. Peter Paret suggests that the passivity of the vast majority of people showed that "the reformers overestimated the strength of patriotism in Prussia, or, more likely, that they claimed more for it than it could perform."⁸ With about 18,000 volunteers,⁹ the districts would need to conscript from the rest of the eligible males to reach the national goal of 120,000 Landwehr men.

⁶ Erwin Heidelberg, *Hundert Jahre Preussische Landwehr*, (Oldenburg: G. Stalling, 1913), 26.

⁷ Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 374.

⁸ Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 236-237.

⁹ Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 95. This number does not include Freikorps and Jäger volunteers.

The uniforms of the Landwehr were meant to be as easy and practical as possible. (See Images 4 & 5) A Landwehr man needed to wear a blue or black coat, a *Litewka*, which could be easily tailored from the Sunday dress of the farmers and townsmen. He would provide his own trousers and footwear, and don a blue or black cap, which would bear a white cross with the inscription “With God for King and Fatherland” (*Mit Gott für König und Vaterland*). Landwehr units would be distinguished by the colors of their collars and by the band on their caps, which would be in the unit’s regional color.¹⁰ If a Landwehr man could not supply his own equipment, the commission would provide it with funds raised through taxes and donations from the people.



Image 4:
Pomeranian Landwehr infantryman (left)
East Prussian Landwehr cavalryman (right)



Image 5:
Silesian Landwehr infantrymen

¹⁰ East Prussians wore red with white buttons, the men of the Kurmark and Neumark also wore red but with yellow buttons, West Prussians wore black with white buttons, Pomeranians wore white with yellow buttons, and Silesians wore yellow with white buttons

Though the ideas of the Landwehr and universal military service were founded on ideological grounds, i.e. the ability and responsibility of all subjects to fight for the king and fatherland, the implementation of the force was decentralized from the state and given to local governments for pragmatic reasons. On March 15, in preparation for the coming war, Frederick William ordered the creation of four military governments, dividing the kingdom into four zones.¹¹ Each of these military governments was composed of military and civilian officials who were responsible for organizing and training the Landwehr and for organizing the defenses of each of the respective areas. While the military governments acted on behalf of the state, the responsibility of raising men for the Landwehr was given to individual districts. In the *Order on the Organization of the Landwehr*, Frederick William stated: “Time does not allow me to consult with my faithful estates. But the assignment for the creation of the Landwehr is drafted to the forces of the provinces. The governments will inform the estates.”¹² Frederick William seemed to want to appease the estates by giving them a direct say in the implementation of the militia program. On one hand he exerted royal authority through the military governments, but on the other hand, he gave authority to the locals. Each district formed a commission, composed of civilian members of the different estates, to raise men for the Landwehr. Though allowing individual districts to produce men for the war was a good idea, William Shanahan notes that, “[it] gave rise to many recruiting practices, and in the several military governments there were great variations in the handling and in the quality of the troops.”¹³

¹¹ Each of the governments was located in the following cities: Königsberg - between the eastern border and the Vistula, Stargard - the Vistula to the Oder, Berlin - the Oder to the Elbe, and Breslau - Upper and Lower Silesia.

¹² *Das Preussische Heer der Befreiungskriege*, 405-406.

¹³ Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 205.

Pragmatically speaking, instituting universal military service would not be easy, especially given that the population did not produce enough volunteers for the Landwehr and had traditionally been skeptical of or spiteful towards the military. Though German nationalists would portray the War of Liberation as the rising of a united German *Volk*, the ideological rhetoric did not necessarily match the authentic difficulties in the Prussian provinces. As Erwin Heidelberg, a lieutenant in the German army of 1913, admits, “Although loyalty to the king, love of the fatherland, and hatred towards the French led the sons of the country by the thousands to the colors, many instances of withdrawal from service and desertion also should be noted.”¹⁴ The success of each region varied, but generally throughout Prussia there were desertions, a lack of suitable weapons, a slow pace of training, a lack of qualified officers, and even outright mutinies. It would take months for the Landwehr to be anywhere near an efficient fighting force.

East Prussia was the most enthusiastic region, having already created an example for the rest of Prussia and rather quickly filling its quota of 20,000 Landwehr men. (See Image 6) In the region’s earlier version of the Landwehr, substitutions were allowed and deploying outside of the province was forbidden. With the creation of the national Landwehr, both of these exemptions were overridden. The city of Königsberg sent a request to the king asking him “to alleviate the mandatory service to the Landwehr for the citizenry of big trade cities according to the need of their special status.”¹⁵ This request was rejected outright. Though the estates of Königsberg had created the first Landwehr, the city and the region as a whole would not have the same flexibility now that its Landwehr and its regulation of it were part of the national mandate. Despite the success of calling up the East Prussian Landwehr, training did not begin until April 28, and it

¹⁴ Heidelberg, *Hundert Jahre Preussische Landwehr*, 33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

was not officially ready until the middle of May.¹⁶ This was generally the case for the Landwehr from the other regions, which would not see combat until the fall.

West Prussia certainly did not imitate East Prussia. Many of the Polish inhabitants fled to the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, occupied by the Russians, or the city of Danzig, which was still in French hands. Erwin Heidelberg claims that even German subjects “let themselves be induced to flee,”¹⁷ but reading between the lines, we can deduce that conscription was generally unpopular on the left bank of the Vistula. Despite the forces of the German landowners, gendarmes, and even Russian troops, West Prussians would still attempt to desert in significant numbers. On the night of June 19, gendarmes and other troops captured 778 Landwehr men in the forests of the districts of Stargard, Konitz, and Kamin. In these same districts about 1000 men had fled to Poland.¹⁸ There were not many volunteers, but the quota of almost 7000 Landwehr men was eventually filled.

Pomerania raised about 15,000 men for the Landwehr infantry and cavalry.¹⁹ In some districts, the poverty was so bad, that the lottery system was not implemented for the sake of the children. In the district of Rummelsburg, district administrator von Puttkamer reports on the lack of bread and the general lack of money even if bread was available to buy.²⁰ Since poverty hindered patriotism, many Pomeranian men went into hiding.

The Neumark and Kurmark, like East Prussia, had seen its share of destruction and disease from the movement of troops. To the right of the Oder River, the Neumark had many

¹⁶ Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 208-209.

¹⁷ Heidelberg, *Hundert Jahre Preussische Landwehr*, 34.

¹⁸ *Das Preussische Heer der Befreiungskriege*, 262-263.

¹⁹ Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 219.

²⁰ *Das Preussische Heer der Befreiungskriege*, 270.

volunteers and an efficient conscription that would furnish 7,941 Landwehr men.²¹ Between the Elbe and Oder Rivers, the Kurmark, the core of Brandenburg, would supply about 20,000 men.²² The people of the Kurmark supported the Landwehr with many volunteers and contributions of money and equipment, because the French could retake Berlin and the Kurmark. Despite this, there were still desertions, especially over the border to Saxony, and resistance to conscription. In Potsdam, the chief of police reported on April 19, the last day to report for Landwehr service, that, “a large part of the Landwehr men who were called together to take the oath, failed to appear” and even those who did appear were belligerent.²³

In the *Order on the Organization of the Landwehr*, Frederick William stated, “Who but from futile excuses and without lacking physical strength should seek to elude my orders, meets not only the penalty of law, but the contempt of all.”²⁴ In Silesia, there was more contempt for military service than for those who attempted to evade it. The region of about 1.7 million people, the most populated region in the kingdom, had not experienced or was not experiencing some form of occupation or military conflict as other regions of the kingdom. Silesia had always been exempt from military service and was the least enthusiastic region to take up arms. The districts of Striegau, Frankenstein, and Leobschütz experienced riots; a couple of communities in the district of Hirschberg refused to draw lots.²⁵ With the desertions of many to the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, penalties were increased for draft dodging. Frederick William was particularly frustrated with Breslau and on July 1 threatened the city with retribution because it

²¹ *Das Preussische Heer der Befreiungskriege*, 276.

²² Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 219.

²³ *Militair Wochenblatt*, 1857; quoted in Georg Eckert, *Von Valmy bis Leipzig: Quellen und Dokumente zur Geschichte der preussischen Heeresreform*, (Hannover: Norddeutsche Verlagsanstalt O. Goedel, 1955), 245.

²⁴ *Das Preussische Heer der Befreiungskriege*, 406.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 295

was not only slow in producing Landwehr, but it was also taking advantage of its location in the neutrality zone, established by the summer armistice, to purposefully stop the conscription of Landwehr; the king did not want the bad example set by Breslau to spread to other towns.²⁶ In March, Hardenberg believed that Silesia could furnish 49,974 men for the Landwehr. But by June, only 25,000 Silesians were organized.²⁷

With the Landwehr being assembled throughout Prussia alongside the rebuilding of the regular army, shortages of quality officers and weapons slowed the training process for the Landwehr units. Experienced officers were needed not only to lead the men, but to also train them. By May, commanders of the Kurmark Landwehr were reporting to General Bülow that the Landwehr were not ready to help him defend Berlin because their troops lacked officers, proper training, and equipment.²⁸ General Karl Friedrich von Hirschfeld, a Kurmark Landwehr division commander who was not enthusiastic about the militia, wrote to Bülow: “I would be guilty of treason if I considered them fit for duty.”²⁹ The regular army was desperate not to lose its officers to the new units, since the Prussian army was already engaging Napoleon’s new *Grand Armée* in Saxony. Some of the volunteers for Freikorps and Jäger units were made officers in the Landwehr, but some did not want to give up their privileged positions in the units for which they volunteered and personally contributed. The great bulk of the Landwehr officer corps would actually come from the old army officers who were dismissed or retired after the disastrous 1806-1807 campaign. At least 3,898 of the officers who served in 1806 would come back and serve in the Landwehr during the War of Liberation.³⁰ Even if the units had officers,

²⁶ *Das Preussische Heer der Befreiungskriege*, 295.

²⁷ Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 210.

²⁸ Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 72-73.

²⁹ Hirschfeld to Bülow, 12 May 1813; *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁰ Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 108.

they often did not possess sufficient weapons in the spring of 1813. The first rank of a number of battalions actually trained with pikes. The problem was not just a lack of equipment, but that the military was trying to supply both regular and Landwehr troops with sufficient weapons at the same time. Britain, the financier of any anti-Napoleon coalition, contributed some money and guns to the Prussian cause, but certainly not enough.

The events of spring 1813 had set in motion the development of the Landwehr. There were certainly challenges in putting 120,000 men under arms, especially when imposing conscription on a relatively unenthusiastic population. Nonetheless, Landwehr battalions were forming and, to some degree, training. The problems of the spring would continue through the summer, but during the summer armistice, the Landwehr would receive more attention and be given a greater share of responsibility in the fight for the fatherland.

The Landsturm: A Degree Too Ideological

The Landwehr and Jägers were not the only new military units that were created in the spring of 1813. In the *Order for the Organization of the Landwehr* on March 17, Frederick William had mentioned the Landsturm, though the institution was not officially created until April 21, 1813. The idea for the Landsturm, which the reformers had been advocating for years, was based on the popular uprising and guerilla war in Spain against French rule. All able-bodied men between 15 and 60 who were not conscripted into the army or the Landwehr would become the irregular forces of last resort, thus involving every male regardless of class in the fight for the fatherland. If the enemy threatened a certain district or area, the Landsturm would be summoned, organized, and commanded by the civil or military administrators of the district.

Armed with anything that could be used as a weapon, the Landsturm units would hinder the enemy in any way possible.

The Landsturm, intended to be active for the duration of the war, would only last for three months in its original form. The Prussian political, military, and economic elite perceived the Landsturm to be too ideological and not practical enough for combat. They especially feared that the Landsturm could erupt into an uncontrollable, destructive, and anti-elite mob. This is evident from the article of war in which everyone had to swear to obey:

Any attack on, or robbery or looting of, property in friendly territory without orders from commanding generals and military governors, any attempt to evade taxes, duties, compulsory labor [i.e., servile duties on the land], or due obedience to local authorities resulting from, or aided by, the arming or mobilization of the Landsturm, will be mercilessly punished by death. – Likewise inciting to mutiny.³¹

Though intended by the reformers to be a patriotic and impulsive uprising of the Nation, the Landsturm would have strict bureaucratic oversight. Local military commanders and civil government officials were the only ones allowed to summon Landsturm units, and if units were acting without permission, they would be considered mutinous and punished accordingly.

The older military officers, used to Frederician discipline, could not fathom that the Landsturm could have any significant military value. The cities and property owners were not only concerned about the possible destruction from an unruly mob, but also the destruction that a Landsturm operating under orders could pose to property and the economy. Cities, especially Berlin, worried about the consequences of the Landsturm destroying resources to keep them out of enemy hands, and feared that such actions would cripple industry once the enemy move on.

The implication of egalitarianism became the greatest ideological element of the Landsturm, and thus made it the target of a vehement assault from the elites of the Prussian

³¹ Walter Simon, *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement 1807-1819*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955), 170.

estate-conscious society. Having seen the results of the French Revolution, they feared the rise of a Prussian Jacobin movement. Paul Ludwig Lecocq, the chief of police and the chairman of the Landwehr and Landsturm commission for Berlin, tried to get the Berlin Landsturm abolished. Writing to Frederick William, he insisted that he be given the power to single-handedly veto the decisions of the committee because he insisted that the committee contained “a few men who, to be sure, are enthusiastic supporters of the present political condition of the nation” and that “this class of people . . . is as dangerous to the welfare of the state and throne as the foreign enemy can ever be.”³²

Though Chancellor Karl August von Hardenberg had been helpful to the reform movement, he now supported the aristocrats’ effort to amend the Landsturm decree of April 21. On July 17, Frederick William made changes to the Landsturm with suggestions he received from the aristocrats opposed to it. The Landsturm, as the military reformers envisioned it, was now virtually scrapped. The Landsturm would now be summoned by the military government acting only on the king’s orders, and only the military governments would be given the authority to enact a scorched-earth policy and guerilla war. Gneisenau wrote to Chancellor Hardenberg that he hears daily about the success of preparing the Landsturm and:

From the urgent investigations of the enemy on the progress of this defense establishment, one can conclude on the importance that one gives you; and already outside of the opinion that he has of it, allowed itself to examine a sufficient reason to change the Landsturm Edict in not one of its paragraphs, but to relinquish to the military commander the assessment of practicality.³³

³² Lecocq to Frederick William, July 4, 1813; quoted in Simon, *Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 174.

³³ Gneisenau to Hardenberg, 20 July 1813, *Gneisenau, Ein Leben in Briefen*, 236-237. “Aus den angelegentlichen Erkundigungen der Feinde nach dem Fortgang dieser Verteidigungsanstalt lässt sich auf die Wichtigkeit schliessen, die man ihr gibt; und schon allein aus der Meinung, die er davon hat, liesse sich ein hinreichender Grund hernehmen, das Landsturmedikt in keinem einzigen seiner Paragraphen zu ändern, sondern die Beurteilung der Anwendbarkeit den Militärbefehlshabern zu überlassen.”

Theodor von Schön, a prominent pro-reform East Prussian civil servant, wrote that instead of the Landsturm being seen as having “[an] inspired enthusiasm for king and country,” it was seen as potentially being a vehicle for “Jacobinism and sansculottism.”³⁴

Despite the intentions of the supporters of the Landsturm, the idea was too ideological and not practical enough for the traditional nobility and propertied classes because it required too much trust and confidence in the ability and loyalty of the people. Compared to the Landsturm, the Landwehr was also idealistic, but it had a real potential military value and it was put under the direct control of the king’s military. As Walter Simon asserts, “The Landsturm of 1813 was not different in kind but only in degree from the Landwehr and universal service,” and because it was part of the overall reform program, it met the hostility of those who were opposed to the reforms and the reformers themselves.³⁵ The Landwehr would utilize the summer to make itself more valuable for the war, but after the war, the Landwehr would succumb to the same opposition that ended the Landsturm. As Michael Leggiere observes, “the emasculation of the Landsturm in July – a time when a French invasion of the Kurmark to capture the national capital was imminent – provided an ominous sign of the king’s reactionary conservatism, which would ultimately crush the reform movement in 1819.”³⁶

³⁴ Simon, *Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 177.

³⁵ Ibid., 179.

³⁶ Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 288.

Pragmatic for King and Fatherland, Summer 1813

The risks were certainly high for Prussia when Frederick William III declared war on March 16. Even though the Prussians were in the process of arming and expanding the army, Prussian troops were needed to fight the French who were attempting to liberate Saxony, France's ally and Prussia's front yard. Though Napoleon had rebuilt the *Grand Armée* after the disaster in Russia, it was composed of many young and inexperienced recruits and a weak cavalry force. Prussia also entered a diplomatic arena that was far from a solid and devoted anti-Napoleonic coalition. The Russians could not agree on their war aims; Austria was reluctant to fight against Napoleon and sought to broker a peace deal; the Swedes were slow in sending troops; and the British held back full support to the Allies because they were worried about possible Prussian plans regarding northern Germany, i.e. Hanover. With the problems of the *Grand Armée* and the uncertain diplomatic situation with Austria, Napoleon decided to defend Saxony in the hope of reasserting his authority in Europe.

On May 2, Russian commander General Wittgenstein ordered an attack on what he believed was the weak French right-wing near the town of Lützen in western Saxony. The French counter-attacked and desperate fighting ensued in the villages around Lützen. Gerhard von Scharnhorst, the father of the Prussian military reform movement, was wounded in the village of Gross-Görschen, a wound from which he would eventually die in June. The Battle of Lützen resulted in a draw, and the Allies retreated in good order because the French did not have strong cavalry for a pursuit. The Allies then pulled back to Bautzen in eastern Saxony, in order to defend Silesia. On May 20-21, the French were unable to obliterate the Allies again, who retreated in good order. Though the Allies retreated from two battles, their armies were still

intact and committed to defeating Napoleon. Both the Allies and the French needed time to reorganize and reassess their strategies. With French troops temporarily occupying Breslau, both sides agreed to an armistice, which would last from June 4 to August 10.

The summer armistice would give Prussia a period to reassess its political and military situation. At the outbreak of the war in March, Frederick William had a field army of about 68,000 men and officers ready for action.³⁷ For Prussia to have a strong voice in diplomacy and a strong force on the battlefield for offensive operations, the kingdom needed to expand its field army. With the Prussians needing to replace the casualties from Lützen and Bautzen and to fulfill diplomatic obligations, i.e. Russian and British pressure, to augment its field army, the Prussians were desperate for front-line soldiers. The most immediate resource for manpower was already in development: the Landwehr. While the Prussian army was being pushed out of Saxony, the development of the Prussian Landwehr during the spring was so slow and inefficient that it could not be effectively utilized for the spring campaign. Despite this, the militiamen would now be called to fight in the field with the regular troops. As William Shanahan observes, “No one foresaw that this militia which the Armament Commission vaguely intended for limited duty, garrisons, or siege forces would provide most of the man power for rebuilding the Prussian army.”³⁸ The difficulties of the spring would continue to plague the Landwehr during the summer, but the inclusion of the Landwehr into the field army would help accelerate and improve the quality of the militiamen. The transformation of the Landwehr during the summer would provide new hope and a rejuvenated argument for the usefulness of the Landwehr and with it, the realization of the ideological concept of a nation-at-arms.

³⁷ Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army*, 61.

³⁸ Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 211.

The question remained as to how these troops, which were still not ready for battle, would be incorporated into the regular army. Three options were considered. First, some officers believed that since the Landwehr needed more training, small numbers of them could be added into regular line battalions to form ‘mixed battalions.’³⁹ Second, it was proposed that a Landwehr battalion be added to each regular line regiment. Frederick William and the military reformers opposed these two options. The king wanted to protect the spirit of the professional army from being diluted, i.e. becoming a nationalized army, and the military reformers also opposed these two options because they wanted the Landwehr to have its own identity separate from the regular army. Thus, the third option was chosen: a Landwehr regiment would be attached to each line infantry brigade. Instead of brigades, the Landwehr battalions would be organized into regiments. (See Figure 1) Each army brigade would be composed of at least one line regiment, one reserve regiment, one Landwehr regiment, plus artillery and cavalry support.

The Military Governments had been responsible for preparing the Landwehr for duties within their respective zones, but now military officers were given the responsibility of completing the Landwehr’s training. General von Bülow, who had led the defense of Berlin during the spring campaign, was now put in charge of training the Kurmark and Neumark Landwehr, an authority which the Military Government in Berlin did not easily cede to Bülow and his new chief-of-staff Hermann von Boyen, one of the military reformers and a close friend of Scharnhorst. Bülow and Boyen faced many of the problems the units had had since the spring: lack of men, officers, equipment, weapons, and even proper clothes; but the general and his chief-of-staff initiated changes to make Landwehr training more productive, such as

³⁹ Four Landwehr companies, each of 150-200 men, made a battalion of 600-800 men. Three or four battalions made a regiment. A regiment thus equaled 1800-3200 men. Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 220. Heidelberg, *Hundert Jahre Preussische Landwehr*, 27.

reorganizing battalions to consolidate the most prepared men and drilling Landwehr and regular troops together. Despite the shortages, Boyen reports to Bülow that the morale is “thoroughly excellent” and “unusually good.”⁴⁰

Frederick William ordered Gneisenau on June 8, 1813 to finish the mobilization of the Silesian Landwehr, which had still not raised its quota of men. On June 7 Gneisenau wrote to his wife that he had a feeling he would be called on to finish mobilizing the Silesian Landwehr, “a task, of which I dread among all the different dreadful actions that I want then to take on, so that from all the many split means will a whole and as much sacrifice not be lost.”⁴¹ Just like Bülow and Boyen, Gneisenau encountered the same problems. On June 20 he wrote to privy councilor Theodor von Hippel, author of the Landsturm edict, that his Landwehr have many needs and if the men are not equipped, their training will be slowed.⁴² He goes on to beg Hippel for money. “Money, my revered friend, money is a pressing hardship for me,” Gneisenau writes, and he goes on to advise that it is essential to morale that Landwehr men be issued a third of their pay.⁴³ In a letter written ten days later, he reports that despite difficulties, the Landwehr are coming along, and he has raised 50,000, but is still busy supplying and clothing them.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Boyen to Bülow, 1 July 1813; quoted in Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 97.

⁴¹ Gneisenau to his wife, 7 June 1813; *Gneisenau: Ein Leben in Briefen*, 232. “eine Arbeit, vor der mir graut unter allen den verschiedenen schädlichen Einwirkungen die ich aber dann übernehmen will, damit aus allen den vielen versplittern Mitteln ein Ganzes werde und soviel Opfer nicht verlorengelien.”

⁴² Gneisenau to Hippel, 23 June 1813; *Ibid.*, 235-236. “Sowie sie nicht ausgestattet werden, können sie nur langsam in der Ausbildung fortrücken . . . überdies fehlt es an so mannigfachen anderen Bedürfnissen.”

⁴³ Gneisenau to von Hippel, 23 June 1813; *Ibid.*, 235-236. “Geld, mein verehrter Freund, Geld, tut mir dringend not . . . Um den Geist nicht sinken zu lassen, ist es nötig, den Landwehrmännern, gleich den Feldtruppen, 1/3 ihres Soldes, . . . weil es nicht gut ist, die Meinung in ihnen rege zu machen, als ob sie schlechter als die Linientruppen seien.”

⁴⁴ Gneisenau to Kammergerichtsrat Eichhorn, 3 July 1813; *Ibid.*, 236. “Diese Schöpfung vervollkommt sich endlich trotz der Schwierigkeiten, die der Unverstand ihr in den Weg gelegt

Prussia, still economically handicapped from the years of French occupation and supremacy, was reliant on its allies for financial support and deliveries of equipment. On June 14 England agreed to grant Prussia an annual subsidy of £666,666 on the condition that the Prussian field army be at least 80,000 men strong.⁴⁵ Along with money, England sent large quantities of weapons. By July 15, the British had sent about 40,000 muskets, of which only about 6,400 were sent specifically to Landwehr in Pomerania, West Prussia, Lower Silesia, and the Neumark; the rest were sent to towns, depots, or garrisons.⁴⁶ Typically after the reorganization in July of the Prussian army, the line and reserve infantry received weapons, then the Landwehr were issued weapons, which came from England, Russia, and Austria once it entered the war. In Prussia's weak financial condition, the inability of the state to pay the Landwehr men helped cause desertions and the unwillingness to serve. Before Gneisenau had brought up the issue of pay on June 23, two of the three companies of the Cottbus District mutinied on June 21 after it was announced that the district was not issuing any more money to the Landwehr men.⁴⁷ The financial problems continued after the armistice. On September 26 Gneisenau wrote to Hardenberg that "one speaks of English subsidies and no one sees money," to which the Hardenberg replied, "it is more difficult to bring about the necessary funds to this war and to our great struggles than the uninformed mass believes."⁴⁸

By August 10, 1813, the end of the armistice, the Landwehr had significantly increased the size of the Prussian army. The regions produced the following totals: East Prussia, 20,000

hat . . . 50,000 Mann derselben haben wie in Schlesien aufgestellt. Ich bin nun damit beschäftigt, diese verwaisten Söhne des Vaterlandes auszurüsten und zu kleiden."

⁴⁵ Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 207-208.

⁴⁶ *Das Preussische Heer der Befreiungskriege*, "über die Verwendung der englischen Waffen und Vorräte," 417.

⁴⁷ Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 96.

⁴⁸ Gneisenau to Hardenberg, 26 September 1813; *Gneisenau: Ein Leben in Briefen*, 251-252; Hardenberg's response cited in footnote of *Ein Leben in Briefen*.

men; West Prussia, 6,620; Pomerania, 15,409; Neumark, 7,941; Kurmark, 20,560; and Silesia, 49,974.⁴⁹ Out of 224,241 Prussian infantrymen 49% were Landwehr; Landwehr cavalry composed 36% of the now 30,780-strong Prussian cavalry.⁵⁰ In March, Prussia had a grand total of about 127,000 men under arms; by August, about 271,000 Prussian men were mobilized to fight for the king and the fatherland.⁵¹ The Prussians had achieved their goal to increase the size of the army to become a major player in the coming campaign. The Austrians committed 127,000, the Russians had 110,000 men with more on the way, and Sweden had 30,000 to add to the coalition, making the Allies 528,000 men strong against the 442,000 men under Napoleon, which mostly consisted of young, unenthusiastic, and poorly trained recruits.⁵² The Prussian armed forces had more than doubled and constituted about 6% of Prussia's population, a feat "which would have been insupportable without the kind of total mobilization upon which Scharnhorst and his colleagues had insisted."⁵³ By the numbers, Prussia was now a force to be reckoned with, but the Landwehr was still not battle-tested and its quality was questionable.

Image: 6
East Prussian Landwehr deploy in 1813



⁴⁹ Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms*, 219.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 221.

⁵¹ Ibid., 206, 221.

⁵² Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 366.

⁵³ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 60-61.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly, Fall 1813

Though the Landwehr greatly increased the size of the Prussian army, the majority of the Landwehr battalions were not included into the field army. Most of the Landwehr were used for their original auxiliary role, thus allowing line and reserve regiments to be incorporated into the field army. In July, the army was reorganized into four corps. The First Corps under Yorck consisted of 16 Silesian Landwehr infantry battalions out of a total of 54.5 battalions. The Second Corps under General Kleist also consisted of 16 Silesian Landwehr infantry battalions in his brigades plus a reserve of 8 Silesian Landwehr battalions out of a total of 49 infantry battalions. The Third Corps under General Bülow had four Landwehr regiments – West Prussian, East Prussian, Kurmark, and Neumark – 16 battalions out of 47.5 battalions. Out of the 120,000 Landwehr men, 75,000 would be under General Tauentzien's Fourth Corps. This corps was divided into several sub-corps: an observation corps of Kurmark Landwehr outside of Magdeburg, an observation corps of Kurmark Landwehr on the lower Elbe, a blockade corps of French-held Küstrin by East Prussian and Neumark Landwehr, a blockade corps of French-held Stettin by Pomeranian Landwehr, a blockade corps of French-held Wittenberg by West Prussian Landwehr, a blockade corps of French-held Danzig, a reserve corps at Berlin of assorted Landwehr units, an almost 17,000 man reserve of Silesian Landwehr in Silesia, and a small East Prussian Landwehr force was left in East Prussia.⁵⁴ Though most of the Landwehr would retain their auxiliary role, this role was critical to the Prussian military, because there were several

⁵⁴ *Das Preussische Heer der Befreiungskriege*, 308 and Table 4. Each of the first three corps had at least 16 Landwehr battalions (4 regiments) according to the plan to incorporate Landwehr into the regular army (see page 16). The field army corps each had 4 brigades, thus 4 regiments of Landwehr per corps.

blockades and areas that needed a military presence, so the regular forces, i.e. the trained, professional army, could be organized for the fight against the French field army.

When the armistice ended on August 10, the Allies had surrounded Napoleon and his *Grand Armée* in Saxony, the Emperor's loyal German ally. After much negotiating and scheming on the part of Austria's foreign minister Clemens von Metternich to secure Habsburg interests, the Habsburg Empire shed its neutrality and joined the coalition against Napoleon. The Allies agreed, on Metternich's insistence, to name the Austrian Prince Karl Philip zu Schwarzenberg as supreme commander of the Allied armies. The Allied plan, known as the Trachenberg Plan, called for the Allies to form an arc around Saxony and only engage French forces that were not under Napoleon's immediate command. The Prussian corps would be dispersed to the different armies. Schwarzenberg would have immediate command of the Army of Bohemia (220,000 Austrians, Prussians, and Russians), which included Kleist's Second Corps, to threaten Napoleon from the south across the Erzgebirge Mountains. Gebhard von Blücher would threaten Napoleon from the east with the Army of Silesia of 75,000 Russians and Yorck's First Corps. Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, the crown prince of Sweden and former marshal of Napoleon's empire, would defend Berlin to the north with the Army of Northern Germany (120,000 Prussians, Russians, Swedes, and North Germans).⁵⁵ The Prussian contingent consisted of Bülow's Third Corps and four of the divisions of Tauentzien's Fourth Corps that were in Brandenburg: the reserve corps at Berlin and the observation and blockade corps of Magdeburg, Wittenberg, and the lower Elbe.

After Scharnhorst's death on June 28, Gneisenau was named the new chief of the General Staff. Fulfilling Scharnhorst's goal, Gneisenau made sure that each corps and commander had a

⁵⁵ Numbers for each army provided by Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 129.

chief of staff to help coordinate operations, especially since the Prussians would have to operate ever closer with their allies. General Friedrich Wilhelm von Bülow and Hermann von Boyen had worked together to train and supply the Landwehr west of the Oder during the summer, and their relationship would strengthen as the War of Liberation progressed. Blücher and Gneisenau also formed a formidable duo. After the war, Oxford University presented Blücher an honorary doctorate, to which he replied, “Well, if I am to become a doctor, you must at least make Gneisenau an apothecary, for we two belong always together.”⁵⁶

In the Army of Northern Germany, General Bülow was constantly irritated by Crown Prince Bernadotte, who was more interested in preserving his troops for his desired conquest of Norway than being decisive and aggressive against an anticipated French offensive towards Berlin. Bülow and Boyen, fearing that Bernadotte would avoid combat and cede Berlin to the French, decided to take the initiative. With the Prussian contingent of the Army of Northern Germany (60,000 men), Bülow would seek to stop Napoleon’s Army of Berlin (c. 67,000) before it reached defenses of the Prussian capital.⁵⁷

The Landwehr of the Army of Northern Germany, which consisted of units from all of the Prussian provinces, would now experience combat for the first time. There was still concern about the quality of the Landwehr units. On August 14, General Major von Thümen, whose brigade consisted of a West Prussian Landwehr regiment, wrote to General Bülow: “With the West Prussian Landwehr it continues to go very badly still, and it is by far still not so, that they could be used against the enemy. A good part of the infantry is completely barefoot.”⁵⁸ On August 22, the French commenced their assault on Berlin. Squadrons of Pomeranian and

⁵⁶ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 62.

⁵⁷ Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 128, 135.

⁵⁸ *Das Heer der Befreiungskrieg*, 267.

Kurmark Landwehr cavalry retreated in confusion after engaging French infantry alongside regular cavalry. French skirmishers were able to drive two Landwehr battalions out of the village of Jühnsdorf, but later that evening, the Third Battalion of the Second Neumark Landwehr Regiment retook the town.

On August 23 General Nicolas Oudinot's Army of Berlin marched towards the Prussian capital along three separate roads. The French corps at the center of the advance took the village of Gross Beeren, but then the Prussians attacked the unsuspecting Frenchmen and their Saxon allies. In the fight on the French right flank, two Saxon battalions overran a Neumark Landwehr battalion, but Prussian line infantry halted the Saxon advance. A Pomeranian Landwehr cavalry regiment successfully trounced Saxon Uhlans and captured their commander after the Saxon cavalry threatened a pursuing Pomeranian Hussar squadron and regular Prussian infantry. With the defeat of his center corps, Oudinot ordered the Army of Berlin to abandon its attempt to take Berlin. The Battle of Gross Beeren was a small victory for the Prussians, but what was more important was that "without a doubt, the victory silenced critics who still questioned the combat-efficiency of the Prussian troops, especially the Landwehr."⁵⁹ In his report of the battle to Frederick William, Bülow said among other things, "I must congratulate the entire corps, including the Landwehr."⁶⁰ To honor the first battle fought with Landwehr units, Bülow stated, "The Landwehr of the corps has earned a glorious distinction. On this day, they have proved their love for King and Fatherland for the first time. No greater praise could they acquire than to be compared to their veteran comrades."⁶¹ Erwin Heidelberg urges that one should not misunderstand Bülow, because the praise was over exaggerated to keep morale high, especially

⁵⁹ Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 173.

⁶⁰ Bülow to Frederick William, 24 August, 1813; quoted in Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 174.

⁶¹ "Tagesbefehl," 24 August 1813; quoted in Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 175.

for future engagements.⁶² Since this was the first major engagement for the Landwehr, the commanders actually used the Landwehr to support the regular infantry. When Bülow's Third Brigade led the attack on Gross Beeren, the brigade's two battalions of East Prussian Landwehr followed the six battalions of line and reserve infantry. After the battle the staff of Bülow's Third Brigade applauded its East Prussian Landwehr for "advancing with great calm and determination under the heaviest cannon fire and likewise for the numerous bayonet attacks."⁶³

On August 27, General Hirschfeld's Observation Corps of Magdeburg, which was mostly Kurmark Landwehr, attacked a French division at Hagelsberg to prevent them from rejoining the Army of Berlin. (See Image 7) Out of 9,000 French soldiers, 3,000 were killed and 3,000 were taken prisoner; the Prussians lost only about 1700 soldiers out of about 9300. Several hundreds of Landwehr men had actually fled at the beginning of the battle towards Berlin spreading the word that the Prussians lost!⁶⁴ In reality, the battle resulted in not just another victory for Prussia, but also for the Landwehr since the majority of battalions were Landwehr men. Boyen commented in his memoirs:

Incidentally, that the condition of the Landwehr was really sufficient for use in war, was demonstrated not only by their behavior in general but also especially by the circumstance, that shortly thereafter the [Kurmark] Landwehr had a decisive part in the fortunate outcome of the engagement at Hagelsberg.⁶⁵

At Gross Beeren and Hagelberg, the Prussian Landwehr in the Army of Northern Germany had certainly proved itself to be comparable to the regular troops.

⁶² Erwin Heidelberg, *Hundert Jahre Preussische Landwehr*, 45.

⁶³ "Report of the Third Brigade," 24 August 1813; Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 175.

⁶⁴ Erwin Heidelberg, *Hundert Jahre Preussische Landwehr*, 50.

⁶⁵ Boyen; Nippold, Friedrich. *Erinnerungen aus dem Leben des General-Feldmarschalls Hermann von Boyen*, Vol. 3, (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1890), 74. "Das übrigens die Verfassung der Landwehr wirklich für den Krieger-Gebrauch genügend war, hat nicht allein ihr Benehmen im Allgemeinen sondern auch vor allen der Umstand bewiesen, dass kurze Zeit darauf die Märkische Landwehr einen so entschiedenen Antheil an dem Glücklichen Ausgange des Gefechts bei Hagelsberg hatte."



Image 7: Prussian Landwehr at the Battle of Hagelberg, 27 August 1813

With the resumption of hostilities after the armistice, Napoleon led part of his army against Blücher and the Army of Silesia. Keeping with the Trachenberg Plan, Blücher avoided direct combat with the emperor. When Napoleon learned that Schwarzenberg was advancing against Dresden, the capital of Saxony and the center of French operations, the Emperor returned to take over the situation there and left the French Army of the Bober to Marshal Jacques Macdonald. Though Napoleon told him to defend the Bober against any westward Prussian advance, Macdonald decided to continue the offensive against Blücher. On August 26, three days after Gross Beeren, Blücher and the Army of Silesia routed the French at the Battle of the Katzbach. Gneisenau, the chief of staff of the Army of Silesia, claimed, “this battle is the

triumph of our newly created infantry.”⁶⁶ During the battle, “one of Thiele’s Landwehr battalions was surrounded by enemy cavalry and asked to surrender. It fired; only one gun went off. Nevertheless the Landwehr men did not surrender; ‘No! No!’ they shouted, and jabbed with their bayonets.”⁶⁷ Despite this specific show of bravery and the general victory, there were problems with the Landwehr. Blücher pushed his troops hard, and proclaimed days after the battle that “we have struggled with cold, wet, and privations, and some of you have been insufficiently clad; yet without a murmur you exerted yourselves to pursue your defeated enemy.”⁶⁸ According to the diary of a Silesian Landwehr regiment in Yorck’s Corps, there certainly were no shortages of problems; there were problems of shortages. Many men did not have coats, shoes, and bread, which resulted in malnutrition and disease among the Landwehr men, who were not used to such conditions in their civilian lives.⁶⁹

Between these conditions and the Silesians’ general contempt for military service, it should be no surprise that there were desertions. Yorck complained that his Silesian Landwehr

⁶⁶ Gneisenau to Clausewitz, 28 August 1813; Gneisenau, *Ein Leben in Briefen*, 248. “Diese Schlacht ist der Triumph unserer neugeschaffenen Infanterie.”

⁶⁷ Gneisenau to Clausewitz, 28 August 1813; Gneisenau, *Ein Leben in Briefen*, 248. “Ein Landwehrbataillon von Thiele ward von feindlicher Reiterei umringt und aufgefordert, sich zu ergeben. Es feuerte; nur ein Gewehr ging los. Dennoch ergeben die Landwehrmänner sich nicht; Nein! Nein! schrien sie, und stiessen mit den Bajonetten.” Some guns did not work properly because of the rainy weather.

⁶⁸ Blücher; quoted in Ernest F. Henderson, *Blücher and the Uprising of Prussia against Napoleon, 1806-1815*, (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1911), 133.

⁶⁹ Erwin Heidelberg, *Hundert Jahre Preussische Landwehr*, 57. “Auf diesen forcierten Märschen zeigten sich die Folgen von der so äussert schlechten Bekleidung der Landwehr. Grössenteils ohne Mäntel, in rohleinwandenen einfachen Hosen, ohne Strümpfe und grösstenteils ohne Schuhe, welche in dem besten Willen und auch bei der stärksten Leibes-constitution die armen Landwehrmänner, bei Strapazen noch nicht gewohnt, dies ertragen? Drei Tages chon war beinahe kein Bissen Brod, indem das weniger Branntwein, der gar nicht gereicht wurde, den Soldaten zu Theil geworden; abgemattet, an allen Kräften erschöpft fielen viele um und noch mehrere wurden, da sie zurückbleiben mussten, in Lazarethen durch schleichende Fieber gewisse Opfer des Todes.”

men deserted in the hundreds from exhaustion or malice towards service.⁷⁰ Despite efforts at enforcing stronger discipline, one of Yorck's brigade commanders reports, "nothing remains to be done but to shoot them."⁷¹ Yorck's Corps began the campaign with 38,484 men, but after 18 days his corps had shrunk to 25,296 men.⁷²

While the Allied Army of Silesia was destroying the French Army of the Bober, Napoleon was defeating Schwarzenberg's Army of Bohemia outside of Dresden. The Allied army on August 26 was unable to overcome the defenses of Dresden, in which some Silesian Landwehr battalions of Kleist's Corps participated with the line troops. The French, inspired by the arrival of Napoleon and reinforcements, successfully counterattacked the Allied flanks, which on August 27 convinced the Allies to retreat back to Bohemia. On August 29, a Silesian Landwehr regiment's diary reports:

The lack of all the necessities of life continues and has become very acute. The soldiers, up to their knees in the swampy ground, tortured by the unintermittent downpour of rain, without food to sustain them, with neither wood nor straw at hand, in great part without cloaks and in linen trousers, experience the greatest misery. The general retreat begins at dawn, but several hundred stiffened, almost starved, men of the regiment had to be left lying. A great number died; a part of them cannot work their way out of the mud on account of exhaustion and fall into the hands of the enemy.⁷³

On August 30, the Allied army returned to Bohemia. Napoleon did not follow the victory with a strong pursuit of Schwarzenberg, but ordered General Dominique Vandamme and his corps to pursue the retreating Allies. Overshadowing the defeat at Dresden, the Prussian Corps under General Kleist attacked the rear of Vandamme's Corps at Kulm, taking Vandamme prisoner

⁷⁰ Henderson, *Blücher*, 132.

⁷¹ "Bericht des Oberst von Steinmetz an General Gneisenau über den Rückmarsch der 1. Brigade von Nostitz über Reichenbach . . ."; quoted in Dennis Showalter, *The Prussian Landwehr and its Critics, 1813-1819*, Cambridge University Press, *Central European History*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Mar., 1971) pp. 3-33, 15.

⁷² Erwin Heidelberg, *Hundert Jahre Preussische Landwehr*, 57.

⁷³ Henderson, *Blücher*, 139-140.

along with thousands of French soldiers. Despite the victory, the Landwehr had run into the nearby forest after the first shot of the French cannons.

After Oudinot's attempt to take Berlin ended with the Prussian victories at Gross Beeren and Hagelberg, Napoleon appointed Marshal Ney as commander of the Army of Berlin and ordered him to coordinate another offensive against the Prussian capital. On September 6, Tauentzien's Kurmark Landwehr retreated under pressure from superior numbers of French troops and artillery, but his Landwehr cavalry squadrons were able to rout an Italian division and a French cavalry counterattack, giving Bülow's corps time to bring more pressure on Ney's attack at Dennewitz. The First Battalion of the First Neumark Landwehr Infantry Regiment lost 222 men and 12 officers in the desperate struggle for the village of Gölsdorf.⁷⁴ By the time evening came, the three French corps were in full retreat, having been beaten by two Prussian corps. On September 9, 1813, General Count Tauentzien wrote to Frederick William, "With pleasure I can report to Your Royal Majesty that the West Prussian Landwehr, against my expectation, fights quite well and doesn't desert anymore; it is just a pity that it has shown itself to be so weak."⁷⁵ The Battle of Dennewitz had a profound effect on Napoleon's German allies, who started to reconsider their allegiance to the French Emperor.

The Trachenberg Plan had gradually reduced the size of the *Grand Armée*. Though Napoleon won a victory at Dresden, the Army of Bohemia retreated to fight another day, but the Emperor's subordinates were utterly defeated at Gross Beeren, the Katzbach, Hagelberg, Kulm, and Dennewitz. Instead of using the *Grand Armée* to strike at an individual Allied army,

⁷⁴ Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 207.

⁷⁵ Tauentzien, in Heidelberg, *Hundert Jahre Preussische Landwehr*, 34-35. "Mit Vergnügen kann ich Ew. Königlichen Majestät pflichtmässig berichten, dass die Westpreussische Landwehr sich gegen mein Erwarten recht brav schlägt und auch nicht mehr desertiert; es ist nur sehr zu bedauern, dass der ausrückende Stand so schwach gewesen ist."

Napoleon traversed Saxony, distracted by the threats coming from the north, east, and south. Though there was talk in the Allied camp of uniting the Army of Bohemia and the Army of Silesia, the monarchs, persuaded by Blücher and Gneisenau, decided to send the Army of Silesia to link with the Army of Northern Germany.

By October, the Army of Northern Germany and the Army of Silesia were crossing the Elbe towards the south and would march towards Leipzig. Napoleon decided to leave 45,000 men to defend Dresden and to counter the 203,000 men of the Army of Bohemia if needed, while he would take the bulk of the army and attempt to destroy one of the other two Allied armies. On October 8, Napoleon had 140,000 men south of Blücher's 60,000 and planned to attack the Army of Silesia, lift the siege of Wittenberg, and destroy the bridges that the Allies had built across the Elbe. As the Allies crossed the Saale River, moving further towards the west, Napoleon launched an offensive against the Prussian positions along the Elbe. Though this offensive was a success, the Emperor had greater things to worry about that outweighed his victory. The defection of his Bavarian allies, the advance of the Army of Bohemia towards Leipzig, the increasing war-weariness of the Empire's peoples, and the waning resources of Germany convinced Napoleon to concentrate his army of 177,000 men at Leipzig for a last stand, leaving 30,000 men to defend Dresden. The Allies were unsure of the location and intention of the main French army, but they decided to push on to Leipzig, the Army of Bohemia from the south, the Army of Poland (50,000 Russians) from the east, and the other two Allied armies from the northwest.

On October 16, the Army of Bohemia advanced against Leipzig from the south and the Army of Silesia attacked from the northwest. The appearance of the Army of Silesia surprised Napoleon, who had hoped to destroy Schwarzenberg's army. Instead, the Army of Bohemia

withdrew in good order from the area of Wachau. French troops were able to defend Lindenau to the west, but lost the village of Möckern in a bloody engagement to Yorck and his corps, which lost 7,969 out of 21,779 men, a third of the men.⁷⁶ Gneisenau's aide-de-camp illustrates the gravity of this statistic:

On the nineteenth we rode across the battlefield at Möckern, where the corpses of the fallen, in particular the Silesia Landwehr, lay so close to one another that our horses could only get through in single file. I watched Gneisenau's solemn face, and as he said to me 'Victory was bought with German blood at great cost, at very great cost' a tear trickled down from his eye. It was the only tear I ever saw him shed.⁷⁷

Bülow and his men could hear Yorck's artillery in the distance, but Bernadotte did not permit Bülow and his corps to assist Yorck, which infuriated the Prussians. At the end of the day, the French casualties were 25,000 and the Allied casualties were 30,000.

On October 18, the Allies launched their 295,000 men along the whole front against Napoleon's 160,000. In the northeastern sector, Bülow and his corps fought back the French and Saxon troops under Marshal Ney. One of the biggest disasters and embarrassments for the French was the defection of the Saxon contingent in the midst of the battle! During the day, Bülow's line infantry had led most of the fighting, so the Landwehr were given the task of taking two villages from the French. By nightfall seven Landwehr battalions of Bülow's Corps took the villages, but they were just outposts for the French, who were retreating towards the suburbs of Leipzig. On October 19 the French began their retreat from Leipzig, leaving 30,000 troops to defend the perimeter of the city. During a failed attempt at an armistice in order to save the city, Bülow rode to the Russian camp to coordinate an attack. While he was gone, Crown Prince

⁷⁶ Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 266.

⁷⁷ Captain Stosch; quoted in Antony Brett-James, *Europe against Napoleon, The Leipzig Campaign, 1813, from eyewitness accounts*, (London: Macmillan, 1970), 145-146.

Bernadotte rode to one of Bülow's brigades and ordered it to attack Leipzig, but it would not have any support.

The attack was almost a failure. Within minutes a thousand men became casualties during difficult street fighting and hand-to-hand combat. During the fighting, the brigade's East Prussian Landwehr were cut off from the rest of the brigade in a side street – only half of the battalion's 400 men escaped. (See Image: 8) Bülow was furious and ordered his other brigade to attack. The attack threatened the French troops' ability to retreat, thus they began to withdraw. The rest of the East Prussian Landwehr battalion that had lost half its men pushed towards the city's Grimma Gate. Tough fighting ensued around the gate, especially when troops from France's German ally Baden refused to open the gate, allowing trapped Frenchmen to be slaughtered by the oncoming Prussians. The Landwehr used their musket butts to break a wall at the gatehouse, allowing some men to rush inside and open the gate for the rest of the Prussian troops. In his memoir, Major Karl Friedrich Friccius, the commander of the Third Battalion of the Third East Prussian Landwehr Regiment from Königsberg, eulogizes John Motherby, a first generation Prussian of English descent, who was killed leading the charge through the breach:

He was the model Landwehr soldier, the most peaceable and modest citizen, the most conscientious businessman, the finest and most amiable companion, the most resolute of soldiers.⁷⁸

This was without doubt the type of man that Gneisenau and the military reformers had envisioned for the Landwehr. With the enemy reformed inside the wall, Friccius recounts:

They fired incessantly at us and at the breach . . . we quickly collected in tight groups and charged the enemy with fixed bayonets. They took to flight as fast as they could go, and we, being scarcely fifty strong, drove many hundreds before us.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Major Karl Friedrich Friccius; quoted in Brett-James, *Europe against Napoleon*, 223.

⁷⁹ Friccius, *ibid.*, 224.

The French troops surrendered. By the end of the day, it was clear that the Allies had won the battle, and the victory clearly signaled the end of Napoleon's dominance of Europe.



**Image 8: East Prussian Landwehr near the Grimma Gate
Leipzig, 19 October 1813**

Prussia was now liberated. The year 1813 had been a long year yet fruitful year for the Prussian military reform movement. From the Tauroggen to the volunteers throughout Prussia, something happened in the kingdom that had not happened before: the Nation became connected to the State. More specifically, it became connected through the Landwehr and universal military service. The middle class had been apathetic towards the State's situation in 1806, but

in 1813 the middle class became the backbone of the rejuvenated Prussian army. As Gordon Craig states, “Much has been written about the popular enthusiasm of 1813 and doubtless much of it exaggerated; but that there was a sharp contrast with the mood of 1806 there can be no doubt.”⁸⁰

Although there were those who highly doubted the ability and worth of the Landwehr, including Frederick William himself, the militia became a pragmatic step towards reviving Prussia’s military and diplomatic might. It provided Prussia thousands of more men in arms, and at the head of the Prussian military were audacious commanders such as Bülow and Blücher. With the support of the Landwehr of his own corps and Tauentzien’s Corps, General Bülow was able to defend Berlin and fight back the French assaults when his commander, Crown Prince Bernadotte, was largely lethargic, unresponsive, or disruptive. His Landwehr units were generally reliable, such as the East Prussians of the Third Corps; whereas other units, such as the Silesian Landwehr of Yorck’s First Corps, were generally unreliable. Despite the problems and variations, the Landwehr nonetheless fulfilled the goal of the reform movement by connecting the Prussian people to affairs of the state, but now the reformers would have to make the Landwehr an acceptable post-war military and civil institution.

⁸⁰ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 61.

Chapter 3: Ideology vs. Pragmatism, 1814-1819

The creation of the Landwehr in 1813 was a pragmatic step for the Prussian military. Its founding resulted in restoring the kingdom's military might and capturing new laurels in the war for its liberation. But the institution itself, as designed by the military reformers, was a means to an end: a vehicle for civic activism in a highly class-conscious and traditionally politically apathetic society. In this chapter I explore how the Landwehr evolved from a practical addition to the war effort to a political football in the post-war years. In 1814 the Landwehr became a permanent part of Prussia's post-war military structure, but through the post-war years (1815-1819), the institution came under increasing attacks as being neither practical nor politically safe for the state. In 1819 the Landwehr was brought under closer supervision and control of the regular army, thus ending the reformers' version of the Landwehr as a separate but equal force in the Prussian military structure. After 1819, though, the Landwehr still existed semi-independently and continued to be a political and military issue until the conservatives terminated its independence in the 1860s. The reformers had planted the seed of progressive politics within the conservative Prussian state, and after the War of Liberation, ideological positions would better develop around certain issues. The Landwehr would be one of those issues.

The Happy Union, 1814-1815

The Landwehr as an institution had shown itself to have practical military value, and during the last years of the War of Liberation, the reformers' transitioned the Landwehr into a

fundamental element of the Prussian military. Not only were they establishing the Landwehr as a military force, but also as a permanent institution for keeping civilians involved in the military and thus the affairs of the state. General Blücher, upon receiving an honorary degree at the University of Berlin in August 1814, toasted “the happy union of the warrior and civilian society by means of the Landwehr.”¹ The reformers’ victory in making the Landwehr a permanent aspect of the Prussian military would not stop the conservatives from trying to break the ‘happy union’ to restore the army to its traditional character.

After the Battle of the Nations at Leipzig, Napoleon did not surrender, but retreated back to France for the final struggle. Unlike Metternich and the Austrians, who preferred to leave Napoleon on the throne in France, the Prussians, especially Blücher and Gneisenau, pushed for a campaign into France to overthrow the Emperor. There had been many casualties and desertions of Landwehr men, through exhaustion or simply as a result of animosity towards military service. The Prussian army in France was severely depleted in numbers through casualties and desertions. Yorck’s Corps began in August with 45 battalions, but now had only 16 battalions; Kleist’s Corps went from 44 battalions to 13.²

Despite these significant losses in numbers, the quality of the Landwehr that remained was comparable to the line infantry, and its identity was thus based off its performance in comparison to the line infantry. During the autumn of 1813, Gneisenau reported an incident to Hardenberg of a Silesian Landwehr battalion, which consisted mostly of young linen weavers who “teach themselves how to fight.”³ General Horn called to these men, “See! There advances the battalion of the Life Regiment against the enemy; they want to show that they are better than

¹ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 70.

² Showalter, *The Prussian Landwehr and Its Critics, 1813-1819*, 15.

³ Gneisenau to Hardenberg, 7 October 1813; Griewank, *Gneisenau: Ein Leben in Briefen*, 258. “So bildet sich jetzt die jungen Truppen zum Krieg aus!”

you;” to which the Landwehr men replied, “No! No! we are just as good as them!”⁴ According to German military historian Dennis Showalter,

When the allies marched on Paris in the spring of 1814, the Prussian Landwehr had developed its own identity, its own legends, its own loyalties. The men who wore the Landwehr cross on their caps could look back with pride on their achievements in a dozen pitched battles . . . As much as by accident as by design, the Landwehr had evolved parallel to the standing army, neither amalgamating with it, as had been the case in revolutionary France, nor occupying a special place or fulfilling specialized functions within it, like the British militia.⁵

But once liberation was achieved and the victorious end of the war approached, the future relationship of the Landwehr to the line was certainly a question that needed to be resolved.

After the Allies entered Paris in the spring of 1814, Frederick William ended universal military service by restoring the old exemptions, which had been suspended for the duration of the war. Hermann von Boyen – East Prussian military reformer, friend of Scharnhorst, and chief of staff to General von Bülow during the war – was appointed Minister of War in the spring of 1814 and would have the task of establishing Prussia’s peacetime army. On September 3, 1814, Frederick William signed the Conscription Law (*Wehrpflichtgesetz*). Crafted by Boyen, the law retained the Landwehr and universal military service and defended the existence of these aspects with the law’s first sentence:

The common effort of our faithful people, without exception and without distinctions, has produced the liberation of the fatherland through the war that ended so happily, and only

⁴ Gneisenau to Hardenberg, 7 October 1813; Griewank, *Gneisenau: Ein Leben in Briefen*, 258. “Seht! Dort rückt das Bataillon des Leibinfanterieregiments an den Feind; die wollen was Besseres sein, als ihr . . . Nein! Nein! wir sind ebenso gut als sie.” I find Gneisenau’s report to be interesting because, as I showed in Chapter 2, there was rampant desertion amongst the Silesian Landwehr, though this could be an extraordinary case. What is even more interesting is that Gneisenau reported this incident to Hardenberg, who had supported curtailing the Landsturm during the summer, possibly trying to show him the Landwehr’s value.

⁵ Showalter, *The Prussian Landwehr and Its Critics, 1813-1819*, 18.

in the same ways can we continue to claim this freedom and secure the admirable perspective, which Prussia has acquired.⁶

To reestablish universal military service in post-war Prussia successfully, the plan created four levels of service so that “especially in peacetime . . . the progress of education and business are not disturbed.”⁷ Boyen wanted to have middle class men serve in the military, but not at the expense of their civilian careers and livelihoods, as was the concern of the middle class during the spring of 1813. The regular active army would be composed of volunteers and 20-25 year old males conscripted by lot, who would serve for three years. The first reserve Landwehr (*Landwehr des ersten Aufgebots*) would be called up during wartime, but during peacetime, it would only occasionally meet to drill. This first reserve would be composed of 20-25 year olds not conscripted into the regular army, in addition to all males 26-32 years old. The second reserve Landwehr (*Landwehr des zweiten Aufgebots*), composed of veterans and males under 40, would be called up during war to provide troops for garrisons and reinforcements. The final level was the Landsturm, to be called up in time of war; it was to be composed of all males between 17 and 50 not serving anywhere else in the military. Historian Walter Simon observes that “what is perhaps most surprising about this law is not any of its provisions but rather the ease with which it was adopted,” something that may be explained by the fact the Landwehr produced no substantial signs of revolution during the war.⁸ Simon also points to Friedrich Meinecke, Boyen’s biographer, who believes that the reformers’ presentation of the law, such as

⁶ Das Wehrpflichtgesetz von 1814; quoted in Eckert, *Von Valmy bis Leipzig*, 265. “Die allgemeine Anstrengung Unseres treuen Volkes ohne Ausnahme und Unterschied hat in dem so eben glücklich beendigten Kriege der Befreiung des Vaterlands bewirkt, und nur auf solchem Wege ist die Behauptung dieser Freiheit und der ehrenvolle Standpunkt, den sich Preussen erwarb, fortwährend zu sichern.”

⁷ Das Wehrpflichtgesetz von 1814; quoted in Ibid., 265. “besonders im Frieden . . . dass dadurch die Fortschritte der Wissenschaften und Gewerbe nicht gestört werden.”

⁸ Simon, *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 183.

downplaying the Landsturm and emphasizing the need for a solid military plan before the Congress of Vienna, were factors in the lack of opposition.⁹ Because the law was also not clear in the details of the Landwehr reserve armies, further particulars were added on November 11, 1815 to establish the administration of the Landwehr.

Though the creation of the Landwehr and conscription in 1813 was a great success for the military reformers, the legal establishment of both in 1814 was an even greater achievement. The State, through Boyen and the reformers, had now established a permanent, formal link to the Nation. The Nation had rallied in 1813 to rid Prussia of the hated French, but now in peacetime, the reformers only had the memory and traditions of the 1813 Landwehr, which they hoped the post-1813 Landwehr would match. Despite the patriotic romanticization of the War of Liberation, memories of the past cannot produce military effectiveness in the present, especially when neither State nor Nation are at war.

An Instrument of Revolution, 1814-1819

Despite its proven military potential and the legal establishment of universal military service, the Landwehr needed to become an established part of Prussian society. In post-Napoleonic Europe it was essential for Prussia, now bordered by France, Austria, and Russia, to be able to mobilize a large army for defensive and diplomatic purposes. For this reason, the Landwehr was still an attractive source of manpower. Although the ideological arguments against the Landwehr had been largely silenced by its military necessity and its performance in

⁹ Friedrich Meinecke, *Boyen*, I, 403-411; Simon, *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 183-184.

battle, the events of the post-war years would breath new life into the ideological arguments against it. As Europe settled into a conservative period, known as the Restoration, the Landwehr would be opposed by several elements of society. As Napoleon's political and military power began to decline in 1813, the forces of reactionary conservatism began to assemble in order to usher in a new era in Europe, one in which states would attempt to destroy the French Revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity that Napoleon had spread throughout Europe. The Landwehr, the ideological step towards a nationalized army and the reformers' school for civic activism, would certainly become a target in Berlin, where conservative nobles had fought against various aspects of the reform program since 1807. The real issue for many was the continuation of universal military service, for which the Landwehr was the necessary vehicle and an important symbol. There were economic, military, and social concerns, but especially among the political elite, there was a concern that the Landwehr could essentially become "an instrument of revolution."¹⁰

As was the case in 1813, the middle class, especially in the towns of Breslau and Berlin, were apprehensive of the Landwehr and military service, especially with regard to business, industry, and education. Some businesses and industries failed to obtain exemptions for their employees. In Berlin, there was such an outcry about the negative financial impact that, despite concessions, Boyen was unable to overcome the powerful economic and political leaders of the capital and thus unable to continue the Landwehr there.¹¹ The University of Breslau criticized the "militarization of all citizens and especially the equalization of masters and servants,

¹⁰ Beyme, as reported by Gneisenau to Clausewitz, Dec. 23, 1817; quoted in Simon, *Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 190.

¹¹ Ibid., 189.

educated and uneducated, cultured and uncultured.”¹² The institution of the Landwehr began to lose any enthusiasm people might have had for it. As far as the Landwehr men themselves, Showalter notes, “it was one thing to swagger in uniform through the streets of one’s hometown, basking in the reflected glory of Leipzig and Waterloo. It was quite another to sacrifice two weeks’ pay, or to leave the fields at harvest time.”¹³ In the newly acquired Rhineland, which had more in common with France than Prussia,¹⁴ men were so angered by the military drills that Karl von Clausewitz, military reformer and former pupil of Scharnhorst, reconsidered the implementation of the Landwehr.¹⁵ Exercises were voluntary until turnout plummeted, and when they became mandatory, there were reports of a general lack of discipline.¹⁶ The return to peacetime and the routine and challenges of daily life were showing that the reformers’ goal of instilling civic activism through military service was failing.

There was also opposition from the landed nobility and upper class, especially among those who sought to maintain their traditional privileges. The Committee of the East Prussian-Lithuanian Estates argued that the Landwehr disturbed their traditional patriarchal authority by taking men away and letting them gather away from their power. They were especially concerned about special Landwehr armories becoming centers of revolt. Struck by this concern, Karl von Clausewitz pondered in an essay to Gneisenau, “the Landwehr increases the danger of revolution; abolishing the Landwehr increases the danger of invasion. On the historical

¹² Simon, *Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 186.

¹³ Showalter, *Prussian Landwehr and its Critics*, 25.

¹⁴ Prussia acquired the large province at the Congress of Vienna. Christopher Clark characterizes the situation as: “Berlin failed to get what it wanted and got what it did not want.” *Iron Kingdom*, 388. The Rhineland was economically, religiously, politically, and legally different from Prussia.

¹⁵ Clausewitz to Gneisenau, September 26, 1817; Showalter, *Prussian Landwehr and its Critics*, 26.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

evidence, which is the greater danger? . . . If in a certain sense it may be risky to have a people in arms, isn't it far more dangerous to rule an unarmed people?"¹⁷

To Hermann von Boyen, the military exercises of 1817 were a test of the post-1813 Landwehr. The performance of some units encouraged some of the traditional military skeptics of the Landwehr. General Borstell reported that he saw some Landwehr cavalry squadrons as good as the regular cavalry, and General Kleist, who had long been skeptical of the Landwehr, believed it had potential.¹⁸ Though Boyen believed that these maneuvers could prove the Landwehr's value in the face of the multiple criticisms, Dennis Showalter notes that, "What he could not counter was the growing mass of evidence demonstrating that the maneuvers of 1817 had marked the high point of the postwar Landwehr, that inadequate training, insufficient enthusiasm, and inefficient leadership were making it a second-line force with first-line responsibilities."¹⁹

Military spending between 1815 and 1819 constituted nearly half of Prussia's total budget, including occupying France and pensions for veterans, thus "the Prussian army was not a financial stepchild."²⁰ When a budget crisis arose in 1817, many conservatives saw the Landwehr and universal military service as perfect items to slash from the budget. To help resolve the situation, the finance minister proposed reducing the Landwehr and reinstating the pre-Jena furlough system, which would ultimately bring a return of the military-social structure of 1806. To prevent an end to his system, Boyen offered to resign, but Frederick William

¹⁷ "Ueber die politischen Vortheile und Nachtheile der Preussischen Landwehr," Clausewitz to Gneisenau, 17 December 1819; quoted in Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 293-294.

¹⁸ Showalter, *Prussian Landwehr and its Critics*, 21-22.

¹⁹ Ibid., 22.

²⁰ Ibid., 22-23.

refused his offer. The finance minister was later transferred to another position after a commission's inquiry into his department.

Despite thwarting the finance minister's plan, financial constraints threatened the military value of the Landwehr. Since Boyen had to focus his budget on Prussia's whole military situation, of which the Landwehr was only one aspect, he had to make several decisions in regard to the Landwehr. For example, the first Landwehr reserves held one instead of two two-week drill periods, and the second Landwehr reserve, intended for auxiliary duties, would not have any more military exercises. Boyen also shortened the training of the Landwehr in 1817 in order to use that money for fortifications, believing that the trade-off was justifiable.²¹ In order for every man in the regular army to receive their full three years of training, the Prussian army "would have to be nearly 200,000 strong . . . This was a fiscal impossibility, and Boyen knew it," but Boyen also believed that shortening the term of service would weaken the entire army.²² Though the Landwehr was supposed to be composed of men who had served in the regular army, the financial limitation on the army caused military authorities to adopt the practice of sending recruits, originally destined for line regiments, to Landwehr regiments after a "very sketchy training period."²³ The ultimate result was that a fraction of the Landwehr men were trained properly or had any experience in the regular army.

The recruitment of quality officers was a problem after 1814 as it was during 1813. To show the equality of the line and Landwehr infantry, Boyen was able to get Frederick William to allow all officers to apply for a transferable commission to either branch. When the regular army expanded in 1815, many good quality Landwehr officers applied for positions in the regular

²¹ Showalter, *Prussian Landwehr and its Critics*, 23.

²² Ibid., 24-25.

²³ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 74.

army, thus Boyen's plan backfired and he was left with generally the worst officers for the Landwehr men.²⁴ With the shortage of Landwehr officers, men without military experience were recruited as officers; consequently, the Landwehr officer corps consisted by and large of the apathetic and incompetent. Seeking a solution, Boyen turned to the one-year volunteers (*Einjährigen*). The one-year volunteers, organized into special rifle corps, were according to the Conscription Law of 1814, "young men from the educated classes who can provide clothes and weapons for themselves."²⁵ These volunteers could become Landwehr officers, and they acquired "a virtual monopoly when a Cabinet Order of May 22, 1818, forbade commissioning men without prior military experience."²⁶ Unfortunately, the solution did not solve the Landwehr's lack of quality officers, as was evident from later military exercises.

While the Landwehr was showing itself to not be a practical aspect of the Prussian military, an increasing number of liberal and nationalist speeches and demonstrations helped the reactionary conservatives gain the ear of the king. On October 18, 1817, about 500 students from at least eleven universities celebrated the 300th anniversary of the Reformation and the 4th anniversary of the Battle of Leipzig at the Wartburg castle in Thuringia. The students at the Wartburg "were not commemorating a 'War of Liberation' but a 'War of Liberty'; not a war of regular armies, but a war of volunteers; 'not a war', as the fallen volunteer rifleman and poet Theodor Körner put it, 'that crowns know of', but rather 'a crusade', a holy war'."²⁷ They sang patriotic songs and burned literature by reactionary authors, including a pamphlet by Theodor Anton Heinrich Schmalz, the rector of the University of Berlin, in which he downplayed popular

²⁴ Showalter, *Prussian Landwehr and its Critics*, 27.

²⁵ Das Wehrpflichtgesetz von 1814; Eckert, *Von Valmy bis Leipzig*, 266. "Junge Leute aus den gebildeten Ständen, die sich selbst kleiden und bewaffnen können . . ."

²⁶ Showalter, *Prussian Landwehr and its Critics*, 27.

²⁷ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 379. Körner's 1813 poem "Aufruf"

enthusiasm by saying that the Prussian volunteers did not join because of patriotism, but of duty, “just as one hurries by when a neighbor’s house is burning down.”²⁸ Another conservative, publicist Friedrich von Gentz, argued that the state (i.e. princes and ministers) had brought about the successful conclusion to the war:

Not all the demagogues and pamphleteers of the world and of posterity can take that away from them . . . They prepared the war, founded it, created it. They did even more: they led it, nourished and enlivened it . . . Those who today in their youthful audacity suppose that they overturned the tyrant, couldn’t even have driven him out of Germany.²⁹

Arguments over the memory of the war had already begun by 1817, and those interpretations became linked to solidifying political views, but as usual, the truth lies in the middle. Without the patriotism and duty of the people, facilitated through the authority and creativity of the state (i.e. Jäger units, the reformers’ Landwehr), the nation and state would not have been able to play such a leading role driving the tyrant out of Germany.

The nationalist festival at Wartburg caused concern among reactionary conservatives throughout the German Confederation over the growing ‘demagogic’ movement, which threatened the security of the state and traditional society. This certainly was the case in Prussia, where the conservatives now had new talking points against the reformers and their reforms. Though the reformers had been instrumental in bringing about the liberation of Prussia, Frederick William was ever more skeptical of them. Frederick William had been worried by the tone in which Blücher and Gneisenau had insisted on their plans during the war and by their insistence on establishing Prussian dominance over northern Germany, even if it meant going to war with Austria. To Frederick William, “it smacked vaguely of insubordination, and it recalled

²⁸ T.A.H. Schmalz, *Berichtigung einer Stelle in der Bredow-Venturinischen Chronik vom Jahre 1808* (Berlin, 1815); quoted in Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 378.

²⁹ Friedrich von Gentz; *Ibid.*, 379.

to the king's mind the revolt of Schill in 1809, a thing of which he did not wish to be reminded."³⁰

Prussia's volatile political situation did not go unnoticed by other Europeans. In December 1815, Britain's foreign minister wrote to the British representative in Berlin:

With all the partiality and a grateful admiration of the conduct of that nation and its armies in the war, I fairly own that I look with considerable anxiety to the tendency of their politics. There certainly at this moment exists a great fermentation in all orders of the State, very free notions of Government, if not principles actually revolutionary, are prevalent, and the army is by no means subordinate to the civil authorities.³¹

Klemens von Metternich, the reactionary conservative foreign minister of Austria, warned Hardenberg of the "civilian party" that preferred "a senseless system of mere popular forces" to the traditional army.³² Tsar Alexander was reported to have told his generals: "It is possible that some time we shall have to come to the aid of the King of Prussia against his army."³³ Frederick William was susceptible to the opinions of other European elites, and this further made him cast more suspicion on the reformers.

Frederick William, upon whom the success of the reforms depended, had never been a true supporter of the Landwehr. Frederick William's brother-in-law, Duke Charles of Mecklenburg, cautioned the king about the Landwehr and urged its abolition. To the Duke, the Landwehr was "a close approach to a dangerous arming of the people" and thus a threat to the state if the Landwehr got out of hand and became the core of a popular revolt.³⁴ Prince August believed that the Landwehr men were civilians more than soldiers and was thus similar to the

³⁰ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 66.

³¹ Castlereagh; *Ibid.*, 67.

³² Metternich, "Ueber die Lage der preussischen Staaten," Nov. 1818, *Aus Metternich's Papieren*, III, 175; quoted in Simon, *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 192.

³³ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 67.

³⁴ Duke Charles of Mecklenburg; quoted in Simon, *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 191.

French National Guard during the French Revolution.³⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm was certainly receptive to these concerns, especially since the claim of Jacobinism in the reform circle was not a new talking point.

Even though the ideological struggle between reformers and conservatives was fierce, the expenses and weaknesses of the Landwehr could not be ignored. These differences furthered the cause of the conservatives to end the independence of the now seemingly impractical institution. As Gordon Craig states, “the military inadequacy of the Landwehr enabled [the conservatives] to argue that, if Prussia should find herself at war, she would be unable to defend herself and that, consequently, the time had come for the king to submit the Landwehr to closer supervision.”³⁶ This would be brought to fruition in 1819.

The End of “Separate but Equal,” 1819

“I take no pride in you at all. Here, you traitor to the Fatherland!”³⁷ With these words, the radical 24-year-old Bavarian student Karl Sand plunged a knife into the chest of the reactionary dramatist August von Kotzebue, a shocking event that would further plunge the German Confederation into a period of reactionary conservatism. The assassination of Kotzebue at Mannheim³⁸ on March 23, 1819 would also further connect Boyen and his Landwehr to the civil reform movement, a bond that would eventually lead to the end of the Landwehr as Boyen crafted it. To the war minister and the other military reformers, the Landwehr was always a

³⁵ Simon, *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 190.

³⁶ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 74-75.

³⁷ Karl Sand; quoted in Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 399.

³⁸ Mannheim was not in Prussia, but along the Rhine in the southwest of the German Confederation.

means of involving the ordinary subject in the affairs of the state. The next step in this agenda was the long desired goal of Baron vom Stein: a constitution. Sand's action had sent a shockwave throughout the German Confederation and harmed the nationalist and liberal student movement by making it appear more radical to the already fearful conservatives. The Kotzebue assassination made persuading the king to adopt a liberal constitution even less of a possibility, especially when all things liberal, such as the Landwehr, would come under greater scrutiny.

The ideological struggle between reformers and reactionaries had been a constant theme since the rise of the reform movement from the ashes of the fields of Jena and Auerstedt, but with the end of the War of Liberation there began a new escalation of tensions. Unlike the first part of the reform movement (1806-1813), the second part (1813-1819) would feature a different cast of characters. Succeeding Scharnhorst and leading the military reformers, Boyen had been made Minister of War in 1814, and he had been striving to maintain the traditional, independent Landwehr and universal military service as was discussed in the previous section. On the civil reform front, Stein was in retirement, but when he was in power, he had called on Wilhelm von Humboldt to lead the new department of education and religion. After reforming the education system (1809-1810), Humboldt spent some time as an ambassador to Austria and England and participated in the Congress of Vienna as an aide to Chancellor Hardenberg. In January 1819 Hardenberg had Humboldt appointed as head of a new ministry that would oversee constitutional matters, initiating a political struggle that would begin before Humboldt even returned to Berlin. Humboldt did not trust Hardenberg and did not want to become a pawn in the development of a constitution, since the chancellor was already working on one. He wrote to the chancellor:

I had thought that the draft for a constitution would emanate from my department, and I cannot deny that I would find it difficult to conduct such an important matter according to

the ideas of others [i.e., Hardenberg's]. Besides, I cannot conceive how one man alone can work out a constitution, or even work out its basic principles.³⁹

As Walter Simon notes, “The establishment of representative government in Prussia went by default in 1819 because the two men most anxious to promote it were personally incompatible and divergent in their political background and heritage.”⁴⁰ Hardenberg, by eventually threatening to resign, was able to get Frederick William to demand Humboldt's acceptance of the position, which the latter did in February. Hardenberg and Humboldt both drafted similar moderate constitutions, but Frederick William gave the duty of discussing them to a commission. The members of this commission consisted of government leaders, some who wanted to use Humboldt to take power away from Hardenberg.

Other Europeans had been observing the political situation in Berlin, but with the rise of the nationalist and radical student movement, beginning with the fraternities and the Wartburg festival in 1817 and reaching a climax with the assassination of Kotzebue in 1819, Klemens von Metternich was positioning himself to be the reactionary leader of Berlin and Europe. Metternich's foothold in the Berlin court was Prince Wittgenstein, the Minister of the Interior. Wittgenstein and Metternich sought to use the assassination of Kotzebue not to just “suppress the demagogues,” but to implement a greater plan to “steer Prussia away from the path of constitutionalism.”⁴¹ When Frederick William, accompanied by Wittgenstein, went to the Bohemian resort town of Teplitz in July 1819 for some rest and relaxation, Metternich arrived and convinced Frederick William that the constitutional development in Prussia was dangerous,

³⁹ Humboldt to Hardenberg, 24 January 1819; quoted in Simon, *Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 202.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 204-205.

⁴¹ Ibid., 209.

and Frederick William, always susceptible to the opinions of others, looked to the Austrian minister for help.

With Frederick William in the palm of his hand, Metternich assembled representatives from the largest German states in Carlsbad, Bohemia in August 1819. What they produced became known as the Carlsbad Decrees, which curtailed freedoms, allowed suppression of any ‘revolutionary activity,’ and most importantly, halted the development of a constitution. Hardenberg, by seeking to consolidate his power and not standing on principle, became secondary to Metternich and accepted his policies. The other ministers in Berlin attempted to outmaneuver Hardenberg, with the newly arrived Humboldt, but they failed. Humboldt then argued that the foreign minister should not be allowed to agree to an international plan, which affected the domestic politics of Prussia, i.e. the Carlsbad Decrees. Despite the earlier unity against Hardenberg, only two ministers supported Humboldt’s initiative, including Minister of War Hermann von Boyen. Through this failure, Hardenberg was able to regain his authority.

Frederick William now saw Boyen as part of the trio, which “appeared in the light of rebels” because “they were not only rebels against Hardenberg but against the king himself, since the Carlsbad policy was the king’s at least as much as it was the chancellor’s.”⁴² The king’s political view of Boyen affected the crown jewel of his ministry: the Landwehr. On December 6, 1819 Frederick William issued a Cabinet Order that would end the independence of the Landwehr, its “separate but equal status.”⁴³ According to Boyen’s plan, in peacetime there would be 72 two-battalion Landwehr regiments, and in wartime, Landwehr ‘Field Regiments’ would each be organized from three battalions. Each Landwehr Field Regiment would be attached to a regular regiment, forming a mixed brigade. Special inspectors in 28 districts

⁴² Simon, *Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, 220.

⁴³ Showalter, *Prussian Landwehr and its Critics*, 27.

oversaw the Landwehr regiments and reported directly to the corps commander of the district. Frederick William's plan involved getting rid of the special administrators and making divisional and corps commanders responsible for training the Landwehr. This was made possible because two three-battalion Landwehr regiments would be formed into a Landwehr brigade and attached to a division. Instead of 72 two-battalion Landwehr regiments, there would be 36 three-battalion regiments.⁴⁴ (See Figures 2, 3, and 4) Frederick William was essentially making the wartime organization of the army into the organization of the army during peacetime. This contradicted what Boyen wanted, and he had always seen any attempt to change his system as a threat and an attack on the Landwehr. Because he did not want to implement a policy he fundamentally disagreed, he offered Frederick William his resignation. Though the king was reluctant to accept it, he did so on Christmas Day 1819. Dennis Showalter points out that there is no proof that Frederick William was looking for a way to get rid of Boyen, but that "[he] had been contemplating a reorganization of the Landwehr since March, several months before Boyen's relationship with Humboldt became politically significant."⁴⁵ With Boyen gone, Hardenberg was able to get Frederick William to dismiss Humboldt by December 31, 1819, ending the Reform Era.

Boyen's resignation did not mean that the Landwehr was eliminated or that its ideological function was altered. The changes made to Landwehr, despite going against Boyen's wishes, were pragmatic changes. Though the more serious problems of 1815-1819 were not directly addressed, the Landwehr's inclusion with the line showed itself to be effective in military exercises.⁴⁶ The institution of the Landwehr was not further altered throughout the

⁴⁴ Showalter, *Prussian Landwehr and its Critics*, 29-30.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

1820s. “Despite Boyen’s anguished description of the reorganization as the beginning of a return to the pre-Jena military system,” Dennis Showalter states, “it was rather a return to the system of command and control which had proved so successful during the War of Liberation.”⁴⁷ In the spring of 1813, the training and supplying of the Landwehr had been a relative failure, but with the inclusion of the Landwehr in the regular army and not the Military Governments in the summer of 1813, the training and equipping of the Landwehr battalions generally improved. Just as that decision was pragmatic in 1813, so it was too in 1819. As was discussed in the last section, though the ideological arguments against the Landwehr intensified, it was also the shortcomings and cost of the Landwehr that made Boyen’s system impractical. As Dennis Showalter claims “[the Landwehr] deteriorated because it failed to generate enough enthusiasm to compensate for its technical difficulties” and “[it] failed to live up to its own heritage. It was not sabotaged by reactionaries.”⁴⁸ If some conservatives had had their way, the Landwehr would have been eliminated, but the Landwehr still retained some autonomy. Nonetheless, the Landwehr, the civilian influence in the army, was still a threat to the conservatives and their staunch belief in the traditional army.

A Politically and Militarily False Institution

The Landwehr did not cease being a political topic after 1819, despite the victory of the reactionary conservatives. The Landwehr would once again become an element in the debate between liberalism and conservatism in Prussia during the nineteenth century. The royal army

⁴⁷ Showalter, *Prussian Landwehr and its Critics*, 30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

became the means for keeping internal order and for cracking down on ‘dangerous political activity’ and freedoms according to the Carlsbad Decrees. Any respect that ordinary people had developed for the army during the Wars of Liberation was lost as the king’s troops became oppressive and despotic. “In the years between 1819 and 1840,” Gordon Craig notes, “everything that Scharnhorst and his disciples had done to reconcile the military establishment with civilian society had been destroyed; the army was once more widely regarded as the main barrier to social progress.”⁴⁹

As liberals began to criticize the royal government, they also criticized the army that upheld the oppressive state. Thus “it was in this period that the deification of the Landwehr began and that its achievements in the War of Liberation began to be praised at the expense of the line army.”⁵⁰ In 1840 Frederick William III died and his oldest son became Frederick William IV. There was much hope amongst the people that Frederick William IV would deliver the long-awaited constitution. This hope was fueled through some of the king’s first actions, such as reappointing Hermann von Boyen as Minister of War in 1841. Boyen made some changes to the army, including arming it with the breech-loading Dreyse needle-gun, but “his return to the War Ministry had no effect upon the prevailing tendencies within the army – the trend to professionalism, the increasing political conservatism of the officer corps, and the steady alienation of the military establishment from civilian society.”⁵¹ He did not do anything to change the Landwehr, as Thomas Nipperdey points out:

The Landwehr, which should have reconciled the nation and army according to the agenda of the reformers, remained a step-child of politics. Its officers were insufficiently trained, and they were also not the educated men that Boyen had remembered. It lacked

⁴⁹ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 81.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 80.

⁵¹ Ibid., 90.

civic awareness, something which Boyen's second ministry after 1840 also did nothing to change.⁵²

Despite the changes Boyen made, he did not have the same power he had in 1814. He had philosophical differences with his subordinates, and conservatives in the army and in the government often challenged his orders. Boyen did not receive support from the king, who realized that he was now caught in the middle of a renewed struggle between liberalism and conservatism.

In 1848 the citizens of France overthrew the regime of Louis-Philippe, setting off a chain reaction of liberal and nationalist revolutions across Europe. Prussians, accustomed to the army putting down riots, rallied to the barricades in the streets, especially in Berlin. Many of the soldiers in the army were from the same classes as those revolting. The crisis even permeated some Landwehr units, which divided into liberal and loyalist factions. Even in Breslau, a radical Landwehr club gained more than 2,000 members.⁵³ Despite the failed attempt of the Prussian revolution to create a true liberal constitution, Frederick William created a conservative constitution in 1850, in which the Landtag, the lower house, had a liberal majority. That same year, under a liberal government, Prussia tried to assert its leadership of "Germany," but the plan failed, much to the delight of conservatives, when Prussia backed down to Austrian and Russian pressure at the Punctation of Olmütz. In 1857 Frederick William IV would become mentally disabled after a stroke. His brother, Prince William, became the regent in 1858 and king in January 1861 upon the death of his brother.

In 1852 publisher Karl Bädker authored a pamphlet defending the Landwehr and noted that for some people "it has lately become fashionable . . . to condemn this association, . . . [and]

⁵² Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1800-1866*, (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1983), 328.

⁵³ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 484.

to describe the Landwehr as a corrupt institution;” these people also “endorse [the Landwehr’s] abolition or a complete reconfiguration, which would amount to [its] dissolution.”⁵⁴ Six years later, General Albrecht von Roon would do just that by using his influence with Prince-regent William to propose reforms to the Prussian military, the most controversial being the end of the Landwehr as a significant and semi-independent force within the Prussian army. Roon viewed the Landwehr as ‘politically’ and ‘militarily false,’ since it was composed of unreliable, undisciplined citizen-soldiers.⁵⁵ This attitude was also shared with William, who “regarded [the Landwehr] as both militarily ineffective and politically unreliable,” and “wanted an armed force that was responsive only to the will of the sovereign.”⁵⁶ The Prince-regent recalled how some Landwehr troops needed to be nudged into battle by a regular regiment during Prussia’s military intervention in Baden in 1849.⁵⁷ Minister of War Eduard von Bonin, who was philosophically more aligned with Boyen than Roon, said that “it would ‘separate the army from the country’ and create a situation in which Prussia would ‘lose the essential condition of her existence’, namely, the confidence of the people in the army.’”⁵⁸ Bonin believed he could prevent Roon’s proposal, but with the influence of the conservatives and William’s creation in 1859 of a special army reform commission, which Roon would chair, Bonin was powerless and resigned. According to Craig, Roon had neither “sympathy [for] nor understanding” of Boyen’s idealism, and the former’s proposals “were dictated primarily by the military deficiencies of the Landwehr, which had been widely recognized since the 1840s.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Karl Bädcker, *Die Preussische Landwehr und ihre Bedeutung*, (Koblenz: Bädcker, 1852), 3-4.

⁵⁵ Roon, *Denkwürdigkeiten*; Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 140.

⁵⁶ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 513-514.

⁵⁷ Eugene Anderson, *The Social and Political Conflict in Prussia, 1858-1864*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1954), 86.

⁵⁸ Bonin; Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 141.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

Unlike the king's plan in 1819, which focused on restructuring the army, Roon's plan was focused on increasing recruits for the standing army, and thus its size. To do this, he wanted to permanently increase the term of service in the active army from 2 years to 3 years.⁶⁰ Though the population increased from 10 million in 1814 to 18 million in 1860, the number of recruits each year (40,000) and the size of the army (130,000) stayed the same.⁶¹ By conscripting 40% instead of 26% of eligible males, the annual number of recruits would be 63,000. As for the Landwehr, Roon's plan would end the second reserve Landwehr and would transfer the youngest Landwehr men into the standing army. The remaining battalions of the older Landwehr men would be used for auxiliary purposes, i.e. garrisons, guarding communications, etc.

Though this plan would involve a significant increase in the military budget, which would result in unpopular deficit spending or tax increases, the ideological aspect of the Landwehr became a serious issue for liberals. The central committee of the German Progressive Party analyzed the numbers in 1861 and concluded that Roon's reform program was not worth the cost.⁶² The liberals also feared that giving recruits another year in the active army would be fatal to the idea of a citizen-army, because "it was known that the regent and Roon considered a third year necessary to imbue recruits with an *esprit de corps*, a sense of military honor, a proper devotion to the state and monarch, and a professional attitude."⁶³ To the liberals, the attack on Landwehr revived the memory of 1813 and the earlier struggles of the reformers. A deputy in the Landtag stated, "We cleave to the Landwehr with religious fanaticism, with the whole weight

⁶⁰ In 1833, in response to Prussia's increasing population, the term of service in the active army had been reduced from 3 to 2 years, which some military leaders believed was sufficient for training.

⁶¹ Anderson, *Social and Political Conflict in Prussia*, 85.

⁶² Ibid., 88-89.

⁶³ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 146.

of our youthful memories.”⁶⁴ In his pamphlet Karl Bädeler reminds his readers about the dangers Prussia faced in 1852 and emphasized the need for many soldiers in the need of an emergency by harkening back to the situation in 1813:

It is true that the Landwehr, which saved the fatherland 39 years earlier and which also was a great means at a time of emergency and upheaval, today still goes without that great national purpose.⁶⁵

He did argue for the maintenance of the Landwehr, but proposed some changes to improve it: returning the term of service to three years, discipline reform, and officer reform, which he admits, that even in 1852, “the great lack of officers for the Landwehr is known.”⁶⁶ In the politically charged, post-1848 atmosphere and with the conservative views of the king and the military, compromise was unlikely.

Roon’s attempt to ensure that the Prussian army was militarily reliable and powerful became such a contentious political issue that the Prussian government became stuck in a stalemate with the liberals in the Landtag, who preferred to have a large and independent Landwehr to dilute the aristocratic influence on the soldiers. To end the stalemate, William appointed Otto von Bismarck as prime minister in 1862. As historian A.J.P. Taylor observes, to Bismarck the issues boiled down to a class struggle because “[the constitutional crisis] was a conflict over [the army’s] character and particularly over the class-origin of the officers. The regular army had exclusively Junker officers; the Landwehr officers from the middle class.”⁶⁷ Bismarck, an East Prussian Junker, supported Roon and the army’s Chief of Staff Helmut von Moltke, (see Image 9) and asserted the power of the royal government because he believed that

⁶⁴ Eyck, *Bismarck*; Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 146.

⁶⁵ Bädeler, *Die Preussische Landwehr*, 5. “. . . entbehrt heute noch jenes grossen nationalen Ziels.”

⁶⁶ Ibid., 20-23.

⁶⁷ A.J.P. Taylor, *Bismarck, The Man and the Statesman*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 48.

the Landtag should not inhibit the king's authority over military matters. The trio "simply ignored parliament's annual vetoes of army bills and forced their changes through in time for [the war in] 1866," changes which increased Prussia's wartime strength from 100,000 in 1859 to 300,000 in 1866.⁶⁸ During the Austro-Prussian War in 1866, not only did Prussia fight Austria, but also Bavaria, Württemberg, Saxony, and Hanover. Despite the quick success of Prussia's forces, the Battle at Langensalza "was a 'black day' for the Prussian Landwehr, for not only did [the] battalions of "lawyers and oculists" hesitate to make the supreme sacrifice – taking only 5.3 percent casualties compared with 10.6 percent in the more ingenuous regular army battalions – they also deserted, shammed wounds, and concealed themselves around the field in alarming numbers. No less than 45 percent of [the] Landwehr strength went missing in the course of the battle."⁶⁹ To Helmut von Moltke, the performance of the Landwehr only justified the necessity of the reforms, which were so strongly pushed by Bismarck, Roon, and himself.⁷⁰

Image 9: Bismarck, Roon, and Moltke



⁶⁸ Geoffrey Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War, Austria's War with Prussia and Italy in 1866*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 80.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 80.

The Landwehr debate after 1819 seems to have been simply a continuation of the debate from before 1819. Just as questions over the inadequacies of the Landwehr and the growth of reactionary conservatism led to the end of the original Landwehr in 1819, so too did the deficiencies and the aristocratic conservatives bring the semi-independent Landwehr fully under the control of the army by 1866 by transferring most of the younger Landwehr soldiers into the standing army and greatly reducing the size of the Landwehr and returning it to its auxiliary role, which it was originally intended to fulfill in 1813. Prussian militarism had fully resurrected and would triumph through the leadership and policies of Roon, Moltke, and Bismarck. The 'civilian influence' in the army had finally been eliminated.

Conclusion

“For the king we dedicate goods and blood,
We give it gladly at any hour,
We do not mind the mortal wounds
And the fiery chaos of battle.
He summoned his people and all came,
Here matters no title, status, and names,
Each took his sword in hand,
With God for king and fatherland!
Each took his sword in hand,
With God for king and fatherland!”

“Dem Kön’ge weih’n wir Gut und Blut,
Wir geben’s gern zu jeder Stunde,
Wir achten nicht des Todes Wunde
Und nicht des Schlachtgetümmels Gluth.
Er rief sein Volk und alle kamen,
Da galt nicht Titel, Rang und Namen,
Ein Jeder nahm sein Schwert zur Hand,
Mit Gott für König und Vaterland!
Ein Jeder nahm sein Schwert zur Hand,
Mit Gott für König und Vaterland!”

This verse of a Landwehr song was one of many verses sung by Landwehr veterans on March 17, 1838 at the “Celebration of the Commemoration of March 17, 1813” in Berlin.¹ After 1815 people remembered and utilized the war in accordance with their own political leanings. In the first half of the nineteenth century, beginning with the Reform Era, Prussian liberals and nationalists struggled to maintain authority to counter the influence of conservative aristocrats. The Landwehr became an important symbol and vehicle for this struggle. The liberals and nationalists turned to the War of Liberation and the Landwehr as justification for their ideals, but Bismarck and the traditional, aristocratic military leaders won out in the end and returned the military to its roots.

With the defeat of the liberal influence in the military, i.e. the Landwehr, Prussian militarism became reinvigorated as Bismarck, Moltke, and Roon launched the Wars of German Unification. As Michael Leggiere points out:

Despite the national awakening that gripped Prussia during the struggle against France, the citizens’ army reverted back to a professional army, so that Prussia was again an army with a state . . . The great omen for subsequent world history was that Prussia’s uprising

¹ H. F. Normann, “Das Fest der Erinnerung an den 17. März 1813, den Tag des königlichen Aufrufes an das Preussische Volk und die Landwehr,” (Berlin: Reimer, 1838), 13.

and victory in the Wars of Liberation failed to make the army more national and popular. Instead Prussia became more militaristic – a trend that continued in 1866, 1870, and 1914.²

Prussia's wars against Austria in 1866 and France in 1870 would result in the creation of the Prussian-centered German Empire. The influence of Prussian militarism would shape the German military and help lead to the First World War in 1914.

Prussian-German militarism would not end with the defeat and collapse of the German Empire in 1918. During the interwar years, the German military establishment resented its defeat and dismantling, further kindling the flame of revenge. Despite this, German historian Friedrich Meinecke notes, "some . . . [who] carried forward the traditions of Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, and Boyen, still always managed to lift themselves out of this ordinarily narrow militarism," although, "this militarism can be regarded as the historical force which certainly helped forward most strongly the building up of the Third Reich."³ In his infamous book, *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler echoes the arguments of the conservatives of the mid-nineteenth century in demanding the army to be the epitome of loyalty and discipline:

In the folkish state . . . [the army] will be the last and highest school of patriotic education . . . but in the forefront of military training will stand what has to be regarded as the highest merit of the old army: . . . He must learn to be silent not only when he is justly blamed but must also learn, when necessary, to bear injustice in silence.⁴

In 1945 the Third Reich would end with the destruction and desolation of Germany, and Prussian-German militarism would be left in the rubble. Today the Bundeswehr, the current military of Germany, looks towards the Prussian Reform Era for part of its history and traditions.

² Leggiere, *Napoleon and Berlin*, 297.

³ Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe, Reflections and Recollections*, trans. Sidney B. Fay, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 47. Meinecke refers specifically to then Defense Minister Groener and Major General Hans von Haeften, who was then President of the Reich Archives.

⁴ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 413-414.

Though the historiography of the Landwehr has generally focused on the institution in the context of the struggle between reformers and reactionaries, liberals and aristocrats, the Landwehr came to an end both by its ideological opponents and its military shortcomings. There is no doubt that the Landwehr became a source of pride for those who fought in its units and for those who sought to counter traditional Prussian society, i.e. the dominance of aristocrats. Unfortunately for the nationalists and liberals, the Landwehr as Boyen designed it, was simply not a practical military institution after the War of Liberation, and it also was not able to lead to a nationalized army or active citizenry. As historian Peter Paret observes:

The educational ideal of the reformers – a community of free, intellectually and morally responsible individuals – in the achievement of which the army was to play a major part, remained unrealized; . . . through the Landwehr and universal conscription it fostered nationalism; but as the school of the nation it failed; . . . armed forces cannot be relied on as tools for general reform. In the army the success of the Prussian reformers had been remarkable; but in the political and intellectual climate of the country they could not bring to fruition what seemed to them to be the essential consequences of their military work.”⁵

Trying to create an active civic culture in the ranks of the disciplined, top-down oriented army would simply not lead to the reformers’ desired results. Most of the Landwehr men joined the ranks in 1813 because they were forced to, and many also deserted or simply could not live a soldier’s life during the fall of 1813. Despite the notable patriotic attitude throughout Prussia, which manifested itself especially through military service, it was certainly a phenomenon when compared to the Nation’s attitude just seven years earlier. As Meinecke laments, “the counterinfluence of the Scharnhorst-Boyen spirit was never able to register more than a very limited success.”⁶ The Kingdom of Prussia never truly politically matured, and in the end, just as it had hatched from a cannonball, it was ended by a cannonball.

⁵ Paret, *Yorck and the Era of Prussian Reform*, 244.

⁶ Meinecke, *German Catastrophe*, 50.



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