



Arden Bucholz. *Moltke and the German Wars, 1864-1871.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001. ix + 240 pp. \$33.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-333-68758-1; \$105.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-333-68757-4.

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Knowledge is Modern Military Power

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The wars of German unification stand out in military history as perhaps the first pre-planned wars, and it is precisely that aspect of looking ahead that occupies center stage in Arden Bucholz's book. The author's stated purpose is "to describe and analyze the German wars within organizational, knowledge and learning theory ... [and] to describe the impact of increasing demands for knowledge on the practical task of war fighting. As size, space, and time considerations burgeoned, as technologies changed, the bonding of war with knowledge was one way through" (p. 9). The proposed contribution is one of approach rather than content. Bucholz evaluates the Prussian General Staff as a knowledge organization. In that vein, a more systematic use of organized knowledge promoted more specialized personnel and led to greater organizational complexity. Meanwhile, real power passed to those who had the knowledge to make the decisions. It was this knowledge-based power that transformed the Prussian General Staff from a small, relatively obscure department under the War Ministry into the new locus of decision-making for the regular army. Similarly, the new demands opened the door for the new type of modern, technocratic, professional officer. To enhance learning, the Prussian Army introduced competition and conflict into its educational process by inventing war games. The gaming scenarios made it possible to identify problems and to correct them by changing or modifying the organization itself. The Prussian Army showed itself as a learning organization through

its growing recognition of the importance of continuing education. The author points to the use of topographic map sets, historical essays, intelligence reports on foreign armies, proposed war plans, and regular sequential war games as examples. Thus, Bucholz fairly credits Prussia with creating the four main core competencies of twentieth-century warfare: organizational, representational, educational, and analytical.

What the author offers is an explanation of the German General Staff as a product of Moltke's unique experiences and mental outlook. The pieces were there, but it took Moltke to assemble them and in the process create an institution that could teach itself. Learning from the highly problematic Prussian mobilization in 1850, Moltke concluded that all troops should be at home garrisons before mobilization, and this required a special alert period prior to declaration of war. More importantly, Moltke's concept of risk management proved vital to the development of Prussian war planning by creating margins for error that allowed a cushion of time and space for the army.

Bucholz has another goal, namely to dispel the stereotypes of Prussian militarism and to rehabilitate the Prussian General Staff from the long shadow of 1914 and 1939. By emphasizing the General Staff as a learning organization rather than as a purely military institution, the author makes it appear more like a civilian establishment. Similarly, the discussions of Moltke as an artist and intellectual rather than strictly as an army officer show him

as a well rounded individual. In this way Bucholz rejects any interpretation that draws a straight line of inevitable, aggressive intent in General Staff war planning between the wars of German unification and the two world wars simply because the Germans had learned how to plan for future wars under Moltke. Thus, the author disassociates the later negative aspects from Prussia's positive contribution to the world's modern military science.

Specialists in German or European history generally

will not find much to chew on in this book. While it is all well and good to point out that we should not read history backwards and instead take the Prussian army at the time of unification on its own terms, the point could have been made succinctly in an article. The information is not new, and the theoretical framework of knowledge and learning theory does not contribute significant insights. The book would be more useful as a teaching tool for undergraduate courses in European military history, or general nineteenth-century European history.

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