

JACQUES-ANTOINE-HIPPOLYTE, COMTE DE GUIBERT: FATHER OF THE
GRANDE ARMÉE

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The eighteenth century was a time of intense upheaval in France. The death of Louis XIV in 1715 and the subsequent reign of Louis XV saw the end of French political and martial hegemony on the continent. While French culture and language remained dominant in Europe, Louis XV's disinterested rule and military stagnation led to the disastrous defeat of the French army at the hands of Frederick the Great of Prussia in the Seven Years War (1756-1763).

The battle of Rossbach marked the nadir of the French army in the Seven Years War. Frederick's army routed the French infantry that had bumbled its way into massed Prussian cavalry. Following the war, two reformist elements emerged in the army. Reformers within the government, chiefly Etienne François, duc de Choiseul, sought to rectify the army's poor performance and reconstitute France's military establishment. Outside the traditional army structure, military thinkers looked to military theory to reinvigorate the army from within and without.

Foremost among the latter was a young officer named Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte de Guibert, whose 1772 *Essai général de tactique* quickly became the most celebrated work of theory in European military circles. The *Essai* provided a new military constitution for France, proposing wholesale reform to create an army that could face the Prussian juggernaut. His star quickly rising, Guibert became the toast not only of literary Paris but all of Europe. Guibert exerted an overwhelming influence on military theory across Europe for the next fifty years. His military theories laid the foundation for the French army of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. As other nations adopted French methods, Guibert's influence spread across the continent, reigning supreme until the 1830s. Guibert's importance to military theory is analogous to

Voltaire's influence on European literature and culture, an area in which Guibert was not unfamiliar. Guibert was also a celebrated lover of women, most notably Julie de Lespinasse and possibly a young Germaine de Staël.

To date, no work has been produced that provides a clear picture of the man, his place in society, his work, and his legacy. For these reasons, a study of Guibert's life and his career is a valuable contribution to French history.

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INTRODUCTION

The eighteenth century was a time of intense upheaval in France. The death of Louis XIV in 1715 and the subsequent reign of Louis XV saw the end of French political and martial hegemony on the continent. While French culture and language remained dominant in Europe, Louis XV's disinterested rule and military stagnation led to the disastrous defeat of the French army at the hands of Frederick the Great of Prussia in the Seven Years War (1756-1763).

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Foremost among the latter was a young officer named Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte de Guibert, whose 1772 *Essai général de tactique* quickly became the most celebrated work of theory in European military circles.¹ The *Essai* provided a new military constitution for France, proposing wholesale reform to create an army that could face the Prussian juggernaut. His star quickly rising, Guibert became the toast not only of literary Paris but all of Europe. In the latter part of the 1770s, Guibert served in the Ministry of War as a member of the War Council that oversaw the most important military reforms prior to the Revolution of 1789. Guibert exerted an overwhelming influence on military theory across Europe for the next fifty years. His military theories laid the foundation for the French army of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. As

¹ Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte, comte de Guibert, *Essai général de tactique* (Liege: C. Plomteaux, 1773). Hereafter referred to as the *Essai*.

other nations adopted French methods, Guibert's influence spread across the continent, reigning supreme until the 1830s. Guibert's importance to military theory is analogous to Voltaire's influence on European literature and culture, an area in which Guibert was not unfamiliar. His dramatic tragedy, *Le Connétable de Bourbon*, was the talk of Paris and a favorite of Queen Marie Antoinette. Guibert was also a celebrated lover of women, most notably Julie de Lespinasse and possibly a young Germaine de Staël. For these reasons, a study of Guibert's life and his career is a valuable contribution to French history.

Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte de Guibert was born in 1743 to an *anoblis* family of bourgeois extraction.² His father, Charles-Benoît, was a career soldier, serving with distinction as an officer in the Wars of Polish (1733-1735) and Austrian (1740-1748) Succession. Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte was born at the height of the latter war and spent his early years at Montaubon. As the eldest and only son of the family, Guibert was expected to follow his father into the army according to French tradition. In 1752, Charles retired from active service to direct the military education of his son. Sometime thereafter, Charles sent Guibert to begin his formal education in arts, letters, and military science.

In 1756, France entered the Seven Years War against England and Prussia. Charles was recalled to active duty as an officer on the staff of Marshal Charles de Rohan, prince de Soubise. Guibert continued his education until late 1757, when he was appointed an officer under his

² *Anoblis* denoted a family that had been recently ennobled, most likely through a marriage or royal decree. The noble establishment used the word as an epithet, particularly in reference to the members of the *noblesse de la robe*, who were not considered by the establishment to be true nobles. In the provinces, ancient noble families that had fallen on hard economic times resented the *anoblis*, whom they saw as having purchased their titles rather than having won them through proper service to the state. The social friction between the *anoblis*, provincial nobles, and great nobles was one of the major contributing factors to the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. Within the military establishment, a *roturier* was a non-noble. The term connotes a low social standing; *roturiers* were expected to fill the ranks of junior officers with little hope for promotion. Mirroring the conflict within French society, the social friction between upper nobles and *roturiers* contributed to the contentious nature of army politics in the late eighteenth century, culminating in the Ségur Decree of 1781 requiring four degrees of nobility for promotion to the upper ranks.

father's care. Both were present at Rossbach to witness the inefficacy of the French army. Taken prisoner, father and son spent eighteen months in Prussia, where both observed the training and methods of the Prussian army. Following their release, both Guiberts served until the end of the war in 1763. Charles, prized for his theoretical knowledge and experience, served in a variety of administrative positions, including in the Ministry of War under Choiseul. Guibert, rising rapidly through the officer ranks, served as an aide to General Noël Jourda de Vaux in the Corsican war of 1769. In Corsica, Guibert drafted the *Essai* and his famous tragedy, the *Connétable de Bourbon*.³ He also won fame for his valor on the battlefield, for which he was promoted to colonel and awarded the Cross of St. Louis. In 1771, Guibert transferred to metropolitan France and in the following year published the first edition of the *Essai* anonymously.

The *Essai* quickly proliferated across Europe, celebrated by military theorists, *philosophes*, and salon patrons alike. Almost overnight, Guibert became a celebrity in France. His *Essai* attracted the notice of Voltaire and the leading *philosophes* of the time, granting Guibert entrée into the leading Parisian salons. In 1773, Guibert journeyed throughout Germany and was received with favor at the Prussian court by his idol, Frederick II. Upon his return to France, his tragedy was published for friends and acquaintances. It made its way to the royal court, where Marie Antoinette particularly liked the drama. Despite critical reviews, the *Connétable de Bourbon* was performed at two royal weddings between 1773 and 1775 and by the Comédie française. Guibert also carried on an affair with leading salonnière Julie de Lespanesse before marrying another love in the summer of 1775.

³ Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte, comte de Guibert, *Connétable de Bourbon*, in *Oeuvres dramatiques de Guibert*, ed. Alexandrine Guibert (Paris: Persan et C^{ie}, 1822) 5-96.

In October of the same year, Claude Louis, comte de Saint-Germain, was appointed head of the Ministry of War. He assembled a War Council of reformers to examine and address the problems facing the French army. Young Colonel Guibert received an appointment to the War Council along with Jean-Baptiste Vaquette de Gribeauval and other notable reformers. The War Council, often over Saint-Germain's objections, implemented an array of reforms that fundamentally altered the nature of the French army. Abolishing colonel-proprietorships, the Council replaced them with government funding for all regiments. The numbers of supernumerary officers and regiments were greatly reduced, including the illustrious *Maison du roi* and many of the regiments attached to the Invalides. Corporal punishment was all but eliminated, while draconian measures like running the gauntlet were replaced by blows from the flat of a sabre. The *Ecole militaire*, long the preserve of the highest nobility, was briefly eliminated in favor of a system of provincial schools catering to the lower nobility who could not previously afford military training and education for their sons. The *École militaire* returned as a school for exceptional cadets. The War Council of Saint-Germain sought to streamline and improve the French army and its officer corps. In the twenty-three months that Guibert served on the Council, it achieved many of these measures on paper. However, resistance came from within the army. Members of the upper nobility resented the loss of noble privilege that many of the reform efforts represented. The French public, particularly the salons, viewed the implementation of blows with the flat of a sabre to be a worse punishment than any used previously. Unfortunately for Guibert, he was painted as the author of the latter policy and largely shunned from public life. The War Council was disbanded in disgrace and Saint-Germain resigned in September 1777.

Following his fall from favor, Guibert was assigned command of the regiment of Neustria. He also served his father, now governor of the *Invalides*, as a roving inspector. He made several other trips across the continent, keeping diaries as he had done in 1773. In 1785, Guibert won appointment to Seat Thirty of the French Academy for his contributions to French literature and military thought. He published a *Défense du système de guerre moderne* in 1779, which refined the tactical system of the *Essai* and refuted many of the latter's proposed social reforms.⁴ In 1787, Guibert was named to a new War Council under Louis-Marie-Athanase de Loménie, comte de Brienne. Once again, he participated in the design of radical reforms for the army, and once again he was lambasted for his part. In January 1789, Guibert stood for election to the Estates-General but was defeated, thanks in large part to his support of unpopular reforms. On 6 May 1790, Guibert died vowing vindication.

The comte de Guibert's legacy is complex. It is often divided into three separate areas. His literary contributions certainly did not equal his sometime-correspondent, Voltaire, but they were nevertheless celebrated in the salons. His reputation as a lover emerged from his court romances and was immortalized in the publication of his correspondence with Julie de Lespinasse. Guibert's military theory would prove to be the most lasting aspect of his legacy. The *Essai* laid the foundation for the armies of the French Revolution and Napoleon. In the years following its publication, theorists across Europe debated its merits. Gribeauval and the du Teil brothers included large parts of Guibert's theories in their own writings.⁵ The provisional regulations of 1788 and 1789 and the formal *Réglement* of 1791 enshrined Guibert's theories in

⁴ Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte, comte de Guibert, *Défense du système de guerre moderne, ou refutation complete du système de M. de M....D.....*, in *Oeuvres militaires de Guibert* (Paris: Chez Magimel, 1803), Volumes 3-4. Hereafter referred to as the *Défense*.

⁵ Jean and Jean-Pierre du Teil were influential artillery theorists who would play a role in Napoleon Bonaparte's military education.

the French military constitution.⁶ The armies of France carried Guibert's flexible, mobile, maneuverable, and simple but decisive method of warfare across Europe to the gates of Moscow. His social theories, particularly the role of the citizen-soldier, would bear fruit under the guidance of Lazare Carnot, the Revolution's "organizer of victory." As France proved the effectiveness of the system, Guibert's theories were adopted by other nations and used against France, eventually resulting in the fall of Napoleon and his banishment from Europe.

A study of Guibert begins with his own writings. Guibert produced a number of published works within his life, most notably the *Essai* and the *Défense*. These comprise the majority of his military theory and are the most useful for military historians. Near the end of his life, Guibert also wrote a number of political treatises, which expounded on the political theory that permeated his military writings. His plays, particularly the *Connétable de Bourbon* and *les Gracques*, were the toast of the salons and illuminate Guibert the playwright.⁷ His correspondence is published in various locations, the most valuable being the volume of letters between Guibert and Julie de Lespinasse produced by the former's widow. On this volume rests Guibert's reputation as an *homme d'amour*, as the affair was largely kept quiet during their lives.⁸ Guibert's minor publications, including his various elegies to military and cultural figures as well as his essays on a variety of topics military and political, are valuable supplements to his major writings.⁹ These will serve as the basis of the argument that Guibert was the father of the armies of the French Revolution and Napoleon.

⁶ Irénée Amelot de Lacroix, *Rules and Regulations for the Field Exercise and Maneuvers of the French Infantry issued August 1, 1791: and the Maneuvers added which have been since Adopted by the Emperor Napoleon: also, the Maneuvers of the Field Artillery with the Infantry* (Boston: T. B. Wait and Co., 1810).

⁷ Guibert, *Oeuvres dramatiques*.

⁸ *The Love Letters of Mlle. de Lespinasse to and from the Comte de Guibert*, ed. Armand Villeneuve-Guibert, trans. E.H.F. Mills (London: Routledge & Sons, 1929). Hereafter referred to as *Letters*.

⁹ See Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte, comte de Guibert, *Eloge de Maréchal de Catinat* (Edimbourg, 1775); *Eloge du roi de Prusse* (London: 1787); *Eloge historique de Michel de l'Hopital, Chancelier de France* (1777); *Journal d'un*

Biographical data on Guibert is found in secondary works, the first of which was published by François-Emmanuel Toulangeon shortly after Guibert's death as an introduction to various editions of Guibert's works.¹⁰ Etienne-Alexandre Bardin and Emerand Forestié followed, presenting Guibert's life and work in a typical nineteenth-century biography.¹¹ Only two modern biographies exist, both in French. Published at the end of the 1990s, Ethel Groffier's *Le stratège des lumières* is chiefly an effort to rehabilitate Guibert's image as a writer.¹² Matti Lauerma's *Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte, comte de Guibert* focuses on Guibert as a military figure and contains extensive analysis of his military writings.¹³ Lauerma's biography is considered to be the standard work; it was published after the author's death by his graduate students. Both serve as the primary source for biographical data for the present work.

As noted, works on Guibert generally fall into one of three categories: literary, social, or military. The first two are closely related and regard Guibert as a man and a lover in late-eighteenth-century Parisian society. The marquis de Ségur's biography of Julie de Lespinasse leads in these categories, drawing liberally upon the correspondence of de Lespinasse, Guibert, and various other social figures.¹⁴ Julie's correspondence supplements Ségur's account and offers a unique portrait of Guibert. All are useful in placing Guibert within the society he inhabited for two decades. Modern sources include works focused on that society, particularly analyses of the salons and Julie's role as a leading *salonnière*: Dena Goodman's *The Republic of*

voyage en Allemagne (Paris: Chez Treuttel et Würtz, 1803); *Voyages de Guibert, dans divers parties de la France et en Suisse faits en 1775, 1778, 1784, et 1785* (Paris: D'Hautel, 1806).

¹⁰ François-Emmanuel Toulangeon, "Notice historique de Jacques-Antoine-Hipolite Guibert, écrit en 1790" in *Journal d'un voyage en Allemagne* 1-85.

¹¹ Etienne-Alexandre Bardin, *Notice historique sur Guibert* (Paris: Corréard jeune, 1836) and Emerand Forestié, *Biographie du Cte. de Guibert* (Montaubon: 1855).

¹² Ethel Groffier, *Le stratège des lumières: le comte de Guibert (1743-1790)* (Paris: Editions Champion, 2005).

¹³ Matti Lauerma, *Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte de Guibert (1743-1790)* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1989).

¹⁴ Pierre Marie Maurice Henry, marquis de Ségur, *Julie de Lespinasse* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1927).

Letters, Daniel Roche's *The Enlightenment in France*, and Steven Kale's *French Salons*.¹⁵ The biographies are also useful in this regard.

Guibert's military theory is the subject of extensive historiographical study. While the Baron de Jomini examined Guibert's writings, it was not until the dawn of the twentieth century that military historians scrutinized his work in great detail. Jean Colin led this line of inquiry, devoting much of his *L'éducation militaire de Napoléon* to a study of Guibert's theories.¹⁶ Spenser Wilkinson drew on Colin for works on the French army; the most useful being *The French Army before Napoleon*.¹⁷ Robert Quimby's *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare* does much to condense Guibert and place his theories within the larger picture of French military thought during the eighteenth century.¹⁸ Despite its density, Quimby's work is the leading work in Guibertian military historiography. Additionally, the works of David Bien and Rafe Blaufarb examine the spasms of reform in the Ministry of War to which Guibert was a party.¹⁹ These works illuminate Guibert's theories and their place within the larger historiography. Studies of Revolutionary and Napoleonic warfare are invaluable to an understanding of Guibert's military

¹⁵ Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), Steven D. Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), and Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹⁶ Jean Colin, *L'Éducation militaire de Napoléon* (Paris: R. Chapelot, 1901).

¹⁷ Spenser Wilkinson, *The French Army before Napoleon: Lectures Delivered before the University of Oxford in Michaelmas Term, 1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915) and *The Rise of General Bonaparte* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1991).

¹⁸ Robert Quimby, *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare: The Theory of Military Tactics in Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957).

¹⁹ David D. Bien, "The Army in the French Enlightenment: Reform, Reaction, and Revolution," *Past & Present* 85 (1979): 68-98; "Military Education in 18th Century France; Technical and Non-Technical Determinants," *Science, Technology, and Warfare: Proceedings of the Third Military History Symposium, U.S. Air Force Academy, 8-9 May 1969*, ed. Monte D. Wright and Lawrence J. Paszek (Washington, DC, 1971): 51-59; David D. Bien and Nina Godneff, "Les officies, les corps et le credit d'état: l'utilisation des privileges sous l'Ancien Régime," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 43e Année (1988): 397-404; David D. Bien and J. Rovet, "La reaction aristocratique avant 1798: L'exemple de l'armée," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 29e Année (1974): 23-48; "La reaction aristocratique avant 1789: L'exemple de l'armée," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 29e Année (1974): 505-534; Rafe Blaufarb, *The French Army, 1750-1820: Careers, talent, merit* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2002) and "Noble Privilege and Absolutist State Building: French Military Administration after the Seven Years War," *French Historical Studies* 24 (2001): 223-246.

legacy. The most useful of these are David Chandler's *Campaigns of Napoleon*, Samuel Scott's *The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution*, Gunther Rothenberg's *Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon*, John-Paul Bertaud's *Army of the French Revolution*, and R.R. Palmer's "Frederick the Great, Guibert, Bülow."²⁰ This work will draw on these works to explore Guibert's military theories and their implications for European warfare.

Historiographical debate tends to focus on one aspect of Guibert to the exclusion of all others. With the exception of the two twentieth-century biographies, none of the works noted make an attempt to examine Guibert in all his various facets. Even the biographies concentrate on a specific area of his life: Lauerma's the military, Groffier's the literary. Neither is accessible to a non-French speaking audience. English-language sources are focused almost exclusively on the military aspects of Guibert's life and present a fragmented and incoherent biography.

Guibert exerted a seminal influence on French military thought and society and a lesser impact on literature and culture. The art and science of Revolutionary and Napoleonic warfare rested squarely on Guibert's theories. His fame spread far beyond France; within his lifetime, translations of the *Essai* appeared in places as far afield as Persia and the Americas. His love affair with Julie de Lespinasse was the toast of Paris long after his death. His theatrical writings, while not excellent specimens, remain relevant to the present. To date, no work has been produced that provides a clear picture of the man, his place in society, his work, and his legacy. The union of the three parts of Guibert's legacy requires a new appraisal.

²⁰ John-Paul Bertaud, *The Army of the French Revolution: From Citizen-Soldiers to Instrument of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); David Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (New York: Macmillan, 1773); R.R. Palmer, "Frederick the Great, Guibert, Bülow," *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Gunther Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978); and Samuel Scott, *The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution: The Role and Development of the Line Army, 1787-93* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

CHAPTER 2

EARLY YEARS

The town of Montauban lies in southern France at the confluence of the Tescou and Tarn rivers. Its mild climate balances Mediterranean sun and the gentle winds of Pyrenean foothills. In its tumultuous history, Montauban has seen Islamic and Spanish invasions, Albigensian crusades, Huguenot uprisings, and Revolutionary occupation. The town has produced many famous citizens, including Jeanbon Saint-Andre, Olympe de Gouges, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, and General Jacques Boyé. In 1743, it produced perhaps its most important citizen: Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte de Guibert. Guibert's early life at Montauban shaped the beliefs that would influence his later writings. After leaving his birthplace for service in the French army, his father Charles and his experience of battle in the Seven Years War and in Corsica created the man whose military ideas would forge the armies of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.

The Guibert family first appeared in Montauban in the early years of the eighteenth century. Little is known about the family's background or origins. The earliest notable member was Jean Guibert (1666-1733). He was appointed *conseiller du Roi* and *garde des sceaux* of Montauban in 1707. These offices, like most government positions, required substantial capital investment and marked Jean as a member of the upper bourgeoisie. Personal wealth enabled him to purchase an estate in Montauban proper. Jean may have been ennobled in the early decades of the eighteenth century, although no clear record exists of such an event. More probable is the speculation of one scholar that Jean was made *anoblis* through a marriage to a local noble.¹ Jean's marriage gained the estate of Fonneuve, which remained the family home until the nineteenth century.

¹ Groffier 23.

Jean had three daughters and four sons. His youngest son, Charles-Benoît, was born in Montauban in 1715. Charles entered the military at an early age, as was customary for the sons of provincial nobles. He began his studies at Strasbourg's *école militaire* in 1729 and was promoted lieutenant in the regiment d'Auvergne in 1732. Charles participated in the War of Polish Succession from 1733-1735, most notably at the battle of Parma, where he demonstrated personal bravery and was wounded. Following the war, he rose through the ranks, being promoted to *aide-major* in 1738 and captain in September 1739. On the outbreak of the War of Austrian Succession in 1740, Charles again went to war. He served in the Flemish and Bohemian theaters throughout the conflict, distinguishing himself during the French defeat at Dettingen in 1743 and the French victory at Rocourt in 1746. War again led to promotion; Charles was made major in January 1744 and lieutenant-colonel in 1747.²

During the war, Charles found time to start a family. In March 1742, he married Suzanne Thérèse de Rivail, daughter of local noble François de Rivail. The marriage fetched a 40,000 *livre* dowry, indicating both the de Rivail family's wealth and the rising social status of the Guibert family. Charles and Suzanne had five daughters: Antoinette-Suzanne, future madame de Salès ; Antoinette-Angélique, future comtesse de Pluvié; Antoinette Christine; Françoise; and Hélène-Antoinette, future madame d'Azincourt.³ Their only son was Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte.

Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte was born 11 November 1743 on the rue d'Elie near the center of Montauban. Three separate birth certificates exist, listing the boy's name as "Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte" or "François-Appollini/Apolline." No satisfactory explanation for the

² Lauerma 13-15.

³ Ibid. 14-15.

discrepancy exists. Guibert took the former name, although he often demonstrated a fondness for the name “Apolline.”⁴

In 1750, Charles sold the Montauban estate and moved the family to Fonneuve. According to one historian, “[Charles] had already acquired a reputation as a most frank, courageous, and conscientious man in the accomplishment of his duties.”⁵ He placed great importance in raising his only son, retiring from the army in 1752 to direct young Guibert’s education. Charles imparted to his son a love for military science, from the minutiae of petty tactics to the intricacies of grand strategy. Guibert also received an elementary education at Montauban, learning his letters, basic mathematics, and language. When Guibert reached the age of eight, Charles arranged for his education to continue at Paris, as was the tradition of provincial nobility in eighteenth-century France. At Paris, Guibert furthered the general education he had received in Montauban. His education emphasized the skills necessary to succeed in the army and in society: rhetoric, logic, and higher mathematics. Graduation from the *école* led to an assignment in an active line unit. On 2 May 1748, Guibert was named second lieutenant in the regiment d’Auvergne and promoted to first lieutenant on 7 May 1753.⁶ Rapid advancement through the ranks of the French army, however, required combat experience, and eighteenth-century Europe soon provided this.

In 1755, a unit of American militia was attacked and virtually destroyed by a combined force of French and Indians on the banks of the Monongahela River in the North American wilderness. The incident led to war between France and England, both states enlisted the aid of

⁴ See Raymond Granier, “Ou est ne le Marechal Guibert?” in *Actes du congrès des sociétés savants. Section d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 77 (Paris, 1952) 29-33. Guibert included the name among those he gave to his daughter. He also published many of his works under the name François-Apolline; several editions still bear the name. Granier rejects speculation that Guibert had a brother who died before maturity, thus accounting for the two names. He concludes that only Guibert knew the reason for the confusion.

⁵ Lauerma 16.

⁶ *Ibid.* 15.

their alliance partners: Austria and Russia for the former, Prussia for the latter. The ensuing Seven Years War raged across Europe and the globe. As Charles had risen to prominence through war, so now did his son.

Upon the French declaration of war in May 1757, Charles was recalled to active duty and appointed *aide-major-général* to Soubise. Charles' duties were akin to those of a modern staff officer: operational and organizational planning, topographical study, and execution of the army's plans. At thirteen, Guibert had reached the age of service and accompanied his father as an aide. The experience of serving on Soubise's staff during the war was invaluable for both Guiberts, shaping their views on military organization and strategic, operational, and tactical execution.

In September 1757, Frederick II advanced into Saxony at the head of a corps of 25,000 Prussians. Soubise led the 18,000 men of his own army and 12,000 men detached from the army of Armand de Vignerot du Plessis, duc de Richelieu, to the east. The French army arranged a rendezvous with the Imperial army of 12,000 soldiers commanded by Joseph Maria Frederick Wilhelm of Saxe-Hildburghausen, Duke of Saxony, near the Salle River. By October, the Franco-Imperial army had done little but shadow the Prussian army, always remaining to its west. Frederick resolved to attack. On the night of 4 November, the Prussian king halted within striking distance of the Allied army, which camped near the village of Rossbach. Unbeknownst to Frederick, Soubise and Hildberghausen had quarreled over the proper course of action; the former counseled caution, while the latter demanded immediate action.⁷ Although technically subordinate to Hildberghausen, Soubises's dominant and quarrelsome personality led to an almost immediate breakdown in command, which both Guiberts likely witnessed.

⁷ Franz Szabo, *The Seven Years War in Europe, 1756-1763* (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2008) 94-98.

The following morning of 5 November, Hildberghausen reluctantly allowed Soubise to execute a plan to march east against the Prussian left. Slow deployment and movement on the part of the French afforded Frederick the time to shift his men to the south to meet the assault. As the French army neared the Prussian line, Major-General Frederick Wilhelm Freiherr von Seydlitz's cavalry succeeded in halting the column's advance. Frederick positioned his artillery on a nearby ridge and brought up his infantry while the Allies wasted time debating whether to attack in line or in column. The latter won out, and the French soldiers formed a tightly-packed mass to assault the Prussian lines. Frederick responded with an artillery bombardment that savaged the French formation. Despite a heroic advance under withering fire, the French column was halted by disciplined Prussian infantry and began a disorderly retreat. Seydlitz's cavalry pounced, shredding and routing the disorganized column. Rossbach was the most lopsided major battle of the eighteenth century; Allied losses numbered as high as 20,000 to 548 Prussian casualties.⁸

The Guiberts were among the thousands of prisoners taken by the Prussians during and after the battle. Both were sent to Prussia, where they spent the next eighteen months in captivity. Despite the lack of freedom, Charles found tremendous opportunity in his situation. By all accounts, the prisoners were well-treated and allowed a large measure of personal freedom. Charles utilized his inactivity to continue the military education of his son. Fortunately for both, their captors allowed them to observe the internal workings of the Prussian army, which was fast becoming the premier military institution of the day. Father and son spent their days studying the army and its methods by attending Prussian exercises. The two dissected

⁸ Ibid...

the Prussian art and science of war to determine exactly how it overcame the French army with such ease.⁹

The Battle of Rossbach proved to be a watershed for the French army. Its leaders were forced to acknowledge defeat at the hands of the new military power in Europe: Frederick the Great's Prussia. During their years of captivity, Charles and his son noted that its well-disciplined tactics stood in stark contrast to the muddled and contentious French army. The French assault at Rossbach had gone awry from the start, doomed by a lack of leadership and an obsolete military constitution. Army leadership had quarreled incessantly. As a member of Soubise's staff, Charles undoubtedly had been privy to these discussions and Hildburghausen's inability to control his subordinates. The younger Guibert probably observed the breakdown of command at headquarters. In addition, his position as an aide also would have allowed him to witness the ineffectiveness of French tactics and operations in the field. The tactical dispute that preceded the attack on the Prussian lines provided a blatant example of the debate that had been raging in the French army for years over the effectiveness of attacking in line or column. The continuation of that argument on the battlefield blunted the force of the attack before it had begun; the unwieldy French formations ceremoniously shifted formation, giving the Prussians time to prepare a proper defense. After the discussion was resolved and the attack proceeded, Frederick's artillery and disciplined infantry fire demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the attack column against a well-defended position. The subsequent slaughter and breakdown in discipline enabled Seydlitz's cavalry to rout the French army. For Guibert, the Battle of Rossbach demonstrated several fundamental principles of war that later appeared in his military writings. The French military establishment, of which Guibert became a leader, would live in the shadow of Rossbach for the remainder of the century.

⁹ Lauerma 16.

Father and son were released in May 1759. During their captivity, Guibert had been promoted to captain on 1 October 1758. On 20 February 1761, Charles was promoted to brigadier and named *chef d'état-major* of the Army of the Lower Rhine under Marshal Louis Georges Erasme de Contades. Guibert again followed as his father's aide. From 1759 until the end of the war in 1763, Charles served in a planning role on the army staff while Guibert distinguished himself through personal bravery and battlefield competence.¹⁰ Two battles, Minden and Vellinghausen, cemented the lessons of Rossbach in Guibert's thought and provided invaluable combat experience.

In summer 1759, Contades' army of 54,000 pushed into Hanover, capturing the town of Minden. Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick, commanding the Prussian army of 43,000 in the region, maneuvered to contain Contades and force a battle. Throughout the last week of July, Ferdinand demonstrated across Contades' front, inviting attack. On 1 August, the latter obliged. Contades deployed his army in an arc to the north of Minden with its left flank anchored on a swamp and its right on the Weser River. Early in the morning, Contades ordered the French right under Victor-François, duc de Broglie, to turn the Prussian left and roll up its flank as Contades himself menaced the Prussian center. As the French attack went forward, Ferdinand deftly maneuvered his forces to contain the assault, repulsing Broglie with artillery and pushing several units against the French center, blunting Contades' attack. Broglie proved unable to act with equal energy. At one point during the battle, he travelled to headquarters to explain personally a minor command decision to Contades. The battle concluded with a French cavalry attack that broke on the Prussian center.¹¹ The day ended with 2,800 Prussian casualties to 7,000 French.

¹⁰ Ibid.. 16-17.

¹¹ Szabo 258-261.

The summer of 1761 opened in much the same manner as previous summers. Two French armies under Soubise and Broglie pushed towards the Rhine, where Ferdinand prepared to meet their assault. By early July, the duke had interposed his army of 65,000 men between Soubise's 58,000 and Broglie's 32,000 in the vicinity of Hamm. Failing to prevent the union of the two French armies on 8 July, Ferdinand fell back on Hamm in an attempt to sever the French army's line of retreat. He positioned his forces in a defensive arc with his left anchored on the Lippe to the north and his right on a hill south of the Ahse. Broglie and Soubise approached from the east and squabbled over the proper course of action, eventually deciding on a general attack led by Broglie. Late in the afternoon of 15 July, Broglie launched an attack on Ferdinand's center and left between the Lippe and the Ahse. His attack made headway, capturing the village of Vellinghausen by midnight, but was halted when Ferdinand shuttled forces across the Ahse to shore up his center. Broglie renewed the attack early the next morning, expecting Soubise to pressure the Prussian right and draw forces away from the heavily-engaged center. Unfortunately for the French, Soubise failed to act with any vigor, launching an ineffectual attack before withdrawing. Broglie, bereft of support, also retreated. The French had lost a combined 5,000 men, only 300 of whom belonged to Soubise. The Prussians lost 1,400 casualties.¹²

Yet again, a French attack had been stymied by a lack of coordination, central direction, and military effectiveness. The battle provided one of the more memorable and important moments in the military experience of the young Guibert. In the course of the battle, he was tasked with delivering an order that a battery be placed on the line. When he arrived, he noted that the situation had changed and the order would have caused harm to the French position. In defiance of his superiors, he altered the order to fit the new situation. "The courageous solution

¹² Ibid., 350-353.

of the young captain later proved to be the correct one.”¹³ The relatively inexperienced Guibert of eighteen years showed signs of having the supreme skill of a battlefield commander, the *coup d’oeil*.

The battles of Minden and Vellinghausen were important in shaping Guibert’s military career. The decision not to relay the orders positioning the battery at Vellinghausen took a large measure of courage; Guibert was directly defying his superiors’ orders when they proved to be incorrect for the situation. Had the decision gone awry or been noticed by a commander seeking a scapegoat, Guibert’s career might have been cut short before it had truly begun. As it was, Guibert was fast winning recognition as a young man of competence and bravery. These traits were also noted in Charles, who undoubtedly passed them on to his son.

Minden and Vellinghausen also exerted an influence on Guibert’s military thought. In both, as at Rossbach, the Guiberts witnessed French commanders displaying the worst of their national character: bickering incessantly over questions of command and operations. While this same national character drove French soldiers to acts of bravery and heroism, their army’s ineffective military constitution proved unable to overcome that of Prussia. Prussian soldiers were simply more disciplined. The ineffectiveness of the French horse, long the army’s most glorious arm, spoke to the inability of French commanders to grasp battlefield realities. Contades opined, “I never thought to see a single line of infantry break through three lines of cavalry ranked in order of battle, and tumble them to ruin.”¹⁴ To the eye of the young Guibert, the fact that France had lost both battles was no accident. While quarrelsome commanders could assume some of the blame, they could not account for the entirety of France’s devastating defeat.

¹³ Toulangeon 4.

¹⁴ Quoted in Szabo 261.

The French military constitution had proven itself fundamentally inferior to its Prussian counterpart.

Ending with the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the Seven Years War proved tremendously influential for Guibert. He began the war as little more than an aide to his father. By war's end, Guibert had seen combat, been recognized for bravery, demonstrated martial skill, and most importantly, borne witness to the structural and operational failings of the French army. These last would remain with him and help form an integral part of his military constitution. Guibert's experience of battle in the Seven Years War imparted in him a special dislike for the bloodshed he had witnessed. He would later "remember especially the horrors of the campaign of 1757; brigandage was at its height; hospitals were charnel houses." He was overcome: "I stop myself; I do not want to sully my pen in making an account of these crimes."¹⁵ The carnage of war made a deep impression on Guibert and shaped his military and political discourse. One of Guibert's fundamental principles of army reform was to raise a powerful army to prevent war, thus preventing the slaughter and inhumanity to which he himself had been party. The second was that wholesale reform of the army was necessary in order to create army institutions that would function, thus preventing the pathetic scene to which he had borne witness.

Following the Treaty of Paris, both Guiberts were inactive for a time and returned to the family estate at Fonneuve. In the spring of 1765, Louis XV appointed Charles to the office of *lieutenant du Roi* in Perpignan, a moderately-sized city on the Spanish border near the Mediterranean. The fortress at Perpignan was considered to be important to national security and required a man of competence as its chief administrator. Guibert remained with the Auvergne regiment. He also continued to serve as an aide to his father in Perpignan, the two discussing the structural failings of the French army and possible remedies for the first time as

¹⁵ Guibert, *Essai* II 302.

equals. Charles demonstrated ability far beyond the requirements of the provincial command at Perpignan and was soon summoned to Paris for greater duties. Having reached brigadier in January 1766, Charles was made *maréchal-de-camp* on 16 April 1767.¹⁶

In 1766, Guibert applied to Pierre-Joseph Bourcet's "Officiers employés à la reconnaissance du pays," a topographical unit assigned to map and study France's military frontiers.¹⁷ Bourcet had made a name for himself as one of the premier military strategists of his day. He served in a variety of staff positions during the War of Austrian Succession and the Seven Years War. Guibert's request was denied for unknown reasons.

In the wake of the French army's disastrous performance during the Seven Years War, King Louis XV appointed Etienne François, duc de Choiseul, as Secretary of State for War and tasked him with wholesale reform of the army. Choiseul transferred Charles from Perpignan to preside over army regulations; the elder Guibert applied his customary energy and competence. Guibert followed his father to Paris, where the two probably collaborated on *L'instruction de 1769 pour les troupes légères*. The instruction was chiefly concerned with battalion maneuvers from column to line and vice versa. Normally an arduous task executed with much pomp and gravity, the *Instruction* simplified the process and produced what became known as "Guibert columns."¹⁸ The *Instruction* marked Guibert's first attempt at military theory; the question of maneuver marked one of the major innovations in his military constitution.

Guibert profited from his association with the Ministry of War vis-à-vis his father. It provided him entry into the murky political waters of Paris and the army establishment. In this atmosphere, Guibert garnered his first taste of Parisian politics, which were equal parts diplomacy, rhetorical skill, and networking. Choiseul's ministry quickly ran afoul of the Parisian

¹⁶ Lauerma 20-21.

¹⁷ Ibid...

¹⁸ See Colin 98, Quimby 107.

establishment, which rejected sweeping changes to the army and any measure that threatened noble privilege.¹⁹

Military reform in eighteenth-century France was a rancorous affair, particularly given the entrenched nature of the nobility within the army. After a series of powerful monarchs pushed them largely out of politics in the preceding centuries, the French nobility retreated to a bastion of privilege within the army. Noble families traditionally dedicated at least one son to army service and expected the state to reward them with titles and estates and, in the case of poorer nobles, incomes. More importantly, nobles expected to retain some measure of feudal privilege vis-à-vis the army. Wealthy nobles purchased the ranks of colonel and higher. Members of the upper nobility rarely exercised any form of active military command, preferring instead to conduct social business on the state's payroll as supernumerary officers. It was not uncommon for an officer to spend less than three months per year with his regiment, much as a feudal overlord would rarely see to the administration of his fief. This led to a two-tiered system whereby lesser nobles of little means were consigned to the lower ranks where they were rarely promoted beyond captain, but charged with the military efficacy of their units. While the divide between nobles grew, they united when confronted with the prospect of reform, or indeed of any change in the status quo. While the reformers were nobles themselves, their status as representatives of an increasingly bourgeois government intent on destroying the last vestiges of noble privilege stymied any reform efforts. Choiseul and his advisors, including Charles, made some headway at reform, but were soon removed from office by reactionary elements at Versailles.

¹⁹ Albert Latreille, *L'oeuvre militaire de la revolution: l'armée et la nation à la fin de l'ancien régime; les derniers ministres de la guerre de la monarchie* (Paris: Librairie Chapelot, 1914) 1-25 and Spenser Wilkinson, *The French Army Before Napoleon* 89.

The experience of the Choiseul ministry proved to the reformers how difficult true, lasting reform would be. From his position at his father's side, Guibert witnessed the contentious political debate. The experience likely impressed upon him the importance of court politics in military reform. It also laid the pattern for Guibert's political service. From the Choiseul ministry until the Revolution, reformers and reactionaries alternately held sway over the court and the Ministry of War. Guibert would emerge as a leading reformer, thrusting him to the forefront of court politics and ultimately leading to his ruin.

In addition to his political connections, Guibert also profited from his regimental associations and battle experience. Through the Auvergne regiment, Guibert was introduced to a variety of officers who would prove influential in the coming decades, both for Guibert and for France. These included the Chevalier François-Jean de Beauvoir, marquis de Chastellux, who would serve with distinction in the War of American Independence. Guibert had a passing acquaintance with the duc de Broglie, having served near or under him during the 1759 and 1761 campaigns.²⁰ Guibert both profited and lost from this association; Broglie became one of the most influential figures in the army in the late eighteenth century, but also one of its most polarizing. He received a disproportionate amount of blame for French losses in the Seven Years War. His fiery and contentious personality only contributed to the problems, as Guibert had borne witness at Minden and Vellinghausen.

Despite his personal failings, Broglie was a first-rate military mind. In the later stages of the Seven Years War, he conducted experiments on operational command. The custom of the day was to assign a theater to one or more armies commanded by a general officer. While one officer was often designated for theater command, the example of Rossbach proved that such designations were often in name only. Armies in theater were often dispersed to a variety of

²⁰ Groffier 28.

posts and positions, forming a cordon through which an enemy army was forced to attack. More often than not, the enemy would retire rather than attack a well-defended position. Maneuver was given precedence over a direct engagement. Operations and tactics were unsophisticated, rarely involving more than a simple maneuver on the enemy flank. Broglie's innovation was to divide his own army command into semi-permanent units that would be referred to as "divisions."²¹ These divisions were autonomous combined-arms units that could disperse across the countryside to locate the enemy and give battle long enough for the other divisions to join. While Maurice de Saxe had first proposed the division in his *Rêveries*, Broglie was the first to utilize them on the battlefield.²² Both Guiberts were privy to these experiments, which played a major role in Guibert's military thought. Guibert's association with the Broglie family waxed and waned with its favor at Louis XV's notoriously fickle court, but the balance was generally positive.

Guibert also formed a close military partnership with his childhood friend Charles-François du Périer Dumouriez. Dumouriez and Guibert served together at times during the Seven Years War and in the Auvergne regiment. Three years after the war, they formed a military friendship built on their childhood association. The two would serve together in France's next military expedition to the island of Corsica.

Situated in the north-central Mediterranean Sea, Corsica sat astride the major trade routes from northern Africa, Egypt, the Levant, Persia, and the Far East. Genoa's struggle to maintain control over the historically recalcitrant Corsican people in order to influence a large portion of Mediterranean trade ultimately failed. After the Seven Years War, France, having lost one of its major American colonies, looked to strengthen trade ties with the east. Many of these ran

²¹ Confusingly, another unit designated a "division" existed within the French army; this division was a section of a battalion also referred to as a platoon.

²² See Maurice de Saxe, *Mes rêveries* (Paris: Librairie Militaire, 1895).

through Corsica. The island's instability threatened French trade, as did its management at the hands of the Genoese. Freed of the obligations of the prior war, France resolved to correct the situation.

Eighteenth-century Corsica, nominally owned by the republic of Genoa, was a hotbed of internal unrest and violence. Genoese control, never strong, evaporated completely around 1755. A revolt led by Pasquale Paoli and Carlo Buonaparte soundly defeated the Genoese and erected a republic based on the model provided by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. That the Genoese held Corsica for so long despite massive military and economic setbacks attests to the strategic importance of the island.²³

In May 1768, the Republic of Genoa sold the island of Corsica to France. The French moved quickly to replace the existing government. To enforce French rule, Choiseul assembled a "Royal Legion" out of the Grenadiers of Languedoc and other units. The initial engagements went poorly for the French; Paoli's ragtag Corsican army hounded the French invaders throughout the autumn, pushing them back to their coastal strongholds. On 7 October, Paoli cornered the largest French army at Borgo. A series of hard-fought engagements over the next two days ended in ignominious defeat for the French.²⁴

The following spring, Choiseul appointed General Vaux to assume command of the Royal Legion. Vaux was an old friend of the Guibert family and appointed the young captain to be his *aide-major-général*. The two reached Corsica in spring 1769 and immediately set about reversing French fortunes. A careful campaign of maneuver succeeded in confining the Corsican army, bringing much of the island under French control.

²³ Philip Dwyer, *Napoleon: The Path to Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008) 19-21.

²⁴ Peter Adam Thrasher, *Pasquale Paoli, an Enlightened Hero, 1725-1807* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1970) 129-132.

Vaux finally cornered the Corsican army in late April. From 26 to 30 April, both armies took up positions, the Corsicans defending the town and the French preparing a concentric assault. On 4 May, Vaux pushed a column into the village of Rapale, where it was halted by devastating fire from entrenched Corsican sharpshooters. French pressure forced Paoli to withdraw the majority of his troops to the right bank of the Golo. Token forces were left to guard the bridges as Paoli consolidated his forces. During the night, French troops massed and overran the bridges, disordering the Corsicans. Undisciplined militiamen ran to the aid of their compatriots but were swept aside by the advancing French columns. By the morning of 5 May, the French had established a secure foothold on the right bank of the Golo. Paoli threw increasingly desperate assaults at the French position but could not dislodge them. A dispirited retreat followed, and Paoli fled for England on 12 June. The battle cost the Corsicans 500-600 casualties and the French fifty to ninety.²⁵

Corsica proved to be a turning point in Guibert's career. Finally emerging from the shadow of his father, he served directly under the expedition commander. This allowed him to witness Vaux's competence in operational planning and tactical execution. Freed from the onerous task of running dispatches, Guibert observed a campaign from its highest levels. The efficiency with which Vaux maneuvered the Corsicans into an unwinnable situation stood in stark contrast to prior French efforts and undoubtedly made an impression on the young captain.

The Corsican freedom fighters left their mark on many who fought on the island. Although heavily outnumbered, the rebels managed to defeat the French in the opening engagements of the war. They utilized operational concentration at key points in space and time, rough terrain, and what the French Revolutionaries would later refer to as love of *la patrie*. This last point was noted by more than one author: "Corsicans loved liberty; [they had] a violent

²⁵ Dwyer 21-22, Thrasher 150-154.

enthusiasm for liberty.”²⁶ The Corsican citizen-soldiers, fighting of their own free will in defense of their nation, had made a good accounting of themselves despite crushing numerical inferiority. Guibert was duly impressed with their tenacity and fighting spirit, and would take from Corsica a strong belief in the efficacy of an army composed of citizen-soldiers.

The climactic battle of the campaign also brought military honor to Guibert. Following the battle of Ponte Nuovo on 4-5 May, he received a citation for personal bravery. He was promoted directly to colonel on 11 May; the following August, Guibert was named colonel-commandant of the newly-christened Corsican Legion.²⁷ This command, given to an officer only twenty-six years of age and not of a high noble family, marked the esteem in which the French army was beginning to hold Guibert. Vaux initiated a review of Guibert’s conduct during the campaign, which resulted in the latter being awarded the Cross of St. Louis in September 1770. Around the same time, the Corsican Legion was transferred to metropolitan France, headquartered at Tarascon.²⁸

By the time of his return to the continent, Guibert had developed his adult character, which would prove essential to his success. By all accounts, Guibert had been a precocious child who naturally took to science and mathematics. His close association with his father had benefited him immensely; Charles was known as intelligent, hardworking, and possessing a mind for military science. Guibert inherited these qualities and added an exceptional memory as well as an ability to read both rapidly and carefully, “traits common to both Guibert and his most

²⁶ Quoted in Dwyer 21.

²⁷ In the French army of the Old Regime, customary practice was for a regimental command to be purchased by a member of the upper nobility; this officer was referred to as the “colonel-proprietor.” Following reforms in the mid-eighteenth century, regiments were required to have a supernumerary colonel responsible for military command; this officer was referred to as the regiment’s “colonel-commandant.” The Corsican Legion, despite its name, was a regiment in function.

²⁸ See Lauerma 22-3. Following the move to the continent, the Legion was transferred to various posts. In 1771, it was moved to Montauban; in 1772 to Strasbourg; in 1775 to Livorno, where it was renamed the *légion de Dauphiné*.

renowned student, Napoleon Bonaparte.”²⁹ Guibert was blessed with a natural speaking voice and charisma, which he used to great effect on the ladies of Paris. He also possessed the military virtues of courage, *coup d’oeil*, and most importantly, the twin virtues of *génie et moyen*.

Debate raged in the eighteenth-century French army as to whether war was primarily an art or a science, that is, whether military ability was innate or could be taught. Proponents of the former tended to be the upper nobility, clinging tightly to their traditional privileges and humanistic education. The latter school was composed of more technocratically-minded lower noble and upper bourgeois officers who pressed for an increasingly mathematical and logical education for all officers.³⁰ Both sides had their partisans within the military establishment, and like all disagreements of the time, the sides rarely found common ground. Guibert, however, was one of the few officers who bridged the gap between the two. Guibert possessed an innate sense for the ebb and flow of a battle, which he demonstrated most notably at Vellinghausen. This corresponds to the virtue of *génie*, literally “genius.” *Génie* was innate and could not be taught, comparable to artistic ability. Guibert also possessed the technocratic and mathematical mind necessary for the study of the military science. He was a gifted student and remained loyal to his father’s teachings. These teachings and his military experience granted Guibert a knowledge of military science that was both broad and deep. This corresponds to the virtue of *moyen*, literally “means.” It would prove quite useful in his various staff positions.

Guibert’s upbringing and early experiences shaped his thought and career. The education he received at his father’s hands proved to be vital in the construction of Guibert’s military thought. His battle experiences demonstrated the principles that his father had taught him. Guibert’s own personality and superior military mind developed on the battlefields of the Seven

²⁹ Ibid., 20.

³⁰ See Bien, “Military Education in 18th Century France; Technical and Non-Technical Determinants.”

Years War and Corisca. They prepared him for the construction of his own military constitution, which would shake the French army establishment to its foundations and provide a blueprint for French military success in the coming decades.

CHAPTER 3

GUIBERT'S MILITARY CONSTITUTION

In 1772, an anonymous tract entitled the *Essai général de tactique* appeared in London. It contained a bold attack on the European governments and militaries of the day and a comprehensive program for the latter's reform in France. Its concise prose proved enormously popular, spurring a second printing and gaining international attention. Widespread readership naturally led to questions of its authorship and it soon became known that the *Essai* had been written by a young colonel in French service named Guibert. His "encyclopedia...of the military science" outlined, in great detail, his observations on the political and military failings of France's Old Regime military establishment.¹ Following a reforming tradition in France stretching back to Jean Charles, Chevalier Folard, and Maurice de Saxe, the *Essai* contained a complete program of reform for the army. Guibert's warfare was light, flexible, and swift, striking its enemies with overwhelming force before they could react. His constitution provided a reformed tactical manual, operational principles, strategic maxims, logistical support, and an organizational substructure. It called for a citizen-army led by a dynamic *homme de génie*.² Guibert's *Essai général de tactique* created a military constitution that pressed the evolution of Old Regime warfare and would be Guibert's lasting military legacy.³

The direct origins of the *Essai* lay in the education, upbringing, and military experiences Guibert acquired in his formative years. His study and experience of Old Regime warfare shaped much of his military thought. Old Regime armies, products of their times and

¹ Guibert, *Essai* II:220.

² Literally "man of genius."

³ For the context of the present work, "constitution" refers to a detailed system that encompassed tactics at their lowest level and grand strategy at its highest. Its meaning connotes less the American political term of a written constitution and more the British political term of an unwritten but omnipresent set of guidelines. The terms "military constitution" and "system" are synonymous, although the latter implies a wider and deeper scope similar to the modern meaning of "doctrine."

governments, often functioned ineffectively. As the state where the Old Regime was most fully developed, France's army in particular suffered from inefficient structures and philosophies that were long entrenched in the minds of the conservative, aristocratic officer corps of Guibert's day. These traditions reached back centuries to the beginning of the modern French state and army.

Following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, enlightened scientific ideas and thought processes came to dominate European warfare. States sought to avoid the wanton destruction of the Wars of Religion through sieges and avoidance of battle in favor of strategic maneuver. Armies were large, unitary, inflexible, unmaneuverable, and immobile. Generals and politicians preferred to fight limited wars for limited objectives. Unitary armies marched in a single column and wheeled *en masse* to form a line facing the enemy army. Commonly, engagements were fought until one army demonstrated a superior position, whereupon the other enemy would retire from the field. Slow march and battle step limited the speed of armies, preventing the rapid deployments and movements necessary for true operational warfare. March speed was also limited by high desertion rates, which required Old Regime armies to conduct short, tightly-controlled marches. Pursuit was largely absent, as it required a degree of operational and tactical flexibility missing from most Old Regime armies. Tactics were limited to simple turning movements, needlessly complicated through strict adherence to an imitation of parade-ground precision and appearance.⁴

Frederick the Great's army epitomized Old Regime warfare, replacing the French army as the premier continental army after the Battle of Rossbach. Frederick's army was well-trained

⁴ See M. S. Anderson, *War and Society in Europe of the Old Regime, 1617-1789* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988); Robert Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Christopher Duffy, *The Military Experience in the Age of Reason* (New York: Atheneum, 1988); Brent Nosworthy, *The Anatomy of Victory: Battle Tactics 1689-1763* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1990); Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Claus Telp, *The Evolution of Operational Art, 1740-1813: From Frederick the Great to Napoleon* (New York: Frank Cass, 2005).

and -drilled and largely mercenary. It fought dynastic wars under Frederick's personal supervision and rigid control. However, Frederick introduced important changes, beginning the long evolution from positional to maneuver-based war. Frederick practiced a "short and lively" style of warfare that would defeat his enemies without exhausting the limited resources of his kingdom.⁵ He advocated the pursuit of a beaten enemy with cavalry to finish the broken army, to which Guibert had borne witness after Rossbach. Most importantly, Frederick restored maneuver to the battlefield. Modern scholars argue that Frederick mastered the art of the operational maneuver, in which he successfully maneuvered his army onto his opponent's flanks and rear.⁶ This enabled his disciplined armies to overcome their numerical inferiority and lead Prussia to victory in the Seven Years War. Frederick's success led to the proliferation of Prussian methods throughout Europe; many nations adopted mechanistic Prussian drill without grasping that Frederick's dynamic leadership was the critical element to its success. Despite his early achievements, Frederick was severely limited by the Old Regime nature of his army. While his army was a model of discipline, it remained largely inflexible on the tactical level. While he could detach from his supply lines for a short time, the experience of 1744 proved that he could not abandon them entirely.⁷ His army was neither maneuverable nor flexible, although it appeared so to his less-disciplined opponents. Frederick had no staff and provided little officer education beyond systematic drill and command. He reserved the questions of strategy for himself and allowed only minimal input from his subordinates on matters of operations. He

⁵ Palmer 102.

⁶ See Citino, *The German Way of War*. Citino refers to Frederick's style of warfare as *bewegungskrieg*, or the war of operational movement.

⁷ The campaign of 1744 saw Frederick probe deeply into Bohemia, which the Austrian army had stripped bare of forage, forcing Frederick to retreat on his supply lines and cede the campaign.

made no effort to share his military wisdom with his officers.⁸ He also established no permanent organizational unit beyond the brigade, which limited operational and strategic flexibility.

Despite resounding success against the French, Frederick ultimately could not overcome the limitations of his army or of the Old Regime from which it sprang. Nevertheless, the Seven Years War proved that the Prussian military constitution was superior to the French. In the *Essai*, Guibert strove to refashion the French army into an instrument that could defeat Prussia, uniting the best elements of both states' military constitutions.

The exact origins of the *Essai* remain in doubt. As early as the Seven Years War, Guibert probably began to write the notes that would eventually find their way into the *Essai*. He drafted the bulk of the *Essai* in the slow years after the war, likely in close consultation with his father. Deployment to Corsica, particularly after the defeat of Paoli's forces, afforded Guibert time to make revisions and polish the work.⁹ The experiences of his youth, collaboration with his father, and the company of bright military minds like Charles-François du Périer Dumouriez and Vaux contributed to the construction of Guibert's military constitution.

Guibert drew from a long tradition within the French military establishment of producing theoretical treatises calling for reform. The first notable work was the Chevalier Folard's 1724 *Nouvelles découvertes sur la guerre*.¹⁰ Folard advocated a large attack column, similar to a Greek phalanx or a Spanish *tercio*, as the basic tactical unit of the French army. François Jean de Graindorge d'Orgeville, baron de Mesnil-Durand, adopted Folard's theories in 1755, founding the school of *l'ordre profond* that valued deep shock columns and cold steel over the thin lines

⁸ See Guibert, *Journal d'un voyage en Allemagne*.

⁹ Lauerma 29.

¹⁰ Jean Charles, Chevalier Folard, *Nouvelles découvertes sur la guerre, dans une dissertation sur Polybe, où l'on donne une idée plus étendue du commentaire entrepris sur cet auteur, et deux dissertations importantes détachées du corps de l'ouvrage* (Paris: Jean-François Josse and Claude Labottiere, 1726).

and firepower of *l'ordre mince*.¹¹ Traditionalists, and the trend of the army, favored the latter, leading to a deep divide and rancor between proponents of each school.¹²

Guibert began his reforms with a call for an army that was “better constituted and more maneuverable...easy to move and to conduct...[with] simple, analogous, [and] flexible tactics.”¹³ He based his constitution on three major principles: simplicity, flexibility, and speed. Each was integral to the system and present at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. The first two principles, simplicity and flexibility, were closely related. These evolved from a response to the formalized Prussian system, which emphasized mechanistic drill and parade-quality battlefield maneuvers. Guibert condemned the presence of Prussian formalism in French works, particularly those of Mesnil-Durand.¹⁴ Dispensing altogether with the Prussian tactical manual, Guibert greatly simplified French tactics and operations. These changes aided Guibert’s third principle: speed.¹⁵ Quickened march step and the liberation of march order from battle order led to increased mobility. According to one historian, “this elementary difference...went far to make possible the rapid transference and reshuffled concentrations of striking power whereby the French could, in Napoleon’s phrase, multiply ‘mass by velocity’ both strategically and tactically.”¹⁶ Guibert’s tactical reforms allowed an army to be far more maneuverable than Old Regime armies. Speed alone, however, could not assure French victory. According to

¹¹ François Jean de Graindorge d’Orgeville, baron de Mesnil-Durand, *Projet d’un ordre français en tactique, ou la phalange coupée et doublée soutenue par le mélange des armes* (Paris: Antoine Boudet, 1755).

¹² See Quimby.

¹³ Guibert, *Essai* I LXVI-LXVIII.

¹⁴ See Guibert, *Défense*.

¹⁵ For present purposes, “speed” will be referred to interchangeably with the terms “mobility” and “maneuverability.” Mobility refers to operational and strategic speed, maneuverability to tactical speed.

¹⁶ B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Meridian, 1991) 94. Had the concept been theorized during his lifetime, Liddell Hart would have undoubtedly included the operational level.

Napoleon, “it is not only speed that assures...success, but order, cohesion, and the effective use of...reserves.”¹⁷ Guibert’s constitution provided each of these.

The concept of pragmatism underlay the entire constitution. The principles of Guibert’s system were based on battlefield reality rather than the “pretension to precision and perfection on many points, meticulous and ridiculous” for which the Prussian army was famous.¹⁸ In the words of Napoleon, “the art of war is a simple art and everything depends upon execution: there is nothing vague, everything is common sense, and nothing about it is ideological.”¹⁹

Guibert began with a reform of tactical organization. He firmly believed in the efficacy of line infantry and constructed his army around that branch. He retained the battalion as his tactical unit for infantry, as “battalions reunite[d] the properties of fire, shock, simplicity, lightness, [and] solidity....”²⁰ Guibert rejected the Old Regime tradition of dividing battalions into two or four sections. Instead, he proposed to divide battalions into three divisions of three companies each; this provided a natural division of left, right, and center within the basic tactical unit. Guibert felt that “the natural and habitual order [was] the proper order of fire, that is to say *l’ordre mince*.”²¹ According to this idea, a line would offer more firepower than a column: “The primitive, fundamental, and habitual order of infantry will be on three ranks of depth; the momentary and accidental order will be the column.”²² Guibert’s battalions deployed into lines of between 140 and 180 men in length, as a longer line would be beyond the ability of the

¹⁷ Jay Luvaas, *Napoleon on the Art of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999) 50. While Napoleon was referring specifically to cavalry, the point is equally applied to every arm at each level of warfare.

¹⁸ Guibert, *Essai* I 25.

¹⁹ Luvaas 133.

²⁰ Guibert, *Essai* I 35.

²¹ *Ibid.* I 30.

²² *Ibid.* I 33.

battalion commander to control. This provided for battalions of approximately 400 to 500 men, which one scholar notes were “considerably smaller than any advocated by previous writers.”²³

Guibert advocated a faster march and double step for his battalions, eighty and 160 steps per minute respectively. The increase in double-step speed would lead to a greater maneuverability, as double step was the slowest pace he advocated for use in battle. Guibert also called for a triple step, although he did not provide a specific pace. Essentially a run, triple step would allow units to remain in formation while attacking in column, retreating in good order, or deploying to another sector of the battlefield. Guibert’s smaller, quicker battalions were more flexible and maneuverable, thus more easily controlled and much more easily adapted to counter any situation encountered on the battlefield.²⁴

Guibert rejected the Old Regime concept of keeping the infantry line perfectly intact while on the march or while deployed. He “permit[ted] only the movements that are by battalion and never by regiment,” essentially devolving march and battle order to the battalion.²⁵ While the larger administrative units would provide an outline of the march and even its organization, the battalion was expected to maneuver around obstacles on its own authority. This simplified the Old Regime’s complex system of march and deployment techniques inherent in linear tactics, where the entire army was expected to maintain a close formation that appealed to aesthetic sensibilities. Guibert allowed for a formation disrupted by terrain as long as the army as a whole maintained its cohesion. This also allowed battalion commanders to act autonomously, thus improving overall flexibility.²⁶

²³ Quimby 117.

²⁴ Guibert, *Essai* I 29-37.

²⁵ *Ibid.* I 42.

²⁶ *Ibid.* I 48-70.

Guibert's methods of deployment relied on simplicity and speed. Battalions formed battalion columns for march and deployment into line for battle, just as they had done during the Old Regime. Guibert's advance was to eliminate complex linear maneuvers in favor of a simple, flexible method for deploying troops. To this end, he proposed the elimination of all but four basic evolutions.²⁷ Guibert noted that deployment was not held to a rigid standard: the first company of a battalion could deploy to the left rather than always to the right, which was common practice in Old Regime armies. The result stripped away the complicated, scientific maneuvers of the Old Regime in favor of a simple, flexible system.

Despite his advocacy of *l'ordre mince*, "the circumstances, the nature of the terrain, the situation of the enemy can require that one go without fire and that one engages in shock action."²⁸ He identified five situations in which the column was superior to the line, all involving an attack on a fortified position. The maneuvers necessary in these situations all had been used previously, but Guibert's simplified deployment allowed them to be performed without danger.²⁹ Rather than combining the attack into one column, as the French army did at Rossbach, Guibert suggested the use of many small columns. These columns would be separated by a short distance and screened by light cavalry. The columns would advance at normal step, gradually increasing pace as they neared the enemy's line. Officers would maintain order and separation between the columns to prevent bunching. If the attack succeeded, the light cavalry would pursue and harass the enemy to prevent counterattack. His instructions effectively reduced the various types of columns to a single, all-purpose column. The use of line and column, which Guibert's system allowed, would come to be known as *l'ordre mixte*.³⁰ This was

²⁷ See *Ibid.*, I 90-94.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I 31.

²⁹ Quimby 127.

³⁰ Guibert, *Essai* I 110-168. *L'ordre mixte* translates as "mixed order."

Guibert's doctrine in practice. He sought to reduce the complicated, ritualized systems of linear tactics to provide an infantry that was flexible, maneuverable, and adaptable to any situation.

Guibert noted that cavalry served several important roles in support of infantry: scouting, raiding, screening, pursuit, disrupting enemy lines of communication and supply, and shock attacks. Just as Guibert's basic tactical infantry unit was the battalion, so his basic tactical cavalry unit was the squadron. Guibert's squadron consisted of eighty men, a reduction in size in favor of flexibility.³¹ Guibert divided his cavalry into two sections: light and heavy. Light cavalry was composed of dragoons and hussars and performed the first four roles. Heavy cavalry executed shock charges. Of the two, Guibert preferred light cavalry, as it was more maneuverable and adaptable to rapidly changing battlefield situations. However, he acknowledged the usefulness of heavy cavalry while advocating significant changes for it. Heavy cavalry was made more mobile by the removal of the traditional cuirass in favor of a series of draped chains to protect the cavalryman from enemy sabres. This served to make the cavalryman lighter and more maneuverable.

Guibert adopted the Prussian constitution's use of artillery in two significant ways. First, he subordinated artillery to the rest of the army, as artillery was "a utile and important accessory of the troops that compose armies...[because it] cannot fight alone and by [itself]...."³² The second was to greatly increase the mobility of artillery. As with cavalry, Guibert sought to reduce the amount of artillery in relation to the army. He soundly rejected the grand batteries and battalion guns of the Old Regime, as they slowed armies and prevented maneuver as the ponderous guns forced the entire army to move at a slow pace. Instead, he advocated the use of small, maneuverable batteries of Gribeauval guns. The much lighter and more maneuverable

³¹ Ibid.. I 169-214.

³² Ibid.. I 231-232.

Gribeauval guns would allow Guibert's small batteries to maneuver quickly on the battlefield, plugging gaps in the line or supporting attacks. The majority of guns could be left in the artillery park, quickly maneuvering to points of need rather than spreading across the entire battle line and slowing the entire army. These factors combined to produce light, maneuverable, and flexible artillery units that could better support infantry.³³

Guibert castigated Old Regime armies for becoming overly fond of light troops, employing as much as of twenty percent of an army's soldiers in the role. These light troops were excellent skirmishers but remained restricted to that role. Rather than separate companies of light infantry, Guibert suggested that line troops be deployed as skirmishers when necessary. This would provide great advantages in flexibility. For example, line troops usually displayed greater discipline than the enemy's light troops, allowing them to maintain the sporadic fire necessary for effective skirmishing. Light troops were designed to perform the same duties as light cavalry, with whom they were often paired. These included scouting, screening, and harassing the enemy.³⁴

Guibert's reduction in the numbers of artillery, cavalry, and light troops in favor of line infantry points to a key element of his doctrine. He strongly advocated the concentration of force provided by a unitary army. The various branches of the Old Regime army, protective of their place in the establishment, often segregated themselves on and off the battlefield. Each argued for primacy in the battle order, claiming only they could defeat the enemy. The separation of an army into large detachments of line infantry, cavalry, light infantry, and artillery limited the opportunity for concentration. Reducing the numbers of cavalry and light infantry in

³³ Ibid., I 231-272. Gribeauval reformed the French artillery in the 1770s, creating lighter, more maneuverable and more powerful guns. These cannon, far superior to earlier Old Regime artillery, are often referred to as "Gribeauval guns" and would remain the standard in France well into the Napoleonic era.

³⁴ Ibid., I 215-230.

favor of line infantry and combining soldiers' duties provided a highly-skilled, unitary army. That army could use its superior maneuverability and flexibility to concentrate its force on the enemy's weak point and win the battle.

Guibert's tactical organization allowed a flexibility of attack not seen in many Old Regime armies. His army deployed from column to line on the battlefield, using the simplified evolutions that Guibert provided. Critically, Guibert maintained that an army should never deploy under enemy fire, as such a deployment could not be executed in good order. Light infantry, cavalry, and line infantry trained in the art of skirmishing were deployed in advance of the army to disrupt enemy formations and attacks.³⁵

After deployment, the attack would proceed. Guibert generally preferred the tactical offensive; like Frederick, his system for the assault relied on maneuver on the flanks of the enemy and local numerical superiority. The first was accomplished primarily with what Guibert referred to as the "oblique order," which was widely believed to have been developed by Frederick II and used to great effect in his wars. In Guibert's oblique order, one flank of the army was refused, inviting enemy attack against a reinforced position. The other flank was pushed forward against the enemy's weakened flank.³⁶

Guibert also provided for a more general tactical envelopment of an enemy's flanks. An army deployed in Guibert's *ordre mince* would have a broader front than most contemporary armies. Spread in a thin, three-deep line, Guibert's army could wrap its flanks around the enemy army's flanks and thus turn them. Local numerical superiority was key to Guibert's tactics. His articulated battalions were able to maneuver more rapidly than Old Regime armies, allowing

³⁵ Ibid.. I 90-94, II 24-39.

³⁶ Ibid.. I 39-61. The similarity of Guibert's oblique attack to the writings of Vegetius is unmistakable and offers a glimpse into Guibert's military education. See Flavius Renatus Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, trans. N. P. Milner (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001).

Guibert's army to have greater numbers of men and greater volumes of fire at critical points on the battlefield. After achieving local superiority, Guibert called for "unit[ing] the most fire possible on the point that one attacks or defends...."³⁷ Fire from troops deployed in line, skirmishers, artillery, and cavalry would be focused on the weak point. Guibert's nimble attack columns also allowed for a tactical assault on a weak position. The flexibility and maneuverability of the system allowed attacks to proceed at great speed with expected success.

Line infantry would bear the brunt of the attack, and the other branches would serve in supporting roles. The shock charge with heavy cavalry was performed in much the same manner as the infantry charge in column: gradually increasing in pace as the cavalry neared the enemy line, reaching the fastest pace just before contact. This charge was made in line rather than in column, as Guibert felt that cavalry could not properly act in column. Guibert's smaller squadrons were more maneuverable than their larger counterparts, allowing for the concentration of force on the enemy's weak points, of which a skilled commander could take full advantage.³⁸ Artillery formed in batteries was used against an enemy line, concentrating fire on the enemy line's weak point. The psychological effect of artillery fire against infantry was its main purpose, creating local disruptions for infantry and cavalry to exploit. Additional artillery remained in the artillery park, to be brought up if necessary to support the infantry. Guibert noted that the best firing position for artillery was the oblique and on a slight rise, as these two factors allowed for the maximum damage from solid shot or canister.³⁹

³⁷ Guibert, *Essai* I 85. This idea would be adopted by Napoleon and christened "schwerpunkt" by Clausewitz.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I 199-214. Guibert's argument for smaller battalions is that they would have a narrower front, concentrating the maximum amount of firepower on the enemy's weakest point. Larger battalions with wider fronts would have wasted the outside files' firepower against stronger portions of the enemy's front. Smaller battalions also maneuvered more easily, allowing them to strike at the proper moment when the enemy's position was weakest.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I 256-272.

Guibert's system primarily concerned itself with tactics. He held that the root of an army's success was tactical superiority. However, he did not neglect strategy and operations. Many of his tactical principles were transmitted to these areas, in spirit if not in writing.

Guibert's operations were essentially his tactics writ large. He removed the complicated systems of the Old Regime to improve operational organization, leading to greater flexibility and mobility. Guibert, quoting Maurice de Saxe, argued that "all the secret of exercise, of war, is in the legs," as an army that could swiftly and easily deploy would have an advantage over other armies.⁴⁰ To this end, Guibert adopted the permanent division system first experimented with by his father and the duc de Broglie in the Seven Years War.⁴¹ Just as the battalion was the tactical unit, Guibert's division served as the operational unit of his army. Divisions were combined-arms units composed of infantry brigades, one cavalry brigade, and artillery. Like his battalions, Guibert's divisions were smaller than enemy armies and, like battalions, made up for numerical weakness with superior mobility. The acceleration of parade step, which became march step in the field, enabled Guibert's divisions to move much faster than Old Regime armies. This mobility enabled an army's commanding general to dispose of preordained battle plans in favor of a more flexible deployment decided only after the enemy and terrain had been properly reconnoitered. "The successful use in battle of armies organized into divisions depended on the use of flexible tactics conducted by the units within the respective divisions," the very same tactics provided by Guibert.⁴² His divisions were also flexible enough to countermaneuver *en*

⁴⁰ Ibid., II 8.

⁴¹ Quimby 80-107.

⁴² Robert M. Epstein, *Napoleon's Last Victory and the Emergence of Modern War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994) 12.

masse, granting an army an immeasurable advantage over an Old Regime army locked into a preconceived battle plan.⁴³

Guibert advocated a greater operational mobility for his divisions. Old Regime armies used the same order for march as for battle; Guibert wholly rejected this notion. The flexibility of his divisions allowed for an army to deploy as necessary from march order. This greatly increased the speed and flexibility of an army as it eliminated the complicated maneuvers necessary in an Old Regime army to deploy from march order to battle order. It also allowed divisions to disperse and use different march routes to arrive at the same destination. “[These] principles...will be able to render march more rapid and easier, will separate the army in many bodies that reunite on a point, or to within range of a prepared point....”⁴⁴ Separate routes allowed divisions to move much more quickly than a unitary march. Dispersed divisions could fan out across the countryside until the enemy was encountered, whereupon they would collapse on the proposed battlefield. This concentration supported the concept of local numerical superiority, as Guibert’s mobile divisions were able to concentrate much more easily than an Old Regime army similarly dispersed, which tended to remain fixed to a geographic point to form a cordon.⁴⁵

The tactical articulation of the battalion was mirrored in the operational articulation of the division. “For a large mass to be moved with the most ease, it must be divided...into many parts; then each of the parts is susceptible to more movement and action; then one can, by these forces combined and multiplied, act on all the parts at a time; this is therefore an army.”⁴⁶

⁴³ See Guibert, *Essai* II 1-38.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* II 11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* II 12-24. Guibert’s operational movement bears a striking resemblance to the “contracting net” of Bourcet. See Pierre-Joseph Bourcet, *Principes de la guerre de montagne* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1888). The influence of Bourcet on Guibert or vice versa is one of the many open questions in Guibertian historiography.

⁴⁶ Guibert, *Essai* II 24.

Guibert's divisions could maneuver as fluidly as his battalions, enabling an operational maneuver on the enemy's flanks. This could be conducted by a division attached to the main body or one separate from it: Guibert's system provided for both. Indeed, one scholar credits Guibert with being "particularly important for the 'discovery' of the operational level of war."⁴⁷ Guibert and his contemporaries certainly did not speak in terms of "operational warfare." However, the conceptual leap from Guibert's tactical envelopment of an enemy's flanks to a flank attack *via* operational maneuver with a detachment is small: "by the disposition of march one can carry a part of the army on the flank of the enemy, while one carries the rest of the front..."⁴⁸

Guibert referred to strategy as "the science of generals."⁴⁹ While he did not have the nuanced view of strategy that modern theorists possess, he enumerated certain strategic principles that would lay the foundation for future strategic thought. The most fundamental of these principles was his belief in the strategic offensive; Guibert rejected the defensive as a matter of course: "one does not reflect enough that there is not a good defensive, that the [good] one is the offensive."⁵⁰ Toward this end, he cast off Old-Regime positional warfare in favor of a strategy of annihilation. In practice, this meant the abandonment of fortresses, defensive strongholds, and cordons in favor of a mobile unitary army whose goal was the destruction of the enemy army.⁵¹ This concentration of force was made possible by the division system and the increased mobility of Guibert's army.

Logistics played a central role in Guibert's strategy. He argued that an important aspect to strategic mobility was the rejection of the Old Regime magazine and depot system perfected

⁴⁷ Telp 26.

⁴⁸ Guibert, *Essai* II 13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* II 7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* I LV; Guibert offers a possible origin for the modern coaching idiom "the best defense is a good offense."

⁵¹ See *Ibid.* I V-LXXIX.

by Louis XIV. Guibert noted that magazines and depots slowed an army considerably, greatly reducing its mobility. Quoting Cato, Guibert argued that “it must be that war nourishes war.”⁵² This would liberate the army from lines of supply, granting it a greatly increased strategic mobility. Guibert also rejected the Vauban system of siegecraft, noting that the investment of a Vauban fortress required an army to maintain a static position for a lengthy period of time, greatly reducing its operational and strategic mobility. Leaving a Vauban fortress to the rear of a strategic advance was only possible if the army could operate independent of lines of supply and communication, which Guibert’s army could. These principles played an integral role in Guibert’s strategic offensive.⁵³

A vital aspect of Guibert’s system was the education and training of its practitioners; Napoleon Bonaparte later recognized that “without discipline there can be no victory.”⁵⁴ In stripping away the systematic approach of the Old Regime in favor of a simpler, more flexible approach, Guibert necessarily placed greater responsibility on the individual, increased responsibility that required greater discipline. He advocated constant drill to hone both a soldier’s instincts and a general’s battlefield command. For tactics, Guibert stressed fire training to increase the battalion’s fire discipline and thus its firepower. Guibert wholly rejected the Prussian volume of fire model in favor of voluntary fire, or the *feu à volonté*. “This fire,” wrote Guibert, “is the liveliest and deadliest of all; it stirs the mind of the soldier; it inures them to danger; it agrees perfectly with the vivacity and the skill of the French; its essence is only to accustom the soldier to stop on signal and to maintain silence.”⁵⁵ To this end, he argued for continual training with live ammunition to improve the soldier’s aim. He also argued for

⁵² Ibid.. II 184.

⁵³ Ibid.. II 180-218.

⁵⁴ Napoleon Bonaparte to the Executive Directory, 17 germinal an IV (6 April 1796), *Correspondence générale*, ed. Gaspard Gourgaud (Paris: Fayard, 2004): 325.

⁵⁵ Guibert, *Essai* I 90. The *feu à volonté*, or voluntary fire, was also referred to as the “*billebaude*.”

bayonet training, as the psychological effects of cold steel could shatter enemy formations with minimal effort or casualties. Unlike Prussian drill, Guibert's drill was simple, reinforcing the concepts of discipline and unit maneuver.⁵⁶

These same concepts would be applied at the operational and strategic levels via the training camp. Guibert devotes much of the second volume of the *Essai* to a discussion of these camps. Modeled on Frederick's annual Prussian exercises, Guibert's camps were the "continual exercise of the work of war...where one can undertake a complete education" of both officers and men.⁵⁷ Guibert dismissed the notion of Old Regime camps, which were as much medieval parades as they were military training exercises. He called for camps lasting for three months to be held every year in an isolated region. He specified in great detail the composition of the opposing armies, both of which used his tactical and organizational systems. After putting them through the paces of basic maneuvering, Guibert would have both armies engage in a number of operational actions, demonstrating and testing his operational principles. These exercises would train the junior officers in the minutiae of tactics and the senior officers in the principles of operational warfare. All officers would receive the pragmatic education that came from commanding their soldiers in realistic simulations.⁵⁸

Training camps were a valuable educational resource for Guibert's system, but hardly the beginning of an officer's education. Unlike many noble officers, Guibert believed that a thorough technical education was the cornerstone of an effective army. To supplement the natural *génie* of an officer, an enlightened education in the technical aspects of warfare was necessary to impart *moyen*. This mirrored his own training in mathematics and other skills necessary to an army officer. Having accrued the necessary academic education, Guibert

⁵⁶ Ibid.. I 21-71.

⁵⁷ See Ibid.. II 70, Guibert, *Journal d'un voyage en Allemagne*.

⁵⁸ Guibert, *Essai* II 61-137.

required that his officers be trained in all aspects of warfare to understand the proper use of artillery, cavalry, infantry, and light infantry. This diversity in training and knowledge led to more skilled officers and continuity in their replacement. Such officers would receive both field and staff assignments.⁵⁹

Leading Guibert's trained and skilled officers was a single general. Guibert's general was *une homme de génie* who could unite the art and science of warfare. Guibert firmly believed in the need for a strong guiding hand for his army. This *homme de génie* was an educated man capable of inspiring his troops in battle, "rarely rest[ing] in action."⁶⁰ He possessed the twin aspects of *génie* and *moyen*, corresponding to the science and art of war respectively. *Génie* was formed by education and the knowledge of command gained from experience, school, and the training camps. *Moyen* was an inherent ability, the means to act effectively in any given situation. Crucial to these concepts was *coup d'oeil*.⁶¹ *Coup d'oeil* allowed *l'homme de génie* to "perceive many objects, embrace many combinations; and there, by consequence, where the mediocre general does not see the position to defend or the impossibility of acting, it presents to the imagination of the former [*l'homme de génie*] an advantageous movement" in both time and space.⁶² He maneuvered his forces in such a way as to take full advantage of this moment, leading to the defeat of the enemy. While an army constructed on Guibert's system could function adequately, *l'homme de génie* was necessary to fully utilize the system.

Guibert began the *Essai* with a discourse on European politics, which he viewed as inseparable from the science of warfare. In this essay, he presented a key philosophical concept necessary for his system to succeed: he "introduced the population to the army and the nation to

⁵⁹ Guibert, *Essai* I V-LVXXXIX and II 61-70.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* II 2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* II:220. Literally "strike of the eye."

⁶² *Ibid.* II 4.

war.”⁶³ He praised ancient Rome for its *patrie et vertu* and criticized modern European states for being weak, decadent, and inefficient. Guibert believed that modern states could reform to a degree, realigning themselves on the Roman model. Guibert’s ideal state was entirely self-sustaining, drawing from its own resources to provide for all its needs. Its administration was simple and efficient, and it required a strong and competent leader, *un homme de génie* in the vein of Guibert’s general. Most importantly for his military theory, Guibert believed that a state should replace the professional mercenary army of the Old Regime with a citizen army. He asserted that no contemporary society in Europe was capable of producing such an army,

But suppose that in Europe was elevated a vigorous people, of *génie*, of means, and of [good] government; a people who attained austere virtue, and a national militia, a fixed plan of aggrandizement, who did not lose the view of this system, who knew how to make war with little cost, and subsist by their victories, not be reduced to lay down arms, by the calculations of finance. One would see this people subjugate their neighbors, and overturn their feeble constitutions, like the north wind bends the reeds.⁶⁴

Guibert witnessed such a patriotic fervor in Corsica, where Paoli’s soldiers fought courageously against the foreign French invaders. His observations undoubtedly contributed to his notion of an army composed of citizen-soldiers. Despite the failure of other societies to produce such an army, Guibert believed that certain nations could reform themselves and advance the science of warfare. He thought the only contemporary state with the resources to properly reform was France.⁶⁵

Founded on his doctrinal principles of speed, flexibility, and simplicity, the army created by Guibert was fully articulated from division to platoon. Each unit could function as a unit or as part of a larger whole, autonomous but interdependent. Rather than relying on imaginary battlefield situations to justify his system, Guibert instead created a military constitution that

⁶³ Roger Caillois, *Bellone ou la pente de la guerre* (Fata Morgana, 1994) 101.

⁶⁴ Guibert, *Essai* I XII.

⁶⁵ See *Ibid.* I V-LVXXIIX.

could function in almost any situation. Its possibilities were limited only by the imagination of its practitioners.

The *Essai*'s exact path to publication is obscure and likely will remain so. Much speculation abounds as to the precise reason for its anonymous publication, but a probable explanation suggests itself: it contained a scathing attack on the French military and political establishment. Despite the need for reform demonstrated by the appointment of the Choiseul ministry, the French army remained an inherently conservative body. A public attack, however warranted, exposed the internal flaws of the army to neutral and hostile observers.⁶⁶ Any military institution naturally would want to conceal its faults, if only to preempt a first strike by enemies cognizant of its weakness. Perhaps more importantly, the French army clung to its *noblesse oblige* and resented meddling with its tradition. A sweeping attack by an *anoblis* junior officer would not go over well with the army's leadership. On a more personal level, Guibert was intensely aware of the possibility of the work's failure. Always hyper-conscious of his reputation, Guibert undoubtedly published the *Essai* anonymously in order to ensure plausible deniability if it failed as a literary work.

Despite its author's apprehensions, the *Essai* was a rousing success from the moment of its first publication in two editions in 1772. The following year, the *Essai* was published in Geneva and Liège; in 1774, it was translated into German and published in Dresden.⁶⁷ The publication and enormous success of his first work proved a watershed for Guibert. At the relatively tender age of twenty-nine, his military theories were the talk of every military establishment from the wilderness of America to the court of Persia. While his later writings, particularly the *Défense*, would refine his military constitution, the *Essai général de tactique* was

⁶⁶ See Groffier 33-42, Lauerma 25-63.

⁶⁷ Lauerma 63.

the widest-read and most influential of Guibert's military works. Its effects would prove to be profound for both its author and the French army.

CHAPTER 4

YEARS OF FAME

Guibert returned from Corsica and entered Paris in 1771 to little fanfare. The obscure young officer from the provinces garnered no interest from the literary or political elite. The following year, the near-instantaneous success of the *Essai général de tactique* began his rapid social ascent. All of France demanded to know the audacious young officer who had dared condemn France's military constitution. Guibert travelled Paris seeking patronage and entrée into the literary elite. Popular success meant acceptance into salon culture, which dominated France. The *Essai* opened the doors of the salons and Guibert's personality won over the social elite.

Paris social life centered on social "circles," or salons, as they are known today. The salon developed first in Paris, spreading across France and Europe in the late seventeenth century. By the latter half of the eighteenth century, salons had evolved into simple, furnished rooms provided by their owners as a place for intellectuals to gather and discuss art, literature, politics, drama, music, theatre, philosophy, and nearly every other subject in a relaxed environment. Each salon opened its doors once or twice per week, usually after sundown. Salongoers maintained a rotating attendance throughout the week, visiting the salons that were open on the appropriate night. The salon provided a generally friendly atmosphere for discussion, readings, and debuts of literary works.¹

Salons were unique in that they were almost universally administered by women. These salonnières, drawn from the nobility and the upper bourgeoisie, attracted men and women from across Paris and Europe to their salons. They opened their salons, usually on a specific day of

¹ See Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters*; Steven D. Kale, *French Salons*; and Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*.

the week, and oversaw who attended, what was presented, and the direction of discussion. This last task was the most important. A salonnière was more than an administrator; she was expected to stimulate and facilitate conversation. A salonnière performed all the functions of a social hostess to a widely varied cast of personalities and tastes in addition to her intellectual obligations to her clients: “as governors, rather than judges, salonnières provided the ground for the philosophes’ serious work by shaping and controlling the discourse to which men of letters were dedicated and which constituted their project of Enlightenment. In so doing, they transformed the salon from a leisure institution of the nobility into an institution of the Enlightenment.”²

The salon played a vital role in the Enlightenment, serving as the breeding ground for its ideas and philosophies. By the late eighteenth century, salons could be found in all major cities in Europe. The salons in Paris, however, remained the leading salons on the continent. Philosophes, artists, writers, statesmen, and military figures from across Europe came to the Parisian salons. The great salons of Paris attracted the leading figures of the Enlightenment, such as Rousseau; Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu; Voltaire; David Hume; Samuel d’Alembert; and Denis Diderot.

To achieve the fame and success that he desired, Guibert needed access to these salons. As a provincial *anoblis*, he was largely denied when he returned from Corsica in 1771. Stationed in Tarascon, Guibert frequently travelled to Paris to seek his fortune. His old friend Dumouriez presented Guibert to a literary salon. Its membership included Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon; Charles Collé; François-Augustin de Paradis de Moncrif; the duc de Richelieu; Jean-Louis Favier; and Emmanuel-Félicité de Durfort, duc de Duras. Like most salons, the salon had a hand in politics as well as literature. During the crisis of the parlements in 1771, its members,

² Goodman 53.

including Guibert, published a memorandum requesting a meeting of the Estates-General.³ The company of the minor philosophes in the salon fired Guibert's literary ambitions, encouraging him to publish the various works he had begun drafting in the years since his return from Prussian captivity.⁴

Guibert's entrance into Parisian society provided another opportunity for social advancement via romantic attachments. Throughout his life, Guibert sought the attention of women who fascinated him. The first of these was Jeanne Thiroux de Montsaugé, wife of financier Philibert Thiroux de Montsaugé. The two met some time in 1771, probably in the salon.⁵ She was the prototypical woman that Guibert preferred: "a remarkable beauty," older, highly intelligent, and demure.⁶ Montsaugé was of no great importance in the Parisian social scene and did little to advance Guibert's career. She nevertheless captured his attention for a significant period of his life. Despite other romances, Guibert never remained long from Montsaugé and carried on a regular correspondence with her until his marriage.⁷

In 1772, Guibert's fortunes changed significantly for the better. The publication of the *Essai* made him a celebrity almost overnight. All Paris clamored to meet the ambitious young man who dared to challenge the existing order. He began to frequent the leading salons of Marie Thérèse Rodet Geoffrin, Suzanne Necker, and Julie de Lespinasse. Their names "were recorded

³ In late 1770-early 1771, Chancellor René Nicolas Charles Augustin de Maupeou forcibly suppressed the parlements of France. He forbade them from meeting, which signaled a shift in the policy of Louis XV to a more direct, and seemingly despotic, control of the government. The parlements remained suppressed until Louis' death in 1774.

⁴ Groffier 33-4.

⁵ See Lauerma 123, Groffier 33-4. Lauerma dates the affair from 1774, Groffier from 1771. The early date seems the more likely, as the latter is not supported by extant sources. See *Letters*.

⁶ Lauerma 123.

⁷ As with much of Guibert's correspondence, these letters have since been lost.

and praised again and again in the letters and works of the philosophes...[their salons] formed the social base of the Enlightenment....”⁸

Madame Geoffrin’s salon, the oldest of the three, served as the training ground of salonnières. Her and Madame Necker’s salons assisted philosophes in the development and proliferation of their works.⁹ Lespinasse’s salon was “more literary than that of the Marquise du Deffand, more aristocratic than that of the bourgeois Mme. Geoffrin.”¹⁰ These salons were considered to be the leading salons in Paris, and therefore, in Europe. The *Essai* gave Guibert entrée, which he grasped eagerly and began associating with the leading literary, political, military, and social figures of the late Enlightenment.

Guibert soon became something of an affectation for salonnières, the young army colonel of charming voice and sweeping intellect. He caught the attention of many ladies who patronized the salons. This came not from his physical attractions, which were rather homely. Rather, “the all-powerful charm of [his] personality” commanded a salon and drew the admiration of the leading philosophes.¹¹ He was intensely passionate, and he relayed that passion through his discourse to eager listeners. He also had a voracious appetite for reading and an eidetic memory.¹² Guibert conversed with philosophes on a broad range of subjects, particularly politics, military theory, literature, art, architecture, and gardening. Perhaps more importantly, Guibert was young, dynamic, well-known, and appeared to have a bright future. In the words of one author, “he exercised over women a special fascination.”¹³

⁸ Goodman 58, 75.

⁹ Goodman 74-83.

¹⁰ C.-A. Sainte-Beuve, *The Love Letters of Julie de Lespinasse* 32.

¹¹ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 20 Sept 1774, *Letters* 180: “M. d’Alembert and the comte de Crillon often speak to me of you....”

¹² Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 1 Aug 1773, *Letters* 78.

¹³ Groffier 102.

Guibert's social connections also aided his rise to fame. His old friend Dumouriez had introduced Guibert to the Parisian social scene; the two remained close until Guibert's death. He carried a close association with the likes of Necker and his wife, their daughter Anna Louise Germaine, d'Alembert, Hume, Horace Walpole, and many others in government and the arts. These connections enabled the rapid proliferation of his writings and ideas, both physically and via word-of-mouth. By 1772, Guibert was recognized as a philosophe by the social and military elite of Europe and had become "a lion of the salons."¹⁴ Not the least of his admirers was Voltaire, who penned a poem about the young man entitled "*La Tactique*."¹⁵

Guibert also came to the attention of Frederick II, king of Prussia and Guibert's boyhood idol. One popular legend has Frederick flying into a rage on reading the *Essai*, furious because the impudent upstart had divined his military secrets.¹⁶ While the story is likely apocryphal, Frederick did remark to Voltaire that "this M. de Guibert seeks glory by all means: collecting applause from armies, theatres, and women; this is one way to immortality."¹⁷ The last would prove an important part of Guibert's legacy.

Guibert's popularity led to more romantic opportunities, the most notable of which was with Julie de Lespinasse. The two knew each other by reputation but had never met in person. Julie was the illegitimate daughter of Julie d'Albon, herself quite active in the Parisian social scene. Given her birth, Julie de Lespinasse felt herself consigned to the unhappy life of an illegitimate noble and resolved to enter the convent. She was saved by Marie Anne de Vichy-Chamrond, marquise du Deffand, a cantankerous character of the mid-eighteenth century who maintained a popular salon. During one of her many journeys to the countryside to improve her

¹⁴ Palmer 106.

¹⁵ See Guibert, *Oeuvres dramatiques* 297-301.

¹⁶ Palmer 106.

¹⁷ Frederick II to Voltaire, 27 July 1775, quoted in Lauerma 86.

health, du Deffand encountered Julie in Champrond around 1747. Taken by the young woman, du Deffand brought her to Paris, where Julie became her protégé. From du Deffand, Julie learned the art of the salonnière. Perhaps more importantly, by standing in du Deffand's shadow, Julie learned the fine arts of tact and grace in social situations: "Look at the education I received: madame du Deffand...the President Hênault, the abbé Bon, the archbishops of Toulouse and Aix, M. Turgot, M. d'Alembert...such are the people who taught me to speak and think."¹⁸

Eventually, the relationship between mentor and protégée soured, and Julie broke away to establish her own salon in 1764. She took lodging in rue Sainte Dominique at the corner of the rue de Belle-Chasse, the front room of which became her salon. She furnished it simply and tastefully on a budget granted by her late mother and several wealthy acquaintances, including Madame Geoffrin.¹⁹ Julie, like Guibert, experienced a rapid rise in Parisian society. Her personality was key to the immediate personality of her salon. She was adored by all but du Deffand and her most stringent supporters. Julie was demure, self-effacing, highly intelligent and well-spoken. In Guibert's words,

She was always free from personality, and always natural. She knew that the great secret of pleasing was in forgetting self to give one's interest to others, and she forgot herself perpetually. She was the soul of a conversation, but she never made herself its object. Her great art lay in showing the minds of others to advantage; she enjoyed that more than to show her own...the charm of her circle was so in *her* that the persons who composed it were not the same as they were elsewhere. It was only in her presence that they had their full value.²⁰

Julie provided a perfect opposite to du Deffand in the latter's salon and was an excellent salonnière in her own right. Julie's salon, buoyed by her personality, attracted the leading figures in Paris. Its intellectual nature drew a number of Diderot's followers: "If the official

¹⁸ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 23 Sept 74, *Letters* 186-7. See also Ségur 16-127.

¹⁹ Ségur 127-130.

²⁰ Guibert, "Elegy of Eliza," *The Love Letters of Mlle. Julie de Lespinasse*, trans. Katharine Prescott Wormeley (Toronto: George N. Morang & Co., Ltd., 1903): 310, 317.

assizes of the Encyclopedia were housed in rue Saint Honoré, the little apartment in rue Sainte Dominique contained its ‘laboratory.’”²¹ Julie also gained a reputation as the arbiter of the Académie française; the candidates who won her approval often won appointment. Such was the case with Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard, who owed his seat to Julie and remained a close confidant until her death. She also maintained a close friendship with Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, who was often referred to as her “vice-secretary.”²² D’Alembert acted as Julie’s secretary and closest personal acquaintance. A leading mathematician and promoter of the Encyclopedia, D’Alembert was himself an illegitimate child of nobility. The two lodged together, but a relationship beyond platonic friendship never developed, despite d’Alembert’s attraction to Julie.²³

Guibert and Julie first met at a garden party hosted by Claude Henri Watelet at Moulin-Joly on 21 June 1772. “She was far from beautiful,” Guibert recorded, “and her features were still further marred by the small-pox; but her plainness had nothing repulsive at the first glance; at the second the eye grew accustomed to it, and as soon as she spoke it was forgotten. She was tall and well-made.”²⁴ Despite her physical appearance, Guibert was taken with Julie at their first meeting and she with him. The two seemed to be a perfect match, and indeed a romantic spark was lit immediately. They began to correspond, developing a strong and mutually beneficial relationship.

To Guibert, Julie represented the seasoned salonnière who orchestrated one of the most celebrated salons in Paris. She could open many doors for him, including those at the highest levels of government. She also possessed the traits Guibert seemed to have valued in women.

²¹ Ségur 154.

²² Ségur 158-170.

²³ Ibid.. 132-142.

²⁴ Guibert, *Elegy of Eliza* 310.

Like Montsauge, Julie had a bright mind and gracious manner. Unlike Montsauge, Julie had a passion to match Guibert's temperament. To Julie, Guibert was a fascinating young man who breathed life and energy into her occasionally boring life.

Despite the obvious attraction, Julie would not allow herself to pursue a romance with Guibert. This was due in large part to a prior unresolved romance. In 1766, she had met Don José y Gonzaga, marquis de Mora, son of the Spanish ambassador. Much like Guibert, Mora was highly intelligent, charismatic, and passionate. The two began a torrid affair in 1767, and Mora promised Julie marriage after disentangling himself from an unfortunate engagement. In 1771, Mora's father was recalled to Madrid and Mora was forced to leave Paris. The following year, Mora fell gravely ill and remained close to death for nearly a year. When Julie met Guibert at Moulin-Joly, she harbored unspoken fears for Mora's life. To Julie, Guibert appeared to be a French version of Mora, and she clung to him as she had to Mora. However, their relationship would remain nothing more than a deep friendship while Mora languished in Madrid and Guibert departed for Germany.

In late 1773, Guibert embarked on a "military voyage" through eastern France, Germany, and the Austrian empire. Throughout the journey, Guibert acted as an informal ambassador and official military observer. More importantly for Guibert, it removed him from Paris at a politically dangerous time. Reactionaries had taken control of the Ministry of War after the fall of Choiseul, and remained in power throughout the French army. Guibert's outspoken nature and the contentiousness of the *Essai* threatened to sabotage his career, and it appeared that a royal reprimand might be forthcoming for "le colonel insolent." On the advice of family friend the prince of Soubise, Guibert removed himself from Paris during a crucial period, which helped

to calm the tension.²⁵ Drawing on the long tradition of travel narratives, Guibert kept a detailed journal for publication. The journal details Guibert's travels and his observations on the military, political, and cultural conditions of the various states that he visited. It helped increase Guibert's popularity after its publication.²⁶

Guibert departed Paris on 20 May 1773 and travelled east, reaching Strasbourg on 26 May. He noted the disrepair of the villages and the plight of the peasants, a strain that repeated itself in every region Guibert visited.²⁷ On 27 May, he crossed the Rhine into Baden and continued east. Passing through Mannheim, he observed the poor condition of the troops, who were maintained with Prussian discipline.²⁸ From 30 May to 1 June, Guibert toured the battlefields of Lützen and Leipzig, where Gustavus Adolphus and Charles XII of Sweden had fought legendary battles. He reached Dresden on 4 June, where he enjoyed the hospitality of the Saxon court that befitted an honored guest of Guibert's stature.

At Dresden, Guibert began the intensive work of examining the military constitution of the state. He found the Saxon army to be populated with "beautiful soldiers, well maintained, but poorly instructed."²⁹ He noted the disrepair of the city's fortifications and doubted the Saxon claim that the city's walls could be held with 30,000 men. He conducted several meetings with Saxon government officials, including the royal family. Guibert concluded that Saxony was ill-governed, with "vices without number; financial disorder; poorly-paid and -maintained troops: ...the Court [having] cabals, disorders, infamy of every kind." After a short stay at Dresden, Guibert set out for Berlin on 8 June. Two days later, Guibert reached the great city.

²⁵ Lauerma 64.

²⁶ Guibert, *Journal d'un voyage en Allemagne*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I 98-100.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I 100-124.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I 132.

“Berlin [is] an immense city; its grandeur cannot be seen at first glance,” wrote Guibert, awed at the prospect of reaching the object of his boyhood military admiration.³⁰ He travelled the city, taking in its sights and recording his observations. Guibert noted soldiers laboring seemingly on every street corner, a strange sight to French eyes unused to seeing soldiers in public: “Berlin has the air of a grand quartermaster-general, of a military metropolis.”³¹ He watched many military parades, remarking on the lack of uniformity in Prussian dress and manners. When he was not occupying himself with military affairs, Guibert toured the city’s gardens and artistic spaces. Much of what he found he described as “in poor taste,” illustrating his typically French sense of cultural superiority.³² After nearly one week in Berlin, Guibert received word that his request to meet the king had been accepted. On 14 June, he left the Prussian capital for Potsdam.

On reaching Potsdam, Guibert was interrogated by a series of officials and aides, culminating in an audience with Frederick’s close associate and military philosophe, Karl Gottlieb Guichard, better known as Quintus Icilius. The two spent several days discussing the military situation in Europe. Quintus argued forcefully that Frederick’s success was due in large part to luck rather than skill, convincing Guibert on the point. Following his audience with Quintus, Guibert passed several days with the crown prince, Frederick William, to whom Guibert took a liking. Frederick William and Quintus introduced Guibert to the various ambassadors and diplomats who inhabited Potsdam. Guibert found himself “becoming more French than [his] country,” a notion that both pleased and surprised him.³³ Finally, on 17 June, Guibert received his audience with Frederick.

³⁰ Ibid.. I 160.

³¹ Ibid.. I 177.

³² Ibid.. I 160-170.

³³ See Ibid.. I 210-214.

When Guibert finally met his hero, he was transfixed: “a sort of magic vapor seemed to me to envelop his person; it is, I believe, what one calls the halo of a saint, and the glory around a Great Man. I remember his face now as if I had seen it in a dream; these are all the details that I know of his private life, of his character; it is the likeness that I have before me, that I find that I saw with confusion and with trouble.”³⁴ Guibert quickly recovered and spent an hour in deep discussion with the king. Frederick revealed that he had read the *Essai* and that it “had given him a great desire to know its author.”³⁵ Impressed with Guibert’s military acumen, Frederick invited the young officer to the fall maneuvers in Silesia, an offer that Guibert eagerly accepted. After the audience, Guibert dined with the royal family before returning to Berlin. There, he encountered Prince Frederick Henry Louis, the king’s brother and erstwhile rival for military and social acclaim. Guibert greatly enjoyed Henry’s company, finding it to be intelligent, educated, and insightful on military and political matters.³⁶

At the end of the month, Guibert departed Berlin, bound for Vienna. He passed through Saxony and into Austria, where he noted the poor living conditions of the peasants and castigated the Austrian government for not aiding them.³⁷ On 1 July, he reached Vienna. Like Berlin, he found Vienna to be an impressively large city with little artistic merit and a corrupt court to match Dresden. He commented on his audience with Empress Maria-Theresa, noting that she appeared to be “a good member of the bourgeoisie.”³⁸ Guibert finished his tour of Vienna with a visit to the city’s arsenal, which he praised for its organization, adoption of Gribeauval guns, and the quality of its saltpeter and powder.³⁹

³⁴ Ibid.. I 217.

³⁵ Ibid..

³⁶ Ibid.. I 218-248.

³⁷ Ibid.. I 249, 272-274.

³⁸ Ibid.. I 284.

³⁹ Ibid.. I 313-324.

After a lengthy stay at Vienna, Guibert departed for a tour of the military border between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires on 19 July. The further he traveled south, the more savage and beautiful Guibert found the countryside, echoing Rousseau and several other philosophes who found beauty in primitive, natural surroundings. On reaching the border, Guibert discovered a highly-militarized zone that stretched from the Adriatic Sea to the forests of Romania. He dined with several provincial officers and lauded the militarization of the land's citizens, who were forced to be on constant alert against Ottoman incursions. While Guibert praised their dedication, he noted that the system could not be exported because it required a long border that remained volatile for years or decades.⁴⁰ By mid-August, Guibert reluctantly left the countryside and journeyed north for Frederick's Silesian maneuvers.

Guibert reached the scene of the maneuvers at Breslau on 15 August. By the 1770s, Frederick's maneuvers had become something of a legend in military circles. He conducted them every year from summer to autumn in peacetime and when he could during war. He intended them to expand small-unit drill onto a larger scale, allowing him to test operational theory and practice in close to accurate conditions. These maneuvers were a critical element in the success of the Prussian military constitution, a fact that had not escaped Guibert.⁴¹ For the next month, he attended a variety of maneuvers, often in the presence of the king and his leading generals.

Guibert viewed the various exercises with a critical eye. Observing basic drill, he found the Prussian infantry to be "capable of perfect movement, when properly commanded" and the cavalry's "alignment [to be] perfect."⁴² After witnessing several small-unit tactical exercises, Guibert was treated to a series of operational maneuvers presided over by the "prodigious

⁴⁰ Ibid., II 1-114.

⁴¹ See Guibert, *Essai* II 70.

⁴² Guibert, *Journal d'un voyage en Allemagne* II 127, 156.

activity of the king.”⁴³ These took place on a variety of terrain and pitted armies commanded by Frederick and “Anhalt” against each other.⁴⁴ These exercises included Frederick, with infantry formed in square, defending against Anhalt’s cavalry; Anhalt placed in a superior defensive position while Frederick demonstrated his favored “oblique order” attack; and Anhalt staging an attack on a fortified camp commanded by Frederick.⁴⁵ Despite his praise for Prussian technical precision, Guibert’s opinion of Frederick and the Prussian constitution decreased as the exercises went on. He criticized Frederick for their unbalanced nature, noting that the maneuvers often gave Frederick’s army an insurmountable advantage of numbers or position. The maneuvers also lacked the confused conditions that often presented themselves on a battlefield.⁴⁶ More damningly, Guibert castigated the entire Prussian constitution, noting that the parade-ground precision for which the Prussian military had become a by-word disappeared once the maneuver progressed beyond its opening volleys. “Since I have been in Prussia,” Guibert concluded, “I have been increasingly confirmed in the opinion that the king has pressed neither the theory nor the practice of the [military] art to its perfection, and there are many objects on which one could think and do better.”⁴⁷

At the beginning of September, Guibert took his leave of Frederick. He intended to visit Poland and perhaps Russia, but he was stricken with fever in Breslau and forced to turn back. On 16 September, he returned to Vienna, still weak with illness. Over the course of the next month, Guibert slowly made his way west, including a visit to Voltaire at Ferney, before crossing the Rhine on 18 October.⁴⁸

⁴³ Ibid.. II 161.

⁴⁴ Probably Heinrich William von Anhalt, a member of Frederick’s staff, although Guibert is unclear on the point.

⁴⁵ Guibert, *Journal d’un voyage en Allemagne* II 125-234.

⁴⁶ What Clausewitz would refer to as “friction.”

⁴⁷ Guibert, *Journal d’un voyage en Allemagne* II 202-203.

⁴⁸ Ibid.. 244-276.

Upon his return to France, a curious incident took place. Guibert's old friend Dumouriez was arrested following a failed attempt in Poland to remove Russian influence. Arrested with Dumouriez was Jean-Louis Favier, future radical and friend of Guibert. The two were implicated in a nebulous plot against the crown. Rumors swirled around Versailles that the two were members of Louis XV's famed *Secret du roi*, a shadowy cabal of agents who undertook secret missions for the king. Dumouriez and Favier were likely members of the *Secret du roi* and some evidence suggests that Guibert might also have been involved.⁴⁹ Lending credence to the argument were the "difficulties without number" that Guibert faced at the various customs stations on his voyage.⁵⁰ Regardless of his suspected complicity in the plot, Guibert was implicated through his close association with Dumouriez and Favier. He first learned of the arrests in Vienna and claimed innocence: "I had a clear conscience; I held my head high. Nevertheless, I am agitated at times."⁵¹ Despite his fears, he was never arrested or accused. One scholar attributes this to timely intervention by Charles-François de Broglie, marquis de Ruffec, who was another old friend of the family and head of the *Secret*. Broglie intervened personally with the king and likely burnt all incriminating evidence, saving Guibert's career and bright future.⁵²

Guibert's return marked his ascension to the highest ranks of Parisian society. It also led to a shift in his relationship with Julie de Lespinasse. Despite their disparity in age and their respective romantic entanglements, the relationship deepened after Guibert's return. On the night of 10 February 1774, the two attended the opera and were left alone in a box. "In the ensuing silence their lips were drawn together; they drank, as Julie writes, the cup of 'delicious

⁴⁹ Groffier 84-93.

⁵⁰ Guibert, *Journal d'un voyage en Allemagne* I 276.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* II 263-264.

⁵² Groffier 93-96.

poison.”⁵³ Their relationship would prove to be one of the great romances of the period. Their letters reveal an intensely passionate love that soared to ecstatic heights and fell to suicidal lows. In the beginning, all seemed well: Guibert promised to keep his distance from Montsaugé and Julie was enraptured by the young man. Selections from her letters reveal the intensity of their passion: “Must I not love you, must I not cherish your presence? You have the power to divert me from so sharp and so deep-seated a pain: I wait for, I long for your letters;” “my dear, I suffer, I love you, I wait for you;” “doubtless, I have been kept in bondage by the same charm which drew me to you, by the all-powerful charm of your personality, which intoxicates my mind... my friend, you are more powerful than God,” wrote Julie.⁵⁴

Their early letters strike many notes of romance, but also a subtle undercurrent of trouble. “You have no need to be loved as I know how to love,” wrote Julie; “no, that is not your style; you are so perfectly lovable, that you must be or become the prime object of all those charming ladies who place on their heads all that they had within them, and are so lovable that they love themselves in preference to all else. You will be the pleasure, you will satisfy the vanity, of almost every woman.”⁵⁵ More ominously: “I love you to desperation, and yet something tells me that is not how you ought to be loved.”⁵⁶

The elevation of their relationship to a romance occurred just as Guibert was rising to the height of the Parisian social scene. When in Paris, Guibert could be found in Julie’s salon or in the same salons she frequented. The two rarely traveled together, but frequented the same social circles. Julie noted Guibert’s schedule:

⁵³ Ségur 321.

⁵⁴ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 30 May 1773, *Letters* 42; Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, dated “at every moment of my life,” *Letters* 101; Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, Tuesday, late spring 1774, *Letters* 116-117.

⁵⁵ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 13 Nov 1774, *Letters* 255.

⁵⁶ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, Monday late spring 1774, *Letters* 111.

Sunday, you will work all morning without going out, you will dine with Mme. de M...; you will return at 5:00 to work, and at 8:00 you will come to my house.

Monday, dinner at M. de Vaines' and supper with Mme. De M....

Tuesday, dinner at the Contrôle Générale and supper with Mme. de M....

Wednesday, dinner at Mme. Geoffrin's, and supper with Mme. de M....

Thursday, dinner at the comte de Crillon's, and supper with Mme. de M....

Friday, dinner at Mme. de Chatillon's, and supper with Mme. de M....

Saturday, dinner with Mme. de M..., and go to Versailles after dinner, and return on Sunday evening to spend the evening with me."⁵⁷

When Guibert was absent from Paris, as he often was for work or social reasons, the two communicated via letter. Julie wrote most often of her feelings for or about him, usually addressing his faults. Guibert responded in kind; he also wrote often of his work and possibilities for his own advancement. Julie offered Guibert constructive criticism on his projects, particularly the development of his theatrical works.

In spite of their visibility on the Parisian social scene, Guibert and Julie's intense relationship was remarkable in that it never became public during either of their lifetimes. "People must suspect my interest in you, for when I was told of the importance of the secret, my informant added: *A secret for everybody, for M. de Guibert*. I laughed at this condition and said: so he is not included in *everybody*? 'No, no, not for you!'"⁵⁸ Julie likely kept the affair quiet in order to preserve her reputation for tact. She pleaded with Guibert to burn her letters after he had read them and she promised to do the same.⁵⁹ Guibert's motives for secrecy remain unknown, although the continuation of his other affairs was a likely factor. Even more remarkably, Julie's lifelong companion, d'Alembert, who often composed her letters to Guibert, never deduced the

⁵⁷ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, November 1774, *Letters* 259. The "Mme de M..." is Montsaugue, of whom Julie was intensely jealous. While Julie was trying to make the point that Guibert spent more time with Montsaugue than herself, the passage is illustrative of Guibert's weekly socializations.

⁵⁸ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 4 July 1775, *Letters* 337. Italics are Julie's.

⁵⁹ See Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 22 Aug 73, *Letters* 89. Julie was conscientious about burning Guibert's letters, which is unfortunate for posterity as few of them are extant. Guibert, despite constant assurances, seems to have preserved the majority of Julie's letters.

affair.⁶⁰ While d'Alembert was likely blinded by his own romantic attraction to Julie, his lack of discovery spoke to the extreme tact of the couple.

As time went by, problems appeared. As the above schedule indicates, Guibert never stopped his visits to Montsaugue, prompting angry recriminations from Julie:

My friend, I ought to hate you. Alas! For how long a time have I no more done what I ought to do, what I wish to do! I hate myself, I condemn myself, and I love you. [...] But how comes it about that [she] does not love you to desperation? As you would like to be loved? As you deserve to be? On what then can she spend her mind and her life? Ah, yes, she has no taste, no sensibility, I am sure of it. She ought to love you, if it were only from vanity. But in what am I going to interfere? You are content, or if you are not, you love the ill she does you.... So why should I pity you? But that other wretched creature, she *does* interest me; have you written to her? Is her unhappiness still as profound as ever?... Only come to me when you have no more to say to *her*.⁶¹

Guibert's continuing liaison with Montsaugue revealed a fundamental flaw within the relationship. Guibert and Julie were both intensely passionate people, but as their relationship advanced, Julie seemed the more passionate of the two. He returned the sentiment with equal fervor only occasionally. While both were engaged in numerous social activities, Julie considered Guibert to be her first priority personally: "I feel so positively that I am not *I*; I am *you*...."⁶² Guibert seems not to have shared the sentiment. He remained primarily focused on his work rather than on his relationship with Julie. Many of his letters reveal him to be distracted by events at Versailles, rarely returning her sentiments. "A king, an emperor, armies, camps, make you forget her who loves you, and, what perhaps touches a sensitive mind more nearly, those whom your friendship sustains and consoles," wrote Julie.⁶³ Only when she railed against

⁶⁰ See Samuel d'Alembert, "To the Manes of Mlle. de Lespinasse," *The Love Letters of Mlle. Julie de Lespinasse* 326-331.

⁶¹ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 6 Oct 1774, *Letters* 207.

⁶² Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 6 July 1774, *Letters* 120.

⁶³ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 6 Sept 1773, *Letters* 90.

his liaisons with Montsauge or mentioned her opium use did Guibert return her passion and eloquence.⁶⁴

Letters of this type revealed an element of Julie's personality that few had seen in public. As a salonnière, Julie was measured, lively, and gracious. As a lover, she was wild, fiercely possessive, jealous, and irrational. Julie demanded constant attention from Guibert when he was in Paris and regular letters when he was not. When she did not receive the latter, she castigated him for not writing as often as she wrote him. Guibert managed to pacify Julie on the wilder occasions, reeling in her widely-flung emotions. His eloquence saved Julie's regard more than once, particularly in situations dealing with Montsauge.

While the two appeared to be an ideal romantic match, their romance was destined to fail. Julie, an older woman, was highly attractive as a mistress but not as a wife. While Guibert carried on a number of affairs, he likely held Julie above his other mistresses given the time and effort he devoted to the relationship. She was everything he desired in a wife: humble, passionate, intelligent, and the model hostess. However, Guibert was an ambitious *anoblis*, needing a good marriage to cement his nobility, social standing, and finances: "the easy circumstances of my family are dependent on the King's beneficence, which may cease at any moment on my father's death, or by cessation of payment...in my perplexity as to the future which I foresee, marriage is perhaps the only means of escaping my debts, of strengthening the fortunes of my family, of gaining the power to be of some help to it."⁶⁵

Unfortunately for Julie, Guibert's marriage prospects were largely out of his own hands; his parents determined to make for him a good social and financial match. In early 1774, they contacted Hayes de Courcelles, a moderately wealthy entrepreneur, regarding his young

⁶⁴ The gap in Guibert's letters is substantial for the most intense periods of their relationship; it is possible that Guibert communicated his feelings in a manner equal to Julie's.

⁶⁵ Guibert to Julie de Lespinasse, 9 Sept 1774, *Letters* 167-168.

daughter, Alexandrine-Louise Boutinon des Hayes de Courcelles. Guibert met Alexandrine at the family estate and seemed to take a liking to her. The following May, the families contracted a marriage. Guibert and Alexandrine were married on 1 June 1775 at Courcelles.⁶⁶

Julie was inconsolable at Guibert's marriage:

I see you to-day as you are, I see that you have committed a vile action for the sake of 12,000 francs a year; I see that you were not afraid of reducing me to despair, if you could use me as a stop-gap during a period which you wanted to use for breaking a connection which you could not keep up when you married...you cared little whether you dragged me in the mud, and made me lose the only thing left to me: my self-esteem.⁶⁷

While her rational mind probably dismissed the idea of marriage, the passion with which Julie was taken overrode any reason. "You know quite well that my heart does not understand moderation: so to want to make me take an interest in you is to condemn me to the tortures of the damned. You would like the impossible: that I should love you madly, and yet that reason should govern all my emotions.... You know quite well, you can see it clearly, I have not even the use of my intelligence with the man I love."⁶⁸ In the months following the marriage, her letters to Guibert alternated between icy condemnation and sorrowful pleading. She attempted suicide on more than one occasion; after each attempt, Guibert soothed her in person or via letter. The two settled into an uneasy friendship, with Guibert seeking her advice on his many projects and she supporting his cause at nearly every juncture. Foremost among these projects was the production of the *Connétable de Bourbon*, which became all the rage in Paris in 1774.

To achieve lasting fame, Guibert knew he had to expand his literary horizons. The drama he had written in Corsica seemed ideal for this purpose. It told the story of Charles III, duc de Bourbon, Constable of France. Charles was a tragic figure in French history; appointed

⁶⁶ Groffier 103-127, Lauerma 127-129.

⁶⁷ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 1 July 1775, *Letters* 326-328.

⁶⁸ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 3 July 75, *Letters* 333-334.

Constable in 1515 by Francis I, he led the French armies in battle until Francis grew uneasy of Charles's power and began to confiscate his estates. Charles fled to the Holy Roman Empire, where he was given command of an army to cow Pope Clement VII in 1527. His army mutinied and killed Charles outside the walls of Rome, after which they sacked the city.⁶⁹

The play, like all of Guibert's dramas, is poorly written but conveys much of his political and personal philosophy. Charles "is torn between love and patriotism on one hand and ambition on the other," a statement that would define Guibert in his later years.⁷⁰ While Charles and Bayard are well-rounded personalities, the other characters are elementary archetypes. The work proved that Guibert cared more for his ideas than for the public despite his constant quest for fame.⁷¹

Guibert may have begun to circulate copies of the *Connétable de Bourbon* as early as 1771, although first public mentions do not occur until early 1773. In the spring of that year, Guibert staged a performance in a small theater in Paris. It was well-received and became moderately popular in the salons.⁷² One scholar notes that "M. de Guibert read the piece at the Palais-Royal, the Palais Bourbon and all the great houses of France. Everywhere he was showered with praise. A young duchess of sixteen years, not knowing how to express the esteem she had for him, said naively: 'My God, one would be lucky to be the mother of that man!'"⁷³

By 1775, the *Connétable de Bourbon* was all the rage in Paris. His finances secured, Guibert sought an outlet for his theatrical work, increasing his own fame in the process. The *Comédie française* contracted to perform the work. It debuted on 23 August and ran for four

⁶⁹ See Jean-Joël Brégeon, *Le Connétable de Bourbon: le destin tragique du dernier des grands féodaux* (Paris: Perrin, 2000).

⁷⁰ Groffier 137.

⁷¹ Guibert, *Connétable de Bourbon*. Guibert's Connétable is a figure much like Guibert and espouses many of Guibert's philosophies in long monologues. Despite much criticism, he refused to remove the philosophical sections to improve the work.

⁷² Lauerma 107-112.

⁷³ Groffier 47.

days to generally positive reviews.⁷⁴ Young Queen Marie Antoinette discovered the play during the summer and took a liking to it. She arranged royal patronage for the work and a court performance. On 27 August, Marie Antoinette presented the play at the wedding of Charles Emmanuel of Piedmont to Marie Clothilde, King Louis XVI's sister. The presentation was lavish, costing an estimated 300,000 livres for set designs and the hiring of the best actors, designers, costumers, and staff in Paris. The performance was panned by literary critics, particularly Jean-François de La Harpe, who would become Guibert's harshest critic and something of a personal nemesis. Marie Antoinette, undeterred by the criticism, arranged for a second production at another royal wedding on 20 December. In the interval between performances, Guibert had revised the play, significantly altering its final two acts. This time, the criticism was unstinting as literary figures across Paris lambasted the play and its author.⁷⁵ The setback would prove to be minor to his career, as Guibert had his eye on a position in the Ministry of War under Claude-Louis, comte de Saint Germain.

At the same time as the debut of the *Connétable de Bourbon*, Julie de Lespinasse's personal life was spiraling out of control. Guibert was pulling away from her, concentrating on his theatrical work and a possible appointment to the Ministry of War. For years, she had taken opium to soothe her nerves, and after Guibert's wedding, she increased the doses.⁷⁶ D'Alembert expressed his reservations at its use, as did Guibert. Her health began to fail. Perhaps knowing she was dying, Julie reached out to Guibert. He responded with all of the passion of their affair, which was rekindled emotionally, if perhaps not sexually. "My friend, if I can still use the word, never has your condition left so painful and deep an impression on my mind. It pursues me, it

⁷⁴ Ibid.. 137-140.

⁷⁵ Lauerma 107-112.

⁷⁶ See Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 3 Oct 1774, *Letters* 202, where Julie opines "the effects of constant opium."

fills my thoughts and freezes them with terror. I spoke to you, I fell at your knees, I told you that I loved you, and you still lay dead,” wrote Guibert in early 1776.⁷⁷

Time was running short for Julie, however. In May, following the announcement of Guibert’s engagement, she had fallen seriously ill. Guibert rushed to her side, joining d’Alembert in an impotent bedside vigil. Julie banished Guibert from her presence, unwilling to have him witness her suffering. The two wrote letters of regret and sorrow, which d’Alembert passed between them. “I have always loved you,” Guibert wrote; “I loved you from the first moment I knew you. I have a secretary here waiting for me to dictate to him. What shall I dictate? That I love you, and that you are dying? That is all that fills my thoughts.”⁷⁸

“Good-bye, my friend” responded Julie; “if I ever come back to life, I should like to spend it again in loving you, but there is no time left.”⁷⁹ As Guibert anguished, she wrote, “My friend, I love you; that is a sedative which stupefies my pain.... Alas! I feel so sick of life, that I am ready to beg your pity and generosity to grant me that relief. It would put an end to a painful agony which will soon weigh heavy on your mind. Oh! My friend, let me owe repose to you; in virtue’s name, be cruel once. I am sinking. Good-bye.”⁸⁰

On 22 May 1776, Julie succumbed to her illness and addictions. Guibert mourned her with his most eloquent words:

What darkness! What solitude! Dreadful emblem of my heart! Tomorrow the night that surrounds me will have passed, but the night that enfolds Eliza is eternal! Tomorrow the universe will waken again; Eliza alone will never waken. Eliza is no more! Who will enlighten my judgment, who will warm my imagination, who will spur me to glory, who will replace in me the profound

⁷⁷ Guibert to Julie de Lespinasse, winter 1776, *Letters* 502.

⁷⁸ Guibert to Julie de Lespinasse, May 1776, *Letters* 518.

⁷⁹ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, Saturday, May 1776, *Letters* 519.

⁸⁰ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, Tuesday, May 1776, *Letters* 520. Count Villeneuve-Guibert notes that “this, in all probability, was the last letter Mlle. de Lespinasse wrote.” See *Letters* 520 Note 1.

sentiment with which she inspired me? What shall I do with my soul and with my life?⁸¹

After Julie, Guibert appeared to turn his romantic devotions to his wife. Before her death, Julie “found her [Alexandrine] charming, and well worthy of the interest that she inspires in you; the manners, face, the style of her mother, are equally amiable and interesting.”⁸² Unlike Julie, Alexandrine never evinced any jealousy of Guibert. She selflessly supported her husband’s projects and quest for fame, becoming his staunchest advocate in his later years and after his death.

While Guibert rose to prominence, great changes were occurring in the French government. Louis XV, king for nearly sixty years, died on 10 May 1774. His grandson, the earnest but feckless Louis XVI, took the reins of government with an eye towards reform. First among his programs was an extensive reform of the army based on those of Choiseul. Louis surprised nearly every court observer in selecting Saint-Germain as Secretary of State for War. Saint-Germain, determined to repair the French army, turned to Guibert, now the foremost theorist in France, to be his chief adviser. In only two years, Guibert rose from relative obscurity in Corsica to the heights of Parisian literary society, travelled Europe, and conducted one of the great romances of late-Old Regime France. His driving ambition had paid dividends, landing him a position as the leading military reformer in France.

⁸¹ Guibert, *Elegy of Eliza* 310.

⁸² Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, May 1775, 315.

CHAPTER 5

COUNCIL OF WAR

Following its defeat in the Seven Years War, France faced a number of crises. Although it remained the leading power in Europe, France had lost much of its standing on the world stage after failing to defeat upstart Prussia. The alliance of England and Prussia shifted the axis of power north, and the emergence of Prussia and Russia as great powers diverted it eastward. France remained the cultural and political capital of Europe, but cracks began to appear in the Old Regime. The defeat at Rossbach had crushed the French army. Worst of all, however, was the deepening financial crisis of the state.

Dating to the centuries of its founding, the French state always had experienced significant problems balancing taxation and expenditures, the latter heavily outweighing the former. The centralization of the monarchy, particularly the construction of the absolutist monarchy under Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal Richelieu, and Louis XIV in the seventeenth century, greatly exacerbated the shortfall. French kings were forced to navigate a tangled web of feudal and legal constraints to raise revenue, creating a vast and bewildering array of local, regional, national, feudal, legal, and religious institutions at every level of government.

The main consumer of state revenue was the military. The army's massive expansion under Louis XIV created large funding problems for the monarchy. *Le roi soleil* embarked on at least five major wars and increased the size of the army to as many as 400,000 men under arms.¹ His ministers, particularly Jean-Baptiste Colbert and François Michel le Tellier, marquis de Louvois, deftly navigated the government structure and created revenue in a number of

¹ See John Lynn, "Recalculating French Army Growth during the Grand Siècle, 1610-1715," *French Historical Studies* 18 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994): 881-906. Lynn estimates the maximum number of soldiers under arms was closer to 350,000.

innovative ways. Their chief method, however, was to place the state under an increasingly-large debt burden via foreign lenders. While Louis' own ministers were masters of wringing funds out of the French people, their successors were neither as skilled nor as successful.

Under Louis XV, the monarchy's debt increased significantly. Like his great-grandfather, Louis sought to aggrandize the French state at the expense of its neighbors. However, he was hardly a statesman to match his predecessor. His two major wars, the War of Austrian Succession and the Seven Years War, were fought at great expense to the crown with no material gains to offset cost. As his reign waned in the 1760s and 1770s, the French state found it increasingly difficult to secure foreign loans. Shortfalls in tax revenue, long the bane of the monarchy, exacerbated the situation.

In his later years, Louis XV increasingly endeavored to assert royal authority, centralizing power in his own and his ministers' hands, to solve the crises facing the state. The suppression of the parlements under Maupeou represented the most significant and visible example of royal efforts. Louis' motives remain nebulous, but the question of governmental power and its relation to society was foremost among the discussions of the philosophes. Enlightenment political thought, following Rousseau and Montesquieu, believed increasingly that centralized royal power was improper. Many philosophes castigated Louis and his ministers, accusing them of tyranny and despotism.

Within the Ministry of War, the policy meant an end to the reforms of the Choiseul ministry (1761-1770) at the hands of reactionaries. These tended to be members of the upper nobility with vested social and economic interests in maintaining the status quo. Members of the upper nobility populated the upper ranks of the officer corps. With very few exceptions, ranks above major were inaccessible to all but the sons of highest birth. These aristocratic scions

refused on principle the idea of advancement by merit in both the army and society. They formed a closed caste that jealously guarded its membership and social privilege. Members of the upper nobility also had a financial interest in preventing reform. Like most political appointments, Old Regime commands had to be purchased. The grades of colonel and above remained far beyond the reach of all but the oldest and wealthiest noble families. The crown also maintained a large number of household regiments, which served little purpose on the battlefield but functioned as a haven for large numbers of supernumerary, noble officers. Choiseul's elimination of venality within the army struck a serious blow to noble privilege, as did his proposed reduction in the number of household regiments and supernumerary officers. As Louis began to assert royal power in 1770, conservative nobles within the army rose in protest against Choiseul. He resigned in 1770, replaced by Louis François, marquis de Monteynard, who reversed most of Choiseul's reforms.²

Louis' death in 1774 ended the reassertion of royal power. His grandson Louis XVI inherited the throne and promised enlightened reform in place of his predecessor's despotic tendencies. He appointed his childhood companion Louis Nicolas Victor de Félix d'Ollières, comte de Muy et comte de Grignan, to head the Ministry of War in June 1774. After an unremarkable term, Muy died in 1775. As summer turned to autumn, Versailles buzzed with talk of who would win the appointment. Emerging as the leading candidates were Charles Eugène Gabriel de la Croix, marquis de Castries; Vaux; and the comte de Broglie.³

Guibert, shuttling almost daily between Paris and the court at Fontainebleau, found himself caught up in the excitement. He noted the strong candidacies of Vaux, with whom he had had a falling out, and Castries, whom Guibert selected as the most probable appointment.

² Latreille 1-25.

³ Groffier 149.

None of the preferred candidates, however, fired Guibert's imagination: "I, who would travel ten leagues to dine with ministers in disgrace, always regret the distance I have to come to meet those who are in office. Their power weighs heavy on me; it seems to me at once that they hold it at my expense, that they have usurped it from me. The idea comes into my head that they do nothing good, nothing big, with it..."⁴

In the intense political climate at Fontainebleau, the comte de Saint-Germain emerged as a dark-horse candidate for the position of Secretary of State for War. Like the other candidates, Saint-Germain had an illustrious military record, having served in the armies of Bavaria, the Palatinate, Prussia, Denmark, and France under Maurice de Saxe. After the Seven Years War, he retired to his estate in Alsace, removing himself from the pitfalls of Parisian politics. Only when a financial crisis eliminated his pension did the old soldier return to court, and then only reluctantly. Saint-Germain had no stomach for Parisian politics and rarely pursued a dispute over even minimal opposition. To the young king, the nearly-colorless Saint-Germain seemed the perfect candidate to enact reforms of the Ministry of War. Louis bypassed the pool of favorites and appointed Saint-Germain on 27 October 1775, probably at the instigation of another reform-minded minister, Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, baron de Laune.⁵

Louis assigned two tasks to Saint-Germain: reform the army to return France to military dominance while simultaneously reducing its costs by a significant amount. Either would have presented a daunting challenge; together, they were nearly impossible. Saint-Germain, however, determined to accomplish both. He began by assembling a group of prominent reformers.

⁴ Guibert to Julie de Lespinasse, 18 October 1775, *Letters* 396-401.

⁵ Lauerma 88.

Among these were Georges-Louis-Félix de Wimpffen, Chevalier Louis de Jaucourt, and Gribeauval.⁶

Like Guibert, Wimpffen had spent his life in the French army and served in Corsica. He had gained a reputation as a military philosophe and outspoken reformer, although notoriety would escape him until the years of the French Revolution. Jaucourt was a celebrated politician, writer, and sometime philosophe who contributed the most articles of any single writer to the Encyclopedia.

After Choiseul, Gribeauval was the most outspoken proponent of reform in the French military. Trained in the artillery, he rose through the ranks of miners and sappers. He founded the Austrian sapper corps while on loan during the Seven Years War. After the war, he was appointed Inspector of French Artillery and tasked with redesigning of the French artillery system. He began by adopting the Dutch method of drilling cannon bores in a finished piece rather than casting the bores around a mold. This greatly reduced windage, improving both the accuracy and distance of each firing.⁷ It also had the benefit of providing standardized calibers, which reduced the overall weight of the siege train by eliminating many extraneous calibers of shot. Following this line, Gribeauval also eliminated all but three calibers of field artillery (twelve-, eight-, and four-pound guns), and four calibers of siege artillery (twenty-four-, sixteen-, twelve-, and eight-pound guns). To this he added a six-inch howitzer and several types of mortar. An outspoken proponent of logical systems, Gribeauval designed his guns and ammunition to use interchangeable parts, a phenomenon in which Gribeauval contributed to the Industrial Revolution. The net result, which became known as the Gribeauval System, greatly

⁶ Lauerma 88-90.

⁷ Windage refers to the gap between the wall of the bore and the shot. A wider windage allowed more of the force of the powder explosion to escape, reducing the effectiveness of the gun. Casting the bore around a mold produced uneven windage, requiring a number of different calibers of shot for each gun.

reduced the cost and weight of cannon while simultaneously increasing their efficiency.

Gribeauval lost favor at court after the fall of Choiseul, and his reforms were overturned after 1770.⁸

Saint-Germain selected each reformer to serve on a Council of War, which would oversee the process of reform. Wimpffen contributed his military knowledge and passion for reform. Jaucourt brought decades of political experience and a bright, active mind bent on enlightened reform. Gribeauval brought the elements of his system, whose cost-saving and efficiency were a microcosm of the task Saint-Germain had set out to accomplish. The council, however, lacked a leader. Saint-Germain, while accepting of his duty to the state, never had the passion necessary to break through the reactionary factions at court to achieve true reform. Wimpffen and Jaucourt did not have the clout, and Gribeauval was interested in little beyond the technical details of his craft.

In early autumn 1775, Saint-Germain requested that Guibert join the War Council as its recording secretary and Saint-Germain's personal counselor. Guibert was initially skeptical of the position and delayed responding to the invitation. He expressed frustration with Saint-Germain and the existing political structure, fearing that his reforms would be unpalatable.⁹ Moreover, he had married the previous June, and his lingering affair with Julie de Lespinasse required a delicate touch and a large measure of his attention. He was also distracted by the debut of the *Connétable de Bourbon* at the *Comédie française* in August and its impending production before the court. Despite his distractions and skepticism, Guibert eventually agreed to join the War Council. After rounding out the Council with several more reform-minded

⁸ Bruce McConachy, "The Roots of Artillery Doctrine: Napoleonic Artillery Doctrine Reconsidered" in *The Journal of Military History* 65 (July 2001) 619-620.

⁹ See Guibert to Julie de Lespinasse, 18 October 1775, *Letters* 398-400.

officers, Saint-Germain and Guibert set out on a “campaign of austerity” for the French military.¹⁰

The War Council faced a daunting task. Its first step was to reduce the army’s financial toll on the government, which began with the *Maison militaire du roi*. As the crown transitioned from a feudal to a national army in the late medieval era, it assumed the responsibility of raising, equipping, and maintaining elite regiments. These units, including the *Maison du roi*, *Maison des princes*, *gendarmerie*, and several light horse regiments, became a major source of friction between reformers and reactionaries. As Louis XIV reduced the nobility’s influence on the government, nobles agitated for their traditional roles leading the military. By the 1770s, the upper nobility formed a bastion of aristocratic privilege within the *Maison militaire*. Commands in these units could be purchased only by the wealthiest nobles, excluding the majority of poorer, provincial nobles from the most illustrious and lucrative positions. Most of the royal household regiments served no purpose on the battlefield, and indeed were excluded from action in the Seven Years War as a result of poor performance during the War of Austrian Succession. In the late eighteenth century, these units became a byword for corruption and leisure. Few contained any soldiers or junior officers. Most consisted of a few soldiers or horsemen and numerous supernumerary officers.¹¹

On 15 December 1775, the Council of War issued a series of ordinances eliminating the *mousquetaires* and the *grenadiers montés* by three companies. These directives also reduced the numbers of *gardes du corps*, *gendarmerie*, and the *chevaux légers*. These measures cut few costs, as the noble officers who had purchased commissions had to be reimbursed for their

¹⁰ Lauerma 90.

¹¹ Latreille 76-80.

expenses.¹² However, the elimination of numerous supernumerary officer positions from units was expected to pay dividends both financially, by saving money in the long run, and in the army's performance, by eliminating unnecessary positions whose holders' authority often trumped that of other officers.

The Council of War followed up its reduction of the *Maison Militaire* by turning its attention to the *Invalides*. The *Invalides* was originally founded in 1670 by Louis XIV as a hospice for wounded soldiers. By the 1770s, several units were attached to it, nominally manned by those with injuries that did not incapacitate them. These units were rarely in Paris, instead serving garrison duty at one of France's frontier fortifications. Guibert's father had served in just such a position at Perpignan from 1767-7, which may have planted the idea in Guibert's mind that such positions were largely unnecessary. While performing a valuable duty by releasing line troops for combat, their inflated numbers, particularly the officer corps, was of concern to the War Council.¹³ Like the royal household units, the *Invalides* had become a haven for inept supernumerary officers. On 17 June 1776, the War Council issued a directive reducing the number of officers and men attached to the *Invalides*.¹⁴ This measure eliminated many of the various political positions for officers, although it reduced few costs for the same reasons as the reductions in the *Maison militaire*.

The major work of the War Council was in the area of military reform. Guibert entered into his position reluctantly, but soon evinced the passion for his work that characterized his writings. Saint-Germain, however, did not share Guibert's passion. Although he initially approved the cost-cutting measures, Saint-Germain was loathe to push matters further. Opposition had arisen at court, centered on the very same reactionaries who overthrew the

¹² Lauerma 90.

¹³ Groffier 266-271.

¹⁴ Lauerma 90-91.

Choiseul ministry six years prior. As 1776 wore on, Guibert began to supplant Saint-Germain as the leading figure on the Council of War. Unlike most reformers of his day, Guibert's writings were intended for practical use rather than as mental exercises for theorists. Immediately on gaining the power to do so, Guibert began to implement the tenets of his military constitution.

The first reform measure concerned officer education. The more conservative upper nobility insisted that the skill of an officer was in his blood rather than his head. They looked with disdain on the technical education of the Enlightenment, preferring instead the traditional array of *collèges*, *académies*, and page schools. Guibert, like most reformers, firmly believed in combining *moyen*, or the technical education of an officer, with the *génie* that noble officers claimed ran in their blood. The reformers, while they did not necessarily reject noble leadership, believed in ordered, technical systems. Following the newer tradition of Enlightenment thought, they insisted that officers needed to have a minimum of technical education and expertise to conduct a successful military campaign. While the concept of noble leadership was good in theory, it rarely proved effective in an increasingly professional and technical military climate. Guibert himself witnessed its downfalls, most spectacularly at Rossbach, where a noble, courageous advance was shredded by the technical, disciplined fire of the Prussian army. As the Prussian constitution had demonstrated, eighteenth-century warfare was far more technical than prior centuries. Guibert realized this in his military constitution and sought to reform the system from within, transitioning it from a feudal to an enlightened model. He determined to reform the officer education process from its roots.¹⁵

¹⁵ See Bien, "The Army in the French Enlightenment" and Blaufarb, *The French Army 1750-1820*. Blaufarb, building on Bien's work, argues that the reformers were attempting to implement promotion by merit based on the Old Regime notion of military merit that passed from a worthy ancestor to his descendants. While Blaufarb does not couch his argument in the same language as Guibert, their arguments are essentially identical.

This was done with edicts issued by the Council of War on 2 February and 28 March. The first decree eliminated the *Ecole militaire*, replacing it with ten (later twelve) smaller *écoles* in the provinces. These schools were designed to provide officers the technical, enlightened education Guibert and other reformers believed was necessary to form a good officer. A side effect of this reform, intentional or not, was a shift away from the clerical education that had dominated France for centuries. A rising tide of anti-clericalism accompanied the Enlightenment, culminating in the expulsion of the Jesuit order from France in 1767. The establishment of provincial *écoles* was intended to replace religious education with a technical, logical education that was affordable to all, particularly impoverished nobles from the provinces.¹⁶

Another breach between upper and provincial nobility concerned the purchase of offices, both in the government and in the military. From its earliest feudal origins, the French army had been an aristocratic institution. The purchase of commissions was the most visible example of this tradition. Members of the nobility purchased commissions to boost their social standing and to demonstrate their martial and financial prowess. Under a feudal government, venality allowed the crown to defer a portion of the costs of a military expedition. France, however, had disposed of its feudal government as early as the 1300s, increasingly centralizing and professionalizing the military in the process.

The principles of enlightened monarchy, chiefly centralized government, ran directly counter to the feudal-style military system clung to by the nobles. For all of their tradition of noble service, venal commissions were far from cost-efficient. As feudal military traditions shifted to modern professionalism, untrained, purchased regiments demonstrated their unsuitability to professional warfare. In medieval, feudal warfare, a purchased regiment could

¹⁶ Latreille 87-93.

engage the enemy autonomously within a larger battle plan. Operational planning consisted of little more than simple flanking maneuvers. As professional warfare developed, this method became increasingly obsolete. Infantry fighting in complex tactical and operational formations required highly skilled and educated officers who possessed the *moyen* of operational and tactical warfare. These principles, however, ran counter to the conservative thinking of the upper nobility. They believed that their own noble *génie*, manifested in their innate leadership over the lesser classes, was enough to lead them to victory.¹⁷

While Choiseul had attempted to eliminate it a decade prior, the noble backlash all but guaranteed its failure. Saint-Germain, with Guibert leading the push, was determined to rectify that issue. On 25 March 1776, the War Council issued an edict to gradually end purchase of commissions. Instead of wealthy nobles and members of the bourgeoisie purchasing commissions, the Ministry of War selected officers from the pool produced by the *écoles*. With this measure, the noble *génie* of Guibert's constitution and the *moyen* of a technical education were united in officer selection and promotion.¹⁸

Another area of noble privilege within the military was the length of time noble officers spent away from their units. Typically, noble officers served with their units only in the spring and summer during peacetime. Drill and training devolved to junior officers, who received little training beyond petty tactics and parade-ground maneuvering. Nobles argued that their estates and business ventures required constant attention, which would lapse if they were required to spend more time with their units.¹⁹ The War Council passed a measure in late spring requiring all officers to spend a minimum of six months per year with their units, training them and

¹⁷ See Quimby.

¹⁸ Lauerma 90-97.

¹⁹ Wimpffen himself expressed reservation about any measure mandating officer attendance. See Blaufarb 33.

themselves.²⁰ This would provide the technical education necessary for Guibert's articulated army.

The elimination of the *Ecole militaire* and venality of offices left the French military without a systematic method of officer promotion. Under the existing system, members of the upper nobility and the wealthy bourgeoisie could purchase commissions without proof of military ability or training. Officers of lesser means, typically poor provincial nobles, were consigned to the lower ranks of the officer corps, possibly achieving the rank of captain after decades of honorable service. Upper ranks were reserved for the upper nobility who could afford their purchase. While the system benefitted conservative noble interests, it hardly provided for a professional military. It also greatly contributed to the animus between members of the upper and lower nobility.

To remedy the issue, the Council of War constructed a system that was designed to ensure orderly promotion for both upper and lower nobles. It began with the creation of the rank of *cadet-gentilhomme*, designed as the lowest rank in the military. Officers were required to spend a minimum of a year as a cadet, living with soldiers and non-commissioned officers to learn their trade and to benefit their own technical education. The War Council attempted to curb rapid promotion without merit by instituting a fourteen-year service requirement for promotion to colonel and by empowering regimental councils.²¹ These councils consisted of the regiment's lieutenant-colonel, major, and senior captain and were given the power to veto promotions within the regiment.²² The construction of this promotion system was intended to bring equality to all noble officers, eliminating the debate between upper and lower nobility.

²⁰ Groffier 179.

²¹ Latreille 98-108.

²² Blaufarb 30-31.

The War Council continued its technical reforms of the French military by implementing elements of Guibert's constitution in three key areas. It adopted the Gribeauval system for the artillery, restoring another of Choiseul's reforms. It reduced the magazine and depot system, decreeing that the proper method of supply was to be foraging on the march. It also issued a new *Réglement* on 1 June 1776 based on Guibert's theories.²³ These changes were designed to produce the light, flexible, and maneuverable army of Guibert's writings. They bore the clear mark of Guibert's influence.

From its inception, the War Council sought to eliminate corporal punishment within the army to ease the plight of soldiers. Guibert's writings expressed sympathy for the common man and soldier, a sympathy that the War Council adopted. It was also concerned with the high desertion rates that plagued all Old Regime armies. Corporal punishment had been introduced to curtail desertion and institute discipline in the ranks, but many of the reformers viewed it as anachronistic and vicious.²⁴

On 25 March, the Council of War issued a decree reforming discipline of soldiers. It forbade the use of corporal punishment, explicitly beatings of soldiers by officers, and running the gauntlet. It required that all punishment be in the form of blows from the flat of a sabre. This punishment was not intended to be physically painful as running the gauntlet was. Rather, it was intended to impart a measure of shame in the offending soldier. Public performance of the punishment served to discourage future transgressions by other soldiers.²⁵

By late 1776, the majority of the War Council's reforms were in place. Guibert, as its leading member, had largely accomplished what he began with the *Essai*: wholesale reform of

²³ Lauerma 92-97.

²⁴ Latreille 114-118.

²⁵ Ibid...

the French military constitution to a system that resembled his model. The resulting product resembled Guibert's theoretical army.

The attention of the Ministry of War, and all of Europe, had turned from reform to other matters by 1776. The rebellion of Great Britain's American colonies entangled it in a trans-oceanic war that threatened to sap London's financial and military resources. Elements within the French government, led by the military, argued that France should intervene on behalf of the rebellious colonies. The question divided the government; Saint-Germain and Antoine Raymond Jean Gualbert Gabriel de Sartine, comte d'Alby, Secretary of State for the Marine, argued for intervention to avenge French defeat in the Seven Years War. Turgot led the opposition, contending that French support of a colonial rebellion would encourage French colonies to rebel in turn and that the costs would be ruinous to the French state.²⁶

Guibert enthusiastically supported intervention in America, both on principle and to advance his own career. In February of 1776, he addressed a memorandum to Saint-Germain offering his services in the event that France went to war in America. In the following months, he issued several more memoranda and letters warning of the danger posed by the British to French and Spanish colonial possessions. As the debate raged, the War Council largely set aside its reforms, having completed the majority of them. Guibert advocated more intensely for American intervention, hoping that he would attain even greater glory. Events within the government, however, would put an end to his ambitions.²⁷

Despite the progressive notions of the young king and the reformers within the Ministry of War, the reactionary element would not be denied its voice. As the Council implemented its reforms, the conservative nobility united behind Alexandre Marie Léonor de Saint-Mauris,

²⁶ Groffier 163-164, Toulangeon 23-28.

²⁷ Groffier 163-166.

prince de Montbarey. They railed against the reforms, castigating the War Council for overturning centuries of French tradition and accusing it of replacing that tradition with Prussian militaristic technocracy. They initially targeted Saint-Germain, but he was neither a man of high visibility nor one who took to confrontation. The reactionaries turned their rage on the most visible, active, and ambitious member of the War Council: Guibert.²⁸

As the leading figure on the War Council, Guibert had received virtual control of the army and made the most of it, implementing the majority of the reforms based on his military constitution. The reactionaries, led by de Montbarey, compared Guibert and Saint-Germain to Maupeou. They argued that his reforms undercut the noble hierarchy, which formed the foundation of the military. The elimination of most noble privilege, including the household regiments and purchase of commissions, came dangerously close to rendering the nobility obsolete within the one refuge of noble privilege.²⁹ Guibert's reforms, and the fundamental arguments of his military constitution, fired the imagination of the philosophes at court and prevented a direct attack. However, the reactionary party began a clandestine campaign against Guibert.

Guibert's first indication that his career aspirations were in danger came in 1776, as France marshaled its forces for possible war against Great Britain to support the American colonies. He wrote a series of memoranda to the War Council and Saint-Germain, trumpeting the benefits of French intervention. As France made the decision for war, Guibert offered his own service, first to Saint-Germain. The young reformer was eager to experience the American form of republicanism firsthand. He also envisioned a brilliant career move, as his rise to fame had been accomplished only through combat and the resulting honors. Unbeknownst to Guibert,

²⁸ Latreille 119-134.

²⁹ Blaufarb 33-35.

however, the reactionaries had mobilized at Versailles. His first letters were greeted with polite responses but no action. As regiments began to mobilize, Guibert requested to accompany his own regiment d'Auvergne to America. The request went unanswered, as did any subsequent pleas. Guibert never received orders to depart for America; he never realized that his policies were the reason. By 1777, French supplies were fueling the rebellion's efforts and French troops were not far behind. Guibert, however, had larger problems at Versailles.³⁰

For months, the reactionaries had sought an angle of attack palatable to the public. In late 1776, they found one in the punishment decrees. De Montbarey and his followers charged that Guibert had introduced Prussian elements into the French military constitution, undermining its very nature and turning France into a second Prussia. While the Prussian system had many admirers, including Guibert, the great majority of French soldiers and officers deeply resented the Prussians for their victory in the Seven Years War. In the years after, a strong *revanchist* element arose, seeking opportunity to return the favor to Prussia. Mesnil-Durand was the earliest of these, insisting that the French system without alteration was superior to the Prussian despite Rossbach.³¹ The reactionaries seized on this argument, painting Guibert as a traitor to French national character. Philippe Henri, marquis de Ségur, summarized the argument:

Wanting to establish in their camps a German discipline incompatible with our morals, he subjected French soldiers to a humiliating punishment of blows from the flat of a sabre; it was obeyed with repugnance and incompletely. I remember seeing in Lille grenadiers of a regiment of four battalions shedding tears of rage at the foot of their colors, and the duc de La Vauguyon, their colonel, mingling his tears with theirs.³²

Saint-Germain, a decorated elder statesman, escaped much of the criticism. His reluctance to fully embrace the reforms of his own ministry and his deferential personality

³⁰ Groffier 167.

³¹ See Mesnil-Durand, *Projet d'un ordre français en tactique*.

³² Quoted in Groffier 128-129.

probably contributed. The other members of the Council of War were either unknown to the general public or aloof from the arguments of theory that took place in French military politics. Given his outspoken and contentious nature and his fast rise from provincial obscurity, Guibert presented the perfect target. His writings, particularly the incendiary introduction to the *Essai*, attacked the noble establishment's most fundamental principles. The tone of his writings rankled conservative, patriotic Frenchmen, who resented any form of foreign influence. Most disastrously, Guibert's union of the French and Prussian military constitutions proposed to unite the French military with a system that had defeated it in the last war. His political opponents pounced, condemning him for the cardinal sin of diluting French national character through his reforms. They accused Guibert of implementing the same rigid, Prussian discipline and formalism that he had decried in his writings. Worse, they argued that his reforms of military punishment were demonstrably anti-French and degrading to soldiers. Conservative officers believed that corporal punishment was a vital ingredient in the proper education and training of a soldier.³³

The *anoblis* Guibert had betrayed not only his national character but also the noble profession itself, eliminating the technique that elevated noble officers above common men and replacing it with demeaning blows from a cavalry sabre.³⁴ After suffering a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Prussians, *revanchist* French officers could not abide anything perceived as Prussian. The word "Prussian" became an epithet in France and was frequently applied to Guibert and his reforms. Guibert's efforts to combine the best of the Prussian system with the

³³ Lauerma 97-99.

³⁴ Most nobles believed it was not only their right but also their duty to punish their soldiers. Corporal punishment served to maintain professionalism and discipline. It also demonstrated the social superiority of the nobles over the common soldier, which conservative nobles believed was vital to maintaining discipline.

best of the French had backfired and cost the young officer a promising career. His star fell as quickly as it had risen.³⁵

Guibert was denied his request for service in the Americas, and greater political peril awaited. In September 1777, Saint-Germain accepted a royal pension and resigned. Bereft of ministerial support, the Council of War dissolved shortly thereafter. Ségur, successor to Saint-Germain, overturned most of Guibert's reforms. Guibert, who had risen from provincial obscurity to the heights of power in Paris, was left to ponder what had gone wrong. For the next decade, he would remain largely out of the public eye. His years of reflection had begun.

³⁵ Ibid...

CHAPTER 6

LATER YEARS

The dissolution of Saint-Germain's War Council in 1777 represented a major check in Guibert's rise. More importantly, it signaled a shift in the French military's attitude towards Guibert. Subsequent events proved that he was rapidly falling out of favor with the majority of the army.

In 1778, the French army was preparing to enter the War of American Independence. Given the contentious debates of theory that had raged within the military establishment in the decades prior, army leaders were determined to produce a working constitution for the French military before combat began. To that end, the army commanded by Marshal Broglie conducted a training camp at Vaussieux in Normandy. Nominally tasked with the protection of France's northern borders, Broglie's army used its inactivity to test various tactical and operational theories.¹

The camp opened early in the year. Attached to the army was *maréchal-général de logis* Henri Joseph, marquis de Saint-Brice et comte de Lambert. Lambert and Broglie espoused the theories of Mesnil-Durand, who had argued for *l'ordre profond* since the 1750s. Mesnil-Durand served as Lambert's aide for the duration of the exercise. Another cadre of officers surrounded Major-General Charles Guibert, who espoused the theories of his son, namely *l'ordre mince* and *l'ordre mixte*. Serving as Charles's aides were the younger Guibert and the comte de Broglie. Also attached to the army were generals Louis-Antoine de Rohan-Chabot, Nicolas Lückner, and Gribeauval and *maréchaux de camp* Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau; Jean-Frédéric de la Tour du Pin-Gouvernet; and Wimpffen. Broglie's army consisted of forty-

¹Quimby 232.

four infantry battalions, six cavalry regiments, and some artillery.² The makeup of the officers participating indicated that the camp was designed to settle the dispute between *l'ordre mince* and *l'ordre profond*. Both Guiberts attended the camp as representatives of the former.

Beginning in mid-August, Broglie ordered his units to drill first by battalion, then in increasingly larger groups and configurations. By 9 September, the petty tactical drills had been completed; Broglie ordered the battalions to combine into divisions. Forming the massive columns of Mesnil-Durand's system, Broglie put the divisions through a variety of exercises based on battlefield situations. After several days, it became abundantly clear to all present save Broglie that *l'ordre profond* was unsuitable for contemporary warfare. The massive columns were slow, immobile, inflexible, and extremely vulnerable to enemy fire, particularly artillery fire. Near the end of the demonstrations, a division operating in column was soundly defeated by a smaller division operating in line commanded by Rochambeau.³ Broglie grew increasingly angry with the demonstrations, which one scholar attributes to inattention and another to "wounded *amour-propre*."⁴ Despite the demonstrative superiority of *l'ordre mince*, Broglie recommended to the king that the army adopt *l'ordre profond* and concluded the exercises on 28 September.⁵

Guibert's role in the demonstration was largely technical, commanding minor units during the exercises. He had been assigned colonel-commandant of the Regiment of Neustria, which was deployed to Normandy as part of Broglie's army. Guibert remained the most noted theorist of *l'ordre mince* present at the exercises, and carried the weight of his notoriety along

² Ibid.. 233.

³ Ibid.. 233-242.

⁴ Colin, *Infanterie* 200-201, Quimby 244.

⁵ Groffier 214-219.

with the protection of his father. His presence strained his relationship with Broglie to the breaking point as the proud marshal saw his favored theory overthrown by Guibert's.

Following the closure of the exercise, many of its participants departed for the war in America or remained in Normandy to await a possible invasion of England. Guibert composed a number of memoranda requesting service in America, but no answer was forthcoming. He had fallen too far out of favor with those in power. After 1780, Guibert had no recourse to the halls of power. He returned to his estate at Courcelles, ill and disillusioned.⁶

In the years after Vaussieux, Guibert settled into a low-key but steady routine. He returned to Paris after recovering from his illness to resurrect his public image. Many of the paths that he had taken to the heights of power still existed, but others had been closed. Vaussieux led to a breakdown in the close friendship of the Guibert and Broglie families. Guibert's personality and reforming spirit had alienated his supporters within the military. The reforms had alienated the conservatives and the "Prussian" nature of Guibert's constitution had turned away many of his fellow reformers. Most importantly, he lost his staunchest social advocate with the death of Julie de Lespinasse. Bereft of the avenues that had launched him to fame, Guibert fell back on his oldest associates in Paris.

Lespinasse's death left a large gap in the Parisian social scene. The subsequent deaths of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire in 1778 signaled a shift in generation within the Enlightenment. Rousseau, Voltaire, and Lespinasse tended not to be politically active, preferring literary and philosophical pursuits. The generation that followed was much more political. First among their favored salons was Suzanne Necker's, "the antechamber of the Revolution."⁷

⁶ Lauerma 97-102.

⁷ Ibid.. 131.

Guibert had been a welcome visitor in Necker's salon since his entrance into Paris in 1771. After 1780, he made Necker's salon the center for his social life, much as he had done with Lespinasse's before her death. As he had done before, he mingled with the assembled philosophes and shared his works with them.

As Guibert's circulation among the salons never ceased despite his downfall, neither did the attentions he paid to beautiful women who intrigued him. He found one such in Suzanne Necker's salon. Like many of Necker's patrons, Guibert was taken by her daughter Germaine. Germaine Necker closely resembled Julie de Lespinasse. Her bright, inquiring mind and social graces more than offset her lack of physical attraction. The young Germaine "saw in Guibert certain similarities with her father," one biographer records, "and in [Guibert's] exaggerated sensitivity, his ambition—his love of glory as she preferred to call it—he possessed all the qualities she sought in a man."⁸ Guibert and Germaine developed a close working and personal relationship.

In January 1786, Germaine married Erik Magnus Staël von Holstein. De Staël grew increasingly jealous of Guibert's relationship with his wife, culminating in a series of accusations that the two were having on an affair. Guibert offered vociferous denials, to which Germaine added her own:

M. de Guibert is certainly one of the men that I love and respect most. He is certainly one to whom I owe most for his profound attachment to me at all times. I don't know exactly where his feelings for me begin and end. But I am certain of the perfection of his behavior towards me...I repeat once again that I do not believe M. de Guibert to be in love with me...what is certain is that all I have for him are feelings of the most tender friendship....⁹

De Staël seemed to have been satisfied by the explanation. The truth of their relationship may never be known, but it appears that they may have had some form of romantic

⁸ J. Christopher Herold, *Mistress to an Age: A Life of Madame de Staël* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1981) 89.

⁹ Quoted in Maria Fairweather, *Madame de Staël* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2005) 73.

bond. Guibert was a notorious coquet, and Germaine was exactly the kind of woman he favored, a new Julie without Julie's extremes of passion. Germaine was undoubtedly attracted to Guibert, and he would provide inspiration for some of her famous works.¹⁰

Guibert was also close with another charming woman of the salons, Amélie Suard. The two had been close friends from Guibert's earliest days in Paris. Amélie's husband was a prominent writer and member of the *académie* and another close friend of Guibert's. Little evidence exists of a romantic attachment between Guibert and Amélie. However, his most recent biographer unearthed a series of letters between the two which may indicate a liaison. In the letters, Amélie expresses a great interest in Guibert's romance with Lespinasse.¹¹ The intimate nature of the letters hints at a relationship deeper than friendship, but further evidence is needed to conclude an affair.

Guibert's fall from the Ministry of War left him without a significant military assignment. He was promoted to brigadier in December 1781, but his regiment required little beyond periodic visits. His situation changed in 1783, when his father Charles-Benoît was appointed governor of *Les Invalides*. The hospital had evolved from the days of Louis XIV into a thriving community of over 30,000. Charles oversaw the hospital's administration and the regiments attached to it. While Saint-Germain had attempted to remove most of these units, many still remained stationed in France's border fortresses. Charles assigned Guibert as his official inspector of these regiments. For the next four years, Guibert undertook periodic journeys to the kingdom's frontiers to conduct the inspections.¹² Like his journey to Germany in

¹⁰ See Groffier 290, where the author suggests that Guibert provided the chief inspiration for Staël's *Zulmé*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 297-300.

¹² *Ibid.*, 265-273.

1773, Guibert kept an extensive journal of his voyages. They stimulated his interest in science and the idyll of the countryside, which had also figured prominently in the earlier voyage.¹³

In addition to his busy social schedule and military duties, Guibert wrote extensively. While he had drafted many works early in his life, only in the 1780s did Guibert have the freedom to devote serious attention to them. In the earlier years of the decade, he concentrated on theatrical and literary works.

Guibert wrote two historical tragedies in addition to the *Connétable de Bourbon*. The first, *Les Gracques*, was probably drafted in 1774. *Les Gracques* tells the story of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, ancient Roman tribunes who attempted collectivist reforms of the Roman republic. To the Enlightenment philosophes, the Gracchi were prototypical republicans who fought for liberty and freedom. In the play, Guibert constructs an eloquent argument against the tyranny of a centralized government.¹⁴ He first presented the work in the salons, where it was received with little acclaim. Charles Henri, comte d'Estaing, remarked that "M. de Guibert's piece is historical, like a drama of Shakespeare's. There is, in this work, much neglected verse, but a grand elevation of sentiment, ideas, and passages of the most sublime eloquence."¹⁵ In 1775, the *guerre des farines* erupted across Paris, and the anti-tyranny message of *les Gracques* resonated with the philosophes, earning it a small measure of public acclaim.¹⁶

Guibert drafted his third tragedy, *Anne de Boleyn*, in 1777. It focuses on the relationship between King Henry VIII of England and his mistress, Anne Boleyn. Henry, portrayed as a tyrant, courts the young Anne, who is not unreceptive to his attentions. Her brother, Alfred,

¹³ Guibert, *Voyages de Guibert, dans diverses parties de la France et en Suisse faits en 1775, 1778, 1784, et 1785*.

¹⁴ Guibert, *Les Gracques* in *Oeuvres dramatiques* 97-160.

¹⁵ Groffier 143.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 143-144. In 1775, Jacques Turgot eliminated the fixed price on grain in an effort to improve the kingdom's economy. Grain prices rose drastically, and riots broke out across northeastern France. They continued for several days until forcibly put down. This *guerre des farines* demonstrated the danger of mob violence in relation to grain prices, which would prove a significant spark for the Revolution. See William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 21-2.

warns Anne of Henry's legendary temper and bouts of tyranny. Anne's inability to choose either Henry's charm or Alfred's pleading forms the central conflict of the work. Alfred's concern is not only that of a brother for his sister, but also a romantic attachment. While the incestuous theme is heavily concealed, it nevertheless runs through the entire work.¹⁷ Like the *Connétable*, *Anne de Boleyn* is not well written but serves as a thinly veiled analogy for events in Guibert's own life.¹⁸

Most modern scholars agree that *Anne de Boleyn* is a dramatization of the early life of Guibert's deceased mistress, Julie de Lespinasse. Julie, a social orphan by virtue of her bastard birth, led an unhappy existence at the home of Gaspard de Vichy in Champrond. The relationship between Julie, Gaspard, and his wife mirrors that of Henry, Anne, and Alfred. While history has recorded no evidence of an incestuous relationship at Champrond, the distaste with which Guibert writes indicates a certain level of personal involvement absent in many of his other writings.¹⁹

Guibert circulated both works among friends, who offered their approval. Despite this, Guibert never sought to have either work performed on stage. This is due in all probability to the failure of the *Connétable de Bourbon* in December 1775 and the resulting literary backlash. Leading this charge was Jean-François de la Harpe, prominent author and cynic. He and Guibert had a public rivalry dating from the first editions of the *Essai*. La Harpe was the better writer by any measure, but Guibert enjoyed the attention and patronage of a wider range of important people, many of whom lay outside of traditional literary circles. La Harpe panned every one of Guibert's forays into literature. He remarked that Guibert was a "man of spirit, a distinguished

¹⁷ Guibert, *Anne de Boleyn* in *Oeuvres dramatiques* 161-242.

¹⁸ Groffier 145-147.

¹⁹ Jean-Paul Charnay, "Amour et incest dans *Anne de Boleyn* – ou la catharsis de Guibert: fragments de la tragédie presents par Jean-Paul Charnay," *Guibert ou le soldat philosophe* (Paris: Chateau de Vincennes, 1981): 41-62.

military man, but a mediocre writer and a bad poet.”²⁰ The two competed for prizes from the *académie*, which La Harpe invariably won.

In addition to his theatrical works, Guibert drafted a number of histories. Immediately following the *Essai*, Guibert had sought to construct a “Histoire de France politique et militaire.” Stymied by the large scope of such a work, he narrowed his focus to a “Histoire de la constitution militaire de France.” He researched the work extensively, spending much time in the *Bibliothèque nationale* and the *Bibliothèque du roi*. He also frequented the *Bibliothèque mazarine*, the libraries of Saint Victor and Saint Germain des Près Abbeys, Sainte Geneviève, and the University of Paris. Continuing the theme of the *Essai*, Guibert hoped to produce a history that would illustrate the need for political and administrative reform within the kingdom.²¹ He never finished the work, perhaps distracted by the prospect of official recognition for his labors.

By the middle of the decade, Guibert’s literary pretensions won him notice among the literary and social elite. La Harpe’s acerbic criticisms notwithstanding, many of Guibert’s friends and associates pursued public recognition for him. Suzanne Necker and Amélie Suard began a campaign to have Guibert elected to the *académie française*, the highest honor for a French author and philosophe. Nothing came of the effort until September 1785, when poet Antoine Léonard Thomas died. Thomas occupied Seat Thirty at the *académie*, leaving a vacancy. Necker and Suard expanded their campaign, drawing on their extensive social connections to win Guibert’s appointment to the vacant seat. Guibert tentatively joined the effort, soliciting votes from *académie* members. He studiously avoided La Harpe, who had

²⁰ Quoted in Lauerma 116 note 162.

²¹ Groffier 252-258.

occupied Seat Twenty-One since 1776 and led the opposition to Guibert's appointment.²²

Despite la Harpe's animus, their efforts soon paid dividends.

On 13 February 1786, Guibert was inducted into the *académie*. The *académie* held a lavish ceremony for the induction, including a banquet and a reading of the inductee's works. Over one-hundred attended, including Guibert's parents, Germaine de Staël, the comtesse de Crillon, and the marshals Castries and Ségur.²³ Guibert was introduced by an old friend, the writer known as Thomas, who lauded Guibert's works and spirit. Following Thomas's introduction, Guibert himself rose to speak. His speech ran several minutes and displayed an uncharacteristic humility and modesty. He thanked his benefactors, recognizing their efforts in achieving the appointment. Following Guibert's speech, Jean-François, marquis de Saint-Lambert, attested to Guibert's literary and military merits and closed the ceremony.²⁴

The ensuing celebration, and indeed the appointment itself, seemed to have embarrassed Guibert. This stood in stark contrast to his military and political activity. Despite setbacks in those areas, Guibert never ceased pursuit of his military reforms and his own political advancement. One scholar suggests that Guibert's curious humility was due to his own knowledge that he was a mediocre writer and did not deserve membership in the *académie* based on literary merit alone.²⁵

It is perhaps significant that the *académie* nomination occurred after Guibert's greatest setbacks, namely the dissolution of the War Council and the failure of the *Connétable de Bourbon*. The latter contributed the most to his reticence. Guibert's father also did not approve of Guibert's literary career, remarking, "when my son reads a work that relates to his profession,

²² Ibid.. 293-294.

²³ Ibid.. 295.

²⁴ See *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique de Grimm et de Diderot, depuis 1753 jusqu'en 1790* Tome Treizième (Paris: Chez Furne, 1830) : 33-45.

²⁵ Groffier 296-297.

I will attend with pleasure.”²⁶ Although he kept producing literary work, after the *Connétable* disaster, he never sought to make them public beyond the close circle of the salons. Indeed, he even refused permission on numerous occasions for various productions of *Les Gracques*, which would remain en vogue throughout the latter half of the 1780s.

Guibert’s attitude in regard to his induction offers a glimpse into his personality and thought processes. When faced with military criticism, Guibert reacted fiercely, defending the tenets of his military constitution. In the many arguments with the reactionaries in the Department of War, he fiercely defended his own political and military views, leading ultimately to his downfall. Even after the public humiliation, he continued to espouse his long-held beliefs in a variety of writings.

His *Défense* is the best example of such a work.²⁷ In the *Defense*, Guibert systematically attacked Mesnil-Durand’s *ordre profond* and demonstrated the superiority of his own system in great detail. The *Défense* changed little from the *Essai*. Rather, the *Defense* built on the ideas of the *Essai*, translating Guibert’s tactical and operational doctrine to the emerging realm of strategy.²⁸ Drawing on his experiences at Vaussieux and perhaps on Bourcet’s *Principes*, Guibert explored the possibilities of the division system.²⁹ He moved from a position of seeing an army as a mostly unitary structure to one composed of autonomous divisions. Guibert’s tactical reforms allowed his battalions to maneuver to meet virtually any battlefield situation with ease; his operational and strategic reforms allowed the same measure of flexibility with

²⁶ Ibid...

²⁷ Guibert, *Défense*.

²⁸ While Guibert did not coin the term “strategy,” he likely popularized its use with the publication of the *Défense*.

²⁹ Bourcet, *Principes de la guerre de montagnes*.

larger units like his division. This was an important step in operational and strategic thinking, which Napoleon Bonaparte would demonstrate repeatedly in his campaigns.³⁰

The single significant change that Guibert made from the *Essai* to the *Défense* was in the area of social reform of the army. He disavowed an army of citizen-soldiers in favor of a professional army, which he believed would act with more discipline and better execute the precepts of his military constitution. He also believed that professional soldiers would lessen the carnage of war.³¹ Guibert attributed the shift to his own naiveté in writing the *Essai*: “the fumes of philosophy inflamed [my] head and blinded [my] judgment.”³²

Guibert’s experience in the Ministry of War and his acceptance by a portion of the military establishment likely contributed to a temporary moderation of his social reforms. Guibert’s experiences with Prussia may have also figured in the shift. In writing the *Essai*, he used a *revanchist* style, which would hardly have adopted Prussian recruitment methods, if only for reasons of wounded national pride. Given the benefit of time to clear his mind of such notions, Guibert adopted another element of the Prussian military when he shifted to professional soldiers in the *Défense*.

Unlike his political and military arguments, Guibert did not publicly defend his literary works from criticism. Other than La Harpe, Guibert refused to engage critics or their criticisms. It seems clear that Guibert put greater stock in his military and political work, both the writings and his abilities in these areas. Although his extant correspondence contains many references to his literary career, it is concerned much more with military and political matters.³³ Guibert simply did not care as much about his literary writings.

³⁰ Quimby 254-256.

³¹ Guibert, *Défense* II 212-30.

³² *Ibid.*, 212.

³³ See Guibert to Julie de Lespinasse, September 1775, *Letters* 382-383, and subsequent letters.

Although his writings were better than average, his talents clearly were not literary. He lacked the biting wit and jaundiced eye of the Enlightenment philosophes, preferring instead a proto-Romantic idealism and flowery prose.³⁴ Most importantly, Guibert was a man of abounding pride and ambition. He could stand his military works being criticized because he knew that his was the superior constitution. His political writings were drawn from his military thought and could be similarly defended. His literary writings, however, could not. While he took great pride in them, he knew that they were not *académie* quality, or even appealing to a wide popular audience. Additionally, his military writings always had an audience, as Guibert led the schools of *l'ordre mince* and the fledgling *l'ordre mixte*. His literary works had no such backing outside of Guibert's personal friends. While Guibert could be given to romantic ideals and flights of fancy, he was above all a pragmatist. When the *Connétable* failed, it harmed his reputation in a way that the dissolution of the War Council did not. A similar failure of another literary work could have doomed Guibert to the sidelines of literary Paris, which would have upset his life's ambition for fame and recognition.

Shortly after his induction into the *académie*, three deaths struck Guibert. The first two were his parents. His father died in 1786, his mother the year after. Bereft of his family connections and support network, Guibert turned his attention to his work. On 18 August 1786, Guibert's military hero Frederick II of Prussia died, ending a long and illustrious reign. Guibert composed an elegy to the dead king, publishing it shortly after the death of his mother. Essentially a panegyric, Guibert's elegy lauded Frederick's military system but faulted the king for his failure to properly care for his soldiers.³⁵ The elegy was published the following year and

³⁴ See for example Guibert, *Journal* II 276, which closes his 1773 voyage to Germany with a hymn to Nature.

³⁵ Guibert, *Eloge du roi de Prusse* (London: 1787).

made the rounds in the salons. By then, Guibert's attention had been drawn back to military politics.

During Guibert's long tenure outside the Department of War, great changes took place within it. The marquis de Ségur replaced Montbarey as Secretary of State for War in 1781. Unlike his fellow reactionaries, Ségur was an advocate of limited reform. He instituted a series of reforms not unlike those of Guibert, including the preservation of Saint-Germain's education system based on provincial *écoles*. He also continued his predecessors' cost-cutting measures, further reducing military expenditures and supernumerary positions. Ségur established a permanent council that would function as a guiding body for the French military.³⁶ This prototypical staff fulfilled Guibert's desire for the War Council to evolve into a permanent staff.

Ségur's most significant reform came on 22 May 1781, when the Department of War issued an edict requiring all officer candidates to demonstrate four degrees of nobility. The infamous Ségur Decree, as it became known, has been the object of much historiographical debate. The liberal philosophes who led the Revolution derided it as a desperate attempt to entrench aristocratic privilege at the expense of talent and merit. More recent scholarship has demonstrated that Ségur and his fellow conservative reformers sought not to create a bastion of aristocratic privilege, but rather to ensure that the most qualified candidates became officers.³⁷

To ensure the timely promotion of meritorious officers, Ségur created a dual-track system of advancement. Members of the upper nobility could quickly advance through the lower ranks of the officer corps but not to the rank of colonel without a long term of service. Members of the lower nobility took a slower route through the lesser ranks, but were assured regular promotion

³⁶ Latreille 171-236.

³⁷ See Blaufarb, *The French Army 1750-1820* 33-37.

for meritorious service. Most importantly, Ségur retained the abolition of venality, eliminating the most significant barrier for the advancement of impoverished rural nobles.³⁸

During Ségur's reforms, a series of financial and political crises rocked the French government. By the latter half of the decade, the Old Regime stood poised on the brink of revolution. Hearing the clamor for further reform, Ségur quietly began to seek a political figure who could conduct these reforms. Guibert, aware of the tumult within the government, sent a series of memoranda to Ségur proposing a new War Council. Ségur assented, and Guibert informally joined his staff.³⁹

In early 1787, Guibert drafted a memorandum in Ségur's name addressed to the Ministry of War that asserted the need to reduce costs substantially. Drawing from his constitution, he advocated the reduction of fortifications, supernumerary officers, and unnecessary units. He called for the reform of the medical and educational services, streamlining them to reduce their costs. He also demanded the immediate implementation of permanent divisions, a reform which had lagged since his time on the War Council. In the spring, Ségur presented the memorandum to the king with only minor changes.⁴⁰

Shortly after, events on France's northern border forced Ségur's hand. In September, Prussian troops invaded the Dutch Republic. The French army clamored for action to ensure the kingdom's security, but Louis XVI failed to act. The event was a serious blow to France's international standing, and its military appeared impotent.⁴¹ Many within the army establishment were disillusioned, including Ségur. When Etienne Cardinal Charles de Loménie de Brienne declared himself prime minister, Ségur balked at the former's notions of a strong ministry.

³⁸ Latreille 180-191.

³⁹ Ibid., 231-235.

⁴⁰ Guibert, "Rapport fait par M. de Guibert." in *Latreille* 393-453.

⁴¹ See Scott, *The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution*.

Under pressure from the cardinal and the crisis in the Dutch Republic, Ségur resigned late in the year.

Cardinal Brienne's elevation was a stroke of fortune for Guibert. The two were long acquainted, having been members of Julie's salon. Brienne appointed his brother, the comte de Brienne, as Secretary of State for War. Guibert presented his reform plan to the new minister, who passed it to his brother and to the king. On 9 October, the Council of War was permanently created and tasked with:

- The creation and maintenance of all ordinances
- The distribution of all funds and all accounting details
- The procurement and monitoring of supplies
- The determination of rules relative to advancement and payment
- The maintenance of discipline and penalties in cases not covered by the ordinances
- Finally the discussion of all projects to improve any branch of the service that required improvement.⁴²

Like Saint-Germain's War Council, Guibert drove the debate and reforms. Unlike Saint-Germain, Brienne enacted few of his own reforms and largely allowed Guibert to do as he saw fit. Brienne's brother and the king followed Brienne; for all intents and purposes, Guibert had assumed complete control over the French military. Guibert's first step was to populate the War Council, which he began by naming himself its reporter and editor. He added lieutenants-general Louis Pierre de Chastenet, comte de Puysegur; Gribeauval; Adrien Louis de Bonnières de Souastre, duc de Guines; the marquis de Jaucourt; the comtes d'Esterhazy and de Fourcroy; the marquis de Lambert and d'Autichamp, marechaux-de-camp. Brienne served as the Council's president and Gribeauval its vice president.⁴³

The War Council undertook its work with Guibert's customary vigor. Its first task was the thorny issue of nobility and officer promotion. While Ségur's promotion system and nobility

⁴² Latreille 239.

⁴³ Lauerma 192-195.

requirements remained in place, the increasingly contentious debate about aristocratic privilege had gained momentum in the dawning Revolution. The Council left the Ségur Decree in place, but made significant alterations to the system of advancement. On 17 March 1788, it issued an “Ordinance of regulations on the hierarchy and on military promotions and nominations.” This ordinance eliminated the position of *colonel en second* and replaced it with *major en second*, which required five years’ service before attainment. It also eliminated the rank of brigadier, promoting all current brigadiers to *maréchal de camp*. Guibert was included in this group and received the intendant promotion. The Council issued a similar ordinance on 17 June implementing the same measures for cavalry units.⁴⁴

The War Council next attacked the issue of extraneous units. On 30 September 1787, it issued a memorandum suppressing the *compagnie des chevaux-légers de la garde* and the *gendarmes de la garde*. The following 2 March, the *gendarmerie de la France* and the *gendarmerie du roi et des princes* were similarly suppressed. Following these reductions, the *Maison du roi* consisted of one regiment of cavalry, six battalions of royal guard, four battalions of Swiss guard and some small detachments.⁴⁵

On 9 October 1787, the Council of War ordered the *Ecole militaire* closed. The act was carried out on 1 April 1788, and the cadets were returned to the regional *écoles*. On 20 June 1788, the Council issued a memorandum forbidding the recruitment of criminals or men of low character and increased the medical standard for service. These measures taken together were intended to improve both the education of officers, the quality of men, and to promote equality at all levels.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Latreille 255-262, Lauerma 195-197.

⁴⁵ Latreille 239-242, Lauerma 197-200.

⁴⁶ Lauerma 200-201.

On 17 March 1788, the War Council issued an ordinance that significantly altered the organization of the French army.⁴⁷ It disposed of the traditional organization by provinces and created permanent divisions stationed in one of seventeen military zones.⁴⁸ The three zones on the north-eastern frontier of the kingdom were assigned a marshal in command; all others were assigned a lieutenant-general. Each commander exerted authority over all troops in his district with the exception of the *Maison du roi*. All infantry and cavalry were organized into brigades commanded by *marechaux de camp*, which were organized into twenty-one divisions commanded by lieutenants-general. Artillery remained separate but under the command of each district commander.⁴⁹ Royal inspectors were assigned to each division; Guibert won appointment as inspector of infantry of the nineteenth division and resigned his command of the regiment of Neustria.⁵⁰ These changes radically altered the fundamental structure of the French army. No longer did it cling to its traditional provincial organization. Guibert's reforms created the basis for the permanent division system, which elevated the basic unit of strategy from the regiment to the division. The staff which the War Council represented would direct these divisions to meet any threat to the kingdom.

The Council next turned its attentions to technical reforms. On 1 July 1788, it issued a provisional *reglement*. This provided sweeping changes consistent with Guibert's constitution. It began by eliminating all forms of corporal punishment and replacing them with the infamous blows from the flat of a sabre. Regiments were required to maintain an elementary school for officers and to create a *police occulte* to prevent desertion. Each regiment was equipped with a

⁴⁷ The ordinance is entitled "L'Ordonnance du Roi, portant Règlement sur le Commandement dans les provinces, ainsi que sur la Division, l'Organisation, la Police, la Discipline et l'Administration générale de l'Armée du 17 mars 1788."

⁴⁸ The zones were Flandre et Hainault; Evêchés; Alsace; Lorraine; Franche-Comté; Dauphiné; Provence; Corsé; Languedoc; Roussillon; Guyenne; Poitou, Saintogne, et Aunis; Bretagne; Normandie; Picardie, Boulonnais, Calais, et Artois; Bourgogne; and the cours de la Loire et provinces de l'intérieur. See Latreille 262.

⁴⁹ Latreille 262-266.

⁵⁰ Lauerma 203-205.

bakery and portable granaries, eliminating the need for magazines and allowing war to nourish war. The *reglement* also gathered all food supply under a *directoire des subsistances*, created a *directoire de l'habillement et de l'équipement*, and improved both the medical and veterans' service.⁵¹

Despite rapid progress, events were moving far too quickly to effect measured, systemic reform. Faced with a bankrupt government and failed reforms, Cardinal Brienne resigned on 25 August 1788. His brother followed in November. Puységur won appointment to replace the comte de Brienne, but Revolution was at hand. Throughout the ordeal, Guibert faced mounting opposition from Revolutionaries. They resurrected the epithet of "Prussian" for Guibert, painting him as a member of the very noble group whose privileges Guibert had assailed. The remaining conservatives, desperate to retain their hold on power within the military, also assailed Guibert.⁵²

From the War Council, Guibert turned his attention to his military duties as inspector of the nineteenth division. In August and September, Marshal Broglie and Louis Joseph de Bourbon, prince of Condé, conducted a series of exercises at Metz and St.-Omer respectively. Guibert arrived at Metz to find the army in an uproar. Broglie refused to implement the provisional *reglement*, and when Guibert used his authority from the War Council to insist, Broglie resigned his command. Guibert departed for St.-Omer to find a conspiracy of junior officers thwarting any attempt to undertake exercises. Despite the best efforts of Guibert and Condé, no activity could be performed.⁵³ Discipline had broken down across the French army as Revolutionary sentiment swept through the lower officer corps.

⁵¹ Latreille 269-284.

⁵² Ibid.. 289-303.

⁵³ Lauerma 215.

On final analysis, Guibert's second stint in the Department of War ended much like his first, at the hands of elements within the military who rejected his reforms. His reforming spirit drove the War Council from its inception, and his constitution informed all of its policies. The Council, however, could not achieve its ultimate goal of cost-cutting. Like all ministries stretching back to Choiseul, reforms on paper did not translate into real *livres* being saved. Moreover, the rising tide of revolution drowned the sentiments of those who sought to reform the establishment from within. Guibert, despite his early advocacy of liberal principles like an army of citizen-soldiers, was portrayed as a dangerous reactionary who sought only to protect noble privilege. His failure to overturn the Ségur Decree combined with his insistence on Prussian-style reforms to turn the tide of public opinion firmly against him.

As Guibert struggled with army reforms, Louis XVI likewise agonized over political reform. After years of contentious wrangling, he assented to a meeting of the Estates of the Realm in early 1789, the first such meeting in nearly two centuries. Having failed under a crushing financial crisis, the monarchy turned to representative government to lead France. Hearing of the meeting, Guibert determined to stand for election as a member of the Second Estate.

As Guibert's estate of Courcelles was located in Berry, he journeyed to the provincial capital of Bourges to stand for election. He arrived at Bourges on 15 March and delivered an address that was well-received by the local bourgeoisie. The elections took place three days later in the church of Carmes. Claude-Louis, comte de la Châtre, presided over the meeting of the Second Estate. La Châtre opened the proceedings for the Second Estate and gave the podium to Guibert, who began to address the assembled nobles. They refused to maintain decorum, hurling insults at the speaker and accusing him of being a traitor to his country vis-à-vis the "Prussian"

punishment reforms. After an intense shouting match, la Châtre ordered the meeting-hall cleared.⁵⁴

Over the next two days, an intense debate raged in Bourges. The local nobles remained opposed to Guibert. Minor nobles accused Guibert of being a member of the upper nobility and caring only for the preservation of traditional noble privilege, which he had demonstrated by supporting the Ségur Decree. Members of the upper nobility accused him of betraying traditional French values. Both ranks of nobles noted that Guibert was only a member of the nobility of Berry through marriage and thus should not stand for election. The local members of the bourgeoisie supported Guibert, which may have further harmed his standing with the nobles. Guibert addressed a letter to the nobles and pled his case in person at the Hôtel de Ville. Le Châtre and Armand Joseph de Béthune, duc de Chârost, argued Guibert's case within the assembly. Their intervention was to no avail, and the nobles refused to hear Guibert. Defeated, he departed Bourges for Paris on 21 March.⁵⁵

After his humiliation in Bourges, Guibert turned once more to his pen. He wrote furiously, producing a number of political pamphlets defending his work and espousing revolutionary ideals. He began by publishing a "Précis de ce qui s'est passé à mon égard à l'Assemblée du Berry," a description of the events in Bourges. This won him a small following among the moderate nobles of Paris, who sympathized with Guibert's plight.⁵⁶ He destroyed that goodwill with his next publication, entitled "Projet de discours d'un citoyen aux trois Ordres de l'Assemblée de Berry." In this work, Guibert argued that the king could not make laws without the people's consent, which required a permanent Estates-General.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Lauerma 217-219.

⁵⁵ Ibid.. 219-222.

⁵⁶ Ibid.. 222-224.

⁵⁷ Ibid.. 223-225

Backlash against Guibert was swift and decisive. Having upset the reactionaries with his reforms and the revolutionaries with his “Prussianism,” Guibert now alienated his few remaining supporters. While moderates would defend his reforms, the “Discours” was far too radical for their tastes. King Louis reportedly flew into a rage on being informed that one of his highest-ranking military officers had publically undermined the crown.⁵⁸ In July, representatives of four regiments stationed at Rennes issued a statement repudiating blows from the flat of a sabre and demanding Guibert’s resignation from the War Council. The king acted on the report, replacing Guibert with Mathieu Dumas.⁵⁹

Guibert continued to write, producing some of his finest political works. In late 1789, he produced a “Mémoire adressé au public et à l’armée sur les opérations du Conseil de la Guerre.” He apologized for the offense taken to his reforms but insisted that they were necessary to mend the French military constitution. He also refuted the claims that were circulating within the army that he had mistreated his own regiment.⁶⁰

Shortly after, Guibert addressed a “Lettre de l’abbé Raynal à l’Assemblée Nationale” on 10 December. He castigated the Revolution for going too far. Guibert disapproved of the events of 5-6 October, when mob violence swept Paris and the Women’s March forcibly relocated the royal family from Versailles to Paris. More fundamentally, Guibert disagreed with the Revolution itself. He argued that men were inherently unequal and that the Revolution was wrong in trying to assert their equality. He accused the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen of expounding “false, dangerous, or contradictory principles.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ Groffier 336.

⁵⁹ Lauerma 227.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 230-233.

⁶¹ Ibid., 234-236

The following spring, Guibert produced his political magnum opus, “De la force publique considérée dans tous ses rapports.” He called for the army to intervene in the political situation, secure the borders, and maintain internal order. He refuted the idea of a citizen army, arguing instead that a small, professional army was more efficient and that citizen-soldiers would refuse to fight because they loved peace too much. Building on his previous political arguments, he placed the administration of the army in the hands of the legislature rather than the king, greatly reducing executive power. Guibert echoed the Ségur Decree in his call for an army separate from society, contending that soldiers should perform no duty other than national defense. He adopted Lafayette’s concept of a national militia for internal use, but he streamlined its organization and reduced its numbers.⁶²

The intense activity of the War Council and his political writings wore on Guibert’s health. He had always battled fevers, but the strain of the Revolution was too much for his health. He fell seriously ill in early 1790. Like his erstwhile mistress Julie de Lespinasse, he spent his final days bedridden in Paris, surrounded by friends. On 6 May, Guibert succumbed to his fever. His dying words echoed his final years’ work and foretold his legacy: “I will be known, I will have justice!”⁶³

⁶² Groffier 353-360, Colonel Menard, “De la force publique ou le testament militaire du comte de Guibert” in *Revue de défense nationale* (1969).

⁶³ Lauerma 247.

CHAPTER 7

ASSESSMENT

Few will question that Gerhard von Scharnhorst was the architect of the new Prussian army that went to war against France in 1813. After the disastrous defeat in 1806/7, Scharnhorst directed the comprehensive reform of the Prussian army in less than six years. Similar to the Prussian experience in 1806/7, French defeat in the Seven Years War led to comprehensive change in the French military establishment. Unlike Prussia, historians have been somewhat reluctant to attribute credit to one individual for the reform of the French army that led to such success during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Names like Bourcet, Gribeauval, Broglie, Folard, and Mesnil-Durand are frequently discussed as sharing credit for the French achievement. However, Guibert rises above all others to claim sole credit. Only Guibert provided the comprehensive blueprint that produced the key elements for French victory. A careful assessment of General Napoleon Bonaparte's first campaign in Italy will demonstrate that Guibert can lay claim to the title of Father of the French Army.

Despite the efforts of the early Revolutionary governments, the army was riven with internecine conflict. The disputes of Guibert's day, reformers against reactionaries and upper against lower nobility, exploded. The Revolution exposed deep rifts within the fundamental structure of the army. *Ci-devant* officers resented new privileges given to non-commissioned and non-noble officers. Reflecting the divide between nobility and bourgeoisie apparent in larger French society, officers of the traditional nobility despised the officers drawn from the largely bourgeois *noblesse de la robe* and those promoted for merit. The division between noble and non-noble resulted in a breakdown of command and control. Army units across the state refused orders to suppress insurrections, some even mutinying against their noble officers and

joining the Revolution. In 1791, the flight of Louis XVI to Varennes completely severed the nobility from the army. Their oaths of allegiance to the king now void, most of the remaining noble officers emigrated. This paved the way for the regeneration of the French army along revolutionary lines.¹

In 1791 and 1792, the Revolutionary government undertook drastic steps to reform the line army and, perhaps more importantly, to win its loyalty. Promotion for merit supplanted noble privilege and purchase. Units were allowed to elect a percentage of officers, the rest being appointed by the legislature. Corporal punishment was replaced with blows from an old shoe. Mercenary motivations were replaced with *la patrie*. One scholar notes that “this was a most important moment in the history of the Revolution, for it marked the point when control of the army passed formally from executive to legislature,” as Guibert had desired in his political writings.²

French citizens, filled with revolutionary *élan*, flocked to the Assembly’s call for volunteers in 1791 and again in 1792 in response to Austrian and Prussian military advances. These forces confronted the Prussian army at Valmy on 20 September 1792 and turned the Prussians back with a sustained artillery barrage. Less than one month later, Charles François Dumouriez’s army defeated the Austrians at Jemappes. The latter demonstrated the failure of *l’ordre profond*, as repeated French assaults in column were thrown back by the Austrians. The French ultimately triumphed through sheer weight of numbers, outnumbering the Prussians 2:1 at Valmy and the Austrians more than 3:1 at Jemappes.³

The successes of the Revolutionary armies in 1792 were little more than a façade concealing deep divisions within the army and French society at large. Early 1793 would see the

¹ Scott, *The Response of the Royal Army to the Revolution* 46-70.

² T.C.W. Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars, 1787-1802* (London: Arnold, 1995) 83.

³ *Ibid.* 71-101.

French driven out of Belgium, the treason of Dumouriez, and the Royalist revolt in the Vendée, bringing the Revolution closer to defeat than in 1792. To combat the failing state and enemy incursions, the Revolution resorted to drastic measures. In mid-1793, radical Jacobins took control of the government and instituted the Terror, purging royalists and moderates alike. Recognizing the necessity of military victory, the radicals infused the army with Jacobin fervor, transforming it into the most formidable fighting machine in Europe. To combat the Allied successes of early 1793, the Revolutionary government instituted the *levée-en-masse* in an effort to produce nearly a million new soldiers. This marked the beginning of the transition from Revolutionary volunteers to conscripts. Jacobin clubs were joined to the army in revolutionary *fêtes*, bringing the people into contact with the forces who fought to preserve the Revolution. Jacobin representatives-on-mission fired the troops' patriotic spirit, ensured that the officers performed well, and exercised complete control over the armies under them. During the period 1793-4, the French army underwent a complete reorganization from the highest levels down to the individual soldier. The French army in 1793 was composed of three distinct parts: the line army, the Volunteers of 1791 and 1792, and various Revolutionary units unattached to either. The Committee for Public Safety began the process of the *amalgamé*, which combined these units into a single army.⁴

The Committee also transformed the strategy, training, and tactics of the French army. It revisited the 1791 Regulations, revising them in the wake of the defeats of 1793 and bringing them closer to Guibert's theories. Lazare Carnot, leader of the military effort, called for the creation of permanent divisions composed of two infantry brigades, a cavalry brigade, and an artillery company. These combined-arms units were governed by the *Reglement* of 1791, which made Guibert's reforms standard throughout the army. Carnot created staffs to assist division

⁴ Bertaud 90-171.

and army commanders, another tenet of Guibert's military constitution. With regard to operations and strategy, Carnot adopted Guibert's theory of firepower superiority, which called for economy of forces until the enemy's weak point was found, then for the concentration of firepower on the weak point until breakthrough was achieved.⁵

It was in the field of tactics that the Committee's reforms ran the deepest. Prior to 1794, undisciplined and largely untrained French armies fought in "open order," where large numbers of skirmishers would harry the enemy while attack columns positioned themselves for shock charges.⁶ The Committee's formal adoption of *l'ordre mixte* reversed this trend and granted the French army a flexibility no Old Regime army could match. This flexibility allowed the French army to develop entirely new tactics. Light infantry replaced flanking cavalry assaults, freeing the cavalry to engage in shock assaults or pursuits *à la* Guibert. Experiments with the infantry square, a direct descendant of Guibert's doubling of the ranks, produced an infantry-based solution to enemy cavalry. The net result of the reforms of the period was that "the army thus presented itself in battle, not as a rigid and compact block but as a mechanism of articulated parts, each capable of various movements."⁷

The patriot armies carried the tricolor to Belgium, Italy, the Vendée, and the Rhineland like Guibert's "north wind bending reeds." The French Revolution represented the almost wholesale adoption of Guibert's organizational, tactical, logistical, and ideological reforms. His larger operational and strategic reforms lagged for want of a true *homme de génie*. In 1796, the French army found that leader when young General Napoleon Bonaparte was appointed to command the Army of Italy.

⁵ Bertaud 231-265.

⁶ See Paddy Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France 1789-1802* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1998) 207-225.

⁷ Bertaud 231-265.

From his early career, Bonaparte was an avid reader of Guibert. The young Corsican likely first encountered Guibert at Brienne, the *Ecole militaire*, or under the du Teil brothers at Auxonne. Bonaparte specifically requested that a copy of the *Essai* be packed in his baggage for the trip to Italy.⁸ As one scholar notes, “the most outstanding feature of Napoleonic warfare [was] its limitless variation and flexibility,” which were unique hallmarks of Guibert’s system.⁹ Bonaparte’s first independent command demonstrated his familiarity with Guibert’s systems and led the French to victory.

On 26 March 1796, General Bonaparte reached his command at Nice. The army he found wanted for supplies but was generally in good condition. More importantly, it had been well-instructed in Guibert’s system. Its soldiers were veterans trained in Guibert’s tactical system, which allowed them to operate flexibly in *l’ordre mince*. They were also trained in forage, liberating them from reliance on magazines and fixed positions. The army’s officers were skilled in the *moyen* of command. Many had been educated in the same system as Bonaparte, which was a product of Guibert’s time in the Saint-Germain ministry. The Army of Italy had a permanent staff organized along Guibert’s lines and proved quite effective under Chief of Staff Alexandre Berthier.¹⁰

At the outset of the campaign, the French army consisted of 18,000 soldiers under André Masséna around Voltri and Savona, 10,000 under Pierre Augereau on the coast north of Albenga,

⁸ Quimby 169.

⁹ Chandler 144.

¹⁰ See Elijah Adlow, *Napoleon in Italy 1796-1797* (Boston: William J. Rochfort, 1948), Carl von Clausewitz, *La campagne de 1796 en Italie*, Jean Colin, trans. (Paris: Librairie militaire de L. Baudoin, 1899) Owen Connelly, *Blundering to Glory: Napoleon’s Military Campaigns* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1987) 23-50, Theodore Dodge, *Napoleon: A History of the Art of War, From the Beginning of the French Revolution to the End of the Eighteenth Century, with a Detailed Account of the Wars of the French Revolution* Volume I, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1904), Guglielmo Ferrero, *The Gamble: Bonaparte in Italy 1796-1797*, Bertha Pritchard and Lily C. Freeman, trans. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1961), Henry Lachouque, *Napoleon’s Battles: A History of his Campaigns*, Roy Monkcom, trans. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1964) 33-56, Duc de Raguse, *Mémoires du maréchal Marmont, duc de Raguse de 1792 à 1841* Tome Premier (Paris, 1857), François Roguet, *Mémoires militaires du lieutenant-général comte Roguet, Colonel en second des Grenadiers à pied de la Vieille garde, Pair de France* Volume I (Paris: Librairie militaire, 1862),

and 9,500 under Jean-Mathieu-Philibert Sérurier at Ormea. Opposing it were the Piedmontese army of Field Marshal Michelangelo Alessandro Colli-Marchi and the Austrian forces of General Johann Peter Beaulieu. The former commanded 20,000, the latter 25,000. The allied armies were dispersed in a thinly-deployed defensive cordon, occupying at least eight separate positions.¹¹

Bonaparte's strategy was ostensibly dictated by the Directory in Paris, but he took it upon himself to implement his own strategy, based on Guibert's principles. The simplest of these was his insistence on the strategic offensive.¹² Prior commanders had contented themselves with minor territorial acquisitions despite exhortations from Paris to drive on. Bonaparte, despite having numbers inferior to his opponents, insisted on the strategic offensive. He opened the campaign with a brilliant operational maneuver that divided the two allied armies, driving the Austrians east. He rolled up the strategic flank of the Piedmontese, putting them out of the war within two weeks. Bonaparte continued his offensive with a turn east, forcing Beaulieu's Austrians to flee precipitously. Over the course of the summer and autumn, the Austrians would attempt to dislodge the French from the vicinity of Lake Garda, but to no avail.

During the middle stage of the campaign, in the actions around Lake Garda from October 1796 to January 1797, Bonaparte made a curious decision that went against Guibert's strategic principles. The theorist urged his model commander to avoid lengthy sieges. Ignoring Guibert's admonition, Bonaparte laid siege to Mantua from 4 July 1796 to 2 February 1797. The siege provided a valuable lure for the Austrians, dominating their strategic planning as they sought to relieve the fortress. However, it also drew forces from Bonaparte's army, greatly reducing his operational flexibility and limiting his ability to concentrate his forces. Bonaparte seemed

¹¹ Martin Boycott-Brown, *The Road to Rivoli: Napoleon's First Campaign.*, (London: Cassel & Co., 2001) 194-196.

¹² See Guibert, *Essai* I LV.

mindful of his situation, and made the critical decision to lift the siege on 31 July, when the Austrians under Dagobert Sigismund, count de Würmsers, pressed his forward positions before the battle of Castiglione.¹³ While Bonaparte continued to conduct the siege until the closing stage of the Lake Garda campaigns, his ability to abandon it to conduct a battle speaks to his following of Guibert's strategic principles, if somewhat belatedly.

Throughout his command of the Army of Italy, Bonaparte retained a grasp of the larger strategic situation and continued his strategic offensive. When he was not fending off Austrian attacks from the Tyrol, he sent detachments to southern Italy to pressure his enemies' allies and to secure loot for France. After the surrender of Mantua, Paris seemed content with its gains in Italy. Bonaparte, however, determined to secure them further by threatening the very heart of the Austrian Empire. He marched into the Tyrol in the spring of 1797, apparently intent on taking Vienna itself. While his advance was checked by an Austrian army under Archduke Charles, Napoleon's advocacy of the strategic offensive was clear.

Bonaparte often adopted the central position, another of Guibert's strategic principles. Guibert counseled that an army should seek to place itself between enemy detachments or armies in order to divide the enemy's strength. This allowed the French to strike each opposing force at a time instead of at once. It also rejected what Guibert referred to as the "war of positions," a strategy that had developed during the preceding centuries as opposing commanders sought not to destroy the enemy army, but rather to demonstrate a superior strategic position.¹⁴ Guibert rejected this notion, preferring instead that a general keep his force in hand in order to wage a battle of annihilation.

¹³ Boycott-Brown 360-405.

¹⁴ Guibert, *Essai* I V-LXXIIX.

During his brilliant opening to the Italian campaign, Bonaparte demonstrated the central position to great effect. Piedmontese and Austrian forces remained in a cordon by occupying at least eight separate positions, hoping to halt a French advance. Bonaparte rejected an opposing cordon and minor probing attacks, which would have been the traditional approach. Instead, he sought a battle of annihilation. He began by deploying the Army of Italy in three divisions: south of Ceva under Sérurier, at Savona under Augereau, and further up the coast at Voltri under Masséna. Bonaparte cleverly drew his forces together by staging a feint at Voltri, which attracted an Austrian detachment east of the main Austrian position. Rather than defending the strategically-important position of Voltri, Bonaparte pulled Masséna's division back from Voltri, uniting the better part of his forces around Savona. Having achieved concentration of force, he inserted the divisions of Masséna and Augereau between the Piedmontese and Austrian armies.¹⁵ By positioning his army directly between the two opposing armies, Bonaparte was able to engage each separately. He turned first on the Austrians, defeating them at Montenotte and Dego. The capture of Dego on 14 April by the French effectively severed communications between Colli and Beaulieu and placed the French army between the allied forces.¹⁶ Bonaparte made short work of the Piedmontese, forcing them out of the war by month's end. By seeking the central position and battles of annihilation, Bonaparte was able to divide a numerically-superior foe and remove an enemy from the war.

The battles around Lake Garda proved central to Bonaparte's success in Italy and provided another example of Bonaparte's use of central position. By summer 1796, the Austrians had retreated into the Tyrol and the French taken up position south of Lake Garda. Bonaparte stationed his 40,000 men in five divisions from Salò in the west to Verona in the East.

¹⁵ Chandler 63-79.

¹⁶ Ramsay Phipps, *The Armies of the first French Republic and the Rise of the Marshals of Napoleon I*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980) IV 17-24.

Masséna's division sat astride the chief route from the Tyrol to Mantua, the fortress that dominated northern Italy and contained Austrian forces under siege by a French division.¹⁷ Rather than a unitary assault on the French position, Würmser instead opted to send four columns south to attack all of the French positions. As Würmser approached, Bonaparte drew his forces together south of Lake Garda, yielding space and the siege of Mantua for time and concentration. Würmser never effected the union of his columns and suffered defeat at the hands of the French at Castiglione on 5 August with less than his complete force.

Over the next six months, Wurmer and his successor, Joseph Alvintzi von Borberek, attempted to dislodge the French with a similar strategy and similar results. The Austrian commanders never had the benefit of Guibert's system and fought in the traditional style. Bonaparte achieved a concentration of force via the central position where Würmser had not; despite Austrian heroics during key battles, the campaign's outcome was virtually a foregone conclusion.

Guibert's influence on Bonaparte is most clearly seen in the latter's operations throughout the campaign. One of Guibert's most important principles was concentration of force. This was achieved when a commander kept his available forces in hand, not parceling them out to cordons or detachments. A properly concentrated force would allow the commander to meet the enemy with local numerical superiority, find the enemy's weak point, and strike it with maximum available force. Guibert's "oblique order" was designed to do exactly that, fixing one enemy flank while hitting the opposite, weakened flank. As his operational thought evolved, Guibert abandoned his insistence on the oblique order and replaced it with mobile, articulated

¹⁷ Boycott-Brown 378-9.

divisions. These divisions operated autonomously within the larger operational plan, efficiently achieving the proper concentration of force.¹⁸

Bonaparte demonstrated these principles throughout the First Italian campaign. He modified Guibert's oblique order, itself an adoption of Frederick II's operations, and created his renowned *manoeuvres sur le derrière*. Theoretically, a *manoeuvre sur le derrière* operated much like Guibert's oblique order: divisions fixed the enemy flank, drawing in enemy reinforcements, while other divisions worked around the rear of the enemy army, either from the main body of the army, or as Bonaparte was fonder, from other locations to achieve maximum surprise. While Bonaparte did not refine this system until his later campaigns, its prototype can be seen in Italy.¹⁹

At the August 1796 Battle of Castiglione, Bonaparte demonstrated an early form of his operational planning. By 5 August, Würmser had maneuvered 25,000 soldiers on Bonaparte's position at Castiglione, deploying on a north-south axis to the east of the town. Bonaparte deployed his with 21,000 men in an opposing line, placing Masséna's division of 6,000 on his left and Augereau's division of 21,000 on his right. A detachment of 5,000 more French soldiers marched from the east, commanded by Pascal Fiorella in Sérurier's stead. Early in the morning, Bonaparte launched what appeared to Würmser to be a frontal attack. Würmser took the bait, advancing forward to meet the attack. After Würmser had committed the bulk of his forces to the feint, Fiorella fell on Würmser's southern flank. Würmser shifted forces to meet the new threat, but the damage had been done. Bonaparte renewed his attack on the Austrian center and Fiorella pressed from the east, forcing Würmser to withdraw.²⁰

The battle was not an identical use of Guibert's oblique order, but the foundation remained the same. Bonaparte fixed the Austrians in the manner Guibert recommended, and

¹⁸ Guibert, *Essai* II 50-61.

¹⁹ See Chandler 133-204.

²⁰ Chandler 193-199.

Fiorella's attack represented the turning movement. That the attack had come from an autonomous division instead of a wing of a unitary army was a minor detail in the larger conceptual picture. The concept of the oblique attack, a feint to fix the enemy, and a turning maneuver to finish him, was a result of Guibert's study of Frederician operations. Bonaparte transcended the letter of Guibert's instruction but remained true to the basic concept. The attack itself, and much of Bonaparte's art of war, was made possible by the division system implemented by Guibert during the Brienne ministry. The autonomous division allowed the French to shift away from a unitary army and implement Guibert's flexible operational doctrine, as advocated in the *Essai* and particularly in the *Défense*.

Guibert's tactical system provided the foundation for Bonaparte's success. Using this system, the French outmaneuvered and outfought the opposing armies at nearly every stage of the campaign. While the actual tactics used by participating armies are the most difficult aspect of a battle to ascertain after the fact, certain examples can be gleaned from the campaign.

On 12 April 1796, Bonaparte attacked an Austrian detachment at Montenotte. In the words of one scholar, the French utilized their "tactical flexibility to confuse [their] slow-moving and conventionally minded opponents." As the battle progressed, the French forces advanced so quickly that they outran their own flanking forces along with the Austrian positions.²¹ The flexibility and speed with which the French maneuvered were clear indications that Guibert's tactical system was in use. Guibert's increased march step provided the French with the fastest army in Europe; French detachments would continually demonstrate speed superior to the Austrians.²² The fervor of citizen-soldiers, prophesied by the *Essai*, allowed the French to

²¹ Boycott-Brown 222-233.

²² Guibert, *Essai* I 29-37.

continue marches long after opposing armies would have ceased. The volunteer nature of the French army also allowed night marches over any variety of terrain without fear of desertion.

The same tactical flexibility again appeared on 14 April at the battle of Dego, where the line soldiers of Claude Victor-Perrin's 18th demi-brigade fought in both linear and open order.²³ Guibert's system required that line troops be trained as skirmishers, allowing them to fill both roles on the battlefield. Victor's use of such tactics indicates that the Army of Italy abided by Guibert's instructions on this point. On 10 May, Bonaparte used an attack column and a flanking maneuver with cavalry to dislodge the Austrian rearguard from the bridge at Lodi.²⁴ The column closely resembled those found in the *Essai*, wherein Guibert offered a column formation for an attack on a fixed point.²⁵

Crucial to the success of the French in Italy was the leadership of General Bonaparte. He possessed an almost preternatural ability to anticipate his enemies' moves and to act accordingly. Guibert's system required just such a leader, *un homme de génie* skilled in both the art and science of war.²⁶ Bonaparte represented nearly every aspect Guibert preferred in a general. He received his education in the system prepared by Guibert under Saint-Germain. That education developed the young Bonaparte's natural *génie*. The foremost aspect of *génie* was the *coup d'oeil*, or the natural ability to perceive the precise point in time and space when an action should be taken. Bonaparte possessed perhaps the finest *coup d'oeil* in the French army. He demonstrated it throughout the Italian campaign, including his daring flanking maneuver at Piacenza that forced the Austrians to retreat to Mantua.²⁷ His military education also imparted

²³ Boycott-Brown 250-254. Open order was adopted by the undisciplined armies of the early Revolution. It called for widely-dispersed skirmishing to disrupt enemy deployments and positions followed by the overwhelming assault with superior numbers. See Griffith 207-225.

²⁴ Chandler 80-85.

²⁵ Guibert, *Essai* I 110-168.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, II 4.

²⁷ See Chandler 77-88.

moyen, or the means by which his *génie* operated. This included the technical operation of artillery, in which Bonaparte was first trained, as well as all of the tenets of Guibert's military constitution and a firm grounding in historical battles and campaigns. These combined with Bonaparte's natural charisma, leadership ability, and ambition to produce the ideal *homme de génie* to lead the French army.

The French army, founded on Guibert's system, was qualitatively better than the Austrian army, which relied on Old Regime methods. The Austrian army of 1796 was perhaps the most effective of the armies arrayed against France and was typical of Old Regime armies of the time.²⁸ Its soldiers, while not remarked on, were nevertheless skilled and generally brave. Austrian light troops (*Grenzer*) were renowned for their effectiveness. However, organizational difficulties abounded. The Austrian army possessed no coherent tactical manual. Deployment in battle order was not determined by effectiveness or by the necessities of battle; rather, battle order was dictated by seniority of regimental commanders. Strategic and operational planning favored the cordon system and the strategic defensive. The Austrian staff, headed by the Hofkriegsrat, was marked by "much confusion and an endless stream of directives, minutes, and returns clogging up the military administration at all levels."²⁹ Like all Old Regime armies, the Austrian army relied on complex and unwieldy magazines. Prussian-inspired drill limited mobility and maneuverability. Austrian commanders "were essentially old-fashioned soldiers, cautious rather than enterprising, and always concerned with the preservation of the army."³⁰ Thomas Graham, a British observer attached to the Austrian army, provided the most damning

²⁸ See Lee W. Eysturlid, *The Formative Influences, Theories, and Campaigns of the Archduke Carl of Austria* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), Gunther Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversaries: The Archduke Charles and the Austrian Army, 1792-1814* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982).

²⁹ Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversaries* 18.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

indictment of the Austrian army: “it is not only an able and efficient head of the army that is wanted but a stricter discipline....”³¹

The efficacy of the French army operating under Guibert’s system and led by Bonaparte, *l’homme de génie*, stood in stark contrast to the Old Regime armies of Austria and Piedmont. Numerical superiority counted for nothing against a general schooled in Guibert’s doctrine of central position and concentration of force. During his first Italian campaign, Bonaparte demonstrated the first true application of Guibert’s system, leading the French to success and himself to a position of prominence.

Napoleon drew elements of his operations and strategy from a multitude of sources, including the campaign histories of which he was fond. Guibert also studied those histories, epitomizing their operations and strategy in his military constitution, which Bonaparte encountered in the *Essai*. However, without the tactics, organization, and education provided by Guibert, Napoleon would have been no more successful than other *hommes de génie* like Maurice de Saxe or Frederick II.

On 18 Brumaire 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte effected a coup and seized power as First Consul. For the first time since the monarchy, military and civil power were united in one man. Napoleon quickly reconquered Italy and Jean Victor Marie Moreau defeated the Austrians at Hohenlinden. The Treaties of Lunéville and Amiens brought peace to Europe for the first time since 1792. The peace enabled Napoleon to build his Empire, restructuring governments across the conquered territories. It also enabled him to reshape the entire French army along the lines of

³¹ Thomas Graham, *The Despatches of Colonel Thomas Graham on the Italian Campaign of 1796-1797*, ed. by J. Holland Rose, in *The English Historical Review* 16 (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899) 121-122. See also John Murray Graham, *Memoir of Lord Lynedoch, G. C. B.* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1877). Both are by the same author; no explanation is to be found for the discrepancy in Christian names.

the Army of Italy.³² Napoleon utilized the principles of Guibert and the Revolution to lay the foundation for the army but introduced new concepts that would transcend all who had gone before. What emerged as the Grande Armée was the single most powerful army in the world.

³² See Brent Nosworthy, *With Musket, Cannon, and Sword: Battle Tactics of Napoleon and his Enemies*, Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon*, and Rory Muir, *Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon*.

CHAPTER 8

LEGACY: THE MEASURE OF A MAN

Guibert's legacy is complex. No man better typified the late Old Regime in France than Guibert: promising, youthful, passionate, but ultimately doomed to failure. In Lespinasse's words, "There is a man whom nature has destined to be great, and not to be happy. Diderot has said that nature, when she creates a man of genius, shakes her torch over his head, saying, 'Be a great man, and be miserable.' Those, I think, are the words she uttered on the day of your birth."¹ Guibert's dying words indicate his agreement with this statement. Posterity has borne out his wish. Guibert was a central figure in French politics, military reform, literature, theatre, and society from his entry into Paris in 1771 until his death in 1790. He exerted a significant influence that remains even today.

Guibert's legacy exists because of the unceasing labor of his widow. In the years after his death, Alexandrine Guibert worked tirelessly to ensure her husband's legacy. She became active in the Revolution, associating with several of its leading members. She used this influence to tout her husband's memory and to publish his writings. She worked closely with several family friends, including François-Emmanuel Toulangeon, to edit and publish Guibert's works. Toulangeon published Guibert's *Journal d'un voyage en Allemagne*, prefaced by a lengthy biography, in 1803.² Alexandrine arranged for the publication of Guibert's correspondence with Julie, which first appeared in 1809. Edited by her close friend Bertrand Barère, the correspondence gained immense popularity during the Romantic era of the early nineteenth century.³ She may also have spread rumors of Guibert's affairs with Germaine de

¹ Julie de Lespinasse to Guibert, 23 Oct 74, *Letters* 240.

² Guibert, *Journal d'un voyage en Allemagne*.

³ Groffier 363-364.

Staël and Amélie Suard to increase his popularity and the readership of his works.⁴ In 1804, Napoleon awarded Alexandrine a state pension, remarking on the importance of Guibert's works for his own military. Before her death in 1826, she donated Guibert's papers to the *Archives de la guerre*, where the majority now reside.

On 12 April 1795, their daughter, Appolline-Charlotte, married François-René Vallet de Villeneuve, who later served as Louis Bonaparte's chamberlain. In 1808, Villeneuve was elevated to comte and relocated the family to his hereditary estate at Chenonceaux. In 1814, he petitioned Louis XVIII to alter the family name to Villeneuve-Guibert, which the king granted. Appolline died in 1852; François in 1863.⁵ The family continued to promote Guibert's interests, including the definitive publication of his correspondence with Julie in 1929 by the comte de Villeneuve-Guibert.⁶

Guibert's military legacy remains the most important aspect of his historical importance. It began immediately after his death, when the Revolutionary government resumed the task of military reform. On 1 August 1791, the National Assembly issued a new *Reglément*, which saw Guibert's doctrinal system accepted by the French army. According to one scholar, "It was the culmination of all the intellectual fermentation of the French army during the century, fixing tactics after the many variations of preceding regulations upon the intermediate ground represented by the tactics of Guibert."⁷ It formally adopted *l'ordre mixte*: line for attack, column for maneuver. It dispensed with the formalistic evolutions and deployment, taking instead

⁴ Ibid. 292.

⁵ Lauerma 249.

⁶ *Letters*.

⁷ Quimby 306.

Guibert's simple evolutions and articulated deployment. In short, it adopted most of Guibert's tactical and operational reforms.⁸

Guibert's political legacy was closely tied to his military work. His two political ventures were as the lead reformer in the Department of War. Along with his fellow reformers, Guibert implemented large parts of his military constitution. After his first stint under Saint-Germain, many of his reforms were overturned. Significant portions remained, however. The most important was the reform of the *Ecole militaire* and the officer education system, which remained largely intact. The young, ambitious, and highly-skilled officers of the Revolution were products of this system, including Napoleon Bonaparte.⁹ Guibert's work under Ségur and Brienne proved more fruitful. His reforms were initially reversed, but the Revolutionary governments eventually implemented most of them.

Guibert's political theory paints an enigmatic picture. His earliest political writings, contained in the *discours préliminaire* of the *Essai*, argued for a proto-Republican military formed of citizen-soldiers. He argued for a reforming crusade, although he felt that no government in Europe could fully reform to his standards.¹⁰ As he aged and attained more power and influence, his political opinions moderated. In the *Défense*, he repudiated the idea of citizen-soldiers, calling instead for a professional army.¹¹ His later political writings, written after his second departure from power, reflect a reform spirit that espoused the ideals of the moderate Revolutionaries. He argued for a constitutional monarchy with a severely limited executive. Crucially, he placed control of the military with the legislative branch, which he envisioned as a permanent session of the Estates-General.

⁸ Irenée Amelot de Lacroix, *Rules and Regulations for the Field Exercise and Maneuvers of the French Infantry issued August 1, 1971*.

⁹ See Lauerma 90-92.

¹⁰ See Guibert, *Essai* V-XCIX.

¹¹ See Guibert, *Défense*.

These writings provide an opportunity for a fascinating counter-factual: how Guibert would have responded to the Revolution. On the surface, it would appear that Guibert would have emigrated with his fellow nobles as the Revolution spun out of their control. His oldest friend Dumouriez, who was like Guibert in many respects, fled after attempting to gain power for himself. Given his penchant for political action and his desire to attain fame, it is more likely that Guibert would have remained in France during the early Revolution. Whether he would have survived the Terror is another matter, but one with an obvious answer. Carnot, a disciple of Guibert, parleyed his military experience and reforming nature into positions with every government from the Legislative Assembly to Napoleon. The “organizer of victory,” Carnot used Guibert’s methods to shuttle massive numbers of French troops between as many as eleven separate theatres, holding off the combined might of Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia. Based on Carnot’s experience, a historian must believe that Guibert’s status as the architect of the French military would have preserved him from the guillotine and perhaps elevated him to a position of honor. While Guibert had little battlefield experience, it is not inconceivable that he would have been elevated to an honorary marshalate by Napoleon.

Guibert’s literary legacy cannot be considered on an even par with his military or political legacy. His writings, including poetry, prose, and theatrical works, were mediocre by the elevated standards of his day. Contemporaries recognized the genius in his works but the overall quality of his work was mediocre. *Les Gracques* gained a temporary popularity in 1790, when it was performed by the *Comédie française*. Their popularity, however, ended there. No further performances of his works are recorded. His poetry was of no wide acclaim, even within his circle of friends. Without his admission to the *académie française*, Guibert simply would have been an essayist who dabbled in literature. His seat at the *académie*, however, elevates

Guibert the literary figure to a higher plane. While the *académie* acknowledged Guibert's military writings, his literary work certainly figured into their nomination. His literary peers, with the notable exception of la Harpe, believed that Guibert's literary work was worthy of recognition.

A large measure of Guibert's legacy comes from his social, or rather his romantic, interactions. The publication of his correspondence with Julie sparked a historiographical debate within Guibert studies. While the letters reveal Guibert's innermost thoughts on a variety of issues, his treatment of Julie offended many scholars. Guibert's motives, while obscure, seemed never to include marriage or a serious relationship with Julie. This makes for a fascinating tragic episode, but also paints Guibert as something of a Machiavellian schemer who was only using her. His other liaisons contribute to this view, and those historians who concentrate on Guibert's relationship with Julie take a negative view of him.¹² Those who concentrate on his military accomplishments generally take a positive view.

Guibert's relationship with Julie and the resulting correspondence reveal an early sense of the Romantic in his works.¹³ Guibert never developed the cynical, rationalistic nature of his Enlightenment counterparts. Rather, he was given to intense flights of romantic, and perhaps naïve, fancy. His travel journals show a deep and abiding love of nature and the common man, both of which ran counter to the Enlightenment thought of his time. They were, however, hallmarks of the Romantic movement that would take hold in the following decades. While Guibert probably had no influence on the development of Romanticism, his works anticipated the movement by several decades.

¹² See Janine Bouissounouse, *Julie: The Life of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse: her Salon, her Friends, her Loves*, trans. Pierre de Fontnouvelle (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1962); Margaret Mitchiner, *A Muse in Love: Julie de Lespinasse* (London: The Bodley Head, 1962); and especially Ségur.

¹³ See Groffier 113.

On final measure, Guibert's life and legacy were generally successful, despite his dying sentiment. He rose from provincial obscurity to the heights of society and power in Paris. His military writings laid the foundation for the Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies to conquer nearly all of France's enemies for a time. The principles of his military constitution, adopted by Napoleon and his enemies alike, remained the foundation for linear warfare for decades after Guibert's death. His literary career, while not as spectacular, nevertheless landed him a seat in the *académie française*. His political activity and ceaseless advocacy of reform ensured the implementation of his military constitution. His relationship with Julie de Lespinasse provided one of the great romances of the period. As these aspects of his legacy prove, Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte, comte de Guibert, was one of the seminal figures of the later Enlightenment

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