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THE TACTICS
OF
FREDERICK THE GREAT
AS EXEMPLIFIED
IN THE BATTLE OF LEUTHEN

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EARLY LIFE

Before going into our subject and studying the details of Frederick's masterpiece, Leuthen, it might be interesting to consider for a moment what influence Frederick's early training and youthful tastes exerted on his future greatness.

Frederick II, known as Frederick the Great, was born January 1712. Two elder brothers having died in infancy, he became heir of his father, Frederick William I, who brought him up with extreme rigor and severity in the hope that he would become a hardy soldier and acquire habits of thrift and frugality. The results were just the opposite. Encouraged by his mother and under the influence of his governess, Madame de Roucoulles, and of his first tutor, Duhan, a French refugee, Frederick acquired a taste for literature and music and secretly learned Latin which his father who had a horror for everything which did not seem, to him, practical had forbidden. He scoffed at religion, refused to ride or shoot, preferred the french language, literature and dress and openly despised German habits and life. In fact he exhibited so little interest in and aptitude for anything touching on war that none suspected how great his military achievements were to be. However, Prince Eugene, then the greatest living soldier whom Frederick joined with the Prussian contingent of 1733, is said to have discovered in him that which he pronounced would make him a great general.

Frederick William, seeing his son apparently absorbed in what he considered frivolous and effeminate amusements, gradually conceived for him an intense dislike. This was openly avowed and displayed itself in violent outbursts and public insults. So harsh was his treatment that Frederick frequently thought of running away and taking refuge at the English court. He at last resolved to do so during a journey which he made to south Germany with two companions. His intentions were discovered, one of his companions was executed in Frederick's presence and Frederick was confined in the city of Cutrin where from morning until night he was forced to work in the departments of war, agriculture and government; and to study financial matters, receive accounts and make extracts. These years of retirement were full of active work and no doubt gave Frederick the business training which, in later life, made him so wonderful a financier. They gave him also a chance for study which he did not neglect. He was a keen student of history and spent much time in the study of the deeds of the Great Captains. This fact, doubtless, trained his high grade intellect and sturdy character for the feats of arms which were soon to make the world ring with his name.

On the 31st of May 1740 he became king. To quote Carlisle: "no body had the least suspicion that a tyrant of extraordinary military and political talents, of industry more extraordinary still, without fear, without faith and without mercy, had ascended the throne". He maintained all the forms of government established by his father, but ruled in a far more enlightened spirit; he tolerated every form of religious opinion, abolished the use of torture, was most careful to secure an exact and impartial administration of justice, and, while keeping the reins of government strictly in his own hands, allowed every one with a genuine grievance free access to his presence. The real interest of the army was carefully studied for Frederick realized that the two pillars of the Prussian state were sound finance and a strong army.

THE SILESIAN WARS

Immediately upon the death of Charles VI of Austria, Frederick began to make extensive military preparations. He had made up

his mind to assert the ancient claim of the house of Brandenburg to the three Silesian Duchies. A discussion of the lawfulness of his claim is not within the scope of this paper and will therefore be omitted. However in his memoirs Frederick confessed that he undertook this war "as a means of acquiring reputation and increasing the power of the state." This is the first inkling we have of Frederick's military tendencies. In the War of the Austrian Succession Frederick served his military apprenticeship and put to test the lessons he had learned from his study of the Great Captains. Although his first victory at Mollwitz was due largely to the skill of his trusty and able field marshal Schwerin his subsequent victories marked him as a military leader and tactician of exceptional ability. The peace of Dresden in 1745 ended the war and raised Frederick to a great position in Europe. Henceforth he was the most conspicuous sovereign of his time.

During the Silesian wars Frederick had learned good lessons. He had gained self poise and the knowledge of the hardships of war. He discovered the fact that he could trust no one but himself and his devoted legions. Confederates were like broken reeds, he himself was his own best ally. He was disenchanted. War was no longer a glory but a stern cold fact. He had found that his own conception of war ranged beyond the stereotyped routine of the Prussian army, though this, indeed, was not to be under-rated. Disciplined troops fought best under the excitement of battle and could best execute maneuvers in the face of the enemy. This enabled him to put into actual practice three most important principles of war, viz: the principle of Surprise, the principle of Mass and the principle of Economy of Force. Frederick emerged from the Silesian wars the best tactician the world had ever seen.

The first and second Silesian wars were succeeded by a ten years peace (1745-1756) during which time Frederick devoted himself to the internal administration of his kingdom and to military preparations. He displayed such marked genius in both fields that his people regarded him as a sort of demi-god. He entered the Seven Years War the most esteemed and beloved commander in the field, a fact which enabled him to keep a firm hold on his army even in time of direst stress. The unbounded confidence his troops had in him accounts for their high morale and victories won against such overwhelming odds. "The Austrians are three to one of us, and stoutly entrenched," said the king, ~~as~~ riding the outposts before Leuthen. "And were the devil in front and all around them, we'll hustle them out, only thou lead us on!" answered a brawney grenadier.

THE SEVEN YEARS WAR

The Seven Years War began in 1756, brought on by Maria Theresa's resolve to regain Silesia at any cost. She formed a great coalition against Frederick, including France, a natural enemy. Catherine of Russia is said to have been influenced by Frederick's biting satire, and Louis of France by Madame Pompadour, similarly ridiculed. Frederick had only the assistance of England which appeared mainly in the form of subsidies. The campaigns of this war left Frederick immortal in history, and he came out of it still the possessor of Silesia. Frederick had 150,000 men in the field; the allies 500,000. The latter were well led but lacked unity of direction and effort, and in addition had the handicap of interior lines. Frederick, though numerically inferior, had the best trained army in Europe, a well filled treasury, no debt and a loyal population

FREDERICK'S TACTICS

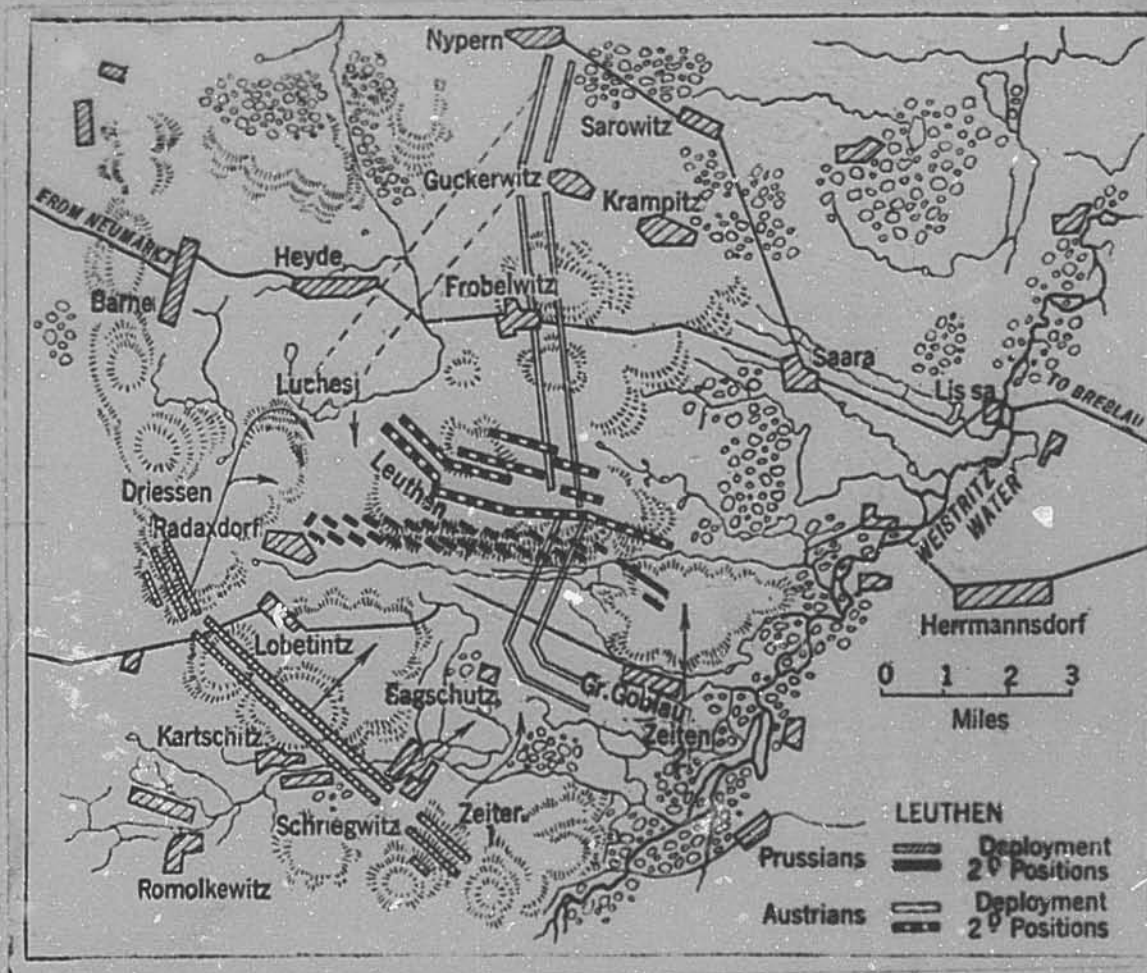
It is impossible in the space of this thesis, whose main theme is the battle of Leuthen, to consider the many brilliant battles fought by Frederick in the campaigns of the Seven Years War. In spite of the numerical superiority of the enemy he was always first in the field and retained the offensive. He marshalled his forces and with lightning like rapidity struck the first blow. In one campaign he marched one hundred and seventy miles in twelve days--a remarkable feat at that time--His victories were invariably won against a superior foe. At Rossbach, outnumbered three to one, by an exquisite maneuver, he took advantage of the faulty disposition of the enemy and, in a bare half-hour, disgracefully routed them with a loss of 8,000 men, 5 generals, 400 officers, 70 guns and numberless flags.

Like the Romans (he was quite a student of Hannibal's) he laid down one rule "never wait for your opponent's attack; if you are on the defensive let this be still of an offensive character both in campaigns and in battles" This rule he followed through life. He opposed passive defense; every one of his battles were offensive. Frederick placed war among the liberal arts. Perhaps the least straight laced of any captain, he held that only broad principles can govern it; that the use of maxims of war depends upon the personality of the soldier and the demands of the moment. Strict rules aid only minds whose conceptions are not clear, and whose executive lack promptness. His "Instructions" to his generals set out Frederick's whole art. It is full of simple common sense, apt rules, practical to the last degree. But it was the man who made them fruitful. Just because they represent the man they are interesting. At the head of the paper stands the motto "always move into the field sooner than the enemy." First in importance came discipline "from the highest officer to the lowest private no one is to argue, but to obey" said he. Next in importance came the care of the troops. In his day subsistence tied down armies to predetermined maneuvers; Frederick carried his rations with him, and in his rapid movements, made requisitions on the country as Napoleon, a generation later, did more fully. Then followed the study of topography. Positions were to Frederick only links in a chain, or resting places, but he ably utilized the lay of the land in his battles. He taught his generals, wherever they might be, to look at the surrounding country and ask themselves: "what should I do if I were suddenly attacked in this position?" He enunciated many maxims scarcely known in his day, "If you divide your force you will be defeated in detail" "If you wish to deliver a battle bring together as many troops as possible." "Always lead the enemy to believe you will do the very reverse of what you intend to do." "It is invariably better to attack the enemy even if weaker." "Make up for weakness by boldness and energy." "Whoever attempts to defend everything runs the risk of losing everything."

Frederick did not attempt to keep everything but put all his energy into one important matter. His was no hard and fast system. He did what was most apt. His battle plans were conceived instantly on the ground, and the genius with which he invariably devolved the best plans makes him stand, tactically, the highest of all soldiers.

BATTLE OF LEUTHEN

Immediately after his brilliant victory at Rossbach, Frederick at once turned towards Silesia, whence came alarming rumors. Prince Charles of Lorraine had defeated the Duke of Bevern, left by Frederick to hold back the Austrians at the price of his neck, captured Breslau and Schweidenitz, and proclaimed Silesia again part of Her Majesty's dominions. In fifteen days Frederick marched one hundred and eighty miles. At Parchwitz he was joined by what was left of Bevern's army, now under Zeiten. This increased Frederick's force to 32,000 men under the colors. Within some miles of Neumarkt he learned that there were one thousand Austrians at that place, some operating a bakery and engineers laying out a camp. By a surprise attack he took Neumarkt capturing 569 prisoners and killing 120. The hot bread was given to his troops.



AUSTRIAN POSITION AND DISPOSITIONS

Prince Charles was overconfident as a result of his last victory. Counting upon his superiority in numbers he abandoned a strong position behind the Lobe and advanced to a position on the left bank of the Schweidenitz Water, sometime called Weistritz Water. He left a large part of his artillery behind, believing that it would be unnecessary in order to beat "La garde montante de Berlin". His position lay perpendicular to Frederick's march and intersected the Great Road at right angles. The right rested on the village of Nypern and its impassible peat bogs, two or three miles north of the Great Road; the center was close behind another village called Leuthen, about as far south of the Great Road; the left lay a little beyond and behind the village of Eagschutz and the left flank was refused. The position was about eight miles long. About six miles in front of the position and on the Great Road lay the village of Borne. A range of hills ran south east of this village for several miles and was only three miles from the Austrian position at a point opposite its left flank. There was a cavalry outpost at Borne under the command of general Nostitz consisting of three Saxon regiments of dragoons and two Hussar regiments. Seven battalions were in the village of Leuthen

eight in Nypern, all the villages were secured woods, scraggy abatis and redoubts helped make the position strong. The artillery was located on the heights north and south of Probelwitz so as to command the direct route from Borne. Probably in anticipation of a frontal attack, two batteries of four guns were on the extreme left and one battery of fourteen guns was between Sagschutz and Goblau. The Austrians numbered 80,000 men, Nadasti commanded the left and Lucchesi the right.

PRELIMINARY OPERATIONS:

Frederick had made up his mind to attack the Austrians wherever found. He was aware that his force was numerically inferior, but he never doubted himself nor his men and he knew the ground. In boldness alone, for him, lay safety. In a memorable address to his officers and men he fired them with enthusiasm. Before break of day he left Newmarkt and marched toward the enemy in four columns. Cavalry on each flank and infantry and artillery in the center. Frederick, as usual in such cases, rode with the advance guard. At Borne the Prussians ran across general Mottitz's cavalry outpost, quickly surrounding it, almost the entire body was captured. The few who escaped carried confused tidings to Prince Charles who believed that the king's party to be only scouts.

On the farther side of Borne, Frederick called a halt till the main body should arrive. He himself, accompanied by his staff, rode forward to the nearest hill to reconnoiter. From this point of vantage he saw the Austrian army drawn up before him from Nypern to Sagschutz, an interesting sight. From this point Frederick formulated his plan of battle. Nypern on the right, with its bogs and scrags, was tortuous, impossible ground; in the center and on the left it was open and firm, the hills running southeast from where he stood could screen a maneuver to envelop the enemy's left flank. The plan was soon made: the range of hills was to be secured immediately; the advance guard was to advance from Borne to occupy the enemy's attention, especially his right; the main body, in two columns preceded by Zeiten's cavalry was to execute a column right and march, concealed by the line of hills until opposite the Austrian left flank, then by wheeling his platoons to the left his two columns would become his first and second lines of battle and smother the Austrian left. Zeiten's cavalry, now on Frederick's right flank was to attack the Austrian flank and rear. Driessen's cavalry was to be kept concealed in a hollow in the vicinity of Radaxdorf, to protect Frederick's left flank and to be used as a reserve if necessary.

Frederick's maneuvers led the Austrians to believe that their right was to be attacked. Lucchesi, commanding the right flank, was urgent in his calls for reinforcements. After his third request Prince Charles sent his best commander, Daun, with the necessary cavalry reinforcements which he drew from the left flank. The maneuver worked perfectly for Frederick. ~~At~~ ~~and~~

THE BATTLE

At one PM, upon reaching a point opposite the Austrian left flank, Frederick's columns wheeled into line; and, forming the oblique order came streaming over the knolls at Sagschutz. Nadasti, a skillful war captain, was beautifully posted about Sagschutz. His extreme left was refused and rested on heavily timbered knolls

his musketeers were posted in ditches, behind ponds, and on the folds of the ground. The strong battery of fourteen pieces supported the salient from the heights in rear thereof, and the front of the salient was protected by strong abatis.

General Wedell, commanding the Prussian right wing, an impetuous and brave soldier, launched his attack against the strong position after a short artillery preparation which battered the abatis. The Austrians, though surprised, and thrown into confusion were ably commanded by Nadasti who made a determined stand, in fact launched a counterattack with what cavalry he had remaining. Zeiten's cavalry wavered for a minute after sustaining that downhill charge, but the Prussian infantry, posted on the extreme right, supported their cavalry. The uphill charge was renewed, the deluge of infantry and artillery fire was increased, and, with fixed bayonets the Prussians hurled back Nadasti's line, & captured many prisoners, the battery of fourteen guns and out-flanked the Austrian position. In about one hour the Austrian left wing had been completely broken. Meanwhile Prince Charles, realising too late his error in reinforcing the right of his line, frantically tried to recall his reserves to stem the Prussian advance on his left. Battalions were thrown in but were met by crowding fugitives and chasing Prussians and therefore were themselves thrown into disorder. They arrived on the ground flurried and blown, and without standing even one push, were thrown back pell mell upon the center and around Leuthen. Leuthen became the pivot about which the battle raged. It was hastily organized for defense by Prince Charles in an endeavor to stabilize the battle on the left until the right could swing around and in turn envelop the Prussian left. A strong force was posted in the church yard. The Prussian line was now facing almost due north. For an hour the battle raged. Lucchesi, moving ~~far~~ by the left wheel, attempted to envelop the Prussian left which seemed bare and unprotected. The diversion was well intended but came near being fatal. Dreissen's cavalry, waiting in its hollow for the psychological moment, emerged from its hiding place and desperately charged the Austrian exposed flank. Lucchesi was killed and his cavalry was scattered. The position thus taken in reverse, was soon untenable and Prince Charles was forced to beat a hasty retreat. The day was won.

RESULTS

In this astonishing victory, which was won in three hours the Prussians lost 6,200 killed and wounded and 85 prisoners. The Austrians, 10,000 killed and wounded, 12,000 prisoners, 57 flags and 116 guns. A brilliant victory won by a great tactician. Leuthen stands out as the most perfect example of Frederick's oblique tactics.

NOTE: No references have been included in this thesis on account of the fact that only one book of reference was available in the school library: "Carlyle's History of Frederick the Great" Most of the information contained in this thesis was obtained from Volume V of the above mentioned history.

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