

Scott W. Lackey. *The Rebirth of the Habsburg Army: Friedrich Beck and the Rise of the General Staff*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995. xiii + 253 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-29361-0.

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The Forgotten Feldzeugmeister

Scott W. Lackey attempts to rehabilitate the man he calls the Forgotten Feldzeugmeister, Count Friedrich von Beck-Rzikowsky (1830-1920). Beck's career in the Austrian army spanned the years 1848-1906. For a half-century he was a leading figure within the service, first as head of Emperor Francis Joseph's military chancellery (1867-81), then as chief of the general staff (1881-1906).

Lackey laments the fact that Beck has been overshadowed by his controversial successor, Franz Conrad von Hoetzendorf, chief of the general staff before and during World War I (1906-11 and 1912-17). Indeed, for almost a half century after the collapse of Austria-Hungary, Conrad's legion of proteges and admirers dominated the writing of military history within Austria. For them, the preservation of Conrad's reputation became inseparable from the quest to safeguard the honor of the old army; in the process, Beck's accomplishments were either underestimated or forgotten altogether. While Gunther Rothenberg's standard work, *The Army Of Francis Joseph* (1976), certainly does not ignore Beck, Lackey's monograph fills a significant gap in the literature on the Habsburg military in this era.

The first half of Lackey's work deals with Beck's career up to 1881 and the history of the army during the same years. Beck received his lieutenant's commission in the wake of the Revolution of 1848 and saw action the following year in Italy, in the army of Field Marshal Radetzky. In 1852 he entered the newly-opened Kriegsschule (general staff academy) in Vienna. Upon his graduation with the school's first class two years later, he secured a position on the general staff. Seriously wounded in the War of 1859 against France, he served as a high-level liaison between Vienna and the front during the War of 1866 against Prussia. In 1867, when the Austrian Empire became the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, Beck played a crucial role in managing the military side of the transition. In the process he gained the respect of Francis Joseph and the trust of key Hungarian politi-

cians. Afterward, he joined other Habsburg army leaders in promoting the wholesale emulation of the Prussian military model, in particular the primacy of the general staff within the military establishment.

As chief of the general staff after 1881, Beck brought new rigor to the annual regimen of training rides for general staff officers (Generalstabsreisen) and training rides for generals (Generalsreisen), which consisted of elaborate war gaming on horseback, in the field but without troops. The exercises, copied from the Prussians, ultimately left senior officers familiar with the terrain of most provinces of the empire and the concomitant operational challenges. Beck also implemented annual Prussian-style maneuvers, usually pitting one corps against another in several days of simulated combat; before the 1880s, most Austrian army maneuvers had included no more than a division on each side. General staff war planning became more sophisticated, and the problems of mobilization received greater attention.

Perhaps his greatest reform was the territorial reorganization of the army, achieved in 1883. Breaking with a general custom of peacetime stationing that predated 1848, the new scheme left almost all regiments in their home districts, where they could be maintained at lower cost and more easily brought up to full strength in case of war. Further reforms upgraded the Austrian and Hungarian militia (Landwehr and Honved) and the Home Guard (Landsturm), creating the mechanism under which millions of men would be mobilized in the years 1914-18. Lackey notes that by the end of the 1880s the Austro-Hungarian army was as strong as it would be until the very eve of World War I.

The author concedes that Beck's personal achievement was obscured by the subsequent deterioration of the monarchy's military position that occurred under his leadership after 1890 (150). Lackey devotes only a few pages to this period of decline, the last sixteen years of Beck's tenure as chief of the general staff. Herein lies

the greatest flaw in his study. In his quest to rehabilitate Beck, he frames his work (in the introduction and conclusion) with sharp criticism of Beck's successor, Conrad von Hoe=94tzendorf. Beck appears as the sensible, traditional conservative, who recognized that Austria-Hungary had a great stake in peace, while Conrad is the reckless, Darwinian warmonger, who considered an aggressive policy essential to the survival of the empire in the international struggle for existence. True enough. But a character such as Conrad could never have become chief of the general staff in a state as conservative as Austria-Hungary if not for the conditions created by Beck's lethargy (after the age of sixty) and the concurrent decline in Habsburg military readiness.

After the turn of the century, forcing Beck's retirement became a top priority for the heir to the throne, Archduke Francis Ferdinand. In November 1906, he finally succeeded in replacing him with Conrad. Like Beck after 1881, Conrad after 1906 sought to invigorate general staff training, make maneuvers more realistic, and refine war plans. Like Beck, he also hoped to avoid

war with Russia. Whereas Beck never advocated preemptive strikes, Conrad established his aggressive reputation by calling for preventive wars against Italy and Serbia, rivals Austria-Hungary could have beaten, especially with Russia temporarily weakened by its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. Unfortunately for Austria-Hungary, when Conrad finally got his war with Serbia, it came within the context of a general European conflict.

Broader historical opinion acknowledges Conrad's leading role in bringing Austria-Hungary, and all of Europe, to disaster in 1914-18. Perhaps Lackey should take solace in this fact, rather than focusing on the exalted position of Conrad within Austria's military historiography. It was Beck's sad fate to be forgotten, but at least no one will ever count him among the men most responsible for starting World War I.

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