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Matthias Strohn. *The German Army and the Defence of the Reich: Military Doctrine and the Conduct of the Defensive Battle 1918–1939.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 292 S. ISBN 978-0-521-19199-9.

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M. Strohn: The German Army and the Defence of the Reich

This book, a revised version of Matthias Strohn's Oxford D.Phil dissertation is a reappraisal of German military thought between the World Wars. Its primary subjects are political and military elites, their debates over the structure and purpose of the Weimar military, the events that shaped or punctuated those debates, and the official documents generated at the highest levels. All of the personalities, institutions and schools of thought involved had to deal with a foundational truth: that any likely adversary could destroy their Army and occupy key regions of the country in short order, so the military's tradition role was doomed to failure.

The author lays out two problems to be addressed. First, the academic overemphasis on Blitzkrieg and its origins in the analysis of Weimar's military thought and secondly, the military's status as a 'state within the state', when the Army was clearly subordinate to the State. These problems are answered through an orthodox military history of Weimar's defensive military thought, with the 1923 Ruhr Crisis serving as the pivotal turn from offensive to defensive, and from political isolation to cooperation in military matters. These shifts were necessary decisions, as for 'the Reichswehr and the Wehrmacht in the early stages of its existence, the core business was to find out how the Fatherland could be defended against superior enemies' (p. 3).

This shift from offensive to defensive put the Army's structural subordination to the government into practice, and shocked its intellectual culture into a keener appreciation of facts. Toward this end, the author tracks a long and winding road toward the genesis of 'Heeresdienstvorschrfift 300. Truppenführung', written by Ludwig Beck and published in two parts in 1933 and 1934, a document which is widely regarded to be the single most important work of western military thought since the First World War. Its doctrinal predecessor, 'Führung und Gefecht der verbundenen Waffen', or F.u.G. was published in two parts in 1921 and 1923, largely neglected defensive fighting, especially the concept of delaying resistance. Delaying resistance was initially understood as morally corrosive and prohibitively risky, but by 1933 it was acknowledged as the best way for a weak but well trained army to preserve itself. This involved a balancing act between fighting and retreating, though whether the final goal was to gain time or inflict losses was unresolved. In the end, 'Truppenführung' was grounded in an analysis of what the military could and could not do, rather than the idealized qualities and potential of the individual German soldier.

Both a pressing doctrinal problem and roots of a solution lay in recent German military history. Both Clausewitz and Moltke the Elder had argued that the defensive must contain offensive elements as well. These teachings had been put into practice with the First World War doctrine of 'Elastic Defence', which utilized fixed strong points and sudden counterattacks in concert. But the First World War had left Chef der Heeresleitung (1920-1926) Hans von Seeckt with a low opinion of conscript soldiers derived from his war experience, concluding that they ultimately lacked technical skills and discipline. Thus, the British proposal that Germany maintain a long service, volunteer Army was already in line with his thinking. This small, quick, elite force would be more psychologically robust and able to outmaneuvre ponderous conscript armies. Supporting this 'Operationsheer', or Operating Army was a partially trained militia whose function was to hold ground, so that the Operating Army remained free to manoeuvre.

The centrality of the Ruhr Crisis was crucial to debates over fundamental doctrine. The result was to prove definitively that Versailles had left the Weimar Republic with no viable military recourse, but with a few useful conclusions. All contemporary theories were ineffective, whether the Army took the form of Hans von Seeckt's 'Operationsheer', or Joachim von Stülpnagel's 'Volkskrieg', or People's War model based on a Levée en

masse supported by professional partisans, the Feldjäger. Investigations into a crash mobilization with whatever arms were at hand to create a 'Notheer', or Emergency Army, yielded similar prospects. Two further investigations, codenamed 'Sommerarbeit' and 'Winterarbeit', determined that massive yet unrealistic Reichswehr expansion was necessary for reasonable prospects of success. But a useful lesson was learned, partially as a byproduct of von Stülpnagel's call for universal mobilization and irregular warfare on a grand scale, and that was the necessity of support from civilian institutions and elites to augment the Army.

Chapter 7 deals specifically with the topic of increased civil-military cooperation and its overall utility in a military context, concluding that no amount of civil-military cooperation would have improved the Weimar Republic's military prospects. These sentiments were confirmed by a 1927 policy discussion between Oberst Kurt von Schleicher, Oberst Werner von Fritsch, Deputy Foreign Ministry State Secretary Gerhard Köpke and Reichswehrminister Wilhelm Groener. The Army officers' contributions to policy were welcomed, but they were gently reminded that Weimar security depended on the political goal of 'avoidance of armed conflict at any cost' (p. 182). Still, the Reichswehr existed to defend the State, and though it was willing give up initiatives to strengthen the border guards or raise Feldjäger for larger political ends, tactical and operational/strategic problems remained unanswered. The means to do so did not exist in the F.u.G, so a new manual was needed.

'Truppenführung', analysed in depth in Chapter 8, saw offensive and defensive action as equally important and their successful combination was crucial at every level, from the tactical to the strategic. Readers were told that 'the conduct of war is art, a free creative activity based upon scientific principles' (p. 190). In pursuit of these goals and unlike the F.u.G, junior officers were to be told they were fighting a delaying engagement to better coordinate their actions and focus the latitude granted to them to carry out orders.

The Nazi seizure of power demanded offensive action, which the Army believed impossible until the planned completion of rearmament in the 1940s. However, Hitler had successfully merged the military with the political by creating the office of Führer. The Army, the author argues, had always believed that either a general with political skill or a politician with military experience would be the best head of state, and believed its expertise was even more critical when pacifist or democratic governments sat in power. As it was described by Oberstleutnant Walter Warlimont, by assuming a place between the Führer and all other institutions, the Army traded political power for status within the Nazi Party, so where in the past the Army had aided in the formulation of policy, they became its executors instead.

Matthias Strohn's work is complex, detailed, and well situated. Moreover, the author deserves a great deal of credit for managing a huge cast of officers and politicians. However, there is a lack of explanation as to why 'Truppenführung' was adopted when it was, which runs against the grain of the Army's post-Ruhr pragmatism.

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