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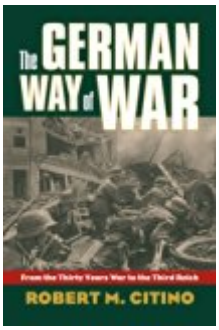
Robert M. Citino. *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005. xix + 428 pp. $34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-1410-3.



Reviewed by David Yelton

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Robert M. Citino's latest work attempts to determine whether there is a uniquely German style of fighting wars. Although he really does not examine the Thirty Years' War so much as its aftermath and the focus until 1871 is, of course, on the Prussian military and not those of other Germanic states, Citino does identify what he considers a German way of war. Citino's thesis is that Prussia, largely due to its position amidst other powers, developed a tradition of fighting "'short and lively' wars" (p. xiii) which emphasized the rapid maneuver and an aggressive spirit of attacking the enemy whenever possible, preferably with a flanking movement of some sort. To achieve this latter objective, field commanders were given considerable leeway to judge for themselves when to attack and Citino believes Prussian-German commanders were not hesitant to exercise this independence. To support his contentions, Citino traces a series of illustrative German military operations from Great Elector Frederick William's victory at the Battle of Warsaw in 1656 to the opening phase of Operation Barbarossa in 1941.

Citino's efforts plainly aim at modifying some generally accepted notions about Germany's military history. One of these ideas, prevalent in the U.S. Army today, is that Prussia and Germany's military success sprang largely from the efforts of staff officers who studied warfare intellectually and rationally and made it more a science than an art through the development of what is generally called *Auftragstaktik*. In this view, the general staff laid out the parameters of an operational plan under whose guidelines field officers operated with a maximum flexibility to achieve the larger goals. Citino finds repeated examples of German field commanders working at cross purposes with overall command objectives and sometimes each other. He concludes that it is much more accurate to assume that the German way of war was based on attacking the enemy at the first reasonable moment with scant regard to prior planning. For Citino, Germany's officer corps' operational behavior was governed more by an aggressive offensive ethos than any sort of intellectual and rational planning. Far from being characterized by a perfect balance of staff planning and control and operational flexibility, the German strategy often

involved no real coordination of subordinate commanders which, Citino notes, was unthinkable in the days before modern communication technologies. Many of these field commanders violated orders from superiors in order to push more aggressively, as demonstrated by Heinz Guderian in France in 1940, Hermann von Francois in East Prussia in 1914 and Friedrich Wilhelm von Seydlitz in the 1700s. Indeed, Citino states in his conclusion that the current understanding of ***Auftragstaktik*** simply was not a component of Germany's military history.

Citino also challenges the idea that Germany developed the notion of a war of movement (***Bewegungskrieg***) or, as it is more popularly known, blitzkrieg, in the 1920s and 1930s in the wake of the defeat in World War One. Citino cites ample evidence to show that Germany, and Prussia before it, had always sought to fight short wars because of its paucity of resources and central position in Europe. Short wars necessitated speed, audacity and nimble operational maneuvers. In turn, these priotities required commanders to be aggressive and seize the earliest possible moment to try to force a battlefield decision. Citino presents repeated examples of this pattern as a hallmark of Prussian/German operations from the seventeenth century to the early phase of World War II. For Citino, this is the German way of war: a war of movement intended to bring a sudden and decisive victory. Simply put, Citino sees that Germany (and Prussia before it) simply did not have the luxury of time in fighting, which necessitated the development of ***Bewegungskrieg*** early on in the Prussian military tradition. For Citino, blitzkrieg merely constitutes the effective adaptation of new technologies to this traditional Prussian/German style of fighting.

Overall, Citino's re-interpretation is well supported by his evidence, most of which, given that this is a work of synthesis, is based on secondary or published primary sources rather than archival work. He presents multiple examples to support his case and effectively supports his assertions about trends in the German military over time. He offers a compelling alternative explanation to overly idealized views of the Prussian and German militaries that exist in some quarters of the English-speaking world today.

Nevertheless, some weaknesses trouble Citino's otherwise sound work. First, he tends to present the German way of war in isolation from other developments, even in military affairs. For instance, it is common among military historians to credit Napoleon with the development of the operational, indeed strategic, goal of seeking to destroy one's enemy in a climactic battle. Yet Citino never mentions this historiographic position as one that needs reworking in light of a clearer understanding of earlier Prussian developments. Nor does he compare how the German offensive mentality leading up to World War I compared with that in France. Indeed, the book includes very little discussion of foreign influences on Germany's military development.

Citino also claims his work is correcting the neglect of operational history endemic in the New Military History (which is no longer all that new). Yet Citino tends to neglect the impact of broader social, economic and cultural factors on military affairs. For example, little attention is paid to the impact of the paucity of resources on Prussia's war-making capabilities, one of the main factors behind Prussia's need for quick victories. Citino writes nothing about the role of nationalism as a motivational factor for troops. This omission seems significant, given scholars' wide acceptance of the claim that the spread of nationalism greatly facilitated both the growth of military forces and the reliability of the average soldier to perform a wide array of duties without immediate supervision, particularly those involving speed and offensive actions. Indeed, the book makes no mention of how growth in education, literacy and technological skill encouraged this development as well. Certainly, these issues would not command exten-

sive attention in a book of this sort, but incorporating the useful findings of the New Military History might have been better than simply setting it up as a straw man.

Lastly, there is the matter of style; Citino is, on the whole, a very good writer, but sometimes falls victim to overt glibness. For example, he refers to the Prussian commanders of 1806 as "a group of men long past their sell-by date" (p. 110), and elsewhere to "happenstance" (p. 100). Such examples can simply be written off as stylistic idiosyncrasies, but they occur frequently and consistently enough that when coupled with the aforementioned tendency to omit discussions of broader trends, they detract slightly from the overall quality of the work. The book also suffers from a shortage of maps, particularly to accompany the descriptions of battles, surprising for a work so proudly devoted to operational history.

On the whole, Citino's significant book deserves attention from a wide range of historians and military thinkers. He successfully demonstrates that Germany's military history indeed follows a consistent path from its origins in the Prussia of the Great Elector through the National Socialist era and the first part of World War II, though that path is not necessarily the one commonly accepted by students of the German military; that is, that *Bewegungskrieg* is older than often accepted and *Auftragstatik* did not exist as commonly defined by experts today. Whether this characterization constitutes a completely distinct German path or not, Citino does not conclusively demonstrate, because of the lack of a comparative element. Yet, Citino's argument is sufficiently compelling in showing a consistency within Germany's military history to merit the reassessment of some significant assumptions about this nation's military heritage and legacy.

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