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978-0-521-88659-8 - The German Army and the Defence of the Reich: Military Doctrine and the Conduct of the Defensive Battle, 1918-1939

Matthias Strohn

Excerpt

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## Introduction and definitions

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The history of the interwar period in Germany is overshadowed by the two world wars that mark the beginning and the end of this era. Accordingly, the bulk of academic publications have concentrated on a limited number of events and fields of interest. The beginning of the period, namely the collapse of the empire and the creation of the Weimar Republic, has attracted much attention, as has the downfall of the first German republic and Hitler's ascent to power in 1933. Finally, the events that led to the outbreak of the Second World War on 1 September 1939 have been explored in great detail.<sup>1</sup> The history of the German armed forces in the period is no exception to this general trend. The *Reichswehr* has been blamed for its role in the collapse of the Weimar republic, and, accordingly, most studies have concentrated on the military–civilian relationship in this period, and the alleged role of the army as a ‘state within a state’.

In the field of military thought and doctrine, interest has centred on the development of the so-called ‘Blitzkrieg’.<sup>2</sup> It argues that a direct line existed from the stormtroopers of the First World War to the German victories in the first half of the Second World War.<sup>3</sup> According to the

<sup>1</sup> See, on this, Jürgen Förster, “‘Aber für die Juden wird auch noch die Stunde schlagen, und dann wehe ihnen!’ Reichswehr und Antisemitismus’ in Jürgen Matthäus and Klaus-Michael Mallmann (eds.), *Deutsche, Juden, Völkermord. Der Holocaust als Geschichte und Gegenwart, Festschrift Konrad Kwiet* (Darmstadt, 2006), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> A good example is the statement of Robert O'Neill, the later Chichele Professor of War at Oxford University, who argued that when it came to doctrine and training of the German army in the interwar period, there was ‘one thing that makes this story worth telling . . . : the Blitzkrieg’; see Robert J. O'Neill, ‘Doctrine and training in the German army 1919–1939’ in Michael Howard (ed.), *The Theory and Practice of War: Essays presented to Captain B.H. Liddell Hart* (London, 1965), pp. 143–66, 143.

<sup>3</sup> Some authors go even further back in history. Robert M. Citino has argued that the Grand Elector's sleigh ride in the seventeenth century marks the beginning of German military doctrine that would culminate in the ‘Blitzkrieg’ of the Second World War; see Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence, 2005). Here, Citino even argues that the destruction of three Roman legions under Varus near the Teutoburger Forest in AD 9 cannot be regarded as the foundation

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adherents of the ‘Blitzkrieg’ idea, the German army, defeated after the First World War, remembered its superiority on the tactical and operational/strategic levels of war, embodied in *Auftragstaktik* or mission command, and the stormtroopers. The military used the peace, although hindered by the Versailles Treaty, to improve their concepts, which were then successfully put to the test in 1939. At one level, it is not surprising that this interpretation was widely adopted, because scholars and the military alike have been anxious to explain the reasons for the German victories in the first half of the Second World War. However, the truth is more complex than that. Nothing shows this better than the years 1939–42, in which the Germans allegedly used this new concept to subjugate wide parts of Europe. Especially the 1940 campaign in the west is often regarded as the classical example of ‘Blitzkrieg’. In a campaign that lasted from 10 May to 22 June, the *Wehrmacht* achieved what the imperial armies had not managed in more than four years of trench warfare between 1914 and 1918: France was defeated, as were the Netherlands and Belgium. The British Expeditionary Force also suffered a costly defeat, although the British prevented total disaster at Dunkirk and were able to evacuate the bulk of the BEF back to Britain. Despite the traditional perception of this campaign, recent research has shown that a concept of ‘Blitzkrieg’ did not exist in the German army as a coherent doctrinal concept, but that the successes of the Second World War were based on traditional German doctrine and military thought.<sup>4</sup> The importance of swift operations that would lead one’s armies into enemy territory, combined with the aim of crushing the enemy’s armies and thus ending the war quickly had been the mantra of German military thought. The widespread use of the combustion engine made it possible to carry out these operations quicker than had been the case in earlier wars. However, the introduction of the tank and the use of the air force only increased the absolute speed with which operations were carried out.

of German military thought. One of the main reasons for that is, according to Citino, that ‘Hermann wasn’t invading anyone, but defending his homeland from the rapacious Romans.’ To the disciples of ‘Blitzkrieg’, a German defensive doctrine obviously is a contradiction in terms; see Citino, pp. 1–2.

<sup>4</sup> See on this, Karl-Heinz Frieser, *Blitzkrieg Legende: Der Westfeldzug 1940* (Munich 1996); and ‘Der Westfeldzug und die “Blitzkrieg”-Legende’ in Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (ed.), *Ideen und Strategien 1940. Ausgewählte Operationen und deren militärgeschichtliche Aufarbeitung* (Herford and Bonn, 1990), pp. 159–204; Jürgen Förster, ‘Evolution and development of German doctrine 1914–45’ in John Gooch (ed.), *The Origins of Contemporary Doctrine*, Camberley 1997, pp. 18–31; and ‘From “Blitzkrieg” to “Total War”: Germany’s war in Europe’ in Roger Chickering, Stig Förster and Bernd Greiner (eds.), *A World at Total War: Global conflict and the politics of destruction, 1937–1945* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 89–107; John Paul Harris, ‘The myth of blitzkrieg’, *War in History*, 2:3 (1995).

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The enemies had these assets at their disposal as well, and, accordingly, the relative speed of the opposing armies had remained at the same level. However, the idea that the Second World War would result in trench warfare just like the first had led the French army in particular to plan and prepare for a renewed First World War scenario. The result was that the relative speed of the German army was increased to an even higher degree, because the opposing forces did not make sufficient use of their absolute speed on the battlefield. Moreover, in the case of the campaign in the west, sheer luck and a lot of improvisation also played a crucial role in the outcome of the campaign. What is more, the idea of a ‘Blitzkrieg’ did not play a role on the level of *Kriegführung*. Bernhard Kroener has pointed out that the modern understanding of ‘Blitzkrieg’ does not only comprise the tactical or operational level of war, but that ‘it consists in the best possible combination of military principles of leadership with the corresponding economic and social factors required to achieve the desired overall strategic goal within a previously calculated period of time’<sup>5</sup>, and Kroener has argued that the German Reich did not possess such a comprehensive approach or concept, especially in the first half of the Second World War.

The view that a ‘Blitzkrieg’ concept had been lurking in the minds of the German military and that it only took Hitler and rearmament to turn these ideas into practice reduces the interwar period to a time of transition between the two world wars, and it obscures the fact that only a few years before the outbreak of the Second World War the total German armed forces consisted of an army of 100,000 men and a navy of 15,000 men. It was clear that in this period the army would not be strong enough to repel an invader, and, accordingly, for the *Reichswehr* and the *Wehrmacht* in the early stages of its existence, the core business was to find an answer to the question of how the fatherland could be defended against superior enemies. Only in the long term could Germany hope to regain its military independence (*Wehrhoheit*) and start thinking of strategic offensives. This meant that attention had to be paid primarily to matters of defensive warfare. Despite this importance of defensive warfare for the German military, this field has been neglected by scholars. One reason for this was the already mentioned desire to explain the German successes in the Second World War. Another point was made clear by Hauptmann Hermann Geyer as early as 1921. ‘To talk or write about

<sup>5</sup> Bernhard Kroener, ‘The manpower resources of the Third Reich in the area of conflict between Wehrmacht, bureaucracy, and war economy, 1939–1942’ in Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (ed.), *Germany and the Second World War*, 9 vols., V/i: *Organization and Mobilization of the German Sphere of Power: Wartime administration, economy and manpower resources 1939–1941* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 787–1154, 791.

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the defensive is a thankless task', Geyer argued, 'one exposes oneself to unfavourable judgement. Only he who thinks, or seems to think, offensively, is thought to be a good soldier.'<sup>6</sup> Historical research should not be judged by the alleged criteria for good soldiers, but this statement also seems to hold true for the historiography of the military in the interwar period.

The clear emphasis of the book is on the development of military thought and doctrine. Michael Howard has pointed out that in some academic circles military history is often regarded as a servant or even a backer of militarism;<sup>7</sup> accordingly, most of the scholarship dealing with the German armed forces in the interwar period has focused on the military's role in domestic and foreign policy, trying to analyse and explain the forces' position in the state and their share of responsibility for the collapse of the Weimar Republic, Hitler's rise to power and the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>8</sup> In addition to these fields, the social structure and the sociology of the *Reichswehr* have been explored

<sup>6</sup> Hermann Geyer, *Einige Gedanken über Verteidigung, Ausweichen und dergleichen* (Berlin, 1921), p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Howard, 'The use and abuse of military history' in M. Howard, *The Causes of War and Other Essays* (London, 1983), p. 208.

<sup>8</sup> An overview of the available literature, unfortunately only up to 1973, can be obtained from Michael Geyer, 'Die Wehrmacht der Deutschen Republik ist die Reichswehr. Bemerkungen zur neueren Literatur', *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 2:14 (1973), pp. 152–99. The most comprehensive insight into the German army in the interwar period can be obtained from Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (ed.), *Handbuch zur deutschen Militärgeschichte*, 6 vols. (Munich, 1983); on matters of rearmament and the implications for the armed forces and politics, see Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (ed.), *Germany and the Second World War*, 9 vols., I: *The Build-up of German Aggression* (Oxford, 1990); Ernst Willi Hansen, *Reichswehr und Industrie. Rüstungswirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und wirtschaftliche Mobilisierungsvorbereitungen* (Boppard, 1978); Michael Geyer, *Aufrüstung oder Sicherheit – Die Reichswehr in der Krise der Machtpolitik 1924–1936* (Wiesbaden, 1980); Jürgen Förster, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat. Eine strukturgeschichtliche Analyse* (Munich, 2007) provides a thorough analysis of the political role of the *Reichswehr* and *Wehrmacht* and the shifting positions the armed forces held in the structure of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, and he shows that the amalgamation of *Wehrmacht* and NSDAP was far more advanced than hitherto thought. The political side of the army's history in the interwar period has also been explored by Francis L. Carsten, *The Reichswehr and Politics 1918–1933* (Oxford, 1966); and Harold J. Gordon, *The Reichswehr and the German Republic 1919–1926* (Princeton, 1957). Although these books were published several decades ago, they remain important works on the history of the German army in the interwar period. A number of further works on the influence of the armed forces in politics should now be regarded as obsolete: Herbert Rossinski, *The German Army* (London, 1939; rev. edn Washington, 1944); Gordon A. Craig (ed.), *Die deutsche Armee. Eine Analyse* (Düsseldorf, 1970); John Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German army in politics 1918–1945* (London, 1953); Jacque Benoist-Méchin, *Histoire de l'Armée allemande*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1936–8); Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640–1945* (Oxford, 1955).

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in a number of works, mainly dealing with the officer corps or regional contingents of the army in the period.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, the main function of the army, to plan and fight wars, has not been explored adequately. In most works that deal with the development of German military thought and doctrine the dominant view is that the interwar period was only a time of transition and a prerequisite for the development of so-called 'Blitzkrieg' tactics. This of course implies that the German army's thinking was restricted to the alleged components of 'Blitzkrieg', and, in order to prove that this was the case, many authors have concentrated their research on fields that allegedly support this view, such as the planning of a war against Poland and the concepts of the *Chef der Heeresleitung*, Hans von Seeckt.<sup>10</sup>

This also answers the question why the author of this book concentrates on the 'unloved military area',<sup>11</sup> instead of paying more attention to the ideas and ideals of 'new' military history, for example the experiences of common soldiers, sociology, the influence of culture or the role of women in the military world.<sup>12</sup> The author is convinced that the more traditional approach taken by this book is not only justified, but necessary. 'New' military history has produced a lot of new insights into military history, but it seems that more traditional views, such as political or operational history, have been shunted into the background.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it has been rightly argued that the writing of the common soldiers' history should

<sup>9</sup> Karl Demeter, *Das Deutsche Offizierkorps in Gesellschaft und Staat 1650–1945* (Frankfurt, 1962); Heinfried Voss, 'Das neue Haus der Reichswehr'. *Militärische Sozialisation im politischen und militärischen Übergang. Der Aufbau der Vorkämpfer Reichswehr 1919–1920 und ihre politische Funktion in der Republik dargestellt an ihren badischen Truppenteilen* (St Katharina, 1992); Kai Uwe Tapken, *Die Reichswehr in Bayern von 1919 bis 1924* (Freiburg, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Robert M. Citino, *The Evolution of Blitzkrieg Tactics: Germany defends itself against Poland 1918–1933* (Boulder, 1987); and *The Path to Blitzkrieg: Doctrine and training in the German army 1920–1939* (Boulder, 1999); Jehuda L. Wallach, *The Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation: The theories of Clausewitz and Schlieffen and their impact on the German conduct of two world wars* (Westport, 1986); James Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans Seeckt and German military reform* (Lawrence, 1992). A collection of articles on military doctrine and thought in the interwar period can be found in Geoffrey Jensen (ed.) *Warfare in Europe 1919–1938*, The International Library of Essays on Military History (Aldershot, 2008). The majority of the articles deal with the Soviet Red Army, and only three out of eighteen essays deal with the German armed forces. On this volume, see the review article by Matthias Strohn in *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 19:4, pp. 801–3.

<sup>11</sup> Sönke Neitzel, *Blut und Eisen. Deutschland im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Zurich, 2003), p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> An example is Wolfram Wette (ed.), *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes: Eine Militärgeschichte von unten* (Munich, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> On the influence of social history on military history writing, see Marcus Funck, 'Militär, Krieg und Gesellschaft. Soldaten und militärische Eliten in der Sozialgeschichte' in Thomas Kühne and Benjamin Ziemann (eds.), *Was ist Militärgeschichte?* (Paderborn, 2000), pp. 157–74.

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not overshadow the fact that the decisive decisions were taken at the top of the hierarchical system – even if the common soldier had to endure the consequences of these decisions.<sup>14</sup> There is no way round it – the important military decisions were taken by a handful of selected officers, and it is thus fair to say that, in this case, men did still make history.<sup>15</sup> The ‘postmodern variety’<sup>16</sup> of ‘new military history’ deepens our insight into the context in which armed forces operated by looking at fields such as gender, anthropology and cultural history. However, most of these new approaches neglect one crucial factor: the military is not an end in itself, and armies have not been sustained in order to parade uniforms, nor have they been defined by the influences they might have on society. It was the purpose for which these forces were sustained that shaped their nature: war.<sup>17</sup> Without this purpose, there would be no armed forces. Clausewitz argued that ‘War is nothing other than fighting.’<sup>18</sup> He has been criticised for this statement, because he did not pay attention to economic factors and questions of how war can be sustained, but, as Hew Strachan has shown, Clausewitz believed that only tactical success on the battlefield allowed strategic and political victory, and that Napoleon’s successes in battle shattered the strategic plans of the enemies, each victorious battle creating the conditions for the next.<sup>19</sup> Even if Clausewitz’s statement can be seen as exaggerated, John Keegan’s more subtle statement, ‘War, ultimately, is about fighting’, does still hold true,<sup>20</sup> and Michael Howard has supported this view by stating that ‘at the centre of the history of war there must lie the study of military history – that is, the study of the central activity of the armed forces, that is *fighting* [italics in the original text].’<sup>21</sup>

Despite the book’s clear emphasis on genuine military matters the author is aware of the fact that attention also has to be paid to

<sup>14</sup> Stig Förster, ‘Der deutsche Generalstab und die Illusion des kurzen Krieges, 1871–1914. Metakritik eines Mythos’, *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 54 (1995), pp. 61–95, 67–8.

<sup>15</sup> Stig Förster, Markus Pöhlmann and Dierk Walter (eds.), *Schlachten der Weltgeschichte. Von Salamis bis Sinai* (Munich, 2004), pp. 7–18.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17. <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *Schriften-Aufsätze-Studien-Briefe*, ed. Werner Hahlweg, 2 vols. in 3 parts (Göttingen, 1966–90), I, p. 645. For a critique of Clausewitz’s limitation on the actual conduct of war, see Michael Howard, *Clausewitz* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 2–4.

<sup>19</sup> Hew Strachan, *Clausewitz’s On War: A biography* (New York, 2007), p. 177. The importance of the battle in Clausewitz’s thinking is also portrayed in Howard, *Clausewitz*, p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> John Keegan, *The Battle for History: Re-fighting World War II* (New York, 1996), p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Howard, ‘Military history and the history of war’ in Williamson Murray and Richard H. Sinnreich (eds.), *The Past as Prologue: The importance of history to the military profession* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 12–20, 20.



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civil–military relations. Military planning does not happen in a vacuum without any connection to political matters. The neglect of these relations would result in the writing of *Kriegsgeschichte*, which only concentrates on tactical and operational matters and which might be useful for the training of officers, but which does not contribute to the deeper understanding of history.<sup>22</sup> Once the debates about whether to sign the Versailles Treaty had ended with the signature of the German government, political–military discussions on a future war and the possible conduct of operations were not high on the agenda. The isolationist drive of Seeckt ensured that co-operation between the military and the politicians was as minimal as possible – even though this did not lead to the creation of a ‘state within a state’ as has been claimed. The structure of the state and the clear subordination of the military to the political institutions ensured this. It was only after the occupation of the Ruhr and the obvious failure of Seeckt’s approach that the military sought closer support from the politicians. Finally, Hitler’s promises of a reborn mighty German army resulted in a close co-operation between the military and the other state organisations.

Michael Howard’s remarks on the history of war also hold true for more-or-less peaceful periods, such as the interwar years. Naturally, in such times an analysis of military thought and doctrine is more complicated; there are no battles and campaigns against which these concepts can be tested. Accordingly, the emphasis has to lie on the theoretical approach of the armies; contemporary doctrine can be scrutinised and analysed against wargames and staff rides, many of which were conducted by the German army in this period. Of course, these games and rides were in essence theoretical too, and they do not provide a direct window into actual war planning, but they came as close as possible to real action and were based on doctrine and military thought.<sup>23</sup> Hans von Seeckt, the head of the army command from 1920 to 1926, made that clear in 1923 when he issued a pamphlet on the conduct of wargames and staff rides. Seeckt stated that ‘Staff rides, wargames and terrain discussions [*Geländebesprechung*] have the purpose of teaching the principles of the higher leadership [*Truppenführung*] in practical terms and on the grounds

<sup>22</sup> On *Kriegsgeschichte*, see Bernd Wegner, ‘Wozu Operationsgeschichte’ in Thomas Kühne and Benjamin Ziemann (eds.), *Was ist Militärgeschichte* (Paderborn, 2000), pp. 105–13, esp. 105–8.

<sup>23</sup> See, on this, Robert T. Foley, ‘The real Schlieffen Plan’, *War in History*, 13:1 (2006), pp. 96–7. On the role that theoretical exercises such as ‘tactical education without troops’ (TEWT) played in the German military, see David Hall, ‘The modern model of the battlefield tour and staff ride: Post 1815 Prussian and German traditions’, *Connections, The Quarterly Journal of Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defence Academies and Security Studies Institutes*, 1:3 (2002).

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of actual situations.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the scenarios created for the wargames were more often than not based on the realities that the German army was facing. If unreal scenarios were chosen deliberately, this was usually made clear in the introduction or the final discussion that was conducted by the highest-ranking officer attending the exercise. The aim of these so-called training wargames (*Lehrkriegsspiel*) was to test tactical and operational doctrine and principles rather than developing real plans for the conduct of a future war.<sup>25</sup>

The interwar thinking on defensive warfare did not come out of nowhere, but it had deep roots in military thought. In fact, it is necessary to go back to Carl von Clausewitz and his elaborations on defence in the early nineteenth century in order to understand the changes in military thought that occurred in the interwar period. Moreover, the soldiers' experiences of the First World War had a deep impact on the understanding of warfare, and the majority of the first part of the book is therefore devoted to the development of military thought and doctrine of the defensive battle up to the end of the First World War.

The Versailles Treaty imposed a number of clauses that had a decisive influence on how a future war could actually be conducted. The times between the truce of 1918 and the Treaty of Versailles were turbulent ones, and it is important to explain the situation the German military found itself in when the war had come to an end. This is also done in the first part of the book.

From 1920 to 1926, Hans von Seeckt was head of the army command and he had a great deal of influence on the development of the *Reichswehr* and its military thought. Based on his experiences of the war, Seeckt advocated the *neuzeitliches Heer*, a new, small army that would be

<sup>24</sup> Hans von Seeckt, *Anhaltspunkte für Leitung von Übungsreisen, Kriegsspielen und Geländebesprechungen* (Berlin, 1923), p. 3. After the Second World War, the former *Generalfeldmarschall* Wilhelm List listed the different methods of theoretical training in a contribution to the US Army's Historical Division's elaborations on training in the German army; see *Ausarbeitung über Kriegsspiele*, List papers, BA-MA N 527/43, p. 1. The '*Planspiel*' (planning game) was characterised by the fact that the participating officers would only deal with one's own forces. The enemy forces were led by the officer in charge of the '*Planspiel*'. In the '*Kriegsspiel*' (wargame), on the other hand, both one's own and the enemy forces were played by the participating officers. The '*Geländebesprechung*' (terrain discussion) was regarded as a '*Kriegsspiel*' that was taken into the open country. In addition, Hans von Seeckt had introduced the '*Führerreisen*' (staff rides) aimed at the training of staff officers and generals. For the Historical Division, see James A. Wood, 'Captive historians, captivated audience: The German military history program, 1945–1961', *The Journal of Military History*, 69:1 (Jan. 2005), pp. 123–47.

<sup>25</sup> A good example of this is the 1925 operational wargame conducted by the head of the *Truppenamt*, Hasse. In the final discussion, Hasse explains the differences between a conventional wargame and a training wargame; see BA-MA RH 2/3198, ff. 5–8.



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characterised by mobility, good equipment and superior training. This concept found its embodiment in the manual *Führung und Gefecht der verbundenen Waffen* (F.u.G.), which was published in two parts in 1921 and 1923, respectively, and which would form the basis for the tactical training of the *Reichswehr* until the new manual *Truppenführung* was published in 1933. Therefore, it is important to look more closely at Seeckt's concept and the role of defensive warfare in the F.u.G. and Part II of the book is devoted to these matters.

However, Seeckt's ideas did not go unchallenged. The occupation of the Ruhr by French and Belgian troops in 1923 showed that Seeckt's concept was unsuitable for the defence of Germany in case of immediate war. Alternative ideas, such as the concept of a people's war, had to be developed if Germany was to sustain a major conflict. A group of young officers in the *Reichswehr* ministry and the *Truppenamt*, the so-called 'Fronde' around Joachim von Stülpnagel, was particularly active. Of special importance are the changes in the relationship between the army and the civilian authorities. Having realised that the army alone was not able to defend Germany, the *Reichswehr* advocated the inclusion of the civilian authorities in the planning of the future war. Moreover, it had become apparent that Seeckt's concept of the *neuzeitliches Heer*, embodied in the F.u.G., was not an appropriate answer to Germany's tactical and operational military problems, and, in 1933, a new manual, *Truppenführung*, was issued. This manual resembled the actual military situation of Germany, which meant that defensive warfare found more attention than it had hitherto found in the F.u.G. These changes in military thought and doctrine and the intensified military-civilian relationship are dealt with in Part III of the book.

After 1933, Germany rearmed and concrete preparations were made for the future war. This included a move from defensive planning to a more offensive approach once the army had increased its strength. In the early years of Hitler's chancellorship, however, the military situation still did not allow the German army to switch immediately and entirely to offensive warfare. This change is dealt with in Part IV of the book; special stress is thereby put on the planning for a war against Czechoslovakia, as the switch from defensive to offensive warfare particularly developed in the plans for the campaign against this state.

### On definitions and vocabulary

Every trade has its special terms and vocabulary, and the armed forces are no exception to this. The correct use of military terms is imperative

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for anyone who engages in military history; without an understanding of the terminology it is impossible to comprehend military thought correctly and to understand the world the military work and live in. This is even more so in this study which tries to make a contribution to the understanding of the development of military thought and doctrine and which thus looks at the core business of the army.

The terms '*Reichswehr*' and 'German army' are used interchangeably in this work. Technically, this is wrong, since the *Reichswehr* officially meant 'armed forces' and comprised the '*Reichsheer*' (army) and the '*Reichsmarine*' (navy). However, the term *Reichswehr* was also used loosely by the contemporaries in the interwar period. For instance, Hans von Seeckt wrote a book called *Die Reichswehr* in 1933 in which he only dealt with army matters and left the navy aside. The explanation for this has to be seen in Germany's military tradition and its geopolitical location in the centre of Europe. Surrounded by potential enemies on land, the army has always been Germany's senior branch of the armed forces, and, accordingly, the land forces have always found more attraction in general and military language, and the terms for army and armed forces have often been used interchangeably. Thus the term '*Armee*', which literally translates as army, has also been used to describe the entire armed forces with all its branches.

The official name of the armed forces changed a number of times in the period that will be looked at in this study. From 6 March 1919 to 31 March 1921, they were called the preliminary or '*vorläufige*' *Reichswehr*. From that time onward, the armed forces bore the name '*Reichswehr*',<sup>26</sup> until a new military law changed this into '*Wehrmacht*' on 21 May 1935.<sup>27</sup> This change included a number of additional alterations, and the defensive definitions of the Weimar Republic gave way to a more offensive and aggressive-sounding terminology.<sup>28</sup> The *Reichswehrminister*, von Blomberg, became the *Reichskriegsminister* and *Oberbefehlshaber der Wehrmacht* (minister of war and commander-in-chief of the armed forces); the *Chef der Heeresleitung* (head of the army command) was now called *Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres* (commander-in-chief of the army), and the *Reichswehrministerium* became the *Reichskriegsministerium* (Reich

<sup>26</sup> *Reichsgesetzblatt*, 31 Mar. 1921. The law was signed on 23 Mar., but only issued and made public on 31 Mar. 1921.

<sup>27</sup> The *Wehrgesetz* of 21 May 1935 can be found in Rudolf Absolon, *Die Wehrmacht im Dritten Reich*, 4 vols., III: 3. August 1934 bis 4. Februar 1938 (Boppard, 1975), pp. 342–78.

<sup>28</sup> Förster, *Wehrmacht*, p. 26.