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Dietrich Heinrich von Bülow Edited and Translated by C. Malorti de Martemont

Excerpt

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THE  
SPIRIT  
OF THE  
MODERN SYSTEM OF WAR.

PART THE FIRST.

A VIEW OF THE PRINCIPLE ON WHICH THE MODERN SYSTEM OF WAR IS FOUNDED; OF THE ALTERATIONS IT HAS PRODUCED IN THE MILITARY SYSTEM; AND OF THE RULES RESULTING FROM IT FOR THE DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES\* AND OPERATIONS OF WAR.

CHAP. I.

*General Notions. Examination of Offensive Lines of Operation; and First, of a single Line of Operation, which, proceeding from a single Point constituting its Base, advances into an Enemy's Country.*

**T**HE invention of gunpowder, and the consequent introduction of fire arms in military

\* The Author appears to me to express himself too generally; for if it be true, as I have observed in the Preface,

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operations, rendered an immense quantity of ammunition necessary for the supply of those arms. It was gradually discovered that this new mode of destroying an enemy required a great display, and that an army was formidable in proportion to its number of lines of fire. In time this observation led to a change of tactics; and a system of spreading and displaying troops on a large scale, and of embracing a vast extent of ground, was adopted. In this new system it appeared that the number of soldiers produced the effect which formerly resulted from the personal qualities of the men; consequently, it became the object of the Powers of Europe to acquire the means of augmenting their troops: innumerable bodies were put into motion; and to the enormous equipage, which the ammunition drew after an army, was added the no less considerable one of the provisions necessary for so great a number of men and horses. The countries into which the armies marched, soon failing in the power to feed such multitudes, and to supply them with the means of fighting, it

that moral, physical, and political causes necessarily modify in practice the fundamental principles of the art of war, it follows that the author may be able to lay down rules applicable to the different operations of war, but not to the different circumstances, which are perpetually varying.

COMMENTATOR.

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became requisite to think of magazines; and, in the end, the fate of armies was found to depend on the abundance of those places of resource, on their security, and on the facility of keeping up a communication with them: to establish them, and to fill them with stores, before the opening of a campaign, was then the object of attention. The positions best calculated to screen them from every insult, were previously and maturely considered; and, at the same time, it became a principle to manœuvre in such a manner as to cover them; not to go far from them but with great caution; and never to cease preserving with them those connections in which the strength of an army consists, and on which its success depends. Plans of campaigns were then formed\*, fortified towns

\* It is necessary, no doubt, previous to entering upon a war, either offensive or defensive, to settle a plan of campaigns; that is, to concert, in a general way, the measures to be taken to ensure the war's leading to the object proposed in making it, which ought to be calculated according to the data supplied, not only by the situation, local circumstances, &c. of the frontiers of the Belligerent Powers, but also by the comparative view of their forces, and resources of every kind, and by the nature of the war to be carried on. These measures may be considered under two heads, political and military.

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marked out as fundamental points; in a word, a *base* was fixed where magazines were established,

To the political are referred, the alliances to be formed, the treaties of subsidies to be entered into, the discussion of the causes that render the war necessary, and consequently that of the grounds on which the treaty of peace that is to terminate it should be founded, supposing the success of the war to be equal to the hopes entertained of it: to this head too is to be referred, the advantage to be taken of enmities, of factions, of civil dissensions, of private ambition, of the jealousy conceived by states, and even by individuals, of one another, and of the differences arising in the same nation, from customs, religious tenets, and opinions of every kind: lastly, it belongs to political measures to foresee that certain governments, neutral at the beginning of the war, will afterwards become hostile; and to form beforehand provisional plans by means of which their aggressions may either be resisted if they declare themselves, or anticipated by an attack before they have completed their preparations.

Then follow the military measures, which are to be so concerted as to contribute the most effectually to ensure the success of the war: the first is the determination of the points on which the operations are to begin. If it be intended to act *offensively*, it is necessary to begin with examining what part of the enemy's frontiers, by its situation, the nature of the country, and the concurrence of other circumstances, which I shall hereafter more fully explain, not only furnishes ampler means and greater facility to attack him there with advantage, but will likewise lead more directly, after it is mastered, to the principal object proposed to be attained: against that part should the principal opera-

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whence lines of operation issued, and of which the object was to protect retreats, as well as to favour attacks.

tions be directed. If any other part of the frontiers be found favourable to a powerful diversion, and which should likewise offer the advantage either of leading the enemy into an error respecting the point where the principal operations are projected, or of forcing him to weaken himself at this point, to defend that against which the diversion is to be made, it will be requisite also to march thither, provided, however, that the army be not thereby exposed to any of the inconveniences planned for the enemy; as, for example, that of being weakened by too many divisions. It is also to be observed, that, as it is possible that a war begun offensively, may decline into a defensive one, and that the enemy may himself attempt diversions, it is necessary that such of the frontiers of the offensive army as might present him an advantage, and particularly those containing the magazines, or which would enable him to take in flank or rear the positions of the army, while advanced, should be completely covered. In short, for every hypothesis, provisional plans should be settled, in order to be prepared against whatever may happen.

When once the points of attack are determined upon, the base is settled whence the operations are to proceed, and on which are to be established the magazines, which are, as much as possible, to be so disposed as to divide the attention of the enemy, by drawing it to several points at once. Demonstrations are made to mislead him, and if he is deceived, advantage is taken of it. The direction which the lines of operation are to follow, in order to terminate at the first intended point of action is then determined.

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The utility of this base, its figure, and its dimensions, objects of such importance in the

The safer plan is, to choose, not only the shortest and easiest way for them, but likewise that which affords the enemy the fewest means to molest them. There are countries in which this direction is self-traced; flat and open countries are generally of this kind: but there are others, which being woody and mountainous, present the enemy an infinity of means to obstruct the communications and attack the convoys, and which, consequently, require the greatest precautions. In such countries, to secure the conveyances of the supplies, and render them easy, it is necessary, when the army is on its march, that it should be preceded by a great number of pioneers, in order to remove, as much as possible, every kind of obstacle likely to obstruct or endanger the communications; to destroy the roads and tracts through which the enemy may steal upon them, and to place, at certain distances, posts more or less numerous, and more or less strongly entrenched, according to the nature and importance of the points where they are situated, to serve as so many steps, by means of which the supplies may be conveyed with safety.

Nay, sometimes, when it is foreseen that a war will be of long duration, exertions are made to conquer, in some sort, nature itself, by blowing up rocks, cutting roads through forest, and carrying some of them to the points most proper for the establishment of the depots of provisions and ammunition that are to go along with the army. If there be a navigable river at hand, as many boats as possible are collected upon it, to take advantage of the conveyance by water, which, besides a considerable reduction of expence, may be the means of the operations

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present system of war, particularly demand our attention, and shall be principal subjects for our consideration.

proposed being executed with greater facility, and at an earlier period ; for there are countries which can be entered only at particular times, on account of the forage, or of the state of the roads. Sometimes, too, rivers not actually navigable, may, at a proper time, be rendered such at a small expence ; and when that opportunity offers itself, advantage must no doubt be taken of it.

Attention is also paid to the storing of the magazines ; the number and stations of the troops intended for the protection of the frontiers are settled ; the fortresses that require it are repaired, particularly those which in the course of the campaign, or of the war, may be exposed to attacks ; and they are, more or less, furnished with stores and provisions, according to the extent and proximity of the danger they may run ; and, lastly, according to the nature of the country in which the operations are to be carried on, to the number, quality, and kind of troops that the enemy may bring into the field, the strength and composition of the army, as well as the number of cannon and pontons to attend a, are regulated : the general officers to be employed in it are appointed, and the provisional instructions necessary delivered to them ; the different corps of which it is to be formed are drawn nearer, and when the time fixed for the commencement of the operations arrives, they are assembled, care being taken to plan as well as possible their junction, in such a manner as to meet no obstruction from the enemy, and to mislead him in respect to the point towards which they are to be marched, in order, by this means, to anticipate him there. Except in a case of abso-

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The necessity of attending so particularly to the base of the lines of operation, made

lute necessity, the army should not be assembled at a great distance from the first point of action ; for it is a rule, in an offensive war, that the first movements particularly, should be extremely rapid, and if the men and horses, from a state of rest, have immediately to make a long march, they may be so much fatigued as not to be able to act afterwards with the necessary celerity.

I have said nothing of the levying of new troops, of the augmentation of the old ones, of the purchase of horses for the use of the cavalry and artillery, for the conveyance of provisions, and for the service of the army in general ; nor of the construction of wains, carriages, ordnance-stocks, covered waggons, &c. of which, no doubt, the army will stand in need. It is generally known that these preparatory measures are indispensable before the commencement of war ; it is also known what influence secrecy has on the success of military operations in general.

At length the army advances towards the first point of action, and then it is that combinations rendered necessary by a multitude of local and other circumstances, of which there is an endless variety, determine the movements and operations which it is to execute. Has it been able to anticipate the enemy in the field ? Will it be able to come up with him before he has had time to collect his forces from their quarters ? or are they assembled, and the enemy already on the defensive ? Is this defensive strictly so, or will the situation and resources of the enemy allow him to wage a defensive-offensive war ? Is the country attacked flat and open, or mountainous and entangled ? Is it protected entirely or in part, either by a position or by fortresses ? If



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it also necessary to determine accurately the point to which those lines were to be carried.

by a position, what is the nature of it, and what are the means of taking it before the enemy, if he does not yet occupy it, or of dislodging him if he does? How are the fortresses situated? Do they stand upon the extremities of the frontier or at some distance from it? And in the latter case, is it not possible by manœuvring to advance a column between the enemy and them so as to cut him off? How is he to be driven behind his fortresses? Is it by vigorously following up the first advantages the army may have obtained, to prevent his rallying; or by well combined manœuvres, or in fine by a battle?

Further, what is the strength of the fortresses that cover the enemy's country, the ability of the governors, the number and goodness of the troops appointed to defend them? Are these fortresses in good repair, sufficiently garrisoned and provisioned in every respect? Which are those that on account of their importance (and this importance should be estimated less from their internal strength than from their local situation, and the kind of obstruction or of support they may give in respect to the operations) must necessarily be besieged? What is the probable duration of the resistance they will make? Which, on the other hand, are the fortresses that may be neglected, or merely masked? In fine, which are the fortresses that it would be of importance to keep as such after they are taken; and which those it would be better to demolish, to avoid being weakened by the garrisons they would require, and that without yielding any advantage capable of counterbalancing this inconvenience?

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The general and vague object of conquering the enemy, and of driving him as far as possible, was

If the object be to pierce the enemy's line of defence, or to dislodge him from a country he occupies, and which he can defend only by manœuvres, what means are to be employed to accomplish it? Shall it be, by so confining him in his forage as to compel him to abandon such a point as may be desired? Shall it be by menacing at once several points of his frontier, so that when he has weakened himself by sending detachments to cover them, he may be attacked to advantage, and those very detachments be perhaps cut off? or, shall it be by manœuvring before him so as to excite his apprehension for some important point, and to keep him thus in check, till a movement is made on his flank, that shall oblige him to fall back for fear his communications be cut off? Lastly, Shall a diversion, real or feigned, be attempted, or a decisive battle fought at the very opening of the campaign?

Suppose that the country invaded be flat and open, and without any fortresses to defend it; let us even suppose that the enemy himself has voluntarily abandoned it, after having deprived it of all the resources it might have presented to the offensive army; how is that army to establish itself there firmly, and in such a manner as to secure its depots, communications, &c. should the enemy, taking advantage of the extension which the occupation of this country would require, or with the help of reinforcements he expects, afterwards act offensively? What might he then undertake; where direct his efforts with the greatest advantage to himself? What are the points to be fortified, and to what degree should they be so in regard to their