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FREDERICK THE GREAT: THEY DON'T CALL HIM GREAT FOR NOTHING

BY

Lieutenant Colonel Vincent Scatamacchia  
United States Army

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**FREDERICK THE GREAT: THEY DON'T CALL HIM GREAT FOR NOTHING  
AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT**

**by**

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# ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Vincent Scatamacchia, LTC, USA  
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Once every few generations a leader emerges who has the ability to restructure the paradigm of his society. Such a leader was Frederick the Great. Through the clarity of his vision, the force of his personality and the enormity of his talents he single-handedly raised Prussia from a second rate power to one of the great powers of Europe. In the course of this lifetime project, Frederick demonstrated a mastery of every level of military operations from tactics to strategy as well as an uncanny understanding of national strategy and its elements of power. This paper provides a brief biography of the Prussian king and examines the contributions he made at the various levels to military thought and their relevance to current thought.

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Prussia. The name evokes images of military precision and accomplishment that have few equals in the annals of history. The accomplishments of Bismarck and the German military of the 20th century are revealed by those who study strategy, operational art, and tactics. But my interest is not in these relatively recent examples of German military excellence. Rather, my interest is in the source from which this greatness sprang. And that source is arguably Frederick the Great. In fact it has been said that if Frederick the Great "...had not made Prussia a great power there might not have been a Bismarck...and without Bismarck there could hardly have been a Hitler."<sup>1</sup> So spend a few minutes with me and learn from this man of the 18th century whose deeds had grave consequences deep into our own century.

Born on 24 January 1712, Frederick was the first surviving son of Frederick William. Since he had lost two earlier sons in their infancy Frederick William was delighted to finally have produced an heir. Known as the soldier-king, Frederick William believed that one of the monarch's foremost responsibilities was to develop an expertise in military art and science. As such the young prince spent much of his life prior to ascending to the throne in preparation for the time when he would lead the Prussian army into battle.

By the age of six he was already introduced to the rudiments of drill and his military development was placed in the hands of two East Prussian officers, Colonel Christoph von Kalckstein and Lieutenant-General Count Albrecht Konrad von Finckenstein. Frederick William's instructions to these officers were to prevent the youngster from developing a sense of false pride and to teach geometry, mathematics, and economics as well as the subjects of artillery and fortification and other military subjects "...so as to make him...acquire the qualities and knowledge of...a general...(and) impress him with the conviction that nothing on earth is so calculated to earn...honor for a prince as the sword."2

This certainly seems like an severe way to begin the education of a six year old boy until one realizes that Prussia was an absolutist, hereditary monarchy and, as such, a great deal of the welfare of the state hung on the heir to the throne. Frederick William was well aware of this and expected a lot and when young Frederick didn't measure up to his father's expectations he was frequently and publicly humiliated. In 1730, after one such incident, Frederick had had enough. In desperation he devised a plan to escape Prussia and seek asylum in a foreign country. When the King discovered this plot he had his son arrested and tried by court-martial. As a result the Crown Prince spent two years in confinement.

After this unfortunate incident Frederick was reinstated into the army in 1732 and appointed as Colonel-Proprietor of an Infantry regiment at Goltz. His appointment to this position, roughly equivalent to battalion command at the age of twenty, marked the beginning of his serious military career. For the next eight years Frederick diligently applied himself to learning his military skills from the capable officers of his regiment for in that time there was no system of formal officer training. Rather, the skills needed for great generalship were believed to be "...something which could be transmitted to the most able members of the next generation only by an almost sacramental process...[of] direct instruction and the example of great men."<sup>3</sup>

At the same time he availed himself of the lessons to be learned from the great captains of the past. He studied the works of Caesar, the histories of the wars of the Greeks and Romans, and the campaigns of Charles XII of Sweden. At the same time he was guided by Prince Leopold I, Prince of Anhalt-Dessau (the Old Dessauer), who at the time was Frederick William's Chief of Staff. The Old Dessauer provided him with a great deal of knowledge from the past, including an illustrated text based on his orders of the day for his campaigns against the Swedes from 1715 to 1720.

In 1734, during the War of the Polish Succession, Frederick met Prince Eugene of Savoy and observed active

operations for the first time. Frederick spent many hours learning from one of the greatest warriors of the old generation. In 1758 he wrote "...If I understand anything of my trade...I owe that advantage to Prince Eugene. From him I learn't to hold grand objectives constantly in view and direct all my resources toward those ends." Though the term "grand strategy" was unknown at the time, it was the awareness of this concept that was Prince Eugene's legacy to the young prince.<sup>4</sup>

Frederick learned his lessons well. Frederick William required each of his regiments to demonstrate their readiness at an annual review. In 1735 he promoted his son to major general on the spot because of his excellent performance at that year's review. That this honor was due to military excellence and not nepotism can be assured because of the King's belief that the future welfare of the state rested in large measure on his son's military preparedness.

In June 1740 Frederick ascended to the throne. The Prussia he ruled was far from one of the great powers of Europe that summer. In his view the previous two centuries were characterized by "...the unceasing struggle of German freedom against the despotism of the House of Austria, which governed the weaker princes as slaves..."<sup>5</sup> He believed that Prussia was "...in an untenable position between the small states and the great powers..."<sup>6</sup> To correct this he devised



a national strategy to lift Prussia "...through the frightfulness of its weapons to such a degree of power that it might retain its independence against every great neighbor..."<sup>7</sup> To accomplish this vision he chose to steal the rich province of Silesia from Austria.

The struggle to take and hold this land would define his life. He would fight three wars before Silesia was permanently secured. The First Silesian War, in which Frederick first invaded Silesia, was fought from 1740 to 1741. The Second Silesian War, in which Maria Theresa of Austria hoped to regain Silesia, was fought from 1744 to 1745. And the final struggle, the Seven Years War, was fought from 1756 to 1763. As a result of this titanic struggle in which Frederick defeated the combined forces of Austria, Russia, and France Silesia was finally recognized to be permanently a part of the Kingdom of Prussia.

As the product of an absolute monarchy Frederick, inevitably, was deeply involved in the creation of Prussian national strategy. As a product of the Hohenzollern soldier-kings and of his early training, he just as inevitably was deeply involved in every level of military operations from tactics to strategy. Prussia's rise in standing among the great nations of Europe during his reign is attributable to his ability to operate successfully at each level.

Frederick came to the early realization that Prussia was poor in land, natural resources and manpower vis a vis the great powers of the time. In order to achieve a more equitable position he knew Prussia needed greater access to these elements of national power. He decided to take Silesia, Austria's richest province, to catapult Prussia to greatness.<sup>8</sup>

In order to achieve this vision Frederick knew that he would need a unified population.<sup>9</sup> After all, Prussia was badly outnumbered by any one of the great powers and this strategy was guaranteed to put him in conflict with at least three of them. To this end he immediately issued a series of enlightened decrees which were calculated to win public favor, such as the abolition of torture.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, he admonished his ministers that it was not the King's purpose that "...you should enrich us and oppress our poor subjects."<sup>11</sup> By taking these steps and by making dynastic service the key to upward mobility, he secured the cooperation of the nobility, the land owners and the population at large to ensure his access to taxes and soldiers for the pursuit of his grand strategic vision.<sup>12</sup>

As a national strategist, Frederick never lost sight of the importance of economic strength in the pursuit of national objectives. Indeed, his father had warned him to always put his trust in a good army and hard cash.<sup>13</sup> He made a habit of ensuring that precious metals were always

fashioned into ornaments which could be melted down and converted to cash in times of crisis. During the Second Silesian War he left the Austrians temporarily in control of that treasured land while he returned to Berlin to raise the necessary cash to continue the fight.<sup>14</sup>

After the Seven Years War which finally secured his national objective and at the same time exhausted his nation's power, he continued to use economic power to protect national security. He used trade wars and tariffs to strengthen Prussia vis a vis Austria and he forbade the export of vital raw materials while restricting the import of goods which might harm domestic industry. He did everything in his power to reduce Prussian dependence on foreign powers for material needed to fight future wars. Despite these seemingly archaic policies, he was able to raise a 200 thousand man army to replace the one that had been destroyed in the long war while at the same time maintaining a favorable balance of trade and improving the standard of living of his subjects.<sup>15</sup>

With his national strategy of advancing Prussia's position in Europe by seizing and holding Silesia clearly in mind, Frederick evolved a military strategy to accomplish that end. Because he realized that Prussia was woefully outnumbered and economically weaker than the great European powers, his guiding principle was always to husband the State's scarce resources of men and materiel.<sup>16</sup>

In his early years he pursued a military strategy based on aggressive war and conquest by force which would result in a shifting in the European balance of power and the lifting of Prussia to the status of great power.<sup>17</sup> As such, he launched a surprise attack into Silesia in the hopes of winning a short war. This swift victory would carry the added feature of conserving men and materiel.

The guiding principle of his military strategy for the Seven Years War was still to conserve resources. But this time the situation was different. Through his earlier conquest of Silesia Frederick had indeed altered the balance of power in Europe and Prussia had become a force to be reckoned with. But, he would now fight an alliance of the greatest land powers of Europe simultaneously. A quick victory was out of the question. This time Frederick was forced to advocate a long, low intensity conflict and attempt to wear his opponents down by assuming the strategic defensive.<sup>18</sup> His execution of this strategy was just as adept as his earlier execution of a lightning war. The result was the final achievement of his strategic goal of holding Silesia.

Because Frederick was not only the head of state but also, as Frederick William would have expected, the head of the army, Frederick also functioned at the operational level. He favored offensive operations during his campaigns because these allowed greater freedom for initiative.

However, when faced with a more powerful force he would go on the defensive. Still, the defensive operations were never to be passive and must seize opportunities to attack enemy positions and formations if the situation presented itself. He felt that a commander "...deceives himself who thinks he is conducting well a defensive war when he takes no initiative and remains inactive during the whole campaign."<sup>19</sup>

Frederick also understood the limitations of his own forces at the operational level. Conceptually he knew that in battle the winner should pursue the enemy and destroy him. But his army was not as mobile as Napoleon's and he rarely conducted such operations. Thus the annihilation of the enemy's force was not normally a Frederician objective. Rather his purpose was to force the enemy to move. "To win a battle," he stated, "means to compel your opponent to leave his position."<sup>20</sup>

Frederick's lifting of Prussia to the status of a great power is testimony to his success as a strategist as well a master of operational warfare. But he also excelled at the tactical level. In fact Trevor Depuy states, "Frederick the Great is generally acknowledged as the greatest tactician in modern history."<sup>21</sup> He had an intimate knowledge of every detail necessary to ensure tactical success. His instructions to his generals were filled with such routine matters as how to provide water on the march, how to obtain

Intelligence from civilians, what type of artillery is best suited for winter operations, how to best safeguard convoys, and how to encamp the force are just a few of the subjects he covered at length.<sup>22</sup>

He always had a firm grasp of what was practical and essential at the tactical level. He also understood the importance of training to ensure that his men could perform those essential tasks on the battlefield. To prepare his regiments for combat he devised a training regime which placed artificially difficult demands on his troops. This paid enormous dividends on the battlefield when, under the stress of combat, this rigorous training took over.<sup>23</sup>

Tactically he knew that the commander must be at the critical point at the critical time. As such he always moved with the advance guard. This force was always large enough to hold its position against the enemy until the main army could arrive on the battlefield. By so doing Frederick afforded himself ample time to study the terrain and use it to his advantage in the ensuing battle.<sup>24</sup>

His clear understanding of operations at every level enabled him to ensure a certain consistency between the various levels. Thus, just as his national military strategy was designed to preserve his relatively small army so too were his tactics. His introduction of the oblique order was designed to throw his best troops against the enemy's weakest flank while the rest of the army was arrayed

as an echeloned reserve, prepared to exploit success or cover a retreat. This enabled him to risk the smallest number of forces at the outset of the battle.

Frederick, because of his expertise at every level of operations, made some valuable contributions to military thought. However, "...in general, his achievement lay not so much in inventing new complicated methods as in simplifying those that were too complex."<sup>25</sup> As such, he was a conservative innovator who believed that "It would further human knowledge if, instead of writing new books, we would apply ourselves to making decent extracts of those already written."<sup>26</sup>

Frederick was also very much aware that officer education was sorely lacking. Remember, it was noted above that it was believed that talented youngsters could learn to be great generals by observing the actions of more experienced officers. Frederick thought otherwise. He believed that officers must be educated in order to broaden their vision. Merely producing battlefield commanders was not his goal. He recognized the need to fashion these talented youth into strategists and tacticians as well.<sup>27</sup>

These two convictions led to Frederick's greatest contributions which were his writings for he was a gifted writer who wrote detailed accounts of every one of his campaigns. In the preface to his account of the Seven Years War he identifies the motivation behind his works. He hoped

that succeeding generations would be able to consult his work so that if war ever broke out in the same theater again his writings would "...shorten the work of the men who direct the armies."<sup>28</sup>

His first work of importance was the Principes generaux de la guerre more commonly known as The Instructions of Frederick the Great For His Generals was written in 1746.

Embodying his experiences during the first two Silesian Wars, it contained both philosophical discussions of warfare as well as specific instructions on the details of battle. In many ways this work is considered to have given birth to the Prussian analytical system of warfare that made Prussia and later Germany the premier military land power in Europe for the better part of two centuries.<sup>29</sup>

Despite his greatness, Frederick possessed some profound weaknesses which demand exploration within the framework of this study. Christopher Duffy, among others, points out that our hero often failed to heed his own dictates. At Chotusitz in 1742 and Soor in 1745 Frederick was surprised by the Austrians and defeated when his forces were split. This led him to write in 1748, "If you separate your forces you will be defeated in detail. When you give battle you must concentrate all the troops you can (Quevres, XXVIII, 36) ."<sup>30</sup> Yet in 1759 he attacked a superior Russian force of 80 thousand men at Kunnersdorf in East Prussia with a force of 48 thousand troops. At the same time he allowed



a significant portion of his army under the command of his brother, Prince Henry, to operate far out of support range.<sup>31</sup> The resulting tactical defeat would have been a strategic disaster for Frederick but for Austrian timidity in pursuing the great general and finishing him off.

Though I have already characterized him as a conservative innovator he demonstrated some astonishing blind spots. Assuming command of the army in 1740, he nevertheless resisted any innovations in artillery until the Austrians demonstrated its proper role in the Seven Years War. He seemed unable to accept the fact that an improvement in ordnance could be a true advance in tactics. Thus, he routinely sent the worst troops to that branch and never installed an effective artillery command structure until the middle 1760's. Even then he could not duplicate the Austrian knack of balancing firepower and mobility.<sup>33</sup>

His blind spot for some innovation also extended to his use of cavalry. R. R. Palmer argues, "Frederick hardly knew what to do with such troops which, dispersed and individualistic, could not be extensions of his own mind."<sup>34</sup> He used cavalry purely for shock action and rarely to gather information. Therefore it should not be surprising that during operations in Bohemia in 1744 he frequently was unsure of the Austrians' location despite the fact that he had 20 thousand cavalymen at his disposal. This weakness, admittedly more prevalent in his earlier campaigns, was only

partially solved later on with the introduction of the hussars.<sup>35</sup>

Frederick truly believed that he was preparing his officers for future leadership. He wrote, "I never tire of preaching...and instructing them with all possible care (Principles généraux, 1748, Oeuvres, XXVIII, 41)" Yet he was guilty of the most shabby treatment of many loyal officers. His memoirs contain numerous examples of contemptuous refusals of leave requests, obscure denials of requests for marriage and astonishing ingratitude.<sup>36</sup> He goes so far as to say "...always attribute to your generals the disaster of a battle...You have seen how I punished Finck for the surrender of Maxin, Zastrow for the surrender at Schweidnitz...In point of fact, none of it was their fault: they were mine."<sup>37</sup>

Another serious weakness on the part of this great man was his failure to take council of his key subordinates because he frequently overestimated his own wisdom.<sup>38</sup> On several occasions this led to disaster on the battlefield. At Hochkirch in 1758 he purposely took up an indefensible position a mere one mile from a superior Austrian force. Despite urging from all his top commanders, he was determined to show his contempt for timid Austrian leadership. This lack of respect for his enemy and the advice of his generals cost the lives of 9.4 thousand soldiers when the Austrians attacked, though he did

eventually win the battle due to the timely arrival of reinforcements.

At Kunnersdorf, already cited above as an example where he failed to heed his own advice, he also showed his disdain for the advice of others. Although attacking a much superior force, he did in fact succeed in seizing part of the Russian position. His generals urged him to be satisfied with this as surely this would force the Russians to leave the field. But he arrogantly pressed the attack with his exhausted infantry only to see them routed in the open with the arrival of Austrian cavalry:<sup>39</sup>

So like all men Frederick had his shortcomings. But they didn't call him Great for nothing. Many would argue that the single source of his greatness was in his incredibly strong "sense of the possible united with the daring and clear vision of genius...He sees things as they really are."<sup>40</sup> He had vision.

His strategic vision told him that Prussia could be a great power. To accomplish this vision Prussia would have to both secure greater resources and throw off the yoke of Austrian oppression of the lesser German states. He accomplished both of these by seizing Silesia from Austria and holding it against the efforts of all the great land powers. All his efforts were devoted to this vision. Realizing that he would need the support of the entire population of his tiny kingdom for such a great venture he

secured their support through a series of enlightened decrees and the tying of upward social mobility to dynastic service. And, at the same time he took the necessary economic steps to ensure his subjects maintained a relatively high standard of living.

As a military strategist he knew that his army, much smaller than those of his enemies, must be preserved. Thus he struck with blitzkrieg suddenness to seize Silesia in 1740. And though he changed his strategy to attempt to wear the large coalition down during the Seven Years War, this change was driven by his realization that quick victory under those circumstances was not possible. Still his design was to preserve his fighting force, his center of gravity.

And after the campaigns to hold Silesia were over with the end of the Seven Years War, he embarked on a national strategy that would preserve the exhausted nation's hard won seat at the table of Europe's great powers. Using economic measures he prepared the nation for possible future conflict and rebuilt the standard of living.

At the strategic level he was steadfast in his vision. At the operational level his greatest strength was his aggressive spirit. Whether he was on the strategic offensive as in the first Silesian War or the strategic defensive as in the Seven Years War, he conducted aggressive campaigns. Describing his success in the Seven Years War he

said, "I'm standing in a triangle where I have the Russians on my left, at the right (the Austrians), and the Swedes at my back...The only way I have held my ground to date has been to attack everything there is to attack."<sup>41</sup> And this he did brilliantly, always taking care to attack the most dangerous threat first and preventing the alliance forces from coming together.

Tactically, he proved superior to any other general of his time. Such was his reputation that at one point, after the Russians had seized Berlin, they abandoned that prize immediately upon hearing that Frederick was enroute to take command of Prussian forces in the area.

Here too his aggressive spirit is evident along with his ability to devise tactics that would support his strategy. He devised a strategy that would enable him to fight outnumbered and he carried that down to the tactical level. The oblique order was implemented because he had to have the ability to attack numerically superior forces while conserving his own strength.

Clearly this great man accomplished a great deal. Still, he did die 206 years ago and the world has changed a great deal since then. Therefore it is fair to ask just how relevant is Frederick to the present era. Certainly the passage of time has rendered his thoughts, words and deeds irrelevant to a degree. In fact, by the first half of the 19th century Clausewitz felt that Napoleon had made

traditional Frederician strategy and tactics obsolete. Clausewitz saw Frederician warfare as being restricted by the many handicaps imposed by a ponderous military organization that was unable to pursue war to its climatic ideal of destroying the enemy ala Napoleon.<sup>42</sup>

Frederick's army was indeed very different from those of today. Unlike Napoleon's army or even like today's great armies which could and still can draw on large segments of the population to fight its battles, Frederick's options were decidedly more limited. Because his country's population was so small he was forced to limit the involvement of his own subjects in his wars just so he could keep the economy viable. Frederick "regarded the business of fighting as entirely the concern of the regular army."<sup>43</sup> He heartily believed that during war recruits should only be drawn from one's own country only in the direst emergency and died believing that using foreigners to do his fighting was the only sensible thing to do.<sup>44</sup> How different it is today when the United States seeks to ensure that its army is unable to go to war without the activation of the reserves.

This reliance on foreigners contributed a great deal to the ponderousness of his army. Without any stake in the future of Prussia, these men were often quick to desert during difficult times. This placed limitations on his prosecution of warfare. To reduce desertions he frequently

was forced to use his cavalry to guard the flanks and rear of his own formations to prevent men from fleeing. Thus, the cavalry could hardly act as his eyes and ears. He was also forced to limit night movements so as not to afford these less than committed warriors the cloak of darkness with which to make their escape. The contrast with today's experience is too obvious to point out.

We must also remember that Prussia was a totalitarian state. In Frederick's view all thinking is done centrally in the mind of the king. Therefore, the principal aim of discipline in his army was to turn it into an instrument of his own mind where no one reasons and everyone executes.<sup>45</sup> Here again this line of thinking is irrelevant to how to fight today. Now we speak of "Auftragstaktik" and ensuring that commander's intent is understood two levels down so that our subordinates may be empowered to take the initiative.

It would seem that his totalitarian view can be seen in his view of the commander in chief. Frederick wrote that the king "...must have acquired the greatest knowledge conceivable in all details of military affairs...He will fall as commander in chief...if he cares [not] about the countless details [of maintaining an army]." <sup>46</sup> Compare this to today when senior leaders are not required to know every minute detail but can focus on the big picture while relying on competent staffs to think through the countless details.

That some or much of Frederick's relevance to our own era should be eroded by time is not surprising. What is surprising is how much of what he did and said remains relevant despite the enormous changes that have been wrought by the intervening years. That relevance exists at every level from the strategic to the tactical.

His strategy for the Seven Years War has often been compared unfavorably to that of Napoleon. Frederick's has been called a strategy of exhaustion- images of World War I trench warfare arise. Napoleon fostered a strategy of annihilation- images of blitzkrieg come to mind. But Napoleon never faced such overwhelming odds as Frederick did in the Seven Years War. Gerhard Ritter asks, "But when one faces a superior enemy is the ruthless application of the offense always best? Or is it better to exhaust the enemy through continued limited actions, pursuing the war with the least possible expenditure of force?"<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, despite his criticism of Frederick, Clausewitz admired the King's ability to pursue great objectives with limited means, to undertake "nothing beyond his powers, and [to apply] just enough [force] to gain his object."<sup>48</sup> Certainly it is easy to see the relevance of limited war in today's nuclear era. Jay Luvaas asserts that "...it is possible that Frederick might...enlighten us as we undergo that mental retooling essential to our understanding of wars which of necessity and for our very survival must remain



limited."<sup>49</sup> It is possible that this understanding prevented Saddam Hussein from launching chemical weapons when he contemplated the possible American response.

Still of relevance today also is Frederick's attention to Prussia's economy while he pursued his strategic vision. He asserts, "Neither politics nor the army can prosper if finances are not kept in the greatest order...Great political views, the maintenance of the military and the best conceived plans...will all remain lethargic if not animated by money."<sup>50</sup> One can easily see the difficulties George Bush or any future American president will face in formulating a New World Order if the nation's economy is not restored to good health. Additionally, the implications of a weak economy in maintaining a strong army are being uncovered today in Congress.

Failure to heed Frederick's advice can have catastrophic results. In his view there must be a firm balance between economic production and military power or the army will become impotent.<sup>51</sup> It is obvious that devoting a disproportionate segment of its GNP to military spending, the Soviet Union illustrated the consequences aptly.

The old Prussian's strategic use of alliances also remains applicable today. Surveying a situation in which any one of several powers could crush his tiny nation, he argued that "...prudence requires that alliances should be

formed...as much to secure aid in case of attack as to repress the dangerous plans of enemies."<sup>52</sup> Thus did Frederick align himself with France during the first Silesian War as a counter to Austria's great strength. And so too did he turn to Great Britain for aid during the Seven Years War. The relevance of this view to NATO's success in repressing Soviet expansionism in Europe can hardly be overstated.

Frederick's thoughts on strategic initiative are still of interest. Writing in his Antimachiavelli before he became king he states, "It is better to forestall the enemy than to find yourself anticipated by him" or else you could find yourself fighting a defensive war on your own territory.<sup>53</sup> It would be remarkable if his surprise attack at the beginning of the Seven Years War were not motivated by the same factors that led to the Israeli attack that opened the 1967 Six Day War.<sup>54</sup> In both instances large coalitions were preparing to launch attacks of their own against smaller enemies.

At the operational level Frederick also retains a good deal of his relevance. In discussing campaign planning he argues that "...military calculations alone were insufficient because the belligerents might be able to call on the help of allies." Therefore he felt that campaign plans were "...of value only so far as they are in accordance with the political scene."<sup>55</sup> The parallel with

Desert Storm is obvious. CENTCOM war planners took steps to ensure a prominent role for Arab forces in liberating Kuwait city as well as in responding to the Iraqi attack on Khafji. This helped guarantee the cohesion of the UN alliance while denying Saddam propaganda opportunities concerning US dominance of the coalition.

His insistence on offensive operations even within the context of a strategic defensive holds valuable lessons as well. During the Seven Years War, though on the strategic defensive, he attacked whenever he could and against the force that posed the greatest threat. Consider the alternative outcome if Saddam had maintained the offensive at the operational level in August 1992 even while his strategic objective would be to merely defend that which he already had.

At the tactical level much of Frederick's thinking may have been overcome by events and certainly there are other great captains more worthy of study today. Still, even here a degree of relevance is evident.

One could start with his oblique order which was used to throw strength against weakness while preserving the force. Surely making contact with the minimum force is at the heart of the squad wedge while finding and attacking the weakest enemy flank must have been uppermost in GEN Schwartzkopf's mind when he threw his Hall Mary.

In almost every battle he fought Frederick fought outnumbered. He demonstrated that smaller forces can defeat larger ones by maintaining superior mobility. He took several measures to assure his forces were more mobile than his adversary's force. He trained his men hard, forcing them to perform tasks on the training field that exceeded what might be expected on the battlefield. This is much in line with National Training Center thinking. LTG Pete Taylor, then a BG in command of the NTC, told me in 1988 that he expected that the BLUEFOR commander would have to do everything perfectly in order to win. This paid big dividends during Desert Storm.

So it should now be clear that they don't call him great for nothing. This ruler of a small German state, through the force of his personality and clarity of vision transformed Prussia into a great European power. His fighting spirit was extraordinary as he undertook to fulfill his vision in the face of enormous odds. Yet he never wavered. Realizing he would fight outnumbered he devised a national and a military strategy that could succeed. He then developed operational and tactical procedures that were in perfect harmony with his strategic goals. To be sure, he was flawed by numerous weaknesses and time has eroded his relevance. Still, as we have seen his strengths more than compensated for his weaknesses and there still is a great deal to be learned from his ability to defeat forces that

were far larger than his own. No doubt about it. They  
don't call him great for nothing.

## ENDNOTES

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3. Christopher Duffy, The Military Life of Frederick the Great, p. 9.
4. Ibid., p. 17.
5. Heinrich von Treitschke, The Life of Frederick the Great, p. 133.
6. Ibid., p. 135.
7. Ibid., p. 136.
8. Walter H. Nelson, The Soldier Kings- The House of Hohenzollern, p. 169.
9. Hans Rosenberg, Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy- The Prussian Experience 1660-1815, p. 156.
10. Nelson, p. 152.
11. Ibid., p. 151.
12. Rosenberg, p. 44.
13. Duffy, p. 8.
14. Nancy Mitterand, Frederick the Great, p. 147.
15. S. Fischer-Fabian, Prussia's Glory- The Rise of a Military State, p. 268.
16. R. R. Palmer, "Frederick the Great, Guilbert, Bulow: From Dynastic to Modern War," Makers of Modern War (edited by Peter Paret), p. 102.
17. Rosenberg, p. 156.
18. Palmer, p. 102.
19. Ibid., p. 104.
20. Ibid., p. 103.
21. Trevor N. Dupuy, The Military Life of Frederick the Great of Prussia, p. 119.

22. Jay Luvaas, Frederick the Great on the Art of War.  
p. 20.

23. Duffy, p. 318.

24. Ibid., p. 307.

25. Gerhard Ritter, Frederick the Great, p. 147.

26. Luvaas, p. 51.

27. Nelson, p. 174.

28. Duffy, p. 301.

29. Depuy, p. 78.

30. Duffy, p. 303.

31. Depuy, pp. 131-134.

32. Duffy, p. 304.

33. Ibid., p. 321.

34. Palmer, p. 100.

35. Ritter, p. 174.

36. Duffy, p. 315.

37. Frederick the Great, The Confessions of Frederick the Great, p. 82.

38. Rosenberg, p. 189.

39. Fischer-Fabian, p. 249.

40. von Treitschke, pp. 130-131.

41. Fischer-Fabian, p. 244.

42. Ritter, pp. 129-130.

43. Duffy, p. 295.

44. Palmer, p. 98.

45. Ibid., p. 99.

46. Luvaas, p. 41.

47. Ritter, p. 130.

48. Luvaas, p. 24.
49. Ibid., p. 28.
50. Ibid., p. 40.
51. Palmer, p. 97.
52. Luvaas, p. 37.
53. Duffy, p. 301.
54. Nelson, p. 187.
55. Duffy, p. 301.



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