Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte, Comte de Guibert's Military Reforms: Enlightened Evolution or Revolutionary Change?

Jonathan Abel

On 5 November 1757, a mostly French army of 42,000 soldiers met a Prussian army of 22,000 at Rossbach. Despite their numerical inferiority, the Prussians crushed the French. Rossbach proved to be a watershed for the French army. Once the finest in Europe, the French army had been decimated by a new military power: Frederick the Great's Prussia. Rossbach suggested that the Old Regime system of static, position-based, limited war was outmoded. Replacing it was a maneuver-based warfare that would evolve from Frederick to Napoleon and come to dominate Europe until the Great War.[1]

Following Rossbach, French military thinkers quickly recognized the new military paradigm and began to reform the French army. Beginning with Étienne-François, duc de Choiseul, a series of reformers in the Ministry of War modernized and transformed the French army. These reformers adopted the best of Frederick's strategy and tactics, beginning an evolutionary process that would culminate in the domination of Europe by Napoleon Bonaparte. Several military theorists contributed to this process, chief among them a young *philosophe* named Guibert.[2]

LE COMTE DE GUIBERT.

Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte, Comte de Guibert, son of a prominent French officer and bureaucrat, spent his life in the French army. Reaching maturity in the post-Rossbach reform period, Guibert was uniquely positioned to offer the army a series of reforms that would have far-reaching impact. In 1772, he produced the *Essai Général de Tactique*, an examination of the contemporary state of warfare and Guibert's proposed reforms. The central tenet of Guibert's *Essai* is the rejection of the limited, static warfare that had served the French so poorly at Rossbach. Guibert soundly rejected the complex, scientific systems of war that had come to dominate Old Regime warfare. Instead, he proposed a simple, flexible, maneuver-based warfare that would reduce the size of armies and allow them to maneuver effectively on the battlefield.

Guibert also advocated the rejection of a professional or mercenary army in favor of a citizen army, arguing that citizens fighting for their country would serve as more effective soldiers than professionals fighting for glory or mercenaries fighting for pay. The *Essai* was written to reform the French army in the wake of its devastating defeat at Frederick's hands in the Seven Years' War. Its influence, however, would reach far beyond the limited scope of the Old Regime. Guibert's *Essai* did not appear in a vacuum, nor does it represent a revolution in warfare. Instead, the *Essai* marks a single step in the evolution of European warfare.

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[1] T. C. W. Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars, 1787-1802* (New York: Arnold, 1996), 1-5.

[2] Stephen Wilkinson, *The French Army before Napoleon: Lectures Delivered Before the University of Oxford in Michaelmas Term, 1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), 89.

This paper will trace that evolutionary process. It began with the static, positional warfare of the Old Regime and was radically changed by Frederick's maneuver-based oblique order. The French reformers, led by Guibert, adopted Frederick's strategy and developed new corresponding tactics, logistics, and doctrines to suit. In the 1790s, French Revolutionary armies largely put the theories of Guibert, *et al* into practice. It would be Napoleon, however, who would take the reforms of his predecessors and build on them, completing the evolutionary process and creating the most powerful army in Europe in 1805.

Frederick the Great

Warfare in the Old Regime, 1648-1763

Old Regime warfare was dominated by Enlightenment thinking. The Thirty Years' War saw mercenary armies rage across central Europe, devastating much of Germany. Casting off the religious fervor of the preceding wars, scientific ideas and thought processes came to dominate European warfare by the late seventeenth-century. This resulted in deliberate, methodical warfare dominated by various "systems."

First among these systems was that of Sébastien Le Prestre, Seigneur de Vauban. Marshal of France during the reign of Louis XIV, Vauban entirely redesigned fortification systems. Vauban's fortresses were large, complex, and extremely difficult for a besieging army to successfully assault. Vauban's fortifications soon spread across Europe, effecting a change in warfare. An Old Regime army could not leave a Vauban fortress in its rear for fear that its garrison would sally forth and destroy communication and supply lines. The successful siege of a Vauban fortress required a system of siege works almost as complex as the fortress itself. The investment and siege of a Vauban fortress was a methodical, scientific affair that could take weeks or months. More often than not, the besieging army contented itself with bombarding the fortress into submission. The net result of the Vauban fortress was a return to the strategic defensive in Old Regime warfare.[3]

Old Regime armies were larger than their predecessors, chiefly in response to the increased efficacy of fortifications.[4] They were professional armies composed of mercenaries who fought for pay with no particular loyalty to their nation or commander. Often, a "nation's" army would in fact be largely composed of soldiers from other nations. Old Regime soldiers were drawn from the dregs of society, often including criminals and other social misfits. Training was harsh and was accompanied by severe corporal punishment, resulting in high desertion rates.[5]

Warfare was limited by several factors, chiefly logistics. Louis XIV's reign saw the advent of

[3] Christopher Duffy, *The Military Experience in the Age of Reason* (New York: Atheneum, 1988), 289-293.
[4] See Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[5] See M. S. Anderson, *War and Society in Europe of the Old Regime, 1617-1789,* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

the magazine system, in which supply depots were be placed on the line of an army's advance to provide food, clothing, and ammunition. Communication lines ran parallel to supply lines. An Old Regime army abandoned its supply and communication lines at its own peril.[6]

Strategy and tactics were also affected by these factors. Unmotivated by their pay or any form of patriotic sentiment, and mindful of the large monetary burden they represented to their states, armies rarely fought each other to extinction. Armies were arrayed for battle in mutually opposing lines with cavalry on the flanks and battalion guns interspersed throughout. Armies marched in column, wheeled to form a line, and engaged the enemy. Engagements were fought until one army demonstrated a superior position, whereupon the other army would retire from the field. Drill books were needlessly complicated, requiring uneducated soldiers to know a myriad of commands, formations, and evolutions. Positional warfare dominated the field, with battles fought for control of an advantageous position. Military thinkers of the Old Regime debated endlessly on the merits of line versus column. In every way, the wars of the Old Regime were limited wars. They were dynastic rather than national, fought for limited objectives, and sought to defeat the enemy with attrition rather than annihilation (see Figure 1).[7]

Frederick the Great's Prussia was the epitome of Old Regime warfare. Frederick's army was well trained and drilled and largely mercenary. It fought dynastic wars under Frederick's personal supervision and rigid control. However, Frederick introduced important changes, beginning the long evolution from positional to maneuver-based war. Frederick's invasion of Silesia in 1740 "gave Europe a taste of what would later be called blitzkrieg." Frederick practiced a "short and lively" war that would defeat his enemies without exhausting the limited resources of Prussia. Frederick was not afraid to abandon from his supply lines to engage an enemy army, as he demonstrated in the Seven Years' War. He developed an administrative unit for an army on the march that would lay the foundation for the modern division. He advocated the pursuit of a beaten enemy with cavalry to finish the fleeing army, much as the French were pursued after Rossbach. Most importantly, Frederick restored maneuver to the battlefield. He instituted the famous oblique order, allowing his smaller army to outflank and crush an enemy army. This enabled his disciplined armies to overcome their numerical inferiority and helped Frederick to win the War of Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War. These changes would be adopted by the French, forming the important first step in the evolutionary process from Old Regime to Napoleon (see Figure 2).[8]

Guibert and the French Reforms, 1763-1789

After the crushing defeat at Rossbach, the French army began to institute a series of reforms based on Frederician principles and the French experience in the Seven Years' War. In the decades after the 1763 Treaty of Paris, the Ministry of War sought to remake the French army. Choiseul, Minister of War from 1761 to 1770, greatly reduced the number of officers in the French army, eliminated recruiting by officers, and encouraged Jean-Baptiste Vaquette de Gribeauval's efforts to reform the

[6] Duffy 189-267.

[7] R. R. Palmer, "Frederick the Great, Guibert, Bülow: From Dynastic to National War" in *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, edited by Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 91-94.

[8] *Ibid*, 95-102.

artillery. These changes encountered opposition, particularly by the enemies of Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour, who held Louis XVI's ear and firmly believed in the efficacy of the Old Regime. Despite her interference, the Ministry of War managed to adopt a series of reforms. Choiseul and later ministers relied on the writings of various military reformers throughout the Ministry of War. After 1772, the leading reformer was a young colonel named Guibert.[9]

Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte Guibert was born in 1743 to a career army officer, likely of the bourgeoisie. The elder Guibert served with the French army in Bohemia and Flanders during the War of Austrian Succession, where he experienced Frederick's blitzkrieg firsthand. He retired in 1752 to see to the education of his son. Guibert was educated first in his hometown of Montauban, then in Paris, where he studied military theory. He received an army commission at a young age, as was the practice in eighteenth-century France. In 1757 during the Seven Years' War, his father returned to the army as an aide to Charles de Rohan, prince de Soubise, general of the French army at Rossbach. The young Guibert accompanied his father, earning valuable experience and firsthand knowledge of the French army and its doctrine. Both were taken prisoner after the French defeat. Their Prussian captivity lasted for eighteen months, during which Guibert observed Frederick the Great's military technique for himself and learned much.[10]

Their release and the subsequent Treaty of Paris found both Guiberts bereft of any significant duty. This allowed the elder Guibert to educate his son in both the art and the science of war, laying the foundation for Guibert's later work. In 1767, Guibert's father was promoted to *maréchal du camp* and ennobled, allowing the family to adopt the noble *de.* The following year, Guibert's father was named to the Ministry of War under Choiseul while Guibert himself furthered his education in philosophy and literature. The two Guiberts likely collaborated on the 1769 *Instructions for Light Troops*. During this time, Guibert also wrote most of the *Essai*. In 1770, Guibert was dispatched to Corsica. As an officer of the Corsican Legion charged with putting down a local rebellion, Guibert distinguished himself by his personal bravery and leadership skills, earning the Cross of St. Louis and impressing his commander, General Vaux. Guibert was brevited colonel and placed in command of the Corsican Legion. He stayed in Corsica until 1772, when he departed for Paris and published the *Essai*.[11]

The *Essai Général de Tactique*

The *Essai Général de Tactique* is divided into three sections. The first is a discussion of contemporary European politics, the second of "elementary tactics," and the third of "grand tactics." The first section would echo the writings of the non-military *philosophes* with the renewal of the concept of the citizen-soldier. The second section would have the most profound effect on the French military, while the third section would influence future military commanders. Guibert's chief doctrine is the adoption of mobile warfare characterized by a well-trained, maneuverable, and flexible army.

Guibert begins the *Essai* with a discourse on European politics. He praises ancient Rome for its "patriotism and virtue" and criticizes

[9] Wilkinson 89.

[10] Matti Lauerma, *Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte de Guibert (1743-1790),* (Helsinki: Soumalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1989), 12-24.

[11] *Ibid*.

modern European states for being weak, decadent, and inefficient. Guibert states that modern states could reform to a degree, realigning themselves on the Roman model. Guibert's ideal state is entirely self-sustaining, drawing from its own resources to provide for all of its needs. Its administration would be simple and efficient, and it would require a strong and competent leader, a "man of genius." Most importantly for his military theory, Guibert believed that a state should cast off the professional mercenary army of the Old Regime in favor of a citizen army. Guibert believed that no contemporary society in Europe was capable of such an army. "But supposing that a people should arise in Europe vigorous in spirit, in government, in the means at its disposal, a people who with hardy qualities should combine a national army and a settled plan of aggrandizement. We should see such a people subjugate its neighbors and overwhelm our weak constitutions like the north wind bending reeds." Despite the failure of contemporary societies to produce such an army, Guibert believed that certain nations could reform themselves and advance the science of warfare. Guibert thought the only contemporary state with the resources to properly reform was France.[12]

A reformed nation would necessarily need a reformed science of war, rejecting overly complicated scientific warfare in favor of simple, flexible war. Guibert believed that a nation's army should be small, as Old Regime armies had grown too large. An army should combine all arms of combat under one unit commanded by a general skilled in all areas of war. Drill, maneuver, and deployment should be greatly simplified, lending the army a new flexibility. Most importantly, an army should always favor mobility and maneuverability over the position-based warfare of the Old Regime.[13]

These recommendations form the basis of the second and longest section of the *Essai*, Guibert's discussion of tactics. Guibert's tactics are largely concerned with formations, training, and drill. Throughout his discussion, Guibert repeatedly emphasizes his belief in mobility, maneuverability, simplicity, and flexibility.

Guibert begins with line infantry, the most important part of the army as they bear the brunt of the fighting. He retains the battalion as his tactical unit for infantry, as he believed that it was still serviceable with minor changes. Guibert rejected the Old Regime tradition of dividing battalions into two or four sections. He proposed to divide battalions into three divisions of three companies each; this provided a natural division of left, right, and center within the basic tactical unit. Guibert felt that the most important aspect of contemporary warfare was firepower. To this end, he soundly rejected *l'ordre profund* in favor of *l'ordre mince*. A line would offer far more firepower than a column. Guibert favored the three deep line, rejecting further ranks as a waste of firepower. Guibert's lines were between 140 and 180 men long, as a longer line would be beyond the ability of its commander to control. This would provide for battalions of approximately 400 to 500 men, which Quimby notes were "considerably smaller than any advocated by previous writers."[14] Guibert believed that smaller battalions were more flexible and maneuverable, more easily commanded on the field.[15]

[12] Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte de Guibert, *Essai Général de Tactique,* (Paris: Chez C. Plomteaux, 1773), I: v-lxxviii. Quote from Palmer 103.

[13] *Ibid* I:xcvii-xcix.

[14] Quimby, Robert. *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare: The Theory of Military Tactics in Eighteenth-Century France* , (New York: Columbia University press, 1957), 117.

[15] Guibert I:29-27.

Guibert believed that the Old Regime notion of keeping the infantry line perfectly intact while on the march or while deployed was nonsense. Guibert essentially advocated the devolution of march and battle order to the battalion. While the larger administrative units (e.g. the regiment) would provide an outline of the march and even the organization, it was left to the battalion to properly maneuver around obstacles. This simplified the complex system of the march and deployment techniques of the Old Regime, where the entire army was expected to maintain a close formation. Guibert allowed for a formation disrupted by terrain as long as the army as a whole maintained its cohesion. This also allowed battalion commanders to act autonomously, improving their flexibility.[16]

Guibert's methods of deployment relied on simplicity and speed. Battalions would form battalion columns for march and deployment into line for battle, just as they had done during the Old Regime. Guibert's advance was to strip away the complex maneuvers of the Old Regime in favor of a simple, flexible method for deploying troops. To this end, he proposed the elimination of all but four basic evolutions.[17]

Guibert's first evolution was a doubling of the ranks to protect vulnerable infantry from cavalry. The Old Regime had done this by inserting each battalion rank in between the ranks of the neighboring battalion, a time-consuming process.[18] Guibert simplified the process by containing the maneuver within a single battalion. He would have the right half-companies move forward and the left half-companies move in between them, quickly doubling the ranks in the face of charging cavalry. The result was a kind of column and a predecessor to the Napoleonic square. The second evolution was a simple wheel, which Guibert believed the Old Regime had done adequately; he proposed only a minor technical change.[19]

Guibert's third and fourth evolutions were instructions for deployment from column to line and vice versa. Old Regime armies had complicated deployment methods requiring many turning and "processional movements."[20] Guibert rejected this approach and simplified the process significantly. His method for deploying from column to line called for the first company (grenadiers) to face right and the other companies to face left. At the order, the first company filed at double step to the right as the following companies did the same to the left. On another order, the companies faced forward and prepared for battle. Deployment from line to column was performed as the exact reverse of deployment from column to line. Guibert noted that deployment was not held to a rigid standard – the first company could deploy to the left, for example. The result stripped away all of the complicated, scientific maneuvers of the Old Regime in favor of a simple, flexible system.

Despite his advocacy of firepower, Guibert noted that certain situations that require use of the column. He identified five of these. The first was a formation in column to resist charging cavalry. The column closed up facing the four sides and withdraws to secure ground. The second and third uses of columns were essentially outgrowths of the four evolutions. The second was for maneuver into battle and the third was for maneuver in battle, both using the evolutions. The fourth use was for countermaneuver, opposing an enemy's movements to reduce their effectiveness. These

[16] *Ibid* I:48-70.
[17] Evolutions in following paragraphs from Guibert I: 90-94.
[18] Quimby 121.
[19] *Ibid* I:94-104.
[20] *Ibid* 123.

maneuvers had all been used by the Old Regime, but "it was Guibert's method of…deployment which made it possible to [perform them in battle] without serious danger."[21]

The fifth use of the column was for attack. In a passage worth quoting in its entirety, Guibert notes serious problems with the unitary attack column of the Old Regime:

> Here is how all attacks in column take shape. One gets under way; one approaches the enemy; one cries to the soldiers "Close up, close up!" The mechanical and sheep-like instinct which causes every man to crowd upon his neighbor, because he thinks to put himself out of reach of danger by it, has already caused only too much execution of this command. The soldiers are then crowded, the ranks are soon mingled, nearly to the front rank and to the exterior files, which maintain some freedom of movement. The column forms no more than a tumultuous mass, incapable of maneuver. If the head and flanks of that column are struck by a lively fire, if it does not overcome the obstacles which it encounters at the first effort, the officers can no longer make themselves heard, there are no more intervals between divisions, the soldier dazed begins to fire in the air, the mass whirls, disperses, and can only rally at a very great distance.[22]

Guibert advocated a much more flexible and maneuverable option. Rather than combining the attack into one column, he suggests the use of many small columns. These columns were to be separated by a short distance and screened by light cavalry. The columns would advance at normal step, gradually increasing pace as they neared the enemy's line. Officers would be required to maintain order and separation between the columns. If the attack succeeded, the light cavalry would pursue and harass the enemy to prevent counterattack. Guibert notes that his instructions for columns effectively reduce the various Old Regime columns to one that was capable of performing all of the necessary tasks under virtually any circumstance. This is Guibert's doctrine in practice. He seeks to reduce the complicated and useless systems of the Old Regime to their essence, providing for an infantry that is flexible, maneuverable, and adaptable to any given situation.

Guibert devotes short sections of the *Essai* to the other branches of the army. He treats in order cavalry, light infantry, and artillery. In each section, he emphasizes his doctrine of simplicity, maneuverability, and flexibility. He also stresses the subordination of the other branches to the line infantry, supporting it and completing its attacks.

Guibert notes that cavalry served several important roles supporting the infantry. Cavalry should be used for scouting, raids, screening the infantry, pursuit of a broken army, and for shock. Just as Guibert's basic tactical infantry unit was the battalion, so his basic tactical cavalry unit was the squadron. Guibert's squadron was eighty men, reduced in size from the Old Regime squadron in order to be more flexible. Guibert seeks to reduce the amount of cavalry across the army.[23]

[21] Quimby 127.
[22] Quoted in *Ibid* 124.
[23] Cavalry discussion in Guibert I:169-214.

Guibert divided his cavalry into two sections: light and heavy. Light cavalry was composed of dragoons and hussars and performed the first four roles. Heavy cavalry was to execute shock charges. Of the two, Guibert necessarily preferred light cavalry, as it was more maneuverable and adaptable to rapidly changing battlefield situations. Despite this, however, he acknowledged the usefulness of heavy cavalry even while he advocated significant changes for it. Heavy cavalry must be made more mobile; toward this end, Guibert advocated the removal of the traditional cuirass in favor of a series of draped chains to protect the cavalryman from enemy sabres. This served to make the cavalryman lighter and necessarily more maneuverable. His shock charge with heavy cavalry was performed in much the same manner as the infantry charge in column: gradually increasing in pace as the cavalry neared the enemy line, reaching the fastest pace just before contact. This charge was made in line rather than in column, as Guibert feels that cavalry could not properly act in column. Guibert's cavalry tactics rejected Old Regime cavalry tactics in favor of a new style. This style relied on two factors: maneuver on the flanks of the enemy and local numerical superiority. Guibert's smaller squadrons allowed for the concentration of force on the enemy's weak points, of which a skilled commander could take full advantage.

Guibert adopted Frederick's use of artillery in two significant ways. The first was the subordination of artillery to the rest of the army, referring to it as an auxiliary rather than a full arm of the army, as the artillery was the one branch that could not fight on its own. The second was to greatly increase the mobility of artillery. As with cavalry, Guibert sought to reduce the amount of artillery in relation to the army. He soundly rejected the grand batteries and battalion guns of the Old Regime, as they slowed armies and prevented maneuver. He advocated instead the use of small, maneuverable batteries of Gribeauval guns. These batteries were to be used against an enemy line, concentrating fire on the enemy line's weak point. The main purpose of artillery fire against infantry was psychological, creating local disruptions for infantry and cavalry to exploit. Additional artillery remained in the artillery park, to be brought up if necessary to support the infantry. Guibert noted that the best firing position for artillery was the oblique and on a slight rise, as these two factors allowed for the maximum damage from solid shot or canister. These factors combined to produce light, maneuverable, and flexible artillery.[24]

Guibert also addresses light infantry. He notes that Old Regime armies had become overly fond of light troops, employing them in excessive numbers. Rather than separate companies of light infantry, Guibert instead suggested that line troops be deployed as skirmishers when necessary. This would give an army a great advantage in flexibility over other armies. Line troops would also have the advantage of greater discipline over the enemy's light troops. Light troops would perform the same duties as light cavalry, with whom they were often paired. These included scouting, screening an army, and harassing the enemy. Guibert notes that a vital aspect of scouting was the accurate reporting of enemy numbers and positions, as light troops tended to exaggerate these factors.[25]

Guibert's grand tactics are essentially his elementary tactics writ large. Stripping away the scientific systems of the Old Regime was key, leading to a greater flexibility and mobility. Guibert argues that the most important aspect of grand tactics is march, as an army that could swiftly and easily deploy

[24] *Ibid* I:231-272.
[25] *Ibid* I:215-230.

itself would have an advantage over other armies. To this end, Guibert adopts the division system first used by de Broglie. Just as the battalion was the tactical unit, so Guibert's division was the strategic unit of an army. Divisions were combined arms units composed of infantry brigades, a cavalry brigade, and artillery. Like his battalions, Guibert's divisions were smaller than enemy armies and, like battalions, made up for this weakness with superior maneuverability. This maneuverability enabled an army's commanding general to dispose of complicated battle plans in favor of a more flexible deployment decided only after the enemy and terrain had been properly reconnoitered. Guibert's divisions were also flexible enough to countermaneuver, granting an army an immeasurable advantage over an Old Regime army locked into a preconceived battle plan.[26]

Guibert also advocated a greater mobility for his divisions. Old Regime armies used the same order for march as for battle; Guibert wholly rejected this notion. The flexibility of his divisions would allow for an army to deploy as necessary from march order. This greatly increased the speed and flexibility of an army as it stripped away the complicated maneuvers necessary in an Old Regime army to deploy from march order to battle order. Guibert argued that another vital aspect to mobility is the rejection of the Old Regime magazine system so prized by the armies of Louis XIV. Guibert noted that these magazines slowed an army considerably, greatly reducing its mobility. He argued that an army should instead forage for food and supplies from the land in which it operates. This would liberate the army from supply lines, granting it a mobility almost incomprehensible to an Old Regime general. Guibert also rejected the Vauban system of siegecraft, noting that the investment of a Vauban fortress necessarily required an army to maintain a static position for a lengthy period of time, necessarily removing all mobility.

Guibert believed that a necessary aspect of his new tactics is an emphasis on training. In stripping away the systematic approach of the Old Regime in favor of a simpler, more flexible approach, Guibert necessarily placed a greater responsibility on the individual. This responsibility required a greater discipline to be put to successful use. He advocated constant drill to hone both a soldier's instincts and a general's battlefield command. For elementary tactics, Guibert stressed fire training to increase the battalion's fire discipline and thus its firepower. Guibert wholly rejected the Prussian volume of fire model in favor of voluntary fire. To this end, he argued for continual training with live ammunition to improve the soldier's aim. He also argued for bayonet training, as the psychological effects of a bayonet wielded properly were immeasurable. Drill would be simple, reinforcing the concepts of discipline and maneuver as a unit. These same concepts would be applied to grand tactics, necessarily on a larger scale. Guibert contended that a successful general, a "man of genius," would be trained in all aspects of the army, understanding the proper use of artillery, cavalry, infantry, and light infantry. As each of these would be included in a division, this training would enable a division commander to properly deploy and utilize his forces. As the drill was vital for a battalion, so was the training camp vital for an army. Guibert noted that a general who conducts training exercises with entire armies in realistic situations is fully prepared to use the same army on the battlefield.

The Adoption of Guibert's Theories: The French Revolution, 1772-1799

[26] Grand tactics discussion from Guibert II.

Guibert published his *Essai* in 1772 to great acclaim. Lauerma attributes this to four factors: Guibert's war experience, his attainment of the rank of colonel at a young age, his repeated demonstrations of courage on the battlefield, and his winning of the Cross of St. Louis. Almost overnight, Guibert became a darling of the *salons*. Military thinkers and *philosophes* alike debated the merits of the *Essai*, and written responses appeared to support or rebut Guibert.[27] In the last years of the Old Regime, the reforms of Choiseul, St. Germain, and Guibert himself transformed the French army from an institution of "indiscipline and cowardice" to an army not far removed from the prestigious days of Louis XIV. Guibert's tactics and strategy were adopted, in practice if not in name, throughout the French army.[28] During the ten years of the Revolution, Guibert's principles were adopted by the French army and the state. However, the tumultuous nature of the Revolution would work against these principles as much as for them. The Revolution was a critical step in the evolutionary process, but for this reason it could not complete it.

While the French army may have appeared to be repaired by the 1780s, in reality the reforms exposed deep rifts within the fundamental structures of the army. Noble officers resented new privileges given to non-commissioned and non-noble officers. Reflecting the divide between nobility and bourgeoisie apparent in larger French society, officers of the traditional nobility despised the officers drawn from the largely bourgeois *noblesse de la robe* and those promoted for merit. This divide culminated in the Ségur Decree of 22 May 1781, which restricted the officer corps to those who could demonstrate four degrees of nobility. The growing discontent of the enlisted men and excluded officers would play a vital role in the Revolution.[29]

On 14 July 1789, a mob stormed the Bastille, freeing prisoners and seizing ammunition and weapons. The disaffected French army was vital to the success of the operation: not only did Royal Guard units stand aside and allow the assault, but defectors from the army also participated in and perhaps led the insurrection. The division between noble and non-noble had resulted in a breakdown of command authority. Army units across the nation refused orders to put down insurrections, some even mutinying against their noble officers and joining the Revolution. In 1791, the flight of Louis XVI to Varennes completely severed the nobility from the army. Their oaths of allegiance to the king now void, most of the remaining noble officers fled the army in fear of their lives. This paved the way for the regeneration of the French army along Revolutionary lines.[30]

In 1791 and 1792, the Revolutionary government undertook drastic steps to reform the line army and, perhaps more importantly, to win its loyalty. Promotion for merit made a triumphant return to the army. Units were allowed to elect a percentage of officers, the rest being appointed by the legislature. Corporal punishment was replaced with blows from an old shoe. Guibert's theories were formally adopted in the Regulations of 1791, which advocated his doctrine of simplicity, flexibility, and maneuver as well as many of his technical tactical recommendations.[31]

[27] Lauerma 24.
[28] Blanning 16

[29] Samuel Scott, *The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution: The Role and Development of the Line Army 1787-93*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 4-32.
[30] *Ibid* 46-70.
[31] See Irenée Amelot de Lacroix, *Rules and Regulations for the Field Exercise and Maneuvers of the French Infantry issued August 1, 1971: and the Maneuvers added which have been since Adopted by the Emperor Napoleon: also, the Maneuvers of the Field Artillery with the Infantry*, (Boston: T. B. Wait and

Mercenary motivations were replaced with love of *la patrie*. Blanning notes that "this was a most important moment in the history of the Revolution, for it marked the point when control of the army passed formally from executive to legislature." French citizens, filled with Revolutionary *élan*, flocked to the Assembly's call for volunteers in 1791 and again in 1792 in response to Austrian and Prussian military advances. These forces confronted the Prussian army at Valmy on 20 September 1792 and turned the Prussians back with what amounted to a sustained artillery barrage. Less than one month later, Charles François Dumouriez' army defeated the Austrians at Jemappes. The latter demonstrated the failure of *l'ordre profund*, as repeated French assaults in column were thrown back by the Austrians. Guibertian reforms notwithstanding, the French ultimately triumphed through sheer weight of numbers, outnumbering the Prussians 2:1 at Valmy and the Austrians more than 3:1 at Jemappes.[32]

The successes of the Revolutionary armies in 1792 were little more than a façade concealing deep divisions within the army and French society at large. Early 1793 would see the French driven out of Belgium, the betrayal of Dumouriez, and the Royalist revolt in the Vendée, bringing the Revolution closer to defeat than it had been in 1792. To combat the failing state and enemy incursions, the Revolution resorted to drastic measures. In mid-1793, radical Jacobins took control of the government and instituted the Terror, purging royalists and moderates alike. Recognizing the necessity of military victory, the radicals infused the army with Jacobin fervor, transforming it into the most formidable fighting machine in Europe. To combat the Allied successes of early 1793, the Revolutionary government instituted the *levée-en-masse* in an effort to produce 300,000 new soldiers. This marked the transition from Revolutionary volunteers to conscripts. Jacobin clubs were joined to the army in Revolutionary *fêtes*, bringing the people into contact with the forces who fought to preserve the Revolution. Jacobin representatives-on-mission fired the troops' patriotic spirit, ensured that the officers performed well, and exercised complete control over the armies under them. During the Year II, the French army underwent a complete reorganization from the highest levels down to the individual soldier. The French army in 1793 was composed of three distinct parts: the line army, the Volunteers of 1791 and 1792, and various Revolutionary units unattached to either. The Directory began the process of the *amalgamé,* which combined these units into a single army.[33]

The Directory also transformed the strategy, training, and tactics of the French army. It revisited the 1791 Regulations, revising them in the wake of the defeats of 1793 and bringing them closer to Guibert's theories. The Directory called for the creation of permanent divisions composed of two infantry brigades, a cavalry brigade, and an artillery company. These combined-arms units were to operate on Frederician principles of central position and the oblique order as recorded by Guibert. The Directory also adopted Guibert's theory of firepower superiority, calling for economy of forces around a center of gravity until the enemy's weak point was found, then for the concentration of firepower on the weak point until breakthrough was achieved.[34]

It was in the field of tactics that the Directory's

Co., 1810).

[32] Blanning 83.

[33] Jean-Paul Bertaud, *The Army of the French Revolution: From Citizen-Soldiers to Instrument of Power*. Translated by R. R. Palmer, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 90-171.

[34] *Ibid* 231-265.

reforms ran the deepest. The Directory adopted *l'ordre mixte*, granting the French army a flexibility no Old Regime army could match. This flexibility allowed the French army to develop entirely new tactics. Cavalry assaults on the flanks were replaced with light infantry, freeing the cavalry to engage in shock assaults or pursuits *á la* Guibert. The infantry square, a direct descendant of Guibert's doubling of the ranks, was experimented with. The net result of the reforms of the Year II was that "the army thus presented itself in battle, not as a rigid and compact block but as a mechanism of articulated parts, each capable of various movements."[35]

The patriot armies of the Year II carried the Revolutionary tricolor to Belgium, Italy, the Vendée, and the Rhineland like Guibert's "north wind bending reeds." However, the transformation of the army was not complete. The Thermidorians returned some semblance of normalcy to France, but in the process, they drove the army further from the center of power. The fragmentation of army command into as many as eleven distinct theater armies often prevented cooperation between them, limiting strategic planning and gains. The French Revolution represented the almost wholesale adoption of Guibert's organizational, tactical, logistical, and ideological reforms. His larger strategic reforms lagged for want of a true central army structure and of a dynamic leader. In 1799, however, the army and the state found that leader in Napoleon Bonaparte.

The Evolutionary Process Completed: Napoleon and the Empire, 1799-1815

In 1795, an obscure general from Corsica dispersed a Royalist insurrection with a "whiff of grapeshot." The young general Bonaparte parleyed his newfound fame into command of the underfunded and underfed Army of Italy. In 1796, Napoleon won a stunning series of battles over the Austrians, conquering northern Italy for France. Following a brief dalliance in Egypt, Napoleon returned to Paris and assumed leadership of the government in 1799 as First Consul. Over the course of the next nine years, Napoleon would defeat the Old Regime armies that stood against him and conquer most of Western Europe. Napoleon won his great battles in large part because of the army described above and granted to him by the Revolution. However, the Revolution could not complete the evolutionary process. Still missing was the crucial element: the "man of genius" who could forge a coherent whole out of the various Revolutionary armies. Napoleon provided that element, remaking French strategy, logistics, and organization in his own image. The result transcended Guibert, the Old Regime, and the Revolution. In 1795, few armies in Europe were comparable to the French army. In 1806, no *two* armies in the world were the equal of Napoleon's Grande Armée.

From his early career, Napoleon was an avid reader of Guibert, specifically requesting that a copy of the *Essai* be packed in his baggage for the trip to Italy. His Italian campaign reflected a deep knowledge of Guibert's methods of flexibility, mobility, and maneuverability. A well-known passage from the *Essai* illustrates:

> What will hinder one day a general, a man of genius, commanding fifty thousand men against an army of the same strength, from turning aside from the accepted routine, from not having in this fifty thousand men, ten thousand light troops, or from so constituting them that they could perform line service at need, and hold a place in the combat dispositions? What will hinder him in almost all circumstances from refraining from splintering his army, from making

[35] *Ibid*.

fewer detachments, fewer reserves, fewer movements of detail than one makes today, from maneuvering more with his whole mass? What would the enemy do, astonished at this new kind of war? Will he parcel his army out, will he separate his army, will he have there a pawn here another, will he seek to make one uneasy, to threaten to conceal a march? The first will remain always closed up, always united, if he can, in range or in sight of him, always in readiness to attack the bulk of his [the enemy's] army or the parts which he has detached, always in force and secure from surprise, because he will be assembled and disposed for combat, while his adversary will always be obliged to be fearful, always to wear himself out in fatigues, because he will be dispersed and vulnerable at several points.

Quimby notes that "taken by itself, out of context, this quotation is practically a sketch of the methods used by General Bonaparte in the Italian campaign of 1796."[36]

Napoleon's strategy in Italy was closely based on the grand tactics of the *Essai*. Unlike the earlier Revolutionary armies, Napoleon possessed no numerical advantages over his enemies and was often numerically inferior to them. Instead, Napoleon relied on mobility, *manoeuvres sur les derrières*, and interior lines to defeat the Austrians. Utilizing the superior mobility of his Revolutionary army, Napoleon made a lightning advance over the Alps and onto the plains of Northern Italy. When the Austrians opposed his movements, Napoleon fixed them in place with a division and engaged in a *manoeuvres sur les derrières* to dislodge them. The Austrians were soon driven out of the Piedmont. When an Austrian army returned to engage Napoleon, it conformed to the above passage. Dagobert Sigismund, count de Wurmser separated his Austrian army into columns and sent them south to engage the French. Napoleon, operating on the principle of interior lines, turned on each column and crushed it individually. This last point is the essence of Guibert's grand tactics: the "war of mass" or what Bertaud refers to as "economy of forces."[37] Napoleon held his forces back until the Austrian's weak point was exposed, whereupon Napoleon concentrated his firepower on it and broke the Austrian columns. In Italy, Napoleon united Revolutionary tactics with Guibert's grand tactics, demonstrating for the first time the fulfillment of Guibert's theories.[38]

On 18 Brumaire 1799, Napoleon affected a coup and seized power as First Consul. For the first time since the monarchy, military and civil power were united in one man. Napoleon quickly reconquered Italy and Moreau defeated the Austrians at Hohenlinden. The Treaties of Lunéville and Amiens brought peace to Europe for the first time since 1792. The peace enabled Napoleon to build his Empire, restructuring governments across the conquered territories. It also enabled him to reshape the entire French army along the lines of the Army of Italy. Napoleon utilized the principles of Guibert and the Revolution to lay the foundation for the army but introduced new concepts that would transcend all who had gone before. What emerged as the Grande Armée was the single most powerful army in the world.[39]

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[36] Quote translated in Quimby 141-2. He notes that the context in question is Guibert's discussion of Light Troops found in I:215-230.

[37] Bertaud 232.

[38] Blanning 145-180.

[39] See Brent Nosworthy, *With Musket, Cannon, and Sword: Battle Tactics of Napoleon and his Enemies,* (New York: Sarpedon, 1996), Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon,* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978), Rory Muir, *Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

Upon his assumption of power, Napoleon immediately began to build an empire. He adopted the centralist position of the Revolutionary governments, creating a rigid bureaucratic structure answerable only to Paris and ultimately to Napoleon himself. The massive Imperial government assumed control of virtually every aspect of its citizens' lives, transforming France and her conquests into modern nations. The centralization effort enabled Napoleon to harness the resources of the Empire for the new army being built at Boulogne. Roads were built or improved, providing the infrastructure necessary to quickly move armies long distances. Taxes were increased and collected, providing the financial backing for the army. Conscription was normalized and applied across the Empire, ensuring a steady supply of new soldiers. The unity of command that was sorely lacking in the Revolution had finally appeared in the presence of Napoleon's Imperial bureaucracy.[40]

Just as Napoleon recreated the French state, so too did he recreate the French army. Napoleon knew that the Peace of Amiens would eventually fail, whether by his own or British design. In 1803, he began to assemble an army at Boulogne for the purpose of invading England. He reduced the number of regiments in each brigade, allowing for undermanned regiments to be brought up to proper strength. He made permanent many Revolutionary organizational units such as the regiment. He drilled his troops ceaselessly and engaged in war games so that soldier and officer alike would operate with flawless efficiency on the battlefield. He perfected his deployment and maneuver system, called the battalion carré (see Figure 3). He reinforced the concepts of Guibert, emphasizing flexibility, mobility, and maneuverability. By the time the Grande Armée marched from Boulogne in 1805, it was without question the best in Europe.[41]

The camp at Boulogne introduced concepts not contained in the writings of Guibert or the Revolutionary thinkers. The most important of these was the corps system. Napoleon learned the value of the detached combined-arms division from Guibert and from his experiences in Italy, but the largest army in Europe needed a higher organizational unit. As such, Napoleon created the corps. Napoleon's *corps d'armée* were large, autonomous, combined-arms units capable of engaging an enemy until reinforcements arrived. Essentially, corps were divisions writ large. The creation of the corps marks a major break from Guibert. Guibert called for a unitary army operating on the principle of economy of forces. Napoleon's army would be composed of autonomous corps acting independently of their command structure. What Guibert failed to grasp were the implications of his grand tactics. Guibert clearly saw the necessity for autonomy in certain situations. He provides examples of a battalion acting autonomously, for instance doubling the ranks to repel cavalry. Armies, by definition, acted autonomously. Why then, could a division – composed of all of the elements of an army – not act autonomously? Napoleon saw this where Guibert could not and created the corps system to fill the role.

In 1805, the Grande Armée put the combined theories of Napoleon and Guibert into practice. An Austrian army under Karl Freiherr Mack von Leiberich encamped at Ulm on the Danube. "The Unfortunate General Mack," relying on Old Regime march speeds and supply lines, expected Napoleon to take sixty-five days to march from Bolougne. Napoleon's corps made the march in thirty-two days, astonishing the Austrians and forcing Mack's

[40] See Michael Broers, *Europe Under Napoleon*, (New York: Arnold, 1996).

[41] See Robert Goetz, *1805 Austerlitz*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005).

surrender after Ulm was encircled and cut off. Guibert's prophecy of mobility had been fulfilled, enabled by the infrastructure improvements of the Napoleonic state. Following the surrender at Ulm, Napoleon unleashed his corps across Austria, driving the Russian army under Kutusov back to Olmütz. Here again Guibert was vindicated: Napoleon's corps, bereft of supply lines, swarmed across the countryside foraging for their supplies at a speed no Old Regime army could match. Napoleon finally caught the Russians at Austerlitz. Tsar Alexander took command of the Russian army and allowed Austrian General Franz von Weyrother to formulate the battle plan. The following morning, 2 December, the Russians and Austrians divided their army into five columns and assaulted the French right in an effort to turn Napoleon's flank. Following his Italian campaign and Guibert's principles, Napoleon operated from interior lines and destroyed each of the Allied columns in detail. Austerlitz, often considered the finest of Napoleon's victories, demonstrated that Guibert's theories and Napoleon's advancements on them had forged an army unlike any other on the continent.[42]

In 1806-1807, Napoleon again demonstrated the superiority of the French army. At Jena-Aüerstadt, the Grand Armée crushed the once-feared Prussian army. Significantly, Napoleon himself only defeated a small Prussian detachment. A separate French corps under Davout encountered and badly mauled the main Prussian force with no help from Napoleon. While the shortcomings of the Prussian army were largely to blame, Jena-Aüerstadt conclusively demonstrated that Napoleon had outstripped Guibert. A corps operating entirely independently ran counter to every recommendation in the *Essai* but still found victory. Napoleon's system, while integrating Guibert, had transcended it. Napoleon continued on in 1807 to Poland and the very borders of Russia, defeating the Russians at Friedland after a check at Eylau. The resulting Treaty of Tilsit marked the apex of the Napoleonic Empire and the Grande Armée, the peak of the evolutionary pattern begun by Frederick the Great.

Conclusion

Following 1807, Napoleon's Grande Armée experienced a decline. Wastage and over-commitment first caught up with it at Wagram, where Napoleon suffered his first personal defeat on the battlefield. More importantly for European military history and the evolutionary process, the Allied nations began to adopt French military reforms. The evolution of European armies begun by Frederick and fulfilled by Napoleon spread across Europe. This process began in the twilight of the Old Regime as Frederick the Great of Prussia took on all comers and defeated them. Old Regime France, led by a young military *philosophe* named Guibert, adopted Frederick's reforms and expanded them. The process continued through the Revolution, where Guibert's theories were adopted and put into practice. Napoleon Bonaparte followed, marking the culmination of the evolutionary process. His Grand Armée was an army unlike any other: maneuverable, flexible enough to handle nearly every situation it found itself in, and composed of hardened professionals conscripted from across the Empire. Napoleon nearly conquered Europe with the Grande Armée, changing it forever in the process.

[42] *Ibid*.