

CIRCULATION OF MILITARY KNOWLEDGE: THE FRENCH AND DANISH MILITARY REFORMS OF COMTE DE SAINT-GERMAIN IN THE LATE 18TH CENTURY

 Hanna Sonkajärvi^{1,2}

ABSTRACT

Count Claude-Louis-Robert von Saint-Germain's (1707-1778) sweeping military reforms became the subject of massive resistance from officers and the public at large in both Denmark and France in the late 18th century. His French (1775-1777) and

1 Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro - Brasil.

2 Professora Adjunta II de História do Direito da Faculdade Nacional de Direito da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, e membro permanente do Programa de Pós-Graduação em História Social (PPGHIS) do Instituto de História de Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. É Mestre em Ciência Política pela Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Alemanha (2001) e Doutora em História e Civilização pelo European University Institute de Florença, Itália (2006). Obteve o reconhecimento de seu Doutorado no exterior pela Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF, 2014). É Pós-Doutora (2014-2015) pela Universidad del País Vasco em Leioa (Bilbao), Espanha, onde atuou como Feodor Lynen Senior Research Fellow da Fundação Alexander von Humboldt (Alemanha). É, também, Pós-Doutora pelo Deutsches Historisches Institut/Institut historique allemand (DHIP/IHA), Paris (2012-2013) e, ainda, Pós-Doutora pelo Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro (IUPERJ), contando com bolsa de Pós-Doutorado Sênior da Fundação Carlos Chagas Filho de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ) (2013-2014). Foi Professora assistente (Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin) da Universität Duisburg-Essen, Alemanha (2007-2012). É membro do Grupos de Pesquisa "História e Direito: Da Civilização ao Desenvolvimento no Brasil 1750-1930" e "Rede de História do Direito/Legal History Network/Red de Historia del Derecho" vinculados à Universidade de São Paulo (USP) e certificados pelo CNPq. Tem experiência na área de História Social, Econômica e Cultural da Europa Ocidental (XVI-XVIII), com ênfase em História da Imigração Européia, Comércio, Exército e Sociedade na Idade Moderna, Práticas de Administração Local e História Urbana. Desenvolve ainda suas pesquisas sobre o Brasil no século XIX na área de História do Direito, História das Migrações e História Ambiental. E-mail: hanna.sonkajarvi@me.com.

Danish (1762-1767) military reforms stood at the junction of two paradoxical ideals which preoccupied French military thinkers in the second half of the 18th century: on the one hand, there was an increasing awareness within the army that the military needed to be professionalized; however, this was not to lead to an equal treatment of all nobles, or of all military personnel within the army. On the other, the professionalization discourse stood against the ideal of the French soldier as a patriot serving his country out of vocation rather than professional interest. Indeed, Saint-Germain's ideas and political program had much broader implications than the mere transformation of the army. This paper contrasts the image of Saint-Germain and his politics in the eyes of his contemporaries and in the historiography with his own writings and ordinances, from the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) to his renouncement as French Secretary of War in 1777.

KEYWORDS

France - Denmark - Saint-Germain - Army - Reform - Administration

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Introduction

In a world in which nobles and simple soldiers could serve in different armies regardless of their nationality, Count Saint-Germain (1707-1778) initially served in the Electoral Palatinate, Austrian, Bavarian, and Dutch troops. At the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, he was appointed French Field Marshal but fell out of favor at Court and subsequently resigned from French service. In 1761, he accepted the post of Field Marshal in the Danish service and from 1762 onwards he was commissioned by King Frederick V to reorganize the Danish army. From 1762 to 1766, and again in 1767, he conducted far-reaching reform efforts in the Danish military, which were met with massive resistance from the military, but some remained in place even after Saint-Germain was removed as Commander-in-Chief from the Danish army. In France, Saint-Germain received the support of important reformers such as Turgot and was subsequently appointed Secretary of War in October 1775 by King Louis XVI. Faced with fierce critics and a public campaign against his policies, Saint-Germain left his post in September 1777 after implementing extensive reforms.

So far, the major European military reforms of the second half of the 18th century—of which Saint-Germain's reforms are part of—have been analyzed predominantly in their respective national contexts. Researchers have notably been interested in the various reform attempts which were repeatedly met with vehement resistance regarding the role of elites within the military and the different officer ranks. However, these reforms have frequently been analyzed in terms of their respective results rather than their implementation process. The transfer, adaptation, appropriation, and rejection processes associated with reform implementation have been hardly considered. This kind of research overlooks the fact that contemporary debates could often take place in isolation from the actual content of the reform, as is particularly clear on the disciplinary discourses in relation to Saint-Germain's reforms in France. His reforms, aiming at a comprehensive reorganization of the entire army, were fought at the discursive level with arguments that referred to national stereotypes. In both Denmark and France, Saint-Germain was chosen, by the King and a small Court elite, to conduct far-reaching reforms, but he was by no means a popular figure among the contemporary military thinkers. In

Denmark, he was accused of not understanding the Danish mentality and wanting to introduce Prussian reforms:

He [Saint-Germain, HS] undertook without delay to totally change the constitution of the Danish military. Because he did not do this profoundly enough, his way of proceeding was uncertain, and all the ministerial measures were separate and without connection. When objections were raised, he responded with pride that he would not acknowledge anyone other than the King of Prussia as a competent judge of his projects.³

Similarly, in France Saint-Germain was seen as a radical who was, due to his history in foreign service, alienated from the French 'spirit':

Knowing well how far the *esprit* of the great seigneurs of France was opposed to these principles, he [Saint-Germain, HS] tried alienating them from the military, and his first measures were to be the reform of all these corps of pomp and privilege, of these honorary charges, contrary to discipline and to the administration [...]. In a word, M. de Saint-Germain, who did not know other than the foreign *esprit* and the French garrisons, imagined changing the *esprit* of the Frenchmen and to subject to his will people whom even the absolute and powerful King had difficulty in constraining.⁴

Whereas in Denmark Saint-Germain was stereotyped as a superficial Frenchman, in France, the vehement opposition to Prussian disciplinary

3 "Il [Saint-Germain, HS] entreprit sans délai de changer totalement la constitution du Militaire Danois. Comme il ne le connaissait pas assez à fond, sa marche fut incertaine, et toutes ses opérations ministérielles décousues et sans liaisons. L'autorité sans bornes dont il jouissait le préserva d'abord des contradictions. Quand on lui faisait des objections, il répondait avec fierté: Qu'il ne reconnaissait que le Roi de Prusse pour Juge compétent de ses projets", N.N., 1789, p. 41. All translations, unless indicated, are my own. The original citations in French are reproduced in the notes. The language of the original citations was left in the original spelling.

4 "Connaissant combien l'esprit des grands seigneurs en France est contraire à ces principes, il [Saint-Germain, HS] chercha à les éloigner du militaire; et ses premières opérations devaient être la réforme de tous ces corps de faste et à privilège, de ces charges honoraires, contraires à la discipline, et à l'administration [...]. En un mot, M. de Saint-Germain, qui ne connaissait que l'esprit de l'étranger et les garnisons françaises, s'imagina changer celui des Français, et faire plier sous sa volonté des gens qu'un roi absolu et tout-puissant avait bien de la peine à réduire", Besenval, 1846, p. 223.

methods attributed to the Secretary of War culminated in an emotional debate about the nature and national character of the 'French soldier.'⁵ However, even if these military writings took soldiers as their subject matter, it was not them who had the most to fear from the large-scale reforms launched by Saint-Germain: it was the officers, and especially the members of the higher nobility, who felt threatened by the measures taken, as I will show in the following pages.

Earlier studies largely adopted the critical tone of Saint-Germain's contemporaries, claiming him to have been destructive for the army,⁶ but recent historiography has underlined his efforts toward an egalitarian treatment of soldiers.⁷ Evidently, the policies formulated by Saint-Germain were embedded into the contemporary discourses about the army and the army-society relations. Yet, even if the laws issued by Saint-Germain and the reactions provoked by his reforms have been studied, little is known about his own ideas.

The discrepancy between public discourse on the reforms and the content of such reforms constitutes the starting point for this article. I intend to show what Saint-Germain did and did not write about simple soldiers and officers and what were the policy outputs reached during his era as French and Danish Secretary of War. This article will therefore contrast the image construed of Saint-Germain and his reforms by his contemporaries

5 On these discussions, see Seriu, 2008; Deflers 2015; Osman, 2017.

6 Bonneval, 1834, p. 167-174; N.N., 1801, 423-425; as well as assesment in the *Biographie universelle*, 1825, p. 581-586. Equally negative, adopting the contemporary discourse without reserve, Sturgill, 1991, p. 32, who states: "[N]on seulement Saint-Germain détruisit le vieil esprit qui régnait dans l'armée de la monarchie bourbonnienne, mais, pire, il fut responsable de la méfiance que les diverses classes sociales à l'intérieur du corps des officiers – noble ou bourgeoise – éprouvèrent à l'égard les unes des autres. Dans ses tentatives tyranniques et durement menées pour réformer l'Armée française, Saint-Germain fit d'un bel instrument militaire une chaudière bouillonnante d'hystérie politique et sociale. Les réformes de Saint-Germain engendrèrent dans le service le même genre de discordes qu'y amena l'affaires Dreyfus un siècle plus tard."

7 Historians have underlined Saint-Germain's contribution to the army's administrative reforms, see Blaufarb, 2002, p. 28-37; Opitz-Belakhal, 1994, p. 147-184. Bois, 1990, p. 89, recognizes Saint-Germain's measures with regard to ancient soldiers as an essential step towards a professional army. Babeau, 1890, p. 65 emphasises Saint-Germain's merits in reforming military education.

and by historiography with his own writings and ordinances. My aim is to contextualize Saint-Germain's policy and ideas within the ideas of his time.

I argue that Saint-Germain met fierce opposition because he stood at the junction of two paradoxical ideals that occupied French military thinkers in the second half of the 18th century: on the one hand, there was an increasing awareness in the military that the army needed to be professionalized; however, this was not intended to lead to an equal treatment of all nobles,⁸ or even less so, of all military personnel within the army. On the other, the professionalization discourse stood against the ideal of the French soldier as a patriot serving his country out of vocation rather than professional interest.

Saint-Germain's reforms are situated in a larger context of 18th-century military reforms. Following the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), many European armies shifted toward standing armies as opposed to military formations, large parts of which were dissolved after the end of a war. In this scenario, 18th-century standing armies provided States with a growing need of binding individuals into military service. Whereas France continued to rely on an army of mercenaries, states like Sweden,⁹ the Netherlands,¹⁰ and Prussia¹¹ drafted their own subjects into service. However, even these states continued to engage mercenaries. Ralf Pröve accordingly speaks of a "flourishing European-wide labour market" that had been expanding since the 17th century and which led to millions of soldiers moving across Europe at the armies' expense.¹² Specially after the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), Frederick II's Prussia became a model to be copied regarding the development of military equipment, tactics

8 Even though such ideas were expressed by an increasing number of military thinkers from the 1740s onwards, see Bien, 1974, p. 23-48 and 505-34 [article in two parts] and Pichichero, 2008, esp. p. 560-561.

9 Lindegren, 1985, p. 305-336; Roberts, 1956.

10 Glete, 2002.

11 Büsch, 1962; Winter, 2005.

12 Pröve, 2003, p. 347. On military mobility, Wilson, 1996; Mertens; Sonkajärvi, 2012; Glesener, 2017; Lucassen, 2023.

and discipline.¹³ In this context, military thinkers and Secretaries of War undertook numerous attempts to reform different armies.

Saint-Germain's policies had more far-reaching implications than the simple transformation of the military. Implementation of his reforms was interpreted, by the nobility, as a threat to contemporary social order. Simultaneously, Saint-Germain was by no means the only French military thinker to express such ideas in the second half of the 18th century. His ideas and policies are therefore presented in their historical context which permits a distinction to be made between their content and the contemporary interpretations and representations of said content.

After an analysis of Saint-Germain's reforms in France and his previous reforms in Denmark, I will discuss his ideas dating from the Seven Years' War concerning the common soldiers and officers. This perspective allows us to see both policies formulated by Saint-Germain and the responses to these reforms by military and administrative elites. The study is based on sources from French and Danish archives as well as on printed material.

The Danish Military Reforms Informed by French and German Policies

The large scale military reforms that took place in the second half of the 18th century have mostly been studied in their respective national contexts.¹⁴ Even though numerous research has addressed the circulation of military knowledge in Early Modern Europe, these studies have focused mainly on special groups, such as military engineers.¹⁵ However, knowledge was circulated much more widely by both military elites and simple soldiers thus influencing military culture and knowledge across

13 Regarding Portugal and the disciplinary reforms introduced by the Count of Schaumburg-Lippe in the early 1760s, see Costa, 2010, p. 297-304.

14 Regarding Prussian influence on the French army, based on the writings of military thinkers and observers of the time, see Deflers, 2021. Regarding France, see also Guinier, 2014; Blaufarb, 2002; Opitz-Belakhal, 1994; Smith, 1996. Regarding Denmark, Danstrup, 1947; Rockstroh, 1926. Recent research on the Danish army has largely followed the same path as these two older studies.

15 Alder, 1997; Blanchard, 1979; Langins, 2004; Ostwald, 2007; Vérin 1993.

territorial borders. These individuals can be seen as brokers for cultural, technological, or organizational knowledge.¹⁶ Eighteenth-century army reforms can, therefore, be understood in a larger European context as linked to each other across national borders. Military knowledge was not disseminated by printed media only, but was equally transmitted from one army organization to another through visits and through individuals who served in more than one army. One such broker in the second half of the 18th century was Claude-Louis-Robert, Comte de Saint-Germain (1707–1778)¹⁷, who had served in the French, Electoral Palatinate, Austrian, Bavarian, and Dutch armies before becoming a Danish Field Marshal charged with wide-ranging army reform (1762–1767). Ironically, contemporaries claimed that this reformer, who was supposed to be a great Prussia admirer, had intended to join the Prussian service in 1745 but had immediately fled, discouraged by the iron discipline.¹⁸ After his return to France, Saint-Germain became French Secretary of War (1775–1777) and again initiated wide-ranging reforms.¹⁹

The case of the Saint-Germain reforms can be studied as an example of cultural or knowledge transfers²⁰ in 18th-century armies. His implemented reforms in Denmark were inspired particularly by the Prussian model of

16 See notably Kroener, 2015; Lund, 1999; Anklam, 2007.

17 A good overview of Saint-Germains' career and activities as the French Secretary of War is provided by Genet-Rouffiac; Lasconjarias, 2007.

18 An anonymous author writes in the introduction of the correspondence between Saint-Germain and the Administrator-General of Provisions, Joseph Pâris Duverney: "Le vieux Prince d'Anhalt-Dessau, créateur de la discipline sévère qui règne parmi les troupes Prussiennes, entretient le Comte de Saint-Germain sur la manière dont elles étaient gouvernées. Ce discours jetta un tel effroi dans son ame, qu'il se repentit des engagemens qu'il venait de contracter. Dans cet état de perplexité, sans songer à ce qu'il deviendrait, ni où il trouverait un asyle et de l'emploi, il s'enfuit le même jour, et prit la route de Francfort sur le Mein, s'ou il écrivit au Maréchal de Saxe [...]", N.N. *Vie du Comte de Saint-Germain, Ministre d'Etat*, printed in: Saint-Germain, 1789, p. 5-6. The same episode is narrated, almost word by word, by Wimpfen, 1780, p. 21-22.

19 The historiography has treated the Saint-Germain reforms in Denmark and France separately in their respective national context. See, on Saint-Germain in Denmark, Danstrup, 1983; Struwe, 2003; and in France Blaufarb, 2002, p. 28-37; Bois, 1990, p. 86-103; Chagniot, 1981; Mention, 1884; Opitz-Belakhal, 1994, p. 119-146. On the noble participation in Early Modern armies, see Storrs; Scott, 1996.

20 See Middell, 2000; Paulmann, 1998.

military administration and the question left to be solved is whether these Prussian elements found their way into the French army through Saint-Germain's reforms or not.

Saint-Germain, who in October 1775, at the advanced age of 68, was appointed French Secretary of War, had already gathered previous experience as a military reformer in Denmark (1762–1767). There he had not only drafted numerous reform plans and ordinances but had also been obliged to deal with the problems caused by the implementation of said policies. Nominated Danish Field Marshal in 1761, Saint-Germain was confronted with an army that had not faced battle for half a century and whose organization was in a sorry state. It was in the context of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), during which the army was forced to prepare for confrontation with Russian troops, that the King and the leading civilian administrators took notice of the army's lack of resources, knowledge, and men.²¹ King Frederik V, his Secretary of Foreign Affairs, the pro-French Johann Hartwig Ernst von Bernsdorff, and *Oberhofmarschall* Adam Gottlob Moltke, agreed upon the decision to nominate Saint-Germain, on the grounds that he was an expert from outside the Danish army hierarchy, to the mission of thoroughly reforming the Danish military.²² To accomplish this task, Saint-Germain, who knew no Danish and could only speak mediocre German, had to rely on the co-operation of a small group of reform-friendly officers and administrators to formulate his policies. The numerous memoranda and ordinances related to the reforms therefore only partly reflect Saint-Germain's ideas; they also reflect those of his collaborators. The most influential of which was Peter Elias von Gähler, who had served in the French army between 1744–46. He communicated with Saint-Germain in French and wrote Saint-Germain's memoranda in

²¹ However, Lind, 1986, p. 28–29, points out that the Danish army was by no means a little army of a small state. The strongly centralized Danish state invested heavily in the military, and compared to population numbers, the army was always one of the three largest ones in 18th-century Europe.

²² On the foreign elites' importance for the Danish administration, see Lind, 2005.

German, thus functioning as an intermediary between Saint-Germain and the administration.²³

Preceding Saint-Germain's reforms, the Danish army was administered by two bodies (*Generalkrigskommissariatet* for financial matters and *Krigskancelliet* for operative issues), both of which were dominated by civilians. The military consisted of a field army composed of mercenaries and of national militias recruited through conscription. The field army's professional soldiers were dominated by foreigners, who made up 75 percent of its effectives.²⁴ The militia were peasants subordinated to great landowners. The two formations—the regular field army and the land militia—formed separate units inside the army. The higher ranks were dominated by German officers and by personnel who had served in different German armies, especially in Prussia. This explains why, already in the early 18th century, decisive impulses were received from Prussia, for example concerning the linear tactics of the infantry and the content of tactical manuals.²⁵

Under Saint-Germain's ministry (1762–1767) the army administration was centralized and the position of military personnel inside the army administration reinforced. The *Generalkrigskommissariat* and the *Krigskancelliet* were abolished in 1763 and replaced by a Prussian-inspired *Generalkrigsdirektorium*.²⁶ This new governing organ reported directly to Saint-Germain as Secretary of War, who in turn reported directly to the King. Officers were recruited from Prussia and other German states

23 The influence of Peter Elias von Gähler (1718–1783) upon Saint-Germain is especially emphasized by Danstrup. According to Danstrup, 1947, p. 59, Gähler instrumentalized Saint-Germain for imposing his own agenda. Among the reform-oriented personnel, General Major Andreas Hauch (1708–1782) had served the Danish, followed by the Habsburg Imperial troops in Hungary and the Swedish troops in Finland. General lieutenant Hermann Waldemar Schmettow served the Bavarian and Habsburg Imperial armies before passing to the French service under Maurice de Saxe. Carl von Görz (1733–1797) had served the Hessian troops for a decade; Christian Carl Pflueg (1728–1809) was serving the Prussians in 1759 and the French in 1761; Schack Carl Rantzau (1717–1789) had gathered experience in both Imperial and the French armies.

24 Jespersen, 1983, p. 91–92.

25 Lind, 1986, p. 43–44.

26 Danstrup, 1947, p. 44–46.

to import know-how into the *Generalkrigsdirektorium* and to secure a transition from company economy to a regimental economy. In this system, the state would directly pay the regiments, instead of turning to a military-enterpriser, a company captain.²⁷

Saint-Germain's original plan for the Danish army in 1762 foresaw a mix of mercenary troops and land militia according to the French example. In France, the Secretary of War (1758–1761), Duc de Belle-Isle, had since 1758 regularly employed *milices* and *grenadiers de France* in battle and formed regular troops with soldiers from these two formations. Saint-Germain refined his plans in the following years, now drawing on the experience of Duc de Choiseul (Secretary of War 1761–1770)²⁸ who in December 1762 had ordered the unification of infantry regiments and taken the responsibility of enlisting soldiers away from the captain, thus abolishing the company economy system. The company economy had become increasingly under criticism, because whereas the captain could profit from the maintenance of his own troops, he would also need capital to raise a company and carry the financial risk of the enterprise. This in practice meant that many nobles could not afford a company and that others who could, maintained their companies badly equipped and understaffed to make maximum profit. Therefore, the new French system, established by Choiseul, foresaw recruitment and maintenance of permanent regiments through the royal administration.²⁹

In Denmark, Saint-Germain did not at first approve of P. E. Gähler's proposition of creating recruitment cantons according to the Prussian model. However, the subsequent plans for reforming the Danish army, many of which were released as ordinances but not necessarily implemented, became increasingly more radical in their adaptation of Prussian ideas and especially elements of the Prussian recruiting model—the canton system.³⁰ Such policy radicalization can be explained by the

27 Ibid., p. 40–42. On the Prussian company economy, see Redlich, 1964–1965.

28 Danstrup, 1947, p. 35.

29 Blaufarb, 2002, p. 24–27.

30 The canton system was established in 1733 by King Frederick William I (1713–1740). It lessened Prussian dependency on mercenaries and represented a move toward a national conscription army. However,

growing reform opposition inside the *Generalkrigsdirektorium* and the increasing influence of Gähler, who acted as intermediary between Saint-Germain, the army, the ministers, and the King. As a reaction, the civilian parts of the administration (the German and the Danish Chancelleries,³¹ the Chambers of Finance and Customs), grew more and more reluctant to execute orders. But the orientation toward the Prussian canton system was by no means new or a particularity of the Saint-Germain administration. Similar proposals for implementing the Prussian recruitment system had already and repeatedly been made by various army members before the Saint-Germain era.³²

Norway, which was ruled by the Danish King, had a conscription army with a much larger unprofessional element than its Danish counterpart. Hermann Waldemar Schmettow, then Commander-in-Chief of the Norwegian army, proposed a transition to a system similar to the Swedish conscription system (*Indellningsvärk*) for reforming this army, then called the “national army.”³³ When Saint-Germain kept insisting on blending mercenary and conscripted soldiers as had been established for Denmark—his opinion being that a “national army” consisting only of peasants was unacceptable³⁴—the officer corps vigorously dismissed

large parts of the population (inhabitants of certain territories, manufacturers, guild members, etc.) were exempted from the obligatory service. This, and the fact that researchers have established that there was a great amount of horizontal disciplining going on in Early Modern Prussia—i.e., not only did soldiers discipline locals, but also local populations disciplined soldiers on everyday basis—has led to the contestation and weakening of the so called “militarization thesis” of Prussia advocated by Büsch (1962). For More recent interpretations and the contestation of Büsch thesis, see Kroener 2008; Prüve, 1996; Wilson, 2000; Winter, 2005.

31 The Danish Chancellery oversaw the administration of Norway and Denmark. The German Chancellery administered the German Dutchies of Schleswig and Holstein and oversaw the foreign relations, part of which was also performed by the Danish chancellery until 1676.

32 Integration of the militia into the regular army had already been demanded by several officers in 1740. In the same year, *Overkrissekreter* Michael Numsen had tried to forbid the selling of army offices, Danstrup, 1947, p.12.

33 Ibid., p. 54; Rockstroh, 1926, p. 235. On the Swedish system, Lindegren, 2000, p. 129-162.

34 Copy of a letter from Saint-Germain to Schmettow, Copenhagen, 30 March 1765, printed in Trier, 1925, p. 67: “Je ne regarderai jamais comme une armée un amas de paysans enregistrés dans des livres et un nombre d’officiers et bas officiers ou soit disant tels pour la plupart dispersés dans un

his idea by evoking the 'Norwegian character' of the soldiers and local traditions. The Norwegian soldier would be capable of disciplining himself through his ability to think, his sense of duty and his loyalty to the King.³⁵ Significantly, Saint-Germain was excluded from the reform commission by authorization of the King.

The Saint-Germain Reforms in France: Introducing Prussian Elements Grounded on the Danish Experience?

Turning to the later Saint-Germain reforms implemented in France, the context of his nomination as French Secretary of War in October 1775 already reveals a great deal about the limitedness of his individual possibilities for policy application.³⁶ Saint-Germain was surprisingly nominated to this post following the death of the previous Secretary of War, Marechal du Muy (1711–1775). An undated letter by the army reformer, and later Secretary of War, Comte de Guibert (1743–1790) to Saint-Germain, dating from the time immediately preceding Saint-Germain's nomination,³⁷ contains hints and instructions by Guibert as to how Saint-Germain should proceed in formulating his reform project.³⁸ Guibert offered to write substantial parts of the reform memorandum. He provided Saint-Germain with his judgment on the situation inside the Ministry of War and on how Saint-Germain should launch his project. The army reform memorandum was to be submitted to the King, as well as to Maurepas and Turgot, but it should remain strictly secret. If informed, the numerous chambers or *bureaux*

pays immense, vivans et se conduisans à leur fantaisie, et qui peuvent à peine se connoître ni les paysans qui doivent former leur troupe." Saint-Germain claimed that only Poland, Sweden, and the Ottoman Empire had conserved national troops, and that this system had come of age and had proven unsuccessful. Concerning the conflict between Saint-Germain and Schmettow regarding the Norwegian army reform, see their correspondence edited by Trier, 1925, p. 59-75.

35 Danstrup, 1947, p. 54-56; Rockstroh, 1926, p. 230-235.

36 Service historique de la défense, Vincennes [In the Following: SHAT], GR 1 M 1791, "Projet de travail relatif aux vues de M le Comte de Saint Germain," s.d.

37 Ibid.

38 Pieces of these memoranda were integrated into the memoirs of Saint-Germain.

of the Ministry of War would—in Guibert’s opinion—try to hinder the reform right from the beginning by launching a landslide of bureaucratic writings.³⁹ Once nominated, Saint-Germain should, according to Guibert, implement his plan with rigour and without compromise.⁴⁰

The ninety-eight ordinances, regulations, declarations, and *arrêts* released under Saint-Germain between December 1775 and September 1777 underline his determination to conduct a thorough reform of the French army.⁴¹ However, Saint-Germain can be placed in a line of late 18th-century French Secretaries of War who were all preoccupied with renewing the army and making its administration more effective.⁴²

Many of the French military reform memoranda held at the *Service historique de la défense* (SHAT) archives are undated and lack an author’s name.⁴³ It is therefore extremely difficult to determine, based on these sources, which of the ideas put forward in them originate from Saint-Germain or from the time he served as Secretary of War. Rather, the mass of documents suggests that during the Seven Years’ War references to Prussia, and to the Habsburg monarchy, are frequently

39 SHAT, 1 M 1791, “Projet de travail relatif aux vues de M le Comte de Saint Germain,” s.d.: “A propos des bureaux, je ne puis un dispenser de repeter a M. le Comte de Saint Germain qu’il est important de ne pas les admettre a la connaissance encore moins a la confection de son plan. Ils sont incapables de lui etre d’aucun secours. Ils sont bercés dans tous les prejugs de la routine et de l’ignorance, et ennemis nés de tout ce qui peut aider a rendre la constitution vrayment militaire. Leur politique est d’accabler les ministres d’écritures, de calculs, de pretendues difficultés. C’est ainsi qu’ils les ont successivement tous gouvernés. Ils avaient tellement enveloppés et surchargés M. le Marchal du Muy qu’il ne voyait plus que par leurs yeux. L’arrivée de M. le Comte de St. Germain au ministere les consterne. Ils sentent qu’un homme a la fois de guerre et d’etat, un homme qui a déjà remanie et refondu une constitution ne pourra supporter l’horrible et dispendieuse complication de notre machine, et cherchera a la simplifier. De la ils craignent que leur regne ne finisse et ils vont tacher de travailler autour de lui tous les pieges dans lesquels ils ont fait tomber ses predecesseurs.”

40 The surprise at the nomination is described by Besenval, 1846, p. 219-222.

41 Genet-Rouffiac ; Lasconjarias, 2007, p. 460.

42 Audouin, 1811, 299-362; Opitz-Belakhal, 1994, p. 144-146.

43 Seriu, 2008, using military memoranda, distinguishes three different addressees in these writings: the King, the Secretary of War, and the military superior of the writer. Concerning the memoranda, which were already published at the time, one may perhaps add to these addressees the general public, but certainly the peer-group consisting of officers as well as the Court elites of political decision makers.

found in the memoranda written by various French officers and military thinkers. Numerous memoranda from Prussia—both in German and/or translated—and writings by Frederic the Great have been conserved in the archives.⁴⁴ Prussia therefore may have represented an important frame of reference for the French army that was by no means the exclusive domain of Saint-Germain, although he did refer to Prussian military organization in his memoirs and considered Frederic the Great to be a model military commander.⁴⁵

While opposition to Saint-Germain's reforms in France typically had recourse to stereotypes, arguing that the "French soldier" was different from the enslaved, despotically subordinated Prussian soldier who would endure brutality and drill by superiors like a machine,⁴⁶ the posthumous memoirs of Saint-Germain do not contain references to Prussian inspired disciplinary measures nor to the contemporarily largely disseminated practice of striking with the flat of a saber (*coup de plat de sabre*).⁴⁷ Having established this, the question as to what Saint-Germain did actually have to say about soldiers and officers seems worth investigating. In fact, Arnaud Guinier has shown, in his study of late 18th-century military thinkers, that the idealized image of the free-thinking French soldier who—unlike the Prussian "slave"—would not allow himself to be treated as a machine, was only one aspect among many within the contemporary discourse on tactics, military order, and discipline. To motivate soldiers to defend the homeland (*patrie*), the focus was not only on discipline, but above all on honor and individual reward. Contemporary military thinkers understood these were problematic concepts because society was hierarchized by

44 For example, SHAT, 1 M 1519; 1M 1779 and 1 M 1780 on Prussia; 1 M 1486 on Russia; 1 M 1482 on Sweden, Denmark, and Russia; as well as 1 M 1582 and 1 M 1584 on the Habsburg army.

45 Saint-Germain, 1789, brings the keyword "Prusse" on the index.

46 Various memoranda at the archives of the "Service historique de l'armée de terre" thematize the difference between the "wayward" and "sensible" Frenchman and the "enslaved" Prussian soldiers. Some of these were already printed at the time of their appearance, for instance: Bohan, 1781; Laissaic, 1783. See Pichichero, 2008, p. 553-580.

47 More on this topic, Deflers, 2015 and Blaufarb, 2002, p. 32-33.

social status and the military apparatus paid little attention to ordinary soldiers.⁴⁸

Saint-Germain's Views on the Treatment of Common Soldiers

The most publicized of the Saint-Germain ordinances in France was the royal ordinance of March 25, 1776, which proposed to renew the army organization. Articles 20-22 of the "Titre VI: De la police intérieure des Corps" established the punishment by striking with the flat of a saber, a punishment that was to be applied to all soldiers and officers who had committed light offenses regardless of their rank. Article 20 states:

The Intention of His Majesty is that minor faults, which until now have been punished by prison, shall from now on be punished by blows with the flat of a saber. If this punishment—the most efficient for its promptness and even more military than the most famous nations and those in which honor is the most in reference, use it less frequently than others—is feared by the French soldier, it will be the even more secure method to use for the success of discipline [...].⁴⁹

Reference to "the most famous nations" seems to have paved the way for criticism related to the foreignness of the introduced practice. In fact, Saint-Germain himself was very conscious of the differences between army systems. Regarding the Danes, he had already stated in 1759:

⁴⁸ Guinier, 2014.

⁴⁹ "L'intention de Sa Majesté est que les fautes légères qui jusqu'à présent ont été punies par la prison, le soient dorénavant par des coups de plat de sabre. Si ce dernier châtiment, le plus efficace par la promptitude, & d'autant plus militaire, que les Nations les plus célèbres, & chez lesquelles l'honneur étoit le plus en recommandation, en employoient rarement d'autres, est redouté du soldat François, il sera un moyen d'autant plus sûr à employer pour le succès de la discipline [...]", "Ordonnance [...] portant règlement sur l'administration [...], la discipline, la subordination, la police intérieure, les récompenses, les punitions; la nomination aux emplois vacants, la formation des troupes en divisions; les congés, les semestres, les revues des commissaires et celles de officiers généraux," 25 March ,1776, SHAT, Ya 498, Titre VI: "De la police intérieure des Corps," Art. 20 [p. 37-38 of the printed ordinance].

No one appreciates the Prussian military constitution more than I do, but to establish it in a country, it is necessary that the King thinks like the King of Prussia, and it would be crazy to pretend that in a country in which the government is weak and the inhabitants weak and cowardly, one would do more than create a harlequin, all the parts need to be linked to each other, support each other and lend force to each other; I know that one should always strive for perfection, but the means to reach this need to be different according to the respective constitutions.⁵⁰

Significantly enough, similar discourse was mobilized in Portugal when the Count of Schaumburg-Lippe (1724-1777) introduced a Prussian inspired reform of military justice (June 15, 1763) and ordinances which were associated with Prussian discipline. Here too, the different 'national' character of the Portuguese soldier, as opposed to the Prussian, was underlined by late 18th-century military thinkers. The new corporal punishments associated with passive or "slave-like" Prussian soldiers attacked the very notion of military honor.⁵¹

Saint-Germain saw his reforms questioned by a growing number of officers arguing against foreign influence, but his aim in introducing such practice had been quite the opposite: he had wanted lighter offenses, which had previously been sanctioned by prison sentences, to be punished with celerity by introducing 25 to 50 blows with the flat of a saber. He opted for the saber because blows from a cane were seen as degrading.⁵² In fact, blows from the flat of a saber had already been used in the French army before the Saint-Germain era. The practice had existed under Henri IV and Louis XIII, but the latter had limited its use to the cavalry, which

50 "Personne n'estime plus que moy la constitution militaire prussienne, mais pour l'establir dans un pais il faut que le roy y pense comme le roy de Prusse, et ce seroit une folie de pretendre l'introduire dans un estat dont le gouvernement est faible et les mœurs de habitans molles et lasches; on ne feroit qu'un arlequin, toutes les parties doivent ester liées les unes aux autres, se soutenir entre elles et se pretter de la force; je sçais qu'on doit toujours tender à la perfection, mais les moyens d'y parvenir doivent ester différents selon les différentes constitutions," Copy of a letter from Saint-Germain to Schmettow, Klein Linden, 26 November 1759, printed in Trier, 1925, p. 12. At this date, Saint-Germain was already negotiating his transfer to the Danish service.

51 Costa, 2010, p. 297-304. The author thanks the anonymous peer reviewer for pointing this out.

52 Ibid., p. 423.

consisted mainly of noblemen. Disciplinary use of the saber was therefore associated with the nobility, and the extension of the practice by Saint-Germain to all soldiers, regardless of social status, caused an outcry.⁵³

What characterizes Saint-Germain's view of the common soldier is his awareness of their inability to make a living and the appalling conditions they were exposed to. In his memorandum "Sur les vices du Militaire Français" of January 1758, he writes:

The misery of the soldier is so great that it makes the heart bleed, and regardless of this, everything leads to making him even unhappier. Is there a sadder situation than that of a man who always suffers of great needs, who cannot afford to have any fantasies, often stronger than the needs, who passes his days in an abject and despised state, and who lives like a dog in chains destined for battle.⁵⁴

To improve the common soldiers' situation, Saint-Germain states that soldiers should be released during peace time to refurnish society with peasants and artisans. He cautions from measuring an army's force in pure numbers and proposes the completion of regiments with militia in times of war. In his opinion, the number of pressed recruits should always be inferior to the number of experienced soldiers.⁵⁵

Soldier recruitment should not be made by company captains but by regiment commanders in the provinces acting on behalf of the King. This would help give the recruited soldier a sense of worthiness that would motivate him to serve well.⁵⁶ Soldiers should be paid in cash to enable them to buy their own provisions. Saint-Germain proposed to finance this

⁵³ Deflers, 2015, p. 412.

⁵⁴ "La misère du Soldat est si grande, qu'elle fait saigner le Cœur, et malgré cela, tout concourt à le rendre toujours plus malheureux. Quelle triste situation que celle d'un homme qui souffre toujours de grands besoins, qui ne peut se permettre aucune fantaisie, souvent plus forte que les besoins, qui passé ses jours dans un état abject et méprisé, et qui vit comme un chien enchaîné que l'on destine au combat!" *Mémoire du Comte de Saint-Germain, Sur les vices du Militaire Français*, janvier 1758, printed in: Saint-Germain, 1789, p. 208.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 203-204.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

scheme by taxing the army's meat and wine suppliers.⁵⁷ Finally, the soldiers should be accommodated properly in winter quarters and during peace time they should be released on a leave for three to four weeks to prevent the garrisons from having a negative effect on their health.⁵⁸

Almost two decades later, as the French Secretary of War, Saint-Germain did effectively attempt to improve the soldiers' situation. Among other things, he softened the sanctions inflicted on army deserters. Conscious of the relation, which was already recognized by his contemporaries, between the lack of property and desertion⁵⁹ as a means of survival, Saint-Germain, in his *Mémoires*, states that the French soldier would desert out of shallowness, debauchery, and because he did not own anything. A man who had no property would thus have no *patrie*.⁶⁰ Given that the soldier represented a precious "human resource," Saint-Germain preferred sanctions other than the death penalty.⁶¹ According to the ordinance of December 12, 1775, deserters could be amnestied and accorded transport and land to cultivate if they agreed to settle in the colonies, at Île de France (Mauritius) or Corsica. The death penalty was applied only for deserters in times of war. Minimum penalty for desertion in peace times was eight years of forced labor; however, the soldiers were accorded a period of repentance. They would be punished only by fifteen days in prison if, having deserted, they rejoined their unit within three days (prolonged to six days in March 1776).⁶²

57 Ibid., 209.

58 Ibid., 210-211.

59 On the dynamics of Early Modern desertions, see Sikora, 1996; Cicchini, 2005; Sonkajärvi, 2011.

60 Le Comte de Saint-Germain a M. du Verney, à Eisenach, le 24 septembre 1757, printed in: Saint-Germain, 1789, p. 150-151: "La désertion est prodigieuse dans les armées de France; d'où vient cela? D'abord de la légèreté d'esprit, ensuite du libertinage, & enfin de ce que le paysan françois n'a rien que son corps. Tout homme qui n'a ni maison ni propriété, n'a point de patrie. [...] Il est certain qu'un Soldat qui a quelque bien chez lui, ne desertera pas." Saint-Germain states it would therefore take a land reform to make the French peasant prosper and become attached to his *patrie*.

61 In line with Enlightenment thinkers of the time, such as Cesare Beccaria and Joseph von Sonnenfels.

62 Bois, 1990, p. 98-99.

To cut expenses, Saint-Germain introduced a reform revision (ordinances of March and June 1776) concerning veteran soldiers. He abolished the different categories of *soldes*, *demi-soldes*, and *vétérance*, which had been established by Choiseul (1762 and 1764) and Monteynard (1771) and which had proved too costly. Only soldiers who had been wounded or were unable to continue service due to old age or infirmity were to be provided for by the *Hôtel royal the Invalides*, the *compagnies détachés* or pensions.⁶³ Saint-Germain seems to have followed the idea, which he had already expressed in 1753, according to which most veteran soldiers would be able to provide for themselves if they were not attached to the *Hôtel* but instead allowed to settle in the provinces.⁶⁴ Implementation of the ordinances, however, did not produce the desired effects. Instead, most soldiers and officers were outraged by the cuts made.⁶⁵ Locally, city authorities were also irritated by veterans being sent to the provinces.⁶⁶

Although not all policies could be realized, Saint-Germain's reforms designed to improve the lot of the common soldier can be described as well intended. Nonetheless, the military elites, who felt their position inside the military hierarchy threatened, managed to shift the focus of public discussion away from the actual content of the reforms. They depicted the French soldier as a poor fellow punished by a foreign, brutal Prussian discipline and constrained by a terribly complicated and paralyzing headress.⁶⁷ What then, did the Secretary of War think of the officers?

The Officers in Saint-Germain's Judgement

In the Seven Years' War, during which Saint-Germain was involved in a conflict with *Maréchal* de Broglie and finally resigned from the French army

⁶³ Ibid., 1990, p. 84-94.

⁶⁴ Le Comte de Saint-Germain à M. du Verney, à Bièvre, le 19 Octobre 1753, printed in: Saint-Germain, 1789, p. 55.

⁶⁵ Opitz-Belakhal, 1994, p. 162.

⁶⁶ See, on the example of the city of Strasbourg, Sonkajärvi 2008.

⁶⁷ SHAT, MR 1714, Memorandum by Jean-Baptiste Petel de Scallier, "Mémoire sur les changements introduits par le Comte de Saint-Germain dans notre constitution militaire," 25 December 1777, which

(1760), he wrote to the Administrator-General of Provisions, Joseph Pâris Duverney, concerning the deficits in the French army. In a memorandum attached to a letter of December 5, 1757, he stated that the French army had too many *officiers généraux* who in peace times were dissociated from the army and forgot all military rules and practices. Young nobles should not be given the command immediately but made *colonels en second* instead.⁶⁸ This was because Saint-Germain considered most of the youth to have lost their moral integrity and to require experience and guidance of an older officer before they took command.⁶⁹

Saint-Germain believed that the practice of company economy (as opposed to regimental economy) would corrupt army structures and especially the hierarchy of command. Captains would treat recruits, whose drafting had cost them a lot of money, mildly in order not to lose them through desertion. Officers would not punish disorder in neighboring units because the soldiers in question were considered men of the company captain, not men of the King.⁷⁰

According to Saint-Germain, there were too many army officers, and the officer posts would be filled by non-nobles able to afford buying their posts—a practice he disapproved of. Officers would not have enough means for living and given limited career perspectives, they would lack ambition. Thus, they would try to secure retirement and would show no interest in guiding their troops. Pensions should therefore be accorded only to individuals who were unable to serve on account of wounds or

states: "Ce Ministre a si peu fait attention au génie de la nation, et à ses goûts, et a tellement espéré de pouvoir les changer à son gré, qu'il a osé prescrire une nouvelle forme d'habits et de coeuffure aux militaires, absolument différente de celle du reste de citoyens : il a fait encela ce que l'autorité directe du Roy n'entreprendroit peut-être pas, quoique ce fût son gout personnel. Tout frivole qu'est cet objet, aux yeux d'un philosophe, l'homme d'Etat ne le trouvera pas mois interessant, sachant qu'il a affaire à un peuple qui y met de l'importance, et qui de tout tems s'est cru en droit de donner aux autres nations de l'Europe, la forme de leurs vetemens." Blaufarb, 2002, p. 32, points out that Scallier was a supernumerary colonel, i.e., the sort of officer Saint-Germain's reforms aimed to discard.

68 Mémoire joint à la lettre précédente, à Fulde, le 15 Décembre 1757, printed in: Saint-Germain, 1789, p. 171-172.

69 Ibid., p. 172-173.

70 Ibid., p. 173-174.

length of service. Additionally, they should be paid in proportion to the length and quality of service.⁷¹

In his memorandum “Sur les vices du Militaire Française” of January 1758, addressing the Secretary of War, Saint-Germain continues in the same vein by stating that the malady of the army consisted of six elements: 1) in the forced inapplicability and the too large number of *officiers généraux* and their resulting inactivity; 2) in too large numbers of officers and their misery; 3) in the habit of leaving the companies to be guided by the captains; 4) in the limited duration of engagements; 5) in the misery of the soldiers; 6) in the spirit of insubordination and independence.⁷²

Saint-Germain’s analysis clearly demonstrates that he considered the problems of the French army to be, above all, structural and organizational ones. Moral problems are for the most part considered as resulting from deficient organization—they are attributed in the memorandum to the officers, not the soldiers. It is the morally corrupt officer who poses problems through his bad example and through his inability to establish order.

Army professionalization was to be achieved by education and, even more importantly, by career advancement of the lower nobility. However, Saint-Germain did not go as far as some of his contemporaries, who would open the officer’s career to the bourgeoisie.⁷³ He lamented the fact that the troops were filled with laymen, who did not have the quality to replace the nobility.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 175-176.

⁷² Mémoire du Comte de Saint-Germain, Sur les vices du Militaire Français, janvier 1758, printed in: Saint-Germain, 1789, p. 197: “1° Dans l’inapplication forcée et la multiplicité d’officiers généraux, qui produisent nécessairement l’ignorance et le dégoût. 2° Dans le nombre trop considérable d’Officiers, et dans leur misère. 3° Dans le système de laisser les compagnies au compte des Capitaines. 4° Dans les enrôlemens limités. 5° Dans la misère du Soldat. 6° Enfin dans cet esprit d’insubordination et d’indépendance, qui successivement a gagné toute la Nation, et qui produit nécessairement l’indolence et l’inapplication.”

⁷³ Pichichero, 2008, p. 569, names Jacques de Guibert and Maurice de Saxe as advocates for a more inclusive system.

⁷⁴ Mémoire du Comte de Saint-Germain, Sur les vices du Militaire Français, janvier 1758, printed in: Saint-Germain, 1789, p. 201-202.

In 1753, Saint-Germain had already described the barriers posed to the lower nobility in accessing the highest army offices. He wrote to Joseph Pâris Duverney, concerning the *Ecole Militaire*:

I should be tempted to ask why it makes sense to spend such large sums on the education of young noblemen only destined to become lieutenants, captains, and at most lieutenant-colonels, provided they have the time to reach this grade. [...] but if the military service becomes useless for their prosperity, does not laziness, so natural to man, promoted by bad example, win over and will these young people not fade in a few years? [...] If one does not distribute the best posts of a corps according to merit, the service will falter. On this there is the telling example of the King's troops: In a hundred regiments it is difficult to find six good lieutenant-colonels; and even more difficult to find six bad majors.⁷⁵

These ideas were closely related to Saint-Germain's own experiences: although he was of noble birth, he was dependent on his salary as an officer and whenever he was released from duty, he immediately got into financial troubles.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Both in France and in Denmark, Saint-Germain had been appointed Secretary of War as an external expert who was expected to profoundly reform the army. In both countries he immediately felt the constraints of

75 "Je serais tenté de demander, à quoi bon tant de dépenses pour l'éducation d'une jeune Noblesse destiné seulement à faire des Lieutenans, des Capitaines, et tout au plus des Lieutenans-Colonels, s'ils ont le temps de parvenir à ce grade. [...] mais si l'exercice leur en devient inutile pour la fortune, la paresse, si naturelle à l'homme, favorisée du mauvais exemple, ne prendra-t-elle pas le dessus, et ces jeunes fleurs ne seront-elles pas fanées au bout de quelques années? [...] Tant que l'on ne donnera pas au mérite les premiers emplois des Corps, le service languira; il y a là-dessus un exemple parlant dans les troupes du Roi: dans cent Régimens il sera difficile de trouver six bons Lieutenans-Colonels; et encore plus de trouver six mauvais Majors," Le Comte de Saint-Germain à M. du Verney, à Bièvre, le 16 Novembre 1753, printed in: Saint-Germain, 1789, p. 63-64.

76 Saint-Germain could not afford to acquire his own company in France. In 1767, when he was released from Danish duty, he deposited his money by an investor who placed it on the slave trade of the Danish Africa Company. The Company went bankrupt, and Saint-Germain retired into the Alsatian

his duty. Given budgetary limits, his first measures necessarily dealt with numbers, and so he aimed to cut down parade-ground unit numbers and pensions which did not contribute to his popularity and was bound to increase opposition within the army administration. In both countries, the administration succeeded in dragging and even hindering the implementation of these measures. Directly dependent on the monarchy's backing, Saint-Germain was dismissed in Denmark immediately after the death of Frederik V and in France after Turgot and Necker had lost their influence.

In Denmark, where Saint-Germain quickly adopted a very negative view of the officer corps, his reforms directly affected the great landholders' power over their peasants, as the separation between the mercenary forces and the militia was abolished and members of the two were now mixed in the same regiments. The transition from company economy to regimental economy introduced on August 3, 1763, led to widespread opposition by the officers, who started losing possibilities of gain linked to their function as military enterprisers.⁷⁷

Given the few explicit references found in the sources by the actors themselves, it is hard to determine how far, in France, Saint-Germain resorted to ideas created, received, and applied in Denmark. In his memoirs Saint-Germain does propose an organization for the French army's central administration similar to that introduced in Denmark under his authority in 1763.⁷⁸ In both countries, the Comte followed the ideas which he had already formulated in his letters and memorandum "Sur les vices du Militaire Français"⁷⁹ between 1753 and 1758 to the military enterpriser and co-founder of the *Ecole Militaire* (1751), Joseph Pâris Duverney (1684-1770): he hoped the military service would be established

province where he lived from credit and money provided from German officers in French service before becoming the French Secretary of War.

77 Verordnung, wie und auf welche Art die Daenische Armée hinkünftig gehalten und verpflegt werden soll, vom 3. August 1763, printed in: Frederik V, 1763. Implementation followed in September 1763.

78 Saint-Germain, 1779.

79 Mémoire du Comte de Saint-Germain, Sur les vices du Militaire Français, janvier 1758, printed in: Saint-Germain, 1789, p. 196-212.

as a profession in which one could make a living;⁸⁰ he wanted officers to obtain a professional education; and he wanted access to officers' posts to be independent of the applicant's status and wealth, but dependent on his education and experience obtained in service.⁸¹ In his view, less wealthy nobles should be able to make career in the army on equal terms with the higher nobility.⁸² Following these ideals, Saint-Germain introduced a uniform curriculum for all officers in France, independently of their position in the aristocratic hierarchy.⁸³ He established *Ecoles Militaires* in the provinces, thus enlarging the number of non-wealthy nobles admitted to military education. Every future officer was required first to become a *cadet-gentilhomme* (a gentleman cadet) and to spend at least one year as soldier and non-commissioned officer before becoming an officer. Seniority became the basis for promotion and minimum service requirements were established for promotion to the rank of colonel.⁸⁴ Saint-Germain vociferously expressed his opposition to the selling of offices and was little impressed by the quality of the parade-ground units, whose number he sought to reduce. He stipulated that officers should stay with their troops and behave professionally.

Somewhat paradoxically therefore, Saint-Germain—who wanted to establish the military service as a profession sustained by a trained, but distinctly noble group of officers—was dismissed from the French War Ministry by the nobility, who based their arguments on the welfare of the common French soldier. Public reception of the reforms was equally negative because the introduced practice of administering blows using the flat of a saber, regardless of the social background of those punished, made the ordinance appear of a social-revolutionary nature.

80 Saint-Germain also argues for the professionalization in an undated manuscript [ca. 1775-1777], SHAT, 1 M 1714, "Extrait de quelques manuscrits de M. le comte de Saint-Germain", s.d., in which he states: "Il me semble que dans l'état actuel des choses, il ny à rien de mieux à faire, pour former un état militaire, que de le séparer, autant que possible de la masse de la nation [...]."

81 Blaufarb, 2002, p. 24-26.

82 On military education, Bien, 1969; Porquet, 2011.

83 Blaufarb, 2002, p. 30-31.

84 Ibid., 2002, p. 30; Opitz-Belakhal, 1994, p. 158-159.

These findings support the opinions of Blaufarb and Opitz-Belakhal, who argued that the rift over army development in the second half of the 18th century was less between the nobility and the non-nobles than within the nobility.⁸⁵ In judging Saint-Germain's politics one must avoid a teleological interpretation that sees his ministries both in Denmark and France as a mere episode which ended in failure, but instead to differentiate between the policies formulated, their implementation and the discourses created based on these policies and their dynamics of application. The history of the Saint Germain reforms shows how failed reforms often tell us much more about the society in which they were conducted than successful ones.

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