

Marcus Warnke, Logistik und friderizianische Kriegsführung. Eine Studie zur Verteilung, Mobilisierung und Wirkungsmächtigkeit militärisch relevanter Ressourcen im Siebenjährigen Krieg am Beispiel des Jahres 1757, Berlin (Duncker & Humblot) 2018, 696 S., 95 Tab., 54 farb., 8 s/w Abb. (Quellen und Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preußischen Geschichte, 50), ISBN 978-3-428-15371-8, EUR 139,90.

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Adam L. Storing, Göttingen

Marcus Warnke's book integrates »new military history« – the social and economic history of war – with operational military history – the study of campaigns and battles – examining the wars of King Frederick II of Prussia (reigned 1740–1786) from the perspective of military logistics. The Seven Years War (1756–1763) saw Frederick's Prussia faced by a huge coalition: Austria, France, Russia, Sweden and the Holy Roman Empire. Warnke reveals, however, that the Prussians benefitted from a far superior logistical system, and argues that they could therefore sometimes be described as materially superior to their numerous opponents. Indeed, he emphasizes this as the crucial difference between the Seven Years War and the later German experience in the world wars of the twentieth century.

Historians have long stressed the logistical limitations on eighteenth-century warfare¹. Warnke, however, deploys exhaustive research – from archives in Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Poland and across Germany – to show precisely how the Austrian and Prussian and to a lesser extent the French and Imperial armies supplied themselves during the campaign of 1757. He describes how armies drew supplies both from magazines (previously-collected stores held in fortresses, towns or cities) and from the localities where they were based (either through agreed deliveries of supplies or through »foraging« by force).

The author shows that supplying soldiers with bread and ammunition was not so difficult, at least for the Prussians and Austrians. Much more complex was supplying fodder for horses: not only those of the cavalry but also the artillery and particularly those pulling the supply waggons. The combination of oats, hay and straw needed by horses was bulky to transport and, if an army was unable to live from local resources and therefore dependant on distant magazines, the hundreds and often thousands of waggons necessary to bring up supplies might use up a substantial portion of the fodder they carried simply for their own sustenance.

¹ See for instance [Jürgen Luh, Kriegskunst in Europa 1650–1800, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna 2004](#), p. 13–80.



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Scholars have recognised that logistics played an important role in the outcome of the Seven Years War, noting that the Prussian invasion of Moravia in 1758 was stymied by supply problems, while the Russian war effort was hamstrung by the difficulty of transporting its armies across Poland². Warnke shows that the French in Germany were also fatally weakened by logistical problems. In autumn 1757, the French armies advancing on Magdeburg accepted an informal neutrality agreement whereby the Prussians supplied the French army in return for it mostly withdrawing from Prussian territory.

Michael Hochedlinger showed that the theoretically huge Austrian Habsburg Empire suffered from an inability to mobilise its widely spread resources, and Warnke shows that this applied not just at the level of the state but also of military operations³. He details the efficient Prussian logistical system, which included a long-established network of magazines, well organised baggage waggons, mobile ovens, intendants to oversee army supplies, and quartermasters responsible for camps and march routes. Austrian developments such as the creation of a general staff in 1758 were merely a case of catching up with the Prussians. The author also emphasizes the huge importance of river transport along the Elbe and Oder, which allowed the Prussians to concentrate huge resources in Saxony and Silesia.

In contrast, the Austrians had few navigable rivers in Bohemia. While they had substantial resources as far afield as Vienna, Hungary, Italy and the southern Netherlands, it was much more difficult to bring these to the battlefield. Moreover, the mountains along the Saxon and Silesian borders severely restricted Austrian transport, making it hard for them to advance into Prussian territory. Reflecting their material advantages, the Prussians generally had more heavy artillery than their opponents and put more powder in their musket cartridges, while their better uniforms seem to have made it easier for them to campaign in autumn and winter.

Warnke argues that even the tactical course of battles can be explained in logistical terms. The combined French and Imperial armies had for instance already been reduced to such a disastrous state by supply problems that the result of the 5 November 1757 battle of Rossbach was a foregone conclusion. He stresses that the effectiveness of cavalry depended on the condition of their horses, arguing that the consistent superiority of the Prussian cavalry over its opponents reflected the better Prussian supply system, the more generous rations that the Prussians gave to their horses, and their easier access to replacements both from Hannover and from Eastern Europe.

² John L. H. Keep, Die russische Armee im Siebenjährigen Krieg, in: Bernhard R. Kroener (ed.), *Europa im Zeitalter Friedrichs des Großen. Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Kriege, Munich 1989 (Beiträge zur Militärgeschichte, 28)*, p. 133–170; Hew Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*, London 1983, p. 121.

³ Michael Hochedlinger, *Austria's Wars of Emergence. War, State and Society in the Habsburg Monarchy 1683–1797*, London 2003.



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Warnke argues that battles were generally won by the side that deployed the largest force in the best condition. He describes the 6 May 1757 battle of Prague as a series of frontal attacks, decided by the superior numbers of the Prussians and their superior cavalry and heavy artillery rather than by clever tactics. Discussing the 5 December 1757 battle of Leuthen, he notes that the Austrian army was suffering from great supply problems, with huge numbers of sick due to lack of wood and proper winter clothing. In contrast, the Prussians were well supplied, enjoyed their customary superiority in cavalry and heavy cannon, and could repeatedly re-supply their troops with ammunition during the battle.

Warnke admits that there were also tactical reasons for Prussian victory both at Rossbach and Leuthen, and he does not claim that logistics were the only factor influencing the result of the Seven Years War, but his logistical perspective on battle tactics is nevertheless a valuable one for future historians.

The author particularly criticises the German General Staff's multi-volume history of the wars of Frederick II, which has been the standard work for over a century despite its well-known problems⁴. Warnke shows that in many cases the General Staff deliberately under-estimated the size of the Prussian army and over-estimated that of its opponents in order to portray the Prussians as overcoming numerical inferiority through the superior quality of their soldiers and the superior generalship of King Frederick. He also reveals that, whereas the General Staff claimed that Frederick had to attack the Austrians at Kolin on 18 June 1757 in order to protect his siege of Prague, the Austrian army in Prague was in fact almost out of supplies and would soon have been forced to surrender. Warnke thus argues that it is not possible to rely on the General Staff works even for factual details. He also follows the lead of Jürgen Luh, Andreas Pečar, and Franz Szabo in strongly criticising Frederick's generalship⁵.

Warnke's massive book (696 pages) is aimed at military historians, and is primarily an operational narrative of the 1757 campaign. Sadly, this makes the book less accessible for non-military historians, and even for those with a broader interest in early modern military logistics. This is a pity, as the book's material also has wider importance. Whereas historians have stressed the limited power of »absolutist« states, Warnke's material shows the prodigious capacities these states were sometimes capable of, not least in his description of the monumental resources gathered by the Prussians in Silesia for the opening of the 1757 campaign, with an estimated 4000 waggons accompanying the corps of Field Marshal Schwerin as it advanced into Bohemia. While the warring parties were not always so effective, their ability to collect the tons of supplies needed each day by their thousands

⁴ Großer Generalstab Kriegsgeschichtliche Abteilung II, Die Kriege Friedrichs des Großen, Berlin 1890–1913.

⁵ Jürgen Luh, Der Große. Friedrich II. von Preußen, Munich 2011, p. 59–69; Andreas Pečar, Autorität durch Autorschaft? Friedrich II. als Militärschriftsteller, Halle-Wittenberg 2012; Franz A. J. Szabo, The Seven Years War in Europe, 1756–1763, Edinburgh 2008.



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of soldiers and horses, and to transport food, munitions and other supplies in thousands of waggons, reflected considerable powers of organisation. Warnke's description of the exactions and outright plundering of the local population by the Prussians and other armies (particularly on pages 418–419, 423–426, 442–448, 454, 516, 519–520, 553–555) also provides important insights on relations between soldiers and civilians in the eighteenth century. It is sad that Marcus Warnke did not choose to elucidate these wider implications of his material. His work, however, makes an important contribution to our understanding of the Seven Years War and of early modern military logistics.



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