

REVIEWS

Attrition thus stands out as a major contribution, even in this period of renewed scholarly attention to the war. One hopes that, in the second edition, the publisher will do a more thorough job of cleaning up some of the typographical and formatting errors. The book deserves it.

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Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, & Gerhard P. Gross (eds.). *The Schlieffen Plan: International Perspectives on the German Strategy for World War I*. Translation edited by David T. Zabecki. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2014. 577pp. ISBN: 978-0-8131-4746-8. Hardback. £69.50.

While this book shares some of the unevenness often found in conference-paper collections, it contains much to recommend it to any serious student of the crucial early phases of the First World War. Unfortunately, its merits do not extend to fulfilling the implied promise of its title; weaknesses in initial concept have been compounded by passage of time to deprive it of significance regarding its ostensible subject, the 'Schlieffen Plan'.

Like virtually all contemporary writing about the 'Schlieffen Plan', the book has its origins in Terence Zuber's startling 'The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered', *War in History* vol. 6, no. 3 (1999), pp. 262-305, soon followed by *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan: German War Planning 1871-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), adapted from his Würtzburg dissertation. He sought to overturn virtually everything that had been said over the preceding eight decades regarding the German plans in August-September of 1914, in the process harshly condemning the scholarship of many.

The central issue was how far the German operational plan in the West in August-September 1914 was formed on the model of the ideas expressed by Alfred von Schlieffen in a memo completed in February 1906 (but back-dated to his last day as chief of the Prussian General Staff, 31 December 1905). Described by Schlieffen as a *Denkschrift* (think-piece), its contents reflect its title: '*Krieg gegen Frankreich*' ('War against France'). In its more than 4700 words, Russia is mentioned solely to dismiss her from consideration and no provision is made to guard Germany's eastern frontier. Germany's troop strength was inadequate to execute the memo's concept for a strictly western campaign in 1905/1906, let alone for the two-front war of 1914.

After Germany's defeat, some senior surviving General Staff officers claimed that the 1914 plan was nevertheless that of Schlieffen (by then dead) and that it failed

principally because his successor, Helmuth von Moltke the Younger, had not carried through with it, and particularly because he had supposedly shifted troops from the right wing toward the left. Generations of historians have repeated this tale with minor variations and many well-known books about the war are built around it.

Zuber's insistence that these stories were fabricated to cover up the General Staff's failings provoked not simply academic critical examination but considerable outrage, particularly in Germany, where differing interpretations of the plan play prominently in long-running disputes concerning responsibility for the First World War.

In a review of this volume [from *Journal of Military History* vol. 79, no. 2 (2015), pp. 467-71] Zuber says that in the spring of 2004 he was invited to a conference sponsored by the Military History Research Institute in Potsdam on the understanding that it was to be collegial, with a free and open debate of the issues, but that in fact he was 'ambushed' with a series of sharply critical papers, including one by a moderator, followed by a brief question period but no extended open discussion. The editors, for their part (p. 9), say the objective 'was to discuss Zuber's pertinent theses and perhaps convince him to modify them if necessary, in order to establish a basis for debate'.

The papers and extensive supporting materials were published as *Der Schlieffenplan: Analysen und Dokumente* in 2006 and the present volume is a translation of the bulk of this. Although present at the conference, Zuber declined to permit his paper to be included in the translated volume. All of the papers were a decade old when the translation was published, a decade in which much had happened in the field.

The introduction overviews the historiography of the plan before summarising the arguments of the individual chapters, emphasizing the ways in which the editors see the chapters as attacking Zuber's theses. Their chief concern appears to be that Zuber not be taken as undermining the views associated with Fritz Fischer regarding the aggressive intentions of the Kaiser's regime and its consequent responsibility for the First World War. Zuber has indeed argued that Schlieffen's planning cannot be read as aggressive in overall intent and that so far as it involves offensive operations they serve ultimately defensive ends. However, this contention, whatever its merits and relevance, is not central to his arguments regarding the plan's nature and provenance.

Klaus Hildebrand explores the war's origins in terms of broad forces and trends. The paper's age shows: many of the specifics taken as given have been questioned, notably by Christopher Clark's *The Sleepwalkers*. It would better have been updated or suppressed.

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Annika Mombauer, a distinguished proponent of the Fischer thesis, contributes a long chapter arguing that however the plan of 1914 diverged from Schlieffen's memo it was identical in practical effect and aggressive intent. She published a substantially longer article along similar lines ('Of War Plans and War Guilt', *Journal of Strategic Studies* vol. 28, no. 5 (2005), pp. 857-85), subsequently critiqued by Zuber ('Everybody Knows There Was a "Schlieffen Plan": A Reply to Annika Mombauer', *War in History* vol. 15, no. 1 (2008), pp. 92-101). In general, readers will be best served by reading and comparing these two articles.

Robert T. Foley's chapter continues a debate with Zuber regarding details of German planning in which he argued that they support the thesis of German aggressive intent. It was soon revised and expanded as 'The Real Schlieffen Plan', *War in History* vol. 13, no. 1 (2006), pp. 91-115, to which Zuber responded ('The "Schlieffen Plan" and German War Guilt', *War in History* vol. 14, no. 1 (2007), pp. 96-108). Again, this exchange is more illuminating than Foley's superseded original in this book.

Gerhard P. Gross of the Military History Research Institute (and an editor of this volume) reviews at length the arguments over the plan in light of recently recovered summaries of the German initial deployment plans between 1893 and 1914. Together with translations of the summaries provided as an appendix this occupies two-fifths of the book. The plans provide a rich source for more detailed study of German planning and are a primary reason for scholars to consult this book. The critical maps discovered with the summaries are not reproduced here but Zuber shows them (with extended summaries of the plans and commentaries) in *The Real German War Plan, 1904-1914* (Stroud: The History Press, 2011).

Gross' article (but not the translated plans) was later published in *War in History* ('There Was a Schlieffen Plan', vol. 15, no. 4 (2008), pp. 389-431), followed by Zuber's critique ('There Never Was a "Schlieffen Plan"', vol. 17, no. 2 (2010), pp. 231-49). Here too it is well to consult the exchange.

The first chapter with much smell of powder smoke to it, or sense of the realities of large-scale operational manoeuvre, is that by Dieter Storz. He puts his command of Bavarian sources to excellent use in relating and analyzing the operations of the Bavarian-manned Sixth Army up to the Battle of the Marne, clarifying many obscure points and correcting significant myths.

Günther Kronenbitter incisively shows that the planning of the two allied Germanic empires proceeded in scarcely intersecting orbits. Each depended on strong support from the other in reaching for objectives lying beyond its own strength, while promising in return far more than it was actually prepared to give.

Stefan Schmidt analyzes the relationships between political and military factors in French planning. He emphasizes the degree to which French planning was moulded and constrained by the imperative of assuring British support and their uncertainty about doing so. Schmidt also makes clear how anxiety to ensure simultaneous pressure from east and west played into French commitment to *offensive à outrance*.

Jan Kusber probes how the structural weaknesses of the czarist state undermined military capacity while at once impelling the feckless monarch to his fatal decision for war. No comparisons are drawn but it is evident that the Russian regime was significantly weaker in these regards than the German and even than the Austro-Hungarian. Kusber shows that planning integration between Russia and her French ally was only marginally superior to that between the two Germanic empires.

Hans Rudolf Fuhrer and Michael Olsansky cover 'Switzerland's Role in the Schlieffen and Moltke Plans' – essentially nil.

Hew Strachan dissects how and why Britain came to be so ill-prepared for a war her leaders foresaw with reasonable clarity. He clearly illuminates the process of forming the army's general staff, and how it differed from the Prussian *Generalstab* not merely in function but in fundamental concept.

A final chapter by Luc de Vos retells the dismal story of Belgian defence planning.

A five-page glossary of military terms contains much of value even to those with a good general command of German.

It is not made clear at any point in what way Germany's military plans were fundamentally more aggressive than those of the other three major participants.

In all, this book is well justified by its strengths, but its flaws must be borne in mind.

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Jonathan Krause, *Early Trench Tactics in the French Army: The Second Battle of Artois, May-June 1915*. Farnham: Ashgate Studies in First World War History, 2013. 180pp. ISBN: 978-1-4094-5500-4. Hardback. £65.00.

One of the most important recent developments in the historiography of the First World War has been the, at least partial, rehabilitation of the French army. Albeit on a smaller scale, work is taking place that parallels that being undertaken on the