

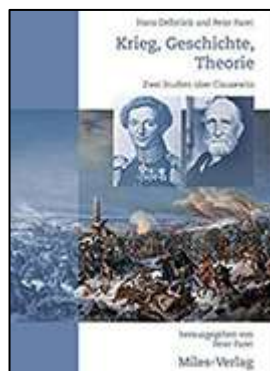


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CLAUSEWITZ IN SWITZERLAND

Roland Beck von Büren

Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) visited Switzerland in June 1807 as a war prisoner of the victorious Emperor Napoleon. This followed the terrible defeats of the Prussian army at Jena and Auerstedt, the disaster of Prussian-Eylau and the defeat of Russia's ally at Friedland.

Clausewitz was a young staff captain with no real military perspectives, who was far from his home and family. Is it no wonder, then, that Clausewitz had a bleak world view during this dark phase of his life.

His picture of Switzerland

In a letter to his beloved bride, Countess Marie von Brühl, Clausewitz wrote that villages in western Switzerland were unremarkable. He remarked that no village had a festive tower and no city a grand cathedral. Towns and villages had gray and nondescript appearances, he wrote. This is all the more astonishing because the landscape Clausewitz described has long been praised for its natural beauty and architecture.

“The beautiful city of Geneva takes her place at sea without grace or dignity. Houses are placed with economic accuracy around the centre. The Evangelical Church has a dry appearance. The towers are just high enough to earn the name and only a few feet higher than the houses. Lausanne is not much better. The small towns along the beautiful lake, Coppet, Rolle and Morges, disappear under the fruit trees and gardens.”

At Castle Coppet on Lake Geneva

Clausewitz arrived with Prince August of Prussia at the magnificent Castle Coppet on Lake Geneva on 11 August 1807. His mood improved considerably due to the Peace of Tilsit, which brought the two prisoners of war a break from their internment. The Prince and Clausewitz were allowed freedom of movement throughout the French territory, which included Switzerland. After French revolutionary troops invaded in March 1798, Switzerland lost its independence and neutrality and became a vassal state dependant on Napoleon's grace.

The Prince used the relaxed internment to travel to Switzerland – home to the glorious Alps – a particular trend of the time, common amongst the aristocracy: a romanticism of nature and most especially the mountains. Examples of this romanticism can be found in the early works of scientist and writer Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777), who wrote a poem on the Alps, or the work of Swiss historian Johannes von Müller (1752-1809), who chronicled and glorified the Swiss Confederation in Europe.

The Prince's preference for the great romantic literature of his time and its exponents played an important role in choosing to travel to Castle Coppet, for the renowned writer and poet Germaine de Staël (1766-1817) resided at the castle.

A second factor in the Prince's preference of Switzerland and Castle Coppet was the parallel visit of the charming Juliette Récamier (1777-1849). The Prince had already met Récamier in Paris and sought to make her better acquaintance. Récamier, who was painted by the great Louis David so memorably on a chaise longue, did not just happen to be in Coppet. She was considered pro-German and an enemy of Napoleon; subsequently, she left Paris to stay with her close friend, Germaine de Staël.

Clausewitz little understood the Prince's weaknesses for the softer sex and described the young Juliette Récamier as an "ordinary coquette". At sixteen Juliette had married one of the most influential bankers in Paris and had a widespread network of contacts. In effect, she had the men of Paris at her feet!

The advances of Prince August of Prussia were unsuccessful - in spite of a written marriage promise that is carefully preserved in the archives of the Castle Coppet. The reasons for the failure of these advances are little known. One might presume it had something to do with Juliette's status as a married woman already, her lack of nobility and her Catholicism.

When the passports for their departure to Prussia on 7th October 1807 arrived, the two internees were allowed to move forward toward their freedom. And the Prince ended this romantic chapter of his life.

Encounter with August Wilhelm von Schlegel

In the summer and autumn of 1807 Lake Geneva awakened back in Clausewitz his feelings for the beauty of nature and life. He wrote to his wife: "From

Coppet we overlook the lake from its whole length on one side and to Geneva on the other. We see the most secret corners of the earth from the gates, from the homes, and from the Rhone River. 'It's like a garden is looking to the country', William Tell says to his son ... and I never go for a walk without seeing natural splendour. No spot of even a few inches is uncultivated. Everything is fenced with green hedges. The frequent vineyards, where wine is cultivated in the Italian way, multiply the elegance of rich flavor. From the soft lighting of the wonderful alpine white heads, and above all the surfaces of the water in these beautiful autumn days, I dare not say a word ... ¹.

In these days of autumn 1807, despite all adversities, Clausewitz succumbed to the beauty of nature. This was reinforced by his acquaintance with the poet and philosopher, August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767-1845), who also was staying at Castle Coppet. After the early death of Baron Eric Magnus de Staël-Holstein in 1804, Schlegel resided at Coppet permanently. He accompanied the great writer on her frequent trips to Italy, France, Scandinavia and England.

Clausewitz was allowed to sit at the table next to Schlegel, where he enthusiastically wrote to his beloved bride in Berlin. Schlegel influenced Clausewitz not only by his romantic sense of nature, but also with his unadulterated, pure nationalism and patriotism. At this point, all those assembled belonged to Germaine de Staël's circle of friends. They longed for a liberated Germany and promoted a new German nationalism, these should provide the courage and strength for the Prussian liberation struggle after the earlier ignominious defeats.

Through his acquaintance with Germaine de Stael, Clausewitz became more enthusiastic, he wrote in a letter to his bride, of German literature. Germaine de Staël herself was taken with the two Germans, calling them "les deux Allemands par excellence"².

In the circle of Germaine de Staël

Germaine de Staël was a Swiss citizen with German roots. Coppet is a castle on Swiss soil and this piece of land belonged to the young, French-speaking canton of Vaud since 1804. But Germaine de Staël was born the daughter of the great French statesman and theorist Jacques Necker (1732-1804), a finance minister. Her father, in turn, was born in Geneva, but his father was Mark Brandenburger, professor of constitutional German law at the University of

Geneva. These were the strong German roots of Germaine de Staël, which perhaps help the reader understand why she was so deeply connected to German culture and why her work “De l'Allemagne” in two volumes was such a resounding success³.

Germaine de Staël promoted the image of Germans and Germany throughout France. Thus it was good for a common understanding between the two great nations. As the Bismarck era ended, however, Bismarck rightly feared that the southern German states and the rest of the former Confederation of Rhine States could close a bilateral alliance with France or Austria and thwart its war plans.

Clausewitz has dealt intensively with the chatelaine of Coppet and reached the following judgement: “Madame de Staël is a woman of much fantasy. She has a strong German spirit, but otherwise she is very French. That is to say: everything she thinks and speaks is marked by her German spirit; however she lacks the practicality of the mind and the quiet, gentle dignity of German womanhood what I need so much to find a woman interesting. In Madame de Staël this falls on me less uncomfortable, because she talks almost always about matters of literature, and therefore more contact with their advantageous side is in. It gives me pleasure, to see so sincere homage among strangers to the German spirit, to the German feelings.”⁴

His picture of the Swiss population and their spirit of resistance

Though Clausewitz was also involved with the Swiss population of the surrounding area, his verdict was not very positive. He stated the following in his travel journal: “Nothing catches the men’s attention, they are almost like Germans, at least a lot is missing that they have French loquacity and vivacity; one also sees many blondes. The second (female) sex is excellent. Usually the women are all very dark, but because all the people look sickly, the women also look pale and very yellow. They do however often have beautiful, black, but usually even more beautiful dark blue eyes, beautiful teeth, a pleasant, subtle and witty countenance. All in all they give off an impression of melancholy, which gives them all even the ugly ones, some interesting allure.” He continued: “The clothes are shabby, but something picturesque, somewhat naive-poetic. The whole nation has a rare degree of good-natured politeness.”⁵

In fact, Switzerland was in those years (during the periods of French occupation), a dirt-poor country, plundered, starved, mistreated and humiliated by the French occupation troops. These French troops followed the Napoleonic principles of the country, and refrained from hawser. Since 1803, Switzerland had a mediation agreement with France, but the occupation was not forgotten, and such deep scars do not heal. Switzerland still had to make significant duties and military service for France. For the augmentation of the Swiss regiments into Napoleon's troops, 18,000 Swiss were permanently sent to serve under the French.

If the mood in Coppet and Geneva was not so oppressive, it was because the French revolutionary troops liberated Canton of Vaud from the rule of Bern. The Canton of Vaud had been a free country and had every reason to be in a euphoric mood.

This situation was quite different from the situation in central Switzerland. The central cantons, especially Nidwalden, have never been subjected to the French conquerors. As such, they represented the myth of "William Tell" and have remained strongly against any foreign power to subjugate them. The consequences were inevitable. Central Switzerland has been repeatedly hit by the severe punitive actions. The population was decimated systematically and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) had to take care of the destroyed families and the many orphans.

Inspired by the Romantics

Clausewitz wanted nothing more than to see Central Switzerland, when he was returning to Germany. In his letter to Marie von Brühl, he wrote: "When I return, I hope to see the German Switzerland, it is classic in so many regards. In particular, I would have been happy to see the lake of Vierwaldstätten. Although I would not have been so happy to travel across, where Tell lay in the ship, tied with ropes, a derelict man to see, defenceless, what he tells us...." ⁶.

Clausewitz had in fact taken the pathos of Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805). The national epic of Switzerland, published in 1804, provided Clausewitz the spiritual nourishment that he urgently needed after the catastrophic collapse of Prussia. In this respect, the visit to Switzerland meant for Clausewitz internal collection and development of psychic forces for the liberation struggle. The example of William Tell and the freedom struggle of the

Confederates against murderous tyrants provided a great welcome. Clausewitz showed the example of the Swiss Confederation, which depicted a freedom struggle in a seemingly hopeless situation against a far superior adversary. This example showed that in the end this kind of situation could lead to a worthwhile, independent and sovereign state of existence.

Balance of the visit in Switzerland

In summary, we can say that Clausewitz's visit in Switzerland in 1807 was extremely important for his spiritual and mental development. These experiences helped him to fight for a liberated Germany, a state of freedom and independence. Moreover this stay, the visit in Coppet, enriched its social and literary education considerably and enabled him to gain important friends like the poet and philosopher August Wilhelm von Schlegel. Unfortunately, he didn't gain any friends from the women's society. He remained in the hearts of Coppet, connected by his faithful Marie von Brühl.

Development of the theory on the little war

Back in Berlin, he developed his lectures on the little war at the new "Kriegsschule", the first Prussian General Staff College in Berlin. These were inspired by the many impressions and experiences from the visit in Switzerland Clausewitz brought these basic thoughts on paper. They are to this day of great importance, even for the defence doctrine of Switzerland.

Many countries today lead wars outside their borders, such as the world power USA and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan. But Switzerland, as a neutral and independent small state, has to conduct the war within its borders and therefore needs to know the principles of "the little war."

Switzerland excellently accomplishes through its strict enforcement of general compulsory military service and in view of its geographical conditions, the conditions that Clausewitz calls for a successful management of "the little war". In his sixth book about the arming of the people, he notes: "The conditions under which the people's war can be effective alone are as follows:

1. that the war occurred in the interior of the country,
2. that the war will not be decided by a single disaster;
3. that the war theatre occupies a considerable area of land;
4. that the people support the measure;

5. that the country is very divided and inaccessible, either by mountains and through forests and swamps or by the nature of the soil culture.”⁷

Only the third requirement does not apply to Switzerland. The country is relatively small, but some helpful factors are the mountains, the forests, many rivers and lakes, and the dense colonization of the plateau. All these aspects favour “the little war”.

Clausewitz said next that “a poor class, accustomed to hard work and privation class” also shows strong military power⁸. This is not true for the Swiss population in the modern major conurbations. But the inhabitants of the mountain valleys, of the lofty mountain farms and the rural areas generally meet these requirements even in the high mass. The old fighting spirit still lives in them, as we know from the Swiss military history.

Clausewitz provides a first approach for a defence doctrine of Switzerland, by saying that the people's war would be in a first phase “like a fog and cloudlike-being”⁹ that could never concretize to a resisting body. Otherwise the enemy would focus an adequate force to this core, destroy it and make a large number of prisoners. “Then the courage would drop, everybody believes, the main question would be decided, and that a further effort would be in vain, and their arms would fall from the hands of the people”¹⁰.

Clausewitz goes on to say that the more passive first phase of defence had to be supplemented by a strong offensive and aggressive second phase of defence. He firmly believes the following: “From the other side, it is nevertheless necessary, that this dense fog shrinks to masses at certain points and forms threatening clouds, which can create strong lightning”¹¹.

To simplify, Clausewitz encourages “the little war” for a defensive doctrine, which weakens and wears the opponents with many small pins and needles, and which shatters and destroys the enemy with massive counter-attacks like lightning from a clear sky. This gives the basic structure of “the little war” in the strict sense of the word.

Clausewitz adds a further consideration: He calls for this “little war” either “as a last resort after a lost battle or as a natural support before a decisive battle is to be delivered”¹². With this statement he asks, that strong defence forces must be ready after weakening the enemy to finally beat and destroy them in key areas. This idea has further consequences for a Swiss defence doctrine.

Arming of the people as the basic of the Swiss defence doctrine

The transfer of these basic considerations to the present day is not easy. Of course, the threat is not comparable with the time when Switzerland faced Prussian forces in the great wars of liberation from the 1813/14. The armament and equipment of today's armed forces is not comparing with those earlier armed forces. Therefore, we can only speak of basic considerations and the level of reference to the construction of a defence doctrine can only be strategic.

With the formation of the Army XXI in the nineties, Switzerland has added many new elements in its defence doctrine. Unfortunately these elements are suitable for "the great war" or better for wars of intervention abroad and less intended for the conventional defence in the interior of the country. The current development of the political situation in Switzerland shows that the failed operations abroad (for example, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan), caused a loss of acceptance in the large war, while the classic little war in national defence gained importance. Strong political forces ask the complete abandonment of operations abroad and therefore they will put a stop to the Swiss engagement in Kosovo. Defence should not be practised in the future in the strategic areas of interest outside of Switzerland, but within its borders, perhaps in cooperation with friendly powers.

The new postulated security concept of "Security through Cooperation" confirms this trend as well. The cooperation is to be, however, mainly in the field of education, intelligence, disaster relief and peace promotion, while there are still no concrete plans visible for the area of defence. As long as the Swiss Federal Constitution defines Switzerland as a neutral and independent state, the intentions for the defence case cannot become a public issue. Given the threat of terrorism, of ballistic missiles from the Middle East, and of nuclear weapons, cooperation intentions could soon become an important political issue.

Initiatives threaten the principle of the arming of the people

Recently, the further development of the Swiss Army has been risked by two initiatives from a known political fringe group that advocates the abolition of the army. Both initiatives are directed against the arming of the people, as

Clausewitz calls in his sixth book for the defence in the interior of the country. The initiative to protect against weapon's violence undermines the credibility of the militia soldiers and threatens the shooting outside of the military service and, more generally, the private shooting clubs in their existence. The other initiative for the abolition of general compulsory military service simply undermines our traditional armed forces and therefore the principle of the arming of the people.

We are not allowed saw the name of this political fringe group. Characteristic of this group is that it eliminates things that exist, without creating something new. So this fringe group urges the abolition of the general compulsory military service, without saying how, for example, the recruitment of a voluntary militia should occur, or what the implications on the composition and quality of the army will be.

Countries, who have left the traditional national defence and therefore also the general compulsory military service and engage their armed forces abroad almost exclusively, provide us with the necessary experience. Accordingly, the recruitment of voluntary militiamen in Switzerland with a comparatively low unemployment rate and a pronounced prosperity will be realizable only with high salary payments. Already a miniature army would cause labour costs of approximately an additional 20,000 federal employees. If we consider that not even the doubling of full-time instruction Corps, what the Army XXI concept envisaged, was possible in life, we see how illusory such an intention is. In short, the abolition of general compulsory military service would have a dramatic impact on military budget and federal budget and would, as a result, prevent investments to modernize the Swiss army.

Even the composition of the Swiss army would change. The army would no longer be a reflection of the people, but a rallying point for citizens, who don't have a civil job, or for military enthusiastic Secondos, who expect with the completed military service better prospects in the civilian labour market, or for violence enthusiastic Rambo's and other marginalized groups in society. The political control of such an army would increasingly become a problem. Sooner or later, such an army would be a burden or a threat for the country's own citizens.

We can therefore conclude that the initiative to abolish general compulsory military service in Switzerland is not sufficiently resolute and can be rejected. This does not prevent us from constantly checking our armed forces

and military law. For example, the Swiss Officer Society recently developed a position paper to give new impetus to the development of the militia army.

For a politically viable development of the army, only the Federal Constitution and the framework of the executive Swiss Federal Counsellors should be allowed to form a basis. It is therefore necessary in the future that the core competence of the Swiss army remains in the area of defence against a military attack on Switzerland. The Swiss army should be organized after the principle of a militia army, to make sure that we have a strong professional and militia officer corps, and that we bend or break the hold on the conscription.

Consequences on the tactical-operational level

On the tactical-operational level, it is difficult to derive principles for the Swiss defence doctrine. It can be said for certain that strong infantry forces in the border area need to weaken the opponent. On the other hand, in the key areas of Zurich, Bern and Lausanne and in the Alps, strong defence forces are called for to make the final decision and to destroy the opponent.

These forces have to be organized, trained and equipped after the latest findings from today's wars. This includes not only heavy weapons like as tanks and artillery, but also a powerful air force and air defence. Without temporary and localized air superiority in key areas, no military success on the ground will succeed in future. That is why modern and efficient forces of air force and air defence are of such overwhelming importance.

The hunting fight of the infantry in the border area should be lead freely and not have solid blocking positions. On the other hand, the defence in key areas need locally defined dispositives with assigned troops where they can lead the defensive struggle from prepared positions and assigned application areas. The idea in the current doctrine of the Army XXI is that a few brigades can form heavyweights to lead the defence wherever necessary and in any terrain. Otherwise they would be overwhelmed by the capacities of a militia army and would thus inadequately utilize the strengths of the terrain.

We can thus derive further conclusions. Switzerland needs combat units, which are allocated in key spaces and which have the necessary equipment and training. While professional armies respond quickly to new threats and can be reorganized accordingly, a militia army of a small state with only a year short service needs decades or years to develop a new defence doctrine and to make sure that the troops are trained and equipped accordingly. To

think a militia army only at emerging threats could, with the help of two or three combat brigades, grow to the maximum war strength, is a most dangerous and deceptive illusion.

Defence readiness also in peacetime

Politicians fear the high cost of a quantitatively and qualitatively well-armed militia army in peacetime. But security has its price and without security, or even with the loss of the own country, all other political efforts are in vain. Some politicians claim that the army has to be prepared only for the current likely threat case, which is terrorism. A threat to Switzerland by a foreign power, that would create dispute in the land, cannot be foreseen. From past historical experience we know that no one can predict threats for the next ten or twenty years. So, for example, the Social Democrats previously rejected the defence of Switzerland four years before the outbreak of the Second World War. After the war many politicians overturned the then-current world view of respecting the territorial integrity of nations. This was not the case when the Russian army invaded Georgia.

Switzerland is well advised if it follows the goal of a warlike militia army even in peacetime, so that the entire world acknowledges its sovereignty, autonomy, independence and inviolability of its territory.

General compulsory military service and militia as eternal cornerstone

Carl von Clausewitz left his imprint over two hundred years ago on Switzerland and on Castle of Copped in the circle of Germaine de Staël. It was here that he experienced spiritual dimensions of education first-hand and learned many proposals. But the main impetus he gained was from Switzerland with its stubborn will to autonomy, independence and freedom. Clausewitz's own personal experience led him to conclude these values can be obtained only with an aggressive attitude and a strong army. Then he built his theory of war and especially that of "little war", gave lectures at the appropriate young war-school at Berlin and prepared the future elite for the Prussian War of Liberation against Napoleon.

His theory of "little war" is still of great importance for Switzerland today. Militarization of the people, as described in his sixth book, is still the basic

principle of the defence of a neutral and independent small state. General compulsory military service and the militia are cornerstones of Switzerland's defence today and hopefully the future.

Notes:

¹ Linnebach, Karl, Carl and Marie von Clausewitz. A picture of life in letters and diary sheets. Berlin, Warneck 1916, p. 145.

² Schramm, Wilhelm von, *Clausewitz: Life and Work*, Esslingen am Neckar 1976, p. 193.

³ Staël, Germaine de, *De l'Allemagne*. 2 vols, Paris, Garnier-Flammarion 1968.

⁴ Linnebach, *ibid*, p. 146.

⁵ Schramm, *ibid*, p. 178f.

⁶ Linnebach, *ibid*, p. 148f.

⁷ Clausewitz, Carl von, *On War*, 19th edition, Dümmler Verlag, Bonn 1980, p. 801.

⁸ *On War*, *op cit*, p. 801.

⁹ *On War*, *op cit*, p. 803.

¹⁰ *On War*, *op cit*, p. 803.

¹¹ *On War*, *op cit*, p. 803

¹² *On War*, *op cit*, p. 805

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