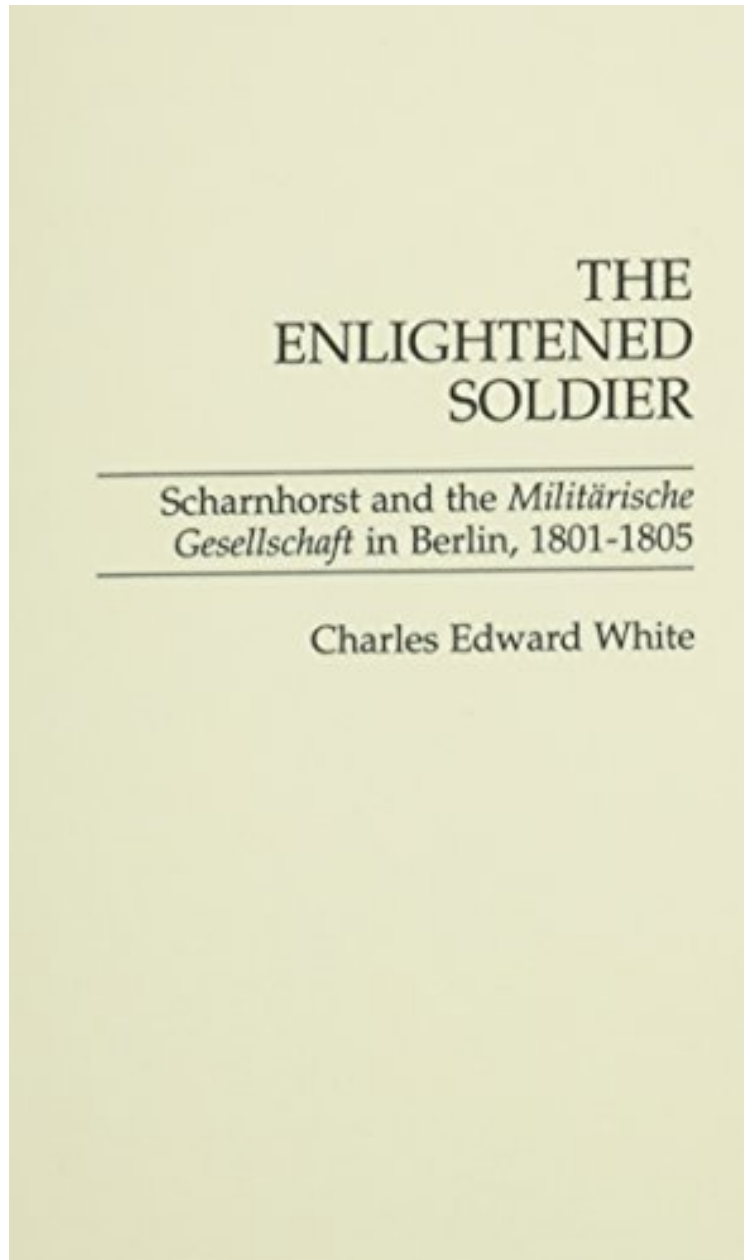


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The Enlightened Soldier: Scharnhorst and the Militarische Gesellschaft in Berlin, 1801-1805

Charles E. White

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Soldier: Scharnhorst and the Militarische Gesellschaft in Berlin, 1801-1805:

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. An intellectual military tradition. By Stone Dog This book highlights the dawn of the intellectual military tradition in Prussia that created an officer corps that *thought* and focused upon the result to be obtained rather than simply following processes. Gerhard Von Scharnhorst emerges after Prussia's disastrous loss to Napoleon to spark a new way in which officers, down to the lowest rank, are to approach their profession. He began with the "military society" wherein officers thought about war as a science rather than an art. Officers were responsible for their own intellectual development. They wrote papers, debated, explored and challenged each other. Von Scharnhorst led the development of a military that consistently out-thought their opponents because they didn't simply follow orders. Officers, at every level, were focused upon the result to be obtained - even if this required *disobeying* orders from above in favor of what the situation in front of them required. This doesn't mean that everyone acted on his own, but rather fulfilled the commander's *intent* by doing what is actually needed to produce a result that will facilitate the higher commander's desired result. They saw war as a creative act which required an intellectual framework and trust both down to a subordinate and upwards to the higher commander. As a result, they were consistently able to make decisions faster than their opponents. This not the story of battles and campaigns. Rather, it is the story of reforming a system that no longer produced the desired result. It is the story of men who think about their profession and where disagreement and strenuous debate are not only tolerated, but encouraged. Compare that with the intellectual environment in the US Army between the world wars that threatened the careers of young Dwight Eisenhower and George Patton for simply *writing* about new technologies (such as the armored vehicle) and how they might challenge existing tactics and traditional combat arms. This book should be read by every American military professional from lowest rank to highest as well as our political leaders. I heartily recommend this book to all interested in military science.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An excellent introduction. By zroth A must-read for anyone looking to understand proper military organization and how we could institute it in the US. Highly recommend.

11 of 13 people found the following review helpful. The Reformers. By Kevin F. Kiley Scharnhorst, the Hanoverian officer who transferred to the Prussian service, bringing with him new ideas of professionalism, excellence, and the education of officers, was one of the guiding lights in Prussia after their catastrophic defeat by Napoleon and his terrible Grande Armee, that, in three weeks of marching, fighting, and pursuit, destroyed the old Prussian Army of Frederick the Great. This excellent volume, however, is not of the reform period, nor does it chronicle the decisive campaign of 1806. What it does tell us, is of Scharnhorst's efforts to institutionalize excellence in the Prussian army, especially its officer corps, and to move it into the era of modern warfare as exemplified by Napoleon and the French experience in the Wars of the Revolution. Scharnhorst, as a new lieutenant colonel with a new patent of nobility, launched into the old ideas of Prussia's methods of waging war, and gathered about him like-minded souls that saw the shortcomings of the Prussian system and wanted to improve the army, especially the officer corps that was dominated by Junkers, the landed Prussian aristocracy that thought it their right to provide the army with its officer corps. To that end, Scharnhorst established the Militarische Gesellschaft, or Military Society, in Berlin. While not a school, it did become a think tank, and most of its members went on to become members of the revamped and reorganized Prussian General Staff, which was attempting to come into the modern world of the nineteenth century, based on the French staff example. Before 1806 there was only partial success, Scharnhorst meeting opposition from most of the older generals and many of his peers. Still, there was success. Many papers and studies were published, including a noteworthy one by Scharnhorst on the Marengo Campaign of 1800, which noted the reforms in organization, tactics, leadership, and staff functioning that were being employed by the French. It also noted the numerous shortcomings of the Austrian Army. This is a valuable work for any understanding of what the Prussian Army, or rather, certain of its members, were trying to do in the rough days before 1806, and in the even rougher ones after. Based on much primary German sources, including Scharnhorst's personal papers, it is a necessary work for both the study and understanding of the period, and it places the nucleus of the responsibility for the Prussian reforms squarely on Scharnhorst's shoulder, where they evidently belong. This is a necessary work for any student of the period and is very highly recommended.

This volume explores the essence of German military professionalism as exemplified by the nineteenth century Prussian German Staff. The study focuses on the most important Prussian military reformer--Gerhard Johann David von Scharnhorst, who in 1801 founded the Militarische Gesellschaft (Military Society) in Berlin. The Gesellschaft became the focal point for the transformation of the Prussian army from a robotic war machine into a modern fighting force that was instrumental in defeating Napoleon in 1813 and in 1815. The author examines the following elements of this military society: its membership; the specifics of its agenda; the intellect, imagination, and habits of thought, reflection, and objective analysis of its members; Scharnhorst's particular contributions.

About the Author CHARLES E. WHITE is the Historian of the United States Army Infantry School, Fort Benning,

Georgia, where he teaches military history.