

WAR IN AN AGE OF REVOLUTION

Conference at the GHI, March 11–12, 2005. Conveners: Roger Chickering (Georgetown University), Stig Förster (University of Bern), Christof Mauch (GHI).

Participants: Timothy Breen (Northwestern University), Marion Breunig (University of Heidelberg), Michael Broers (Lady Margaret Hall), Jost Dülffer (University of Cologne), Donatus Düsterhaus (University of Tübingen), Mary Favret (Indiana University), Alan Forrest (University of York), Azar Gat (Tel Aviv University), Karen Hagemann (Technical University of Berlin), Beatrice Heuser (Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, Potsdam), Günther Kronenbitter (University of Augsburg), Wolfgang Kruse (Fernuniversität Hagen), Jörg Nagler (University of Jena), Ute Planert (University of Tübingen), Jean Quataert (Binghamton University, SUNY), Dennis Showalter (Colorado College), John Tone (Georgia Institute of Technology), Dirk Walter (Hamburg Institute for Social Research).

The prelude to the conference was a roundtable discussion in honor of Hartmut Lehmann, the former director of the Institute. The occasion was the publication of the fifth and final volume of the series on total war, for Lehmann was the original patron of the conference series from which these volumes emerged. Stig Förster, Jörg Nagler, Roger Chickering, Jean Quataert, and Dennis Showalter, five of the principals in this series, shared their perspectives on its history, evolution, and conclusions. The presentations and ensuing discussion focused on the enduring problems of conceptualizing “total war,” as well as the difficulties encountered in the effort to analyze its history from the American Civil War to the Second World War.

The conference itself was devoted to the changes and continuities in the character of warfare in Europe and North America during the “age of revolution.” The organizers had hoped to unlock this problem from the discussion of total war, but the effort proved difficult, for the wars of the late eighteenth century have figured centrally in the narrative of total war in the modern era. In the first panel, which was devoted to theoretical frameworks, Azar Gat analyzed the “military revolution,” the narrative that has governed the history of war in the early modern era. Roger Chickering’s paper explored the nexus of this narrative and the narrative of total war. Stig Förster then argued for the global dimensions of warfare in the revolutionary era.

The second panel analyzed more closely the character of combat in the revolutionary era and the extent to which it represented a departure from patterns of the eighteenth century. Alan Forrest considered the

problem of supplying the mass armies of the French Revolution. John Tone analyzed the partisan warfare that greeted French occupation of the Iberian peninsula, while Dirk Walter argued that the Prussian reforms of the early nineteenth century represented a revolutionary innovation. A third panel addressed broader intersections between military and social history in the revolutionary era. Timothy Breen's paper tapped several of the same themes as Tone's paper in analyzing popular mobilization in the American revolution, while Wolfgang Kruse looked at the force of revolutionary ideology in the French armies of the early 1790s. Beatrice Heuser examined the theoretical work of Jacques-Antoine de Guibert, who is commonly regarded as the intellectual father of revolutionary war but, as Heuser's paper made clear, was a complex thinker who had retreated from his earlier theories by the time the French Revolution began.

The second day of the conference began with a panel on occupation and invasion. Ute Planert argued that French occupation policies, particularly in southern Germany, were driven by many of the same material pressures as the policies of eighteenth-century armies. On the other hand, Donatus Düsterhaus depicted the social and political disruptions that accompanied the repeated invasions of Alsace by revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces. In her account of the British war on Washington and Baltimore during the War of 1812, Marion Breunig demonstrated both the limited goals of the occupiers and their willingness to contemplate terror against civilians as a tool of war. The final panel then turned to questions of war and culture. Karen Hagemann reflected on the new constructions of masculinity that emerged in Germany during the Wars of Liberation. Günther Kronenbitter used the work of Friedrich Gentz to analyze the lessons drawn by prominent European conservatives about revolutionary warfare. Mary Favret then presented a stimulating paper on the traces that the revolutionary wars left in British literature.

After Jost Dülffer and Michael Broers presented their reflections on the deliberations, the conference concluded with a general discussion, which dwelled on the topics omitted in the papers. General agreement reigned that an attempt to assess the innovations brought by the American and French Revolutions required more attention to problems of ideology, confession, mobilization, and everyday life. The organizers hope to address some of these lacunae, as well as to devote more consideration to North America, in the volume that presents the proceedings of the conference.

Roger Chickering