



The Art of War in the Eighteenth Century

This bibliography lists works, from the end of the eighteenth century to the present, documenting the literature on the art of war in the eighteenth century, its role in military education, and its practical influence on soldiers from the Prussian officers of Frederick the Great to the Continental Army officers who served under George Washington.

The military became a profession in the eighteenth century. Military service had been both a way of life and a livelihood since antiquity, but in Western societies from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance, military officers were drawn mainly from the ranks of the aristocracy and the gentry, and military advancement was more often based on social standing than specialized training or practical experience, two of the characteristics of modern professions.

The professionalization of the military paralleled the rise of printing and print culture. It can be discerned in the sixteenth century and was clearly at work in the seventeenth, although social status remained the primary source of preferment and technical knowledge was not yet a prerequisite to success in the field.

Change accelerated in the eighteenth century. As warfare became more technologically sophisticated and expensive, European monarchies needed officers with sophisticated knowledge in military engineering, including the design and construction of fixed fortifications, the management of artillery, cartography, and the effective management of large armies in the field. European navies required increasingly technical knowledge of naval architecture, navigation, and the handling of ever more powerful naval artillery.

Formal military education emerged during the eighteenth century, beginning with the most technically demanding fields like the design and construction of fortifications and the handling of artillery, and gradually extending to other areas. The literature of the art of war, including engineering manuals, technical treatises, and guides to effective drill and the handling of armies on the march, in camp, and in battle, grew in volume and richness during the eighteenth century.

By the time of the American Revolution, European armies were led by an increasing number of officers who learned the art of war by reading and practical application of the prescriptions found in books. Military preferment was still based on social standing at the end of the century, but aristocratic officers who mastered technical aspects of their profession were far more likely to advance in rank and responsibility if they were well versed in literature on the art of war. Among the

officers of Washington's army, soldier like Henry Knox and Nathanael Greene who devoted time to mastering technical literature rose in rank, responsibility, and the esteem of their commander.

This flowering of the literature on the art of war in the eighteenth century is amply reflected in the Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection, the largest and most important of the rare holding of the American Revolution Institute library.

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