

TERENCE ZUBER - THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN DEBATE 1999-2014

In 1999 'The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered' appeared in *War in History*. It contended that the Schlieffen plan, one of the pillars of 20th-century military history, had never actually been the German war plan, which caused considerable controversy and ruffled the feathers of some very senior historians, a number of whom were on the record as saying that the Schlieffen plan had been the German war plan. They had also concluded that the Schlieffen plan was the proximate cause of the Great War and emblematic of rigid German planning and German militarism. Their opposition had already caused an American military history journal to reject 'The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered'. Prof. Hew Strachan, the Chichele Professor of Military History at All Souls, Oxford, and co-editor of *War in History*, published it with the express intent of stimulating a debate.

That debate began in 2001 and continues to this day. It comprises seventeen journal articles, all but one which have appeared in *War in History*: four by Terence Holmes, two by Robert Foley, one by Annika Mombauer and one by Gerhard Gross, plus my rebuttals. In addition, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, which expanded on 'The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered', was published by Oxford UP in 2002, and *The Real German War Plan 1904-1914* by the History Press in 2011.

The Schlieffen plan debate has become one of the longest and most extensive debates in modern military history. The sixteen journal articles of the debate comprise 290 pages of complex text. This is too long for almost anyone to read. The following summaries reduce the debate to a more-manageable 77 pages.

For reasons of copyright, it was not possible to summarize the articles by Holmes, Foley, Mombauer and Gross. Each of their articles is given a paragraph-long 'executive summary'. My rebuttal is given an extensive summary, which itself requires a restatement of my opponent's position. Due to the need to describe newly-discovered documents in detail, my last two debate pieces are longer.

PUBLICATIONS

T. Zuber, 'The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered' in: *War in History*, 1999 (3) pp. 262-305.

T. Holmes, 'A Reluctant March on Paris', in: *War in History*, 2001 (2) pp. 208-32.

T. Zuber, 'Terence Holmes Reinvents the Schlieffen Plan' in: *War in History* 2001 (4) pp. 468-76.

T. Holmes, 'The Real Thing' in: *War in History*, 2002 (1) pp. 111-20.

T. Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan: German War Planning 1871-1914* (Oxford University Press, 2002)

T. Zuber, 'Terence Holmes Reinvents the Schlieffen Plan - Again' in: *War in History* 2003 (1) pp. 92-101.

R. Foley, 'The Origins of the Schlieffen Plan' in: *War in History*, 2003 (2) pp. 222-32.

T. Holmes, 'Asking Schlieffen: A Further Reply to Terence Zuber' in: *War in History* 2003 (4) pp. 464-479.

T. Zuber, 'The Schlieffen Plan was an Orphan' in: *War in History*, 2004 (2) pp. 220-25.

R. Foley, 'The Real Schlieffen Plan' in: *War in History*, 2006 (1) pp. 91-115.

T. Zuber, 'The 'Schlieffen Plan' and German War Guilt' in: *War in History* 2007 (1) pp. 96-108.

A. Mombauer, 'Of War Plans and War Guilt: The Debate Surrounding the Schlieffen Plan' in: *Journal of Strategic Studies* XXVIII, 2005.

T. Zuber, 'Everybody Knows There Was a 'Schlieffen Plan": A Reply to Annika Mombauer' in *War in History* 2008 (1) pp. 92-101.

G. Gross, 'There Was a Schlieffen Plan: New Sources on the History of German War Planning' in: *War in History* 2008 (4) pp. 389-431.

T. Holmes, 'All Present and Correct: The Verifiable Army of the Schlieffen Plan', in: *War in History* 2009, (1) pp. 98-115.

T. Zuber, 'There Never was a "Schlieffen Plan": A Reply to Gerhard Gross' in: *War in History* 2010 (2) pp. 231-249

T. Zuber, 'The Schlieffen Plan's "Ghost Divisions" March Again: A Reply to Terence Holmes' in: *War in History* 2010 (4) pp. 1-14

T. Zuber, *The Real German War Plan 1904-1914* (The History Press, 2011)

T. Holmes, 'Absolute Numbers: The Schlieffen Plan as a Critique of German Strategy in 1914' in: *War in History* 2014 (2) pp. 193-213.

William D. O'Neil, *The Plan That Broke the World. The "Schlieffen Plan" and World War I* (2014)

SUMMARIES

'The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered' by Terence Zuber in: *War in History* 1999 (3) pp. 262-305.

The Schlieffen plan is so well-known that it has become 'common knowledge' which requires no verification: it was an aggressive war plan which promised Germany victory over France in 42 days and also proves German war guilt.

Comparing the 'common knowledge' Schlieffen plan to the actual Denkschrift shows considerable discrepancies. 'Common knowledge' says that the Schlieffen plan was intended for a two-front war against France and Russia: the actual Schlieffen plan Denkschrift was for a one-front war against France. The Denkschrift required an army of 96 divisions, but only 72 were available in 1906 and only 68 on the west front in 1914: the Schlieffen plan was based on at least 24 "ghost divisions".

In any case, aside from the Schlieffen plan Denkschrift, almost nothing was known about German war planning from 1891 to 1914. With the fall of the Berlin Wall German war-planning documents, which had been held by the East Germans, became available for the first time, including a manuscript describing Schlieffen's war planning to 1904. In addition, a number of Schlieffen's war games were found in the Bavarian army archives.

These documents show that up to 1904 there was no trace of the Schlieffen plan. In fact, Schlieffen intended to counter the expected coordinated Franco-Russian attack by using Germany's central position and the mobility provided by her rail net to counterattack against first one opponent, then the other. This is the theme of Schlieffen's last wargame.

Schlieffen wrote the 'Schlieffen plan' Denkschrift to argue for a massive increase in the size of the German army, and not a war plan that involved the use of 24 'ghost divisions.'

The history of German war planning prior to the First World War has been dominated by the 'Schlieffen plan', which was developed in a *Denkschrift* (study) written in early 1906 by the recently retired Chief of the German General Staff, Count Alfred von Schlieffen. The *Denkschrift* assumed a one-front war against France (and later, Britain). No forces needed to be sent to protect East Prussia against the Russians. Schlieffen's concept for this war plan was to deploy seven-eighths of the German army between Metz and Aachen, on the right wing of the German front, leaving one-eighth of the army to guard the left flank in Lorraine against a French attack. The right wing of the western army would sweep through Belgium and northern France, swinging to the west of Paris, continually turning the French left flank, eventually pushing the French army into Switzerland. If the French attacked the German left, in Lorraine, they would be doing the Germans a favor, for the attack would accomplish nothing and the French forces in the north would be that much weaker.

Beginning in 1920, semi-official histories written by retired First World War German army officers such as Lieutenant Colonel Wolfgang Foerster, General Hermann von Kuhl and General Wilhelm Groener, as well as the first volume of the official history of the war produced by the Reichsarchiv in 1925, maintained that this *Denkschrift* represented the culmination of Schlieffen's military thought, and provided Germany with a nearly infallible war plan: all that Schlieffen's successor, Helmuth von Moltke, had needed to do was to execute the Schlieffen plan, and Germany would have been practically assured of victory in August 1914. They maintained that Moltke did not understand the concept of the Schlieffen plan, and modified it by strengthening the forces on the left wing at the expense of the main attack on the right. For this reason, the German army failed to destroy the French army in the initial campaign in the west in 1914.

After the war, the Reichsarchiv in Potsdam, which was the custodian of the pre-war German plans, treated them as classified documents, access to which was essentially restricted to reliable retired officers, such as Foerster, Kuhl, and Groener. These men emphasized the Schlieffen *Denkschrift* and revealed practically nothing of Schlieffen's other war plans written between 1891 and 1905.

The Reichsarchiv also pronounced the *damnatio memoriae* on the failed Chief of Staff of 1914, Helmuth von Moltke: all that we know of his planning is that around 1909 he conducted the fatal modification of the Schlieffen plan.

Since the Reichsarchiv, and with it all of Schlieffen's and Moltke's war plans, was destroyed by British incendiary bombs on the night of 14 April 1945, any analysis of German war planning has had to be made, with a few unimportant exceptions, on the basis of the fragments of information provided by the official history and the retired officers.

Hans Delbrück, who had been conducting a prewar debate on strategy with the German army, responded that Germany had used the wrong war plan. It would have been wiser to attack in the east and defend in the west: this was, Delbrück said, after all the plan of the great Field Marshal von Moltke between 1871 and 1888. An offensive in the east – an *Ostaufmarsch* – would have produced a quick, easy victory over the Russian armies in Poland. Germany could have also respected Belgian neutrality, which would have seriously weakened British enthusiasm for the Entente. The debate between the General staff officers and Delbrück continued up to the Second World War.

Between World War I and the 1990s, only one group of original German war planning documents has come to light, this being the original drafts and copies of Schlieffen's *Denkschrift*, which Gerhard Ritter found in Schlieffen's papers being held after World War II in the National Archives in the United States. Ritter published these along with a critical commentary in 1956 in his book *Der Schlieffenplan: Kritik eines Mythos*. [1] For Ritter, there was no question that this *Denkschrift* was the culmination of Schlieffen's strategic thought and the template for all subsequent war plans. Ritter also thought the plan was inflexible, very risky, and had little chance of succeeding. Ritter made the Schlieffen plan the central piece of evidence in his indictment of German militarism. The Schlieffen plan was war-planning run amok, the 'purely military' plan 'based on military theory rather than on the realities of history and politics'. The violation of Belgian neutrality was a catastrophe: 'The entire world criticized Germany for being led and ruled by unscrupulous Militarists...seen from the perspective of later events (the Second World War), the Schlieffen plan appears to be the beginning of the German and European disaster.'

Subsequent historians have based their description of German war planning on Kuhl, Foerster, Ludendorff, Groener, and above all, Ritter.

The actual *Denkschrift* emphasizes two facts. The first is that the Schlieffen plan was intended for a one-front war against France and Britain. However, in 1914, Germany faced a two-front war with Russia, too. Second, the *Denkschrift* required an army of 96 divisions, but only 72 were available in 1906 and only 68 on the west front in 1914. The Schlieffen plan was based on at least 24 'ghost divisions'. In addition, Foerster told Ritter that Schlieffen, who had retired on 1 January 1906, had actually written the *Denkschrift* in January and February of that year and not, as it had been assumed, in 1905.

In comparison with Schlieffen's exercise critiques, the *Denkschrift* is poorly organized. Schlieffen discussed the complete operation in the first three-quarters of the *Denkschrift*, then in the last quarter picked up at the very beginning and went through the conduct of the operation again. In a General Staff where orders were short, crisp and clear, such verbosity was poor form. . In February, Schlieffen found it necessary to write a supplement to cover the possibility of British intervention.

Schlieffen was also not entirely clear about how he would deal with a French attack into Lorraine. At one point, he says that such an attack would be doing the Germans a favor (*Liebesdienst*) because the pressure exerted by the right-wing envelopment would force the French to pull all their forces to the north. At another point he says that the Germans should...shorten up the right wing and turn directly south....as an operations order, the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift* is a horror.

German unification resulted in the discovery of some German war planning documents in the East German military archives. The most important of these is Major Dr. Wilhelm Dieckmann's *Der Schlieffenplan*, a summary of Schlieffen's war planning until 1904. Dieckmann's manuscript makes it clear that a thread that ran through all of Schlieffen's planning: the concern that the German army was not strong enough for a two-front war. Schlieffen continually advocated strengthening the army by incorporating all reservists into maneuver units and by instituting universal conscription. Indeed, the German army was not even strong enough for an offensive one-front war in the west, and Schlieffen never wrote such a plan. The problem was that the French had fortified their border with Germany. Schlieffen noted in 1897 that an attack through Belgium to avoid this zone would result in the German army being divided in half, with the French free to concentrate on one half and destroy it. One of Schlieffen's senior subordinates, Hans von Beseler, did write a plan in 1900 to attack through southern Belgium, but its objective was to break the French fortress line by attacking it from the front and rear, not annihilate the French army.

The German planning year ran from 1 April to 31 March of the next year. Deployment (*Aufmarsch*) plans were therefore designated by those two years. From 1891/92 until October 1899 Schlieffen deployed 2/3 of the German Army in the east and 1/3 in the west. In October 1899, Schlieffen developed two deployment plans: *Aufmarsch I*, when it was thought that the Russians would not attack in strength deployed 58 divisions in the west and 10 in the east. *Aufmarsch II*, for the usual two-front war, deployed 45 divisions in the west and 23 in the east.

In the 1900/01 plan, Schlieffen's *Aufmarsch II* was an *Ostaufmarsch*: 44 divisions were to be deployed in the east and only 24 in the west. In conjunction with some 30 to 40 Austrian divisions, the Austro-Germans would have had, at least initially, a considerable superiority in the east. On the other hand, deploying 44 divisions using the only three available rail lines would have been very time-consuming, scarcely faster than the Russian deployment, and most of these divisions would detrain not in East Prussia proper but along the Vistula River farther to the west. There is no indication as to Schlieffen's concept of the operation. It is likely that Schlieffen hoped that he would put so much pressure on the Russians that the French would be forced to leave their fortifications and attack to rescue them. It appears that Schlieffen would have retained the mass of his forces in the west in their garrisons, and when the French attacked, used rail mobility to mass and counter-attack. Schlieffen retained the *Ostaufmarsch* in 1901/02, but in 1902/03 turned to the former plan, with 1/3 of the army in the east and 2/3 in the west.

According to the 'Schlieffen School', during his entire tenure as chief of staff, Schlieffen was single-mindedly developing the Schlieffen plan. Dieckmann's manuscript shows that this is incorrect. Schlieffen was interested in a decisive victory, and there were several methods to accomplish this.

From a number of sources, including Dieckmann, as well as Schlieffen's *Generalstabsreisen West* (General Staff rides in the west), which were found in Freiburg and in the Bavarian

archive in Munich, and the *Generalstabsreisen Ost* (General Staff rides in the east) published in 1938, it is clear that from 1898 onwards Schlieffen's long-term goal was to compensate for German numerical inferiority in a two-front war by developing a counterattack doctrine. He assumed that the French and Russians would launch a coordinated and nearly-simultaneous joint offensive. He would use German rail mobility to mass and counterattack against one of these offensives, then use Germany's interior position and rail mobility to mass on the other front and counterattack there. In either case, it was important to fight near the German border, close to the German railheads, and not plunge into the interior of either France or Russia.

The 1905 *Generalstabsreise West*, described in 1938 by *Generalleutnant* Zoellner in an article titled 'Schlieffen's Legacy', shows Schlieffen's mature planning for operations in the west. Schlieffen played the German side against three General Staff field-grade officers. The German army deployed from Lorraine to the border with Holland. In the first scenario Lieutenant-colonel Freytag-Loringhoven's solution was to attack into Belgium. Schlieffen responded by counterattacking against the French left and from Metz against the French right, defeating the French army. In the second scenario, Colonel Steuben attacked into Lorraine. Schlieffen moved the 3rd Army from the right wing to Strasbourg, while two more right-wing armies marched to the east of Metz. Schlieffen then counterattacked against the French flanks, using the fortresses of Strasbourg and Metz as jumping-off points. In the third scenario, Major Kuhl attacked on both sides of Metz. Schlieffen again sent forces from the right wing to reinforce the left and defeated the French attack in Lorraine. This exercise was the capstone of all of Schlieffen's exercises in the west.

The 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* had nothing to do with the Schlieffen plan. In the *Generalstabsreise* the French are attacking and the Germans counter-attacking; in the Schlieffen plan the French are on the defensive and a French attack into Lorraine should be ignored. In the Schlieffen plan it was essential to 'keep the right wing strong'; in the *Generalstabsreise*, the right wing moves to directly reinforce the left. In the Schlieffen plan the decisive right-wing attack sweeps to the west of Paris; in the *Generalstabsreise* the German army fights in Belgium and Lorraine.

In November and December 1905 Schlieffen played his last exercise, a massive two-front, 42-day *Kriegsspiel*, perhaps the greatest war-game in military history. For advocates of the Schlieffen plan, as well as those such as Ritter who saw in Schlieffen only aggressive militarism, this war-game is a bitter disappointment, for in this, Schlieffen's last and greatest exercise, the Germans conducted a strategic defensive on both fronts.

Schlieffen deployed 16 divisions in East Prussia. When the Russians attacked on the 27th day of mobilization with 33 divisions, he sent another 22 German divisions by rail and counterattacked on the 30th day, turning the Russian flanks and destroying both Russian armies. On the 33rd day he began to transfer forces west.

In the west, the French and British massively outnumbered the Germans. On the 23rd day the French attacked into Lorraine and Belgium, and both Belgium and Holland allied themselves to Germany. Schlieffen moved the south German corps by rail to Lorraine and counterattacked, driving the French out, and on the 27th day he transferred three corps to Antwerp, which the French reached Antwerp by the 31st day. On the 33rd day the Germans counterattacked out of Antwerp, and by the 37th day had surrounded the left-flank armies and crossed the Meuse at Namur. On the 39th day the Germans counterattacked from Metz against the French right flank and by the 42nd day the French main body was surrounded in the Ardennes.

Historians have assumed that in the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift*, which was written in early 1906, Schlieffen could afford to leave East Prussia undefended because the Russian army had been made combat ineffective by the effects of the Russo-Japanese war and the Russian revolution of 1905. The 1906 [2] German intelligence report said that the Russians could still deploy about 25 infantry divisions against Germany and 22 infantry divisions against Austria (as opposed to a pre-1904 deployment of 30 divisions against Germany, 30 against Austria). Now there are two massive inconsistencies in the Schlieffen plan: the wholesale use of non-existent units and leaving East Prussia undefended against an invasion by 25 Russian divisions. The only possible conclusion is that the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* was not a war plan at all.

Ritter, and those who followed him, did not understand the *Denkschrift* because they stood it on its head. The point was not to develop a radically new scheme of maneuver, but to readdress the issue which Schlieffen had felt throughout his career to be the most serious problem facing the German army: Germany's failure to utilize exhaustively either her trained manpower or her total available manpower. In the *Denkschrift*, Schlieffen employed the total German force and added to it all the units he thought could be raised using Germany's trained manpower: given equipment and prior planning, reserve corps could be created from reserve divisions and ersatz divisions created outright by using trained reservists. Schlieffen had been recommending such a course of action since 1889. Using this expanded force, he then discussed the campaign that could be conducted. In any case, Schlieffen said the German army was probably too weak for such an operation. The obvious implication was that if Germany wanted to be able to meet any eventuality, she needed even more maneuver units and must raise an army based on universal conscription as the French had done.

The Schlieffen plan file consists of Schlieffen's handwritten draft, covered with additions and deletions, and a typed copy, with Moltke's marginal comments, which is dated 1911: the only conclusion one can draw is that Moltke did not even look at the *Denkschrift* until 1911. In addition, famous Schlieffen plan map was drawn in 1911 too. It shows only one thing: how long it would take to march to the Somme. The answer is: to the 31st day of mobilization. It also shows the march around Paris but does not even bother to measure how long it would take: an educated guess would be at least another 20 days or to the 51st day of mobilization. Even if the campaign ended at this point (and there is one arrow pointing generally from Fontainebleau towards Langres, 200 kilometers away), in a two-front war it would take nearly as long again to march the troops back to German railheads for transfer east. Advocates of the Schlieffen plan usually say that it would have given the Germans a decisive victory in 30 to 40 days. By the 40th day the right wing had not even circumnavigated Paris.

In 1911 the question of radically increasing the size of the German army was becoming acute. Since Schlieffen's *Denkschrift* addressed just such a problem, Moltke directed that it be re-evaluated. The only part of the operational problem in the *Denkschrift* with which Moltke was not intimately familiar was the march around Paris, so the map was made to answer that question. Moltke's evaluation of the *Denkschrift* was not favorable; in particular he disagreed with Schlieffen's evaluation of the French attack in Lorraine, and he thought a one-front war unlikely. The necessary number of ersatz corps were not created and the ersatz formations that were created were never planned to be sent to the right wing.

If Moltke had adopted or even just inherited the 'Schlieffen plan' as his war plan, it would be natural to assume that he would conduct an exercise to test it, particularly since such an exercise had not yet taken place. Since the Reichsarchiv never published any of Moltke's operational work or allowed access to it, it was never possible to verify this theory. Now,

thanks to recent acquisitions at the Militärarchiv in Freiburg, we know the content of two of Moltke's earliest *Generalstabsreise*, the staff rides in the west in 1906.

For the *Generalstabsreise West* of 1906 [3], Moltke provided Prussia with a strong army: 6 corps and 9 reserve divisions, 21 infantry divisions in all. This exercise was therefore testing the western component of *Aufmarsch II (Ostaufmarsch)*. In the west, the right wing with 15 corps (30 divisions) deployed between Diedenhofen and Eupen, with a corps at Metz, 7 corps (14 divisions) in Lorraine, 2 corps at Strasbourg and 2 corps in Alsace. This is clearly not the deployment of the December 1905 *Denkschrift*. The French deployment was the usual one for German exercises. Moltke states that it was not in the French interest to violate Belgian neutrality and therefore the French would attack in Lorraine. The scheme of maneuver that Moltke chose for the French was interesting: a massive attack into Lorraine with 14 corps. Moltke had to acknowledge that such a horde would be practically impossible to supply and have virtually no ability to maneuver. The French left flank army, to the north of Verdun, contained 9 divisions, and 4 divisions attacked in Alsace. In the face of this mass French attack in Lorraine, the German commander decided immediately to launch his main attack through Belgium with the three right wing armies. Moltke disagreed; he preferred to counterattack by the right wing through Metz. Moltke said that one needed to be clear about the purpose of the right wing: it was to force the French to leave their fortress line and fight in the open. If the French launched their main attack in Lorraine, then the decisive battle would be fought in Lorraine and that was where the German right wing needed to march. Nevertheless, he allowed the right wing attack to proceed. On the 15th day the Germans counterattacked against the French invasion of upper Alsace, but this maneuver failed to trap the French forces. The Germans then abandoned Alsace altogether. On the 18th day the Germans were forced to send 2 corps from the right wing to reinforce the left. By the 20th day the decisive battle was being fought by 10 French and 10 German corps on a 70-kilometer long line inside Germany from Metz east to Bleikastel. A mass German frontal attack to the east of Metz failed in the face of the 'murderous fire of modern weapons' while the French slowly turned the open German left flank. On the 21st day the last 3 corps of the German 3rd army had to be sent from the right wing to Metz. The German right wing (1st and 2nd armies) encountered no significant French forces and spent the exercise foot marching through the Ardennes. Moltke ended the exercise without allowing it to come to a climactic battle of annihilation. According to the results of this exercise, the German army would be forced to meet a French attack in Lorraine with at least equal force. The decisive battle would be fought in Lorraine long before the right wing, marching through the Ardennes and northern France, could make itself felt.

The parentage of this exercise is obvious. The situation and exercise critique continues the line of *Generalstabsreisen* starting with Schlieffen's first 1904 *Generalstabsreise*, and extending through both his second *Generalstabsreise* in 1904 and his 1905 *Generalstabsreise*. Moltke's 'school solution' for the exercise in 1906 is the same one that Schlieffen used personally in 1905: in the face of a main French attack in Lorraine, the German right wing must counterattack through Metz. The course of action advocated in this situation by the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift* – to continue the right flank attack through France – was emphatically rejected.

Moltke's *Generalstabsreise* of 1908 also survived.[4] It plays the *Westaufmarsch*: a war between France and Germany in which Britain has promised to provide effective support for France and Russia has not yet declared her belligerency. Moltke also said that even though Russia was not yet a belligerent, the Germans must keep strong forces in East Prussia to guard

against her later intervention. Italy would probably exercise a benevolent neutrality towards France.

The French completed their deployment by the 9th day of mobilization. Moltke stated again that it was not in the French interest to violate Belgian neutrality and therefore the French attack must come in Lorraine. The British would land in Antwerp if the Germans had already violated Belgian neutrality; otherwise they would land in Calais and Boulogne.

Moltke's concept for the French operation was a reasonably good approximation of the concept of the French Plan XVII. It involved a main attack by two armies in Lorraine with a third army attacking to the north of Metz and a fourth army on the left flank of the third. The French were able to launch their attack as of the 11th day of mobilization. Belgium said that she felt threatened by the German deployment and allied herself to France. Moltke said that even if France violated Belgian neutrality, Germany must assume that Belgium would ally herself to France. On the 13th day the British army landed in Antwerp.

Moltke then discussed the possibility of a French offensive in the Ardennes. If France were certain of British and Belgian co-operation, he said, her best course of action would be to launch immediately her main attack with 15 corps and 9 reserve divisions from a line Verdun-Maubeuge to a line Diedenhofen-Liège while remaining on the defensive with 6 corps and 10 reserve divisions between Belfort and Verdun. After the 8th day of mobilization, however, it was too late for the French to change their deployment from an attack in Lorraine to one in the Ardennes. Since in 1914 both Britain and Belgium were at war with Germany by the 4th mobilization day, Moltke was probably anticipating Plan XVII's offensive in the Ardennes, which was conducted by the French 3rd and 4th armies.

The Germans deployed four armies between Metz and Aachen, an army echeloned behind Metz, one in Lorraine and one in southern Lorraine and in Alsace. The Entente had a numerical superiority of 311 infantry battalions, but Moltke seemed to feel that this would be offset to a large part by German qualitative superiority. The German intent was to launch the main attack with the right wing into Belgium and Luxembourg, but the German army would fight a decisive battle wherever the French main force was to be found. If the French launched their main attack between Metz and Strasbourg, the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th armies would swing south to occupy a line Metz-Coblenz and attack with a strong right wing to the south-west. The 1st and 2nd armies would guard the right flank of the main body to the north of Metz and the 7th army on the left would fall back to the north along the left bank of the Rhine. However, the most likely French course of action was a main attack with the left wing between the Meuse and Verdun. This would be met by the German right wing, whose Schwerpunkt would be in an enveloping movement by the 1st and 2nd armies on the right or a breakthrough by the 4th and 5th armies on the left; the 6th army would cover the left flank of the main body in Lorraine. The French might also attack to both sides of Metz. In this case, the 1st and 2nd armies would march south. He said that the great difficulty would lie in determining what strategy the French were using. He then repeated a common concern of all soldiers before the Great War, saying that no one had any experience in conducting a war with a mass army. Deciding on a strategy was no higher than Moltke's third priority problem.

Moltke's analysis of the situation in the west in 1908 was founded directly on the results obtained by Schlieffen's last staff rides. This concept has nothing in common with the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift*. There was also no provision for a pure French defense because every chief of staff from Moltke the elder to Moltke the younger maintained that it was very unlikely that there would even be a war at all unless the French wanted one, and if the French

wanted a war, then the French would attack. This was not a plan for invading France but a plan for meeting the French offensive head-on.

In this exercise, the French attacked on both sides of Metz. The German 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th armies on the right marched directly south, while the 5th, 6th and 7th defended in Lorraine. The French frontal attacks failed, as Moltke said, frontal attacks would fail no matter how overwhelming the attacker's superiority in infantry. Nevertheless, the Germans were unable to prevent the defeated French forces from successfully withdrawing to their fortress line. The Germans, said Moltke, were now faced with a difficult second campaign. In his opinion, the first battle would come quickly and might well decide the final outcome of the war but it would be followed by a long war in the enemy heartland.

Gerhard Ritter's interpretation of Schlieffen's strategy was that first, Schlieffen abandoned the elder Moltke's east front offensive for a west front attack and second, he developed this west front offensive into the perfect plan, the right wing attack around Paris. This interpretation has been accepted by all subsequent historians. It is entirely wrong.

Dieckmann shows us that Schlieffen maintained the elder Moltke's plan virtually unchanged, first as the sole war plan, then after 1899 as *Aufmarsch II*. In 1900/1901 he even revived Moltke's full-scale *Ostaufmarsch* of 1880. Schlieffen never gave up the possibility of conducting an east front offensive.

From the 1898 *Denkschrift* to the 1905 *Generalstabsreise* and the 1905 *Kriegsspiel* Schlieffen's operational thought was moving in the direction of the use of rail mobility to launch surprise counterattacks to encircle and destroy the enemy on or near friendly territory, and not towards deep penetration into enemy territory.

We can reconstruct the manner in which both Schlieffen and the younger Moltke expected to fight the battle in the west. The intent of the *Westaufmarsch* was to win the first battles and not to concoct a grand plan for a colossal *Cannae* battle of annihilation. The *Westaufmarsch* assumed that the war would probably begin with a French attack into Lorraine. This might very well be the French main attack. Depending on the political circumstances, the French could also launch a supporting attack, or the main attack, north of Metz into the Ardennes. The first battle would therefore most likely be fought in Lorraine or in the Ardennes. The German intent was to defeat this attack as decisively as possible.

This battle would not end the war. If the German army won - and the Germans expected to be able to defeat the French army on the open field - then the Germans had two possible courses of action. They could go on the defensive in the west and transfer forces east. If they continued the offensive in the west, then the most likely course of action was that the German right wing would have to cross the Meuse and swing behind the French fortress line while the German left wing fixed the French forces in place. The French field army would be forced to fight again, this time to defend the fortress line. Having won this battle, the German army would break the French fortress line by attacking it from the front and rear. This would link up the two halves of the German army. The French remnants would fall back to the plateau of Langres or the Loire. It was reasonable to expect that the first campaign would be completed in about a month. The first campaign would, however, be followed by a second campaign into the interior of France.

It is therefore clear that at no time, either under Schlieffen or the younger Moltke, did the German army plan to swing the right wing to the west of Paris. The German left wing was

never weak, rather it was always very strong – indeed, the left wing, not the right, might well conduct the decisive battle in Lorraine. The war in the west would begin with a French, not a German attack. The first campaign would end with the elimination of the French fortress line, not the total annihilation of the French army. It would involve several great conventional battles, not one battle of encirclement. If the Germans did win a decisive victory, it would be the result of a counter-offensive in Lorraine or Belgium, not through an invasion of France. There was no intent to destroy the French army in one immense *Cannae*-battle.

There never was a 'Schlieffen plan'.

Terence Holmes, 'The Reluctant March on Paris: A Reply to Terence Zuber's "The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered"' in: *War in History* 2001 (2), pp. 208-232.

Holmes argues that Schlieffen did not develop the Schlieffen plan until after he had retired. The guiding idea of the Schlieffen plan was to form a strong right wing in order to envelop the enemy forces wherever they might be encountered. The march on and around Paris was not the dominant principle of the Schlieffen plan but a 'conditional aspect', which Schlieffen adopted reluctantly. The German army was too weak to implement the Schlieffen plan: the plan was therefore establishing a requirement to build up the German army. Moltke did not adopt the Schlieffen plan until 1911. In 1914 he was employing a variant of the Schlieffen plan concept.

Terence Zuber, 'Terence Holmes Reinvents the Schlieffen Plan' in: *War in History* 2001 (4) pp. 468-476.

Holmes' version of the Schlieffen plan strains credulity.

The 'Schlieffen plan' required 24 'ghost divisions' which never existed.

Holmes contends that principal Schlieffen plan attack was to be conducted east of Paris, but the only maps in the Schlieffen plan file show an attack around the west side of Paris .

The German intelligence estimates show that the Russian army was still effective and that a 'Schlieffen plan' one-front war against France was unlikely.

None of Schlieffen or Moltke's war games ever tested the 'Schlieffen plan'.

There is no trace of the 'Schlieffen plan' in Dieckmann's manuscript on German war planning from 1891 to 1914.

In short, there is no documentary evidence for Holmes' version of the Schlieffen plan.

Terence Holmes defends - up to a point - the old 'Schlieffen school' argument of Kuhl, Groener, et. al., which maintains that Schlieffen's 1905 *Denkschrift* was in fact the template for the German war plan in 1914. The concept of this plan, according to Holmes, was simplicity itself: "make the right wing strong". However, Holmes says that the intent of the *real* Schlieffen plan was for the right wing to attack *between* Paris and Verdun, and that Moltke adopted this plan only in 1911. Here, Holmes breaks with the 'Schlieffen

school'...[which contended] that Moltke never understood the Schlieffen plan and that Moltke's weak right wing attack between Paris and Verdun had no chance of success.

Holmes says that the envelopment of Paris was not essential to the Schlieffen plan, but only a 'conditional aspect' and that historians who emphasize the advance to the west of Paris are 'fetishizing' it. However, every other description of the Schlieffen plan has emphasized that its distinguishing characteristic was the right wing army's march around Paris, in order to outflank the last French line of defense from Paris to Verdun. Indeed, the only maps of any significance in the Schlieffen plan file at the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv in Freiburg im Breisgau show just such a maneuver and none other. If the French succeeded in holding the line Verdun-Paris, a possibility Schlieffen considered quite likely, given the multiple east-west river lines and the fortresses between these two points, Schlieffen foresaw that the German army would have to be prepared to flank it by going around Paris.

However, the devil in the 'Schlieffen plan' is in the details. The 'Schlieffen plan' called for a German army of 96 divisions. The right wing alone in the 'Schlieffen plan' included 82 divisions, while the entire German army in 1905 contained only 72 divisions. In fact, in the 1905 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* Schlieffen was able to 'make the right wing strong' only by the using at least 24 non-existent divisions. According to Ludendorff, who if anyone was in a position to know, in both Schlieffen's own 1905 real-world war plan and Moltke's 1914 plan the right wing included only 54 divisions. Indeed, in the actual campaign the right wing, with 52 divisions, came stumbling to a halt on the Marne.

Holmes pulls out the old Reichsarchiv argument which holds that by employing imaginary units Schlieffen was 'establishing a program for the future'. He even goes one step further and says that 'the program was the corollary to a conscientiously developed plan'. My point exactly: no program, no plan. War planning is not metaphysics. The 'idea' of a plan does not exist in war without the forces necessary to carry it out. Therefore, Schlieffen could not have been writing a war plan, but could only have been arguing for raising the necessary divisions.

Implicitly, the 'Schlieffen plan' assumed that that no forces would be deployed in East Prussia... The Russian army...must have been rendered completely combat-ineffective due to effects of the 1905 Revolution and the Russo-Japanese war...the Schlieffen plan...was not completed until February 1906 and it would have taken months - well into 1906, probably until 1907 - to translate the plan into a rail timetable. The Treaty of Portsmouth ending the Russo-Japanese war had been signed on 5 September 1905 and the Russian army began immediately to re-deploy to the west. The most important thing about the great insurrection of the workers in Moscow from 22 December 1905 to 1 January 1906 was that the army, with the exception of one regiment, remained loyal to the government. The German intelligence analysis for 1905 and 1906, which I found in the archives in Munich, accurately reflect this situation. The 1906 analysis estimated that the Russian army could still deploy 25 divisions against Germany.

Holmes maintains...that the Russians had 'completely denuded' their western border of troops. On closer inspection of this source itself one finds that it says that in August 1905 Schlieffen told Chancellor Bülow the Russians had sent 10 active corps to the east and still had 16 active corps in the west, [\[5\]](#) which is far from stripping western Russia bare of troops.

Holmes maintains that any of Schlieffen's exercises in which German forces enter Belgium, no matter what their strength or mission, proves that Schlieffen was struggling to develop the concept of the great right wing assault through northern France.

In the 1st 1904 *Generalstabsreise West* the German army deployed from Aachen to Strasbourg. Holmes maintains that this exercise was an important milestone on the path to the Schlieffen plan because at the beginning of the exercise critique Schlieffen mentioned a German advance to a line Verdun-Lille in northern France...[but] having mentioned the advance into northern France, Schlieffen went on to list the difficulties inherent in such a course of action, including the lengthy approach march through Belgium, the loss of surprise and the necessity to march through Holland... The mass of the French army attacked into Lorraine and the German right wing swung south through the Ardennes and Eifel towards Lorraine to counterattack. The opposing main bodies maneuvered between Metz and Zweibrücken, halfway to the Rhine. The distinguishing characteristic of the 1st *Generalstabsreise West* 1904 was the use of the fortresses of Metz and Strasbourg as staging areas for the decisive German counterattack into Lorraine.

Holmes bases his interpretation of this exercise on an article written in 1938 by one of the 'Schlieffen plan' apologists, *Generalleutnant* von Zoellner. Holmes' dedication to his *idée fixe* of the 'strong right wing' is clear in his own evaluation of the 1st *Generalstabsreise West*. Although the Germans won a decisive victory in Lorraine by the 21st day of mobilization, Holmes says that the conclusion Schlieffen drew from this exercise was that he had to double the strength of the right wing - to 'concentrate thirty-five and one-half corps on the right wing' in order to facilitate the attack through north France. Holmes does not say why such a step would have been necessary, nor does he mention that Schlieffen would only have been able to reinforce the right wing with imaginary units.

The 2nd *Generalstabsreise West* has even less to do with the 'Schlieffen plan' than the first...Holmes' sole comment on this exercise was to say that it concerned a different situation than that of the 1905 *Generalstabsreise*; he fails to say that it also had nothing to do with the Schlieffen plan.

The *Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered* also presented a detailed analysis of Schlieffen's 1905 *Generalstabsreise West*. This exercise has survived only in Zoellner's article. Because Zoellner maintained that 'Schlieffen laid his cards on the table' and played the actual 'Schlieffen plan' himself...Schlieffen again mentioned a German advance into northern France at the beginning of the exercise critique, and Zoellner took this to be proof that Schlieffen was employing the 'Schlieffen plan'...it is far more reasonable...to see them as they obviously were: warnings of the difficulty inherent in such a course of action. Schlieffen's actual goal in these exercises was to test the methods of conducting counterattacks near the German border.

Schlieffen conducted three separate exercises, and in each it was the French, not the Germans, who were doing the attacking: in one case into the Ardennes, in the second on both sides of Metz into the Ardennes as well as Lorraine and in the third case into Lorraine. In all three exercises Schlieffen allowed the French to advance into Lorraine and/or Belgium and then counterattacked, frequently using rail mobility to move his troops and then deploying them from the fortresses of Metz and Strasbourg. The German troops fought only in Belgium or Lorraine: they never entered France at all...In the case of the French attack into Lorraine, instead of treating this attack as a French *Liebesdienst* and merrily continuing the march into northern France, as provided by the 'Schlieffen plan', Schlieffen sent most of the right wing to Lorraine: part of one army went by rail to Strasbourg (!) and two armies foot-marched to the east (!) of Metz. At the end of the exercise four-plus German armies were fighting the main battle in Lorraine. The two armies on the far right wing were too far away to participate in the main battle and were reduced to acting as flank guard against second and third-rate French reserve and territorial divisions. Holmes maintains that Schlieffen was satisfied that the

German right wing would 'still be able to achieve its original objective'. Which objective would that be? It certainly was not the 'Schlieffen plan' objective of turning the French left in order to drive the French into Switzerland. The ability to see any resemblance to the 'Schlieffen plan' in this exercise would demonstrate quite remarkable powers of imagination.

In *The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered* I show that the capstone of the development of Schlieffen's doctrine was the November-December 1905 *Kriegsspiel*. In this exercise the French attacked all along their eastern border while the Russians simultaneously invaded East Prussia with 33 divisions (!). In further development of the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West*, Schlieffen made extensive use of rail mobility and the German fortresses to conduct counter-attacks against the French attack in Alsace-Lorraine as well as the Russian attack in East Prussia. He then shifted 3 corps from each of these areas by rail and, using Fortresses Antwerp and Metz to deploy his forces, delivered a crushing counter-attack against both flanks of French main body in northern Belgium and the Ardennes. This was a wargame of breath-taking scope and originality, a fitting conclusion to a brilliant career. Holmes was not impressed.

Holmes says that the November-December *Kriegsspiel* was an aberration in the development of Schlieffen plan. Holmes maintains that Schlieffen conducted this wargame because 'It made something of a change from constantly rehearsing and refining the west-front offensive'. [because, he says] Schlieffen made a comment to the effect that the situation was 'improbable but at least it was not boring'.

In fact...The 'improbable but not boring' comment...is not to be found in the exercise critique, even as a paraphrase. We can draw several conclusions from this exercise, but the fact that Schlieffen was bored is not one of them. It is clear that in December 1905 Schlieffen felt more than ever that Germany faced a multi-front war and was seriously outnumbered. The 'Schlieffen plan' assumption that at this time Schlieffen thought that the Russian army was *hors de combat* can finally be laid to rest. With it can be buried the old canard that Schlieffen sought a preventive war in 1905, for the conduct of the exercise clearly shows what Schlieffen felt Germany's strategy must be: strategic defensive on both the east and west fronts...Schlieffen was not developing a plan to invade France, but a plan to meet the Franco-Russian invasion head-on.

Holmes fails to give adequate weight to Wilhelm Dieckmann's *Der Schlieffenplan*, which shows the development of Schlieffen's strategic thought from 1889 to 1904. This is because Holmes is in the unenviable position of arguing that Schlieffen worked on German strategy for 15 years and then developed the 'perfect plan' in the first two months after he retired and could no longer put it into effect.

In fact, even though Dieckmann himself badly wanted to believe in the Schlieffen plan, his manuscript demonstrates that from 1889 to 1904 there was not a trace of the 'Schlieffen plan' to be seen in any of Schlieffen's strategic thought. *Der Schlieffenplan* shows that Schlieffen's principal concern was Germany's numerical inferiority and that Schlieffen was developing a doctrine based on rail mobility and surprise.

I published summaries of the *Grosse Generalstabsreisen* held in 1904, 1906 and 1908 to show that Moltke's 1906 and 1908 exercises were conducted in direct succession to Schlieffen's two 1904 exercises, with the main battle being fought against a French attack in Lorraine. [6] ... We can be sure that, like Schlieffen, Moltke *never* conducted a test of the 'Schlieffen plan': had he done so, the Schlieffen school would have shouted it from the

rooftops. According to Holmes' theory, the Germans war-gamed practically every contingency except the real war plan.

I have pointed out that the maps in the Schlieffen plan file in Freiburg were probably not Schlieffen's, as had always been assumed, but instead had been generated in 1911 to study the employment of Schlieffen's mass army.

Holmes accepts my argument that the maps were Moltke's, not Schlieffen's, but contends that they were generated by Moltke to develop a working operational plan out of the 1905 *Denkschrift*. Moltke did so because he expected that the French were going to launch their main attack with their left wing into the Ardennes. Why the Schlieffen plan should have been considered in this context is unclear. The Schlieffen plan assumed that the French would probably be on the defensive; if the French attacked, it would be into Lorraine.

If Moltke thought that the *real* Schlieffen plan involved an attack between Paris and Verdun, it is certainly very curious that the only maps in the Schlieffen plan file show an attack around the west side of Paris.

The Schlieffen plan employed 96 divisions in the west. The threadbare assertion that in 1905 Schlieffen was establishing a program for the future was untenable by 1911. By 1911 the future had arrived. Ludendorff did succeed in forming the ersatz divisions on 1 April 1911 but even so he could only come up with 6 divisions, not the 'Schlieffen plan's' 16. [7] The German army in 1911 was still far short of the force required by the 'Schlieffen plan', which assumed a best-case strategic scenario: a one front war. If a one-front war was unlikely in 1905, it was completely out of the question in 1911. In a two-front war, the German army was almost hopelessly outnumbered and in no position to invade either France or Russia. Any increase in the German army at this point would not change the fundamental situation in the west, because the French army replied with the Three-Year law, while in the east the Russian steam-roller was ready to get under way.

Holmes says that Moltke did not implement the 'Schlieffen plan' when it was presented to him in 1906 though, for unexplained reasons, he did retain Schlieffen's deployment plan, an odd combination indeed. The 'Schlieffen plan' committed an absolute minimum of forces in Lorraine. Holmes, like the rest of the Schlieffen school, says that in 1909 Moltke reinforced the forces in Alsace-Lorraine by a complete army, reducing the 'Schlieffen plan's' ratio between the right and left wings from 7:1 to 3:1. He then maintains that this 3:1 ratio was inexplicably retained even after Moltke was supposed to have adopted the 'Schlieffen plan' outright in 1911. The resulting tangle is impossible to sort out.

In 1914 Moltke probably hoped to fight on interior lines, defeating the French attack in three to four weeks and then if necessary transferring forces to meet the Russian attack in the east. A decisive victory in the west amounted to winning the frontier battles, surrounding Verdun and breaking the French fortress line between Verdun and Toul, nothing more. The closer to their own frontiers that the German armies could fight their battles, the better, for that facilitated rail transport, which was the key to German strategy. The left wing in Lorraine was just as important to the German army's success as the right, indeed, the *Aufmarschanweisungen* (initial instructions) for the right-wing 5th Army included the mission to be prepared to counterattack from Metz into Lorraine. [8]

Holmes even contends (pp. 223-4) that on 27 August Moltke ordered 1st Army to begin the great wheel around Paris. In the 'Schlieffen plan' this maneuver required 13 corps: in August 1914 1st Army had five.

[Holmes also contends that Moltke's 2 September order to turn the French left flank shows that Moltke was implementing the Schlieffen plan (pp. 230-1)]. If this order proves anything it is that in 1914 the 'Schlieffen plan' was unworkable, because on 5 September Moltke ordered that the 1st and 2nd Armies turn to face Paris. Moltke's intent on 5 September was to break the French fortress line south of Verdun, exactly as in Beseler's 1900 plan.

In the *Denkschrift* Schlieffen said that the French would stop an attack between Paris and France. Lo and behold, that is exactly what happened. Therefore, the Germans needed 82 divisions in the right wing to march west of Paris. By 5 September the right wing *in toto* included about 52 divisions. Moltke was in no position to implement the 'Schlieffen plan']

Both 'Schlieffen plans' - the original one and Holmes' - depend on disingenuous, lawyerly arguments and the distortion of the sources. Neither stands up to a complete and balanced appreciation of the Schlieffen's exercises or the 1905 *Denkschrift*. Indirectly, however, Holmes has helped me prove my point: there never was a 'Schlieffen plan'.

Terence Holmes, 'The Real Thing: A Reply to Terence Zuber's "Terence Holmes Reinvents the Schlieffen Plan"' in: *War in History* 2002 (1) pp. 111-120.

Holmes contends that the 96 divisions necessary for the Schlieffen plan actually existed in 1906 or that Schlieffen could have raised them, that in 1906 Schlieffen could have conducted a one-front war against France alone, and that Schlieffen's last exercises were the predecessors of the Schlieffen plan.

Terence Zuber, 'Terence Holmes Reinvents the Schlieffen Plan – Again' in: *War in History* 2003 (1) pp. 92-101.

Using the Schlieffen plan Denkschrift and other documentary evidence, this article shows that Holmes' assertions are incorrect: the Schlieffen plan really intended to attack to the west, not east, of Paris; the number of divisions required by the Schlieffen plan never existed; a one-front war against Russia, as required by the Schlieffen plan, was unlikely; none of Schlieffen's war games had any resemblance to the Schlieffen plan. Schlieffen wrote the 'Schlieffen plan' after he had retired and Moltke never made it the German war plan.

Every description of the Schlieffen plan has emphasized the famous march around Paris. Terence Holmes maintains they all completely missed the point and that he has discovered that Schlieffen's *real* intent was to attack between Paris and Verdun. He says that the march around Paris was 'conditional' (read: probably unnecessary) and that historians who emphasize the march around Paris are 'fetishizing' it. There is only one way to settle this question. Let's ask Schlieffen. The critical passage of the Schlieffen plan reads:

'One thing is clear. If the French do not do us the favor (*Liebesdienst*) of attacking, and we have to move against the positions on the Aisne, Reims-La Fère and the Oise, we will be forced - regardless of whether the enemy holds the Aisne-Oise etc. positions or if they fall back behind the Marne or the Seine - to pursue them with one part of our forces, and to go

around to the south of Paris with another force and encircle the fortress. We would therefore do well to prepare beforehand to cross the Seine below the confluence with the Oise [i.e., north of Paris] and to first blockade Paris on the west and south sides. These preparations can be made any way that you like: it will soon become clear that we will be too weak to continue the operation in this direction. We will have the same experience as that of all previous conquerors, that offensive warfare both requires and uses up very strong forces, that these forces continually become weaker even as those of the defender become stronger, and that this is especially true in a land that bristles with fortresses.'

Schlieffen is unambiguous: '*One thing is clear*'. The only way that the Germans are not going to have to go to the west of Paris is if the French make a serious mistake and attacked. Therefore, the *principal* operation in the Schlieffen plan was the march around Paris.

Holmes now says he has always contended that 'Moltke did not plan to envelop the French capital', and cites as proof page 229 of his first article. In fact, Holmes is trying to have it both ways, for on pages 223 and 224 of the same article he said "But when Zuber asserts that at no time....did the German army plan to swing the right wing to the west of Paris (305, cf. 299), he leaves out of account one very obvious piece of evidence that would seem to contradict him. On 27 August 1914 Moltke issued a directive calling for the German army to move against Paris. Specifically.... 1st Army was to advance against the lower Seine...At least on that particular day there was an explicit plan 'to swing the right wing to the west of Paris'. And it seems improbable that it was an entirely spontaneous idea." When I said that Holmes thought the German army intended to execute the march around Paris, I obviously did not misrepresent Holmes. I renew my question: the Schlieffen plan provided 13 corps for the march around Paris. How does Holmes think the 1st Army was going to accomplish the same thing with five corps?

Holmes also says that he can show that Schlieffen actually thought that the 24 imaginary divisions used in the Schlieffen plan were actually available. Part of the proof was supposed to have been provided by Wolfgang Foerster, who said that Schlieffen used the force structure the 1906/07 mobilization year as the basis of his plan, when supposedly the XX, XXI and Guards Reserve Corps would be added to the order of battle, giving the German army approximately the 80 active and reserve divisions called for in the Schlieffen plan.

The identity of these corps is well-known: these are Schlieffen's famous *Kriegskorps*. Five were formed in 1902. In April 1904 two of the *Kriegskorps* were disbanded, leaving XX and XXI Corps and the Guard Reserve Corps. ...They were not organized in 1906... They had been around since 1902. Therefore, Schlieffen had 72 divisions available in January 1906, not the 80 required by the 'Schlieffen plan'.

Holmes then notes that Schlieffen used 13 imaginary reserve divisions in the 1st *Generalstabsreise West*, which to Holmes means that Schlieffen intended to use nonexistent units in real war plans. In fact, the only place where Schlieffen employed imaginary units was in a limited number of exercises (or, in the Schlieffen plan, a position paper). Thanks to Dieckmann's *Schlieffenplan* manuscript we now have the order of battle for all of Schlieffen's war plans to 1903/04, and in none of them do we see the appearance of either imaginary reserve divisions/corps or of any ersatz troops whatsoever. Nor was the German army able to immediately create large number of new units on the outbreak of war. *Six* ersatz divisions, not the "Schlieffen plan's" 16, entered the order of battle in 1911 and were available for movement as of the 12th day of mobilization. Six reserve corps (XXII to XXVII) and four Bavarian reserve infantry divisions (16 divisions total) were organized on the outbreak of war

but were available for operations only in *October 1914*, because three-quarters of the troops in these new corps were not trained reservists at all, but untrained young volunteers.

In the Schlieffen plan passage cited above, Schlieffen is quite emphatic that that the German army was not strong enough to execute the plan outlined in the *Denkschrift*: '*These preparations can be made any way that you like*: it will soon become clear that we will be too weak to continue the operation in this direction. We will have the same experience as that of all previous conquerors, that offensive warfare both requires and uses up very strong forces, that these forces continually become weaker even as those of the defender become stronger, and that this is especially true in a land that bristles with fortresses.'

As definite as this sounds, Holmes contends that Schlieffen did not mean it. What Schlieffen really wanted to say was that after the eight ersatz corps appear 'the operation would be manageable - if only just', and added a footnote, citing Ritter, *Schlieffen Plan*, pp. 141-3. We would be tempted to assume that this footnote would support Holmes's assertion with some statement by Schlieffen. We would be wrong. Schlieffen says nothing of the kind. This is Holmes's opinion, not Schlieffen's.

Holmes also continues to try to demonstrate that Schlieffen disregarded his own General Staff's intelligence estimates. To prove his point, Holmes says Schlieffen told Chancellor Bülow in August 1905 that the Russians had sent 26 divisions of a total force of 90 active and reserve divisions to Manchuria and that [obviously] Russian effectiveness had been degraded. In fact, this report agrees with the 1906 intelligence estimate: the Russians still had 64 divisions available, more than two-thirds of their army. (As a point of reference, at this time the Austro-Hungarian army could deploy about 40 divisions in the east, of indifferent quality and with poor artillery.)

Moreover, what is at issue here is not whether Russian offensive capability has been degraded. The 'Schlieffen plan' assumes that the Russian threat was non-existent. Significantly, Schlieffen does *not* tell Bülow that the entire German army can now be deployed in the west, something that would have been worth knowing during the Moroccan crisis. According to Holmes, Schlieffen is still struggling with this concept and won't arrive at such a conclusion until January 1906. Obviously, the unstated assumption in Schlieffen's report is that the Germans would defend East Prussia and *therefore* the Russians cannot attack Germany. If there were no German troops in East Prussia at all, 64 Russian divisions, whatever their condition, could surely occupy an undefended province.

In any case, Schlieffen's report to Bülow was immediately overtaken by events. Peace talks between Russia and Japan began on 9 August 1905, the Treaty of Portsmouth was signed on 5 September 1905 and the Russians immediately began redeploying their forces to European Russia.

The 'Schlieffen plan' was written in January and February 1906, about two years too late. It should have been written in February 1904, when the Japanese attacked Port Arthur. By February 1906 the Japanese war had been over for six months and Russia's internal situation was rapidly stabilizing.

Schlieffen mentions a right-wing advance into northern France briefly in the 1st and 2nd 1904 *Generalstabsreise West* and the 1905 *Generalstabsreise*. However, the exercises themselves were fought entirely in the Ardennes and Lorraine. Holmes says that this only proves that

Schlieffen was struggling to develop the concept for the 'great *Denkschrift*' which finally came to him in a strategic epiphany in January and February 1906.

In fact, Schlieffen mentioned the right-wing attack in these exercises not because he was developing a brilliant new idea but because the right-wing attack was common knowledge. [From 1879 to the outbreak of the war] the concept of the brilliant 'Schlieffen plan' was in fact the subject of French books and newspaper articles.

It is absurd to assert, as Holmes does continually, that any exercise testing a battle *east* of the Moselle-Meuse is really preparation for an attack *west* of those rivers.

If Schlieffen's thoughts in 1904 and 1905 were really moving in the direction of the 'Schlieffen plan', as Holmes maintains, then Schlieffen, as both the Chief of Staff and exercise director, could have easily used these exercises to test the new idea. He did not, and for a good reason. Schlieffen was never particularly fond of attacking into north France.

His intent, as in the 1905 *Kriegsspiel*, was to defeat the enemy on one front and then use Germany's interior position and rail net to mass forces on another front. Since Holmes is now citing the *Generalstabsreisen Ost* he presumably knows that the only scenario Schlieffen played in the east was for a counterattack.

Schlieffen was developing a counterattack doctrine which culminated in the 1905 *Kriegsspiel*, Schlieffen's last exercise. In his first article Holmes tried to say that the 1905 *Generalstabsreise* was meaningless and that Schlieffen held it because he was bored! Holmes had obviously not read the exercise, didn't believe my summary and apparently came to this conclusion because Arden Bucholz had written that 'In his final critique, Schlieffen began by saying that the situation was improbable but at least it was not boring'. [\[9\]](#) I published the first paragraph of the exercise critique to show that Schlieffen in fact said nothing of the kind.

Schlieffen said that the situation portrayed by French newspaper articles fundamentally presented nothing new (*Im Grunde bringt sie nicht viel Neues*). Germany has had to expect a two-front war for the last 20 years, and that, 'we can still assume, as in the past, that the Austrians will keep a part of the Russian army occupied.' Now Holmes says he can prove his preconceived idea that the entire exercise was pointless because of Schlieffen's 'irresolute' use of conditional tense in one sentence: The conditional might be translated as 'If this war comes, we would have to fight against the entire French army....in addition to a significant part of the Russian army.' The paragraph is crystal clear - Schlieffen is still talking about the strategic situation as it has obtained for the last twenty years. No changes are mentioned. It is a spectacular leap of logic to say that because of Schlieffen's 'irresolute grammar' this sentence can be in effect translated, as Holmes would have it, as 'If this war comes, we won't have to fight the Russians...' Holmes wants to use an obscure and practically incomprehensible grammatical quibble to make Schlieffen say exactly the opposite of what he obviously meant: indeed, to make Schlieffen tell the General Staff that it has spent the last month on a fool's errand. That Schlieffen, such a practical joker. But even Holmes isn't 100% behind his own interpretation. As Holmes says, 'if the word "impossible" means what I think it does...'. It doesn't: Schlieffen never says that war with Russia is impossible. In spite for Holmes's disdain for Schlieffen's grammar, Schlieffen clearly says that it is impossible that Germany will have to fight a two-front war alone.

Which leads to a subject that Holmes now wants to avoid at all costs: when did the younger Moltke make the 'Schlieffen plan' as the German war plan? In his first article Holmes said that

Moltke adopted 'something akin to the Schlieffen plan' in 1911. Holmes does not enlighten us further: we have no idea what 'akin' means in terms of the exact relationship between the two plans. The ratio between the right wing and the left wing in the Schlieffen plan was 7:1; in the Moltke plan it's 3:1. The right wing in the Schlieffen plan included 82 divisions; the Moltke plan had 54. The Schlieffen plan was for a one-front war; as of 1911 at the very latest Moltke was clearly faced with a two-front war, and so forth. Nothing in Moltke's actual planning looks like anything 'akin' to the 'Schlieffen plan'.

In this most recent article Holmes has a new revelation for us. The *real* intent of the Schlieffen plan was to break the German fortress line by attacking it from the rear. As his entire proof, Holmes cites a short section early in the *Denkschrift*: 'There is little prospect that an attack on these strong positions will be successful. More promising than a frontal attack supported by an attack on the left flank appears to be an attack from the north-west against the flank at Mézières, Rethel and La Fère and over the Oise against the rear of the position.'

The passage in question occurs after a discussion of the French fixed fortifications at the very beginning of the *Denkschrift*. To this point in the *Denkschrift*, the lower Seine hasn't been mentioned at all. Moreover, far from being a statement of the purpose of the Schlieffen plan, it merely notes that Schlieffen wanted to outflank the fortress line. No mention is made of breaking the fortress line itself, much less that this is the intent of the entire plan.

The true concept of the operation is actually stated on p.150 of the German version of Ritter's book: 'The success of the German attack should be obtained by an *envelopment* [emphasis mine] with the right wing': victory by outflanking the French main body, not by attacking the French fortress line in the rear. Schlieffen says that the French will probably be able to hold a line somewhere between Paris and Verdun and that the Germans will almost certainly have to cross the lower Seine and march around to the west of Paris. The decisive right wing is now about 250 kilometers from the French fortifications on the Moselle. The French fortress line was an obstacle, not the objective.

Holmes fails to address huge gaps in his theory. Holmes refuses to confront Dieckmann's *Schlieffenplan* manuscript because it shows that from 1889 to 1904 there is not a trace of the Schlieffen plan to be seen. Rather, it is clear Schlieffen was developing a counter-attack doctrine. Prussia/Germany had to consider the possibility of a two-front war since the elder Moltke's plan of 1859 and had to fight one in 1914; Holmes finds it completely reasonable that the Schlieffen plan should provide for a one-front war. I am still waiting for Holmes's explanation for the fact that the Schlieffen plan was in the possession of Schlieffen's *daughters* in August 1914. Holmes also does not confront Groener, Kuhl and Foerster, who deny that Moltke ever understood the Schlieffen plan.

The central fact concerning the 'Schlieffen plan' is that it was written in January and February 1906, and as of 1 January 1906 Schlieffen had retired, was no longer the Chief of Staff and had no authority whatsoever. The issues Holmes raises are pointless. It doesn't matter in January 1906 if Schlieffen thought he could immediately raise 24 new divisions, or whether the Russians would fight or not. Schlieffen didn't get to make those decisions any more.

Robert Foley, 'The Origins of the Schlieffen Plan' in: *War in History* 2003 (2) pp. 222-232.

Foley contends that the predecessor of the Schlieffen plan was Schlieffen's 1899 Aufmarsch I for a war against France alone, and that Schlieffen could not implement the plan until the new fortifications at Metz had been completed.

Terence Zuber, 'The Schlieffen Plan was an Orphan' in *War in History* 2004 (2), pp. 220-225.

Robert Foley says he has discovered who the parents of the Schlieffen Plan were: Schlieffen's 1899/1900 Aufmarschplan and the fortress of Metz. This genealogy does not, however, stand up to scrutiny.

The operations plan was effective for only six months, and was then replaced. Schlieffen said in the Denkschrift that the implementation of the plan had nothing to do with the Metz fortifications.

Foley begins with a misstatement of fact. He says that Schlieffen's 'Aufmarsch I is generally seen as a plan for war against France alone'. The 1899/1900 *Aufmarsch I* was for a one-front war: all 68 divisions were deployed in the west. On 1 October 1899, in the middle of the planning year, Schlieffen made a unique change to his deployment plan, at that time implementing a new *Aufmarsch I*, with 10 divisions in East Prussia and 58 in the west, and that *Aufmarsch I* was now defined as a situation in which the Russians were belligerents, but not attacking in strength. Foley's predecessor to the Schlieffen plan lived for six months from 1 April to 1 October 1899, and then died childless.

In a footnote, Foley also says that Dieckmann believed that there was a Schlieffen plan, the implication being that this is proof that the Schlieffen plan actually existed. This is simplistic. When Dieckmann wrote the *Denkschrift*, everyone believed there was a Schlieffen plan - why should Dieckmann have been an exception? There is, however, no proof that Dieckmann ever saw the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift*. He does not refer to specific parts of it anywhere *Der Schlieffenplan*, which ends in 1904. What we can infer from Dieckmann's manuscript is that Dieckmann thought that the Schlieffen plan was intended to be used for a preventive war against France and that Dieckmann had no intention of linking Schlieffen's planning to Moltke's or to the war plan in 1914. This was not a conclusion to Wolfgang Foerster's liking. The Reichsarchiv had already been burned once in 1919 by allowing an open-minded officer access to the Schlieffen plan, and he came to a raft of unorthodox conclusions. [10] Wolfgang Foerster had every reason to deny Dieckmann access to the Schlieffen Plan *Denkschrift* until he was sure that Dieckmann would toe the party line. Indeed, Dieckmann's failure to live up to these expectations may well have led to Foerster's cancellation of the project.

Foley then exhumes a trick used by Groener in 1929 to show that the German army really had enough divisions to execute the Schlieffen plan. [11] Foley says that the 1899 plan called for 23 corps and 19 reserve divisions in the west 'while only a small number of units were left to defend in the east. This constitutes a similar deployment to that envisaged in Schlieffen's memorandum of 1905, which also called for the bulk of the German army to be deployed in the west'. Such vague generalities could work in 1929, when the text of the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift* was still secret, but haven't been plausible for nearly thirty years, since Ritter published the text in 1956. We now know that the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift* required not only that 'the bulk of the army' to be deployed in the west but it also needed about 24 divisions that did not even exist. The 'Schlieffen plan' postulated an army of 96 divisions while the German army had 58 divisions to deploy in the west in 1905 and 72 in 1914.

This leads to the fundamental vague generality that underpins Foley's warmed-over Schlieffen school argument. The similarity between Schlieffen's planning in 1898-1899 and January-February 1906 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* was supposed to lie in the fact that Schlieffen strove to 'keep the right wing strong.' Exactly how strong was that?

In fact, in the 1898 *Denkschrift* that Foley cites as the intellectual precursor to the 'Schlieffen plan', the right wing consists of 30 divisions, the centre and left of 30 divisions: the right wing is no stronger than the combined centre and left. In the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* the right wing consists of 82 divisions, including the 24 imaginary divisions, the centre and left only 14. Courtesy of the fantasy divisions, the right wing in the 'Schlieffen plan' is stronger than any pre-war German army that ever actually existed.

Foley explains the difference between the 1898 *Denkschrift* and the 1906 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* in a rather pointless discussion of the changing German appreciation of the French war plan: the 'Schlieffen plan' supposedly responded to the French extension of their left flank by extending the right wing further to the north. Foley neglects to mention that the 1906 *Denkschrift* accomplished this trick deploying imaginary divisions to the right wing.

The other parent of the Schlieffen plan was supposed to have been the fortress of Metz. Foley says that Forts Lothringen, Kaiserin, Kronprinz and Graf Haeseler were finished in 1905 and this made it possible for Schlieffen to secure the left flank of the right wing (Kaiserin wasn't actually completed until 1908). This is an old argument. Jack Snyder used it in his 1984 book, *The Ideology of the Offensive*, and it surely wasn't his idea originally.

In fact, Metz could hardly have been considered combat-ready in 1905. After 1905 on the west side of the Moselle the Germans found it necessary to build another major fort (Feste Leipzig), a series of infantry bunkers (The Seven Dwarves) between Feste Kaiserin and Feste Kronprinz, five batteries with naval gun turrets, three large infantry bunker systems and a number of smaller infantry bunkers. In 1905 the east side of the Moselle was held only by obsolete masonry forts: the back door to the fort was wide open and the Germans knew it. To 1916 three Festen had to be built (Wagner, Luitpold, von der Goltz) plus three large infantry bunker systems and four forward batteries. [\[12\]](#) The 'completion' of Metz had nothing to do with the Schlieffen plan.

In addition, Schlieffen's opinion of the importance of Metz is at considerable variance with Foley's. Schlieffen said:

Metz will form the strongpoint for the protection of the left flank:

Not the current Metz, also not the Metz as it is to be expanded by the last plan, but a Metz consisting largely of field fortifications, whose perimeter will generally follow the course of the Moselle, the Saar and the Nied, which will include a strong garrison of Landwehr troops and heavy artillery and which will be made capable of drawing off a considerable part of the enemy forces.

Foley said Schlieffen could only write his plan in 1905 because he had to wait for the new 'armoured' fortifications to be completed at Metz. Schlieffen, on the other hand, expressly said that he was not basing his plan on the Metz of 1905 or even the Metz planned for the future, but a 'Metz' that consisted of field fortifications and that extended completely across Lorraine ('the Moselle, the Saar and the Nied'). Since the German army presumably had no lack of shovels, this 'Metz' could have been constructed at any time: indeed, since the Landwehr was

going to garrison it, and therefore probably dig it, Schlieffen did not think that it would come into being until the German army had completed deployment. So, whom do we believe concerning the importance of Metz, Schlieffen or Foley?

Terence Holmes, 'Asking Schlieffen: A Further Reply to Terence Zuber' in: *War in History*, 2003 (4) pp. 464-479.

Holmes acknowledges that the Schlieffen plan Denkschrift provided for an attack with a right wing of 82 divisions (Holmes says 87) that marched 13 corps to the west of Paris in order to push the French into Switzerland. Nevertheless, when Moltke attacked with a right wing of 54 divisions, and only to the east of Paris, he was still executing the Schlieffen plan, because the French had weakened their position by attacking into Lorraine.

A reply was not published.

Robert Foley, 'The Real Schlieffen Plan' in *War in History*, 2006 (1) pp. 91-115.

Foley contends that since Wilhelm Dieckmann thought that there was a Schlieffen plan, there must have been a Schlieffen plan; that Schlieffen never used his war games to test war plans; that Russian weakness allowed Schlieffen to adopt a one-front war plan; that Schlieffen could have raised a 'Schlieffen-plan'-sized army; that the deterioration in Germany's position on both fronts forced Moltke to implement a modified Schlieffen plan

Terence Zuber, 'The "Schlieffen Plan" and German War Guilt' in *War in History* 2007 (1) pp. 96-108.

Foley said that Schlieffen used war games to test his war plans (which reverses his position in 2003, when he said that Schlieffen did). The one exception, according to Foley, was the 1905 General Staff ride in the west, in which Ludendorff said that Schlieffen tested the Schlieffen plan. But the source Foley cites shows that Ludendorff actually said no such thing. Foley said that since Dieckmann, the author of the manuscript on German war planning from 1891-1904, thought there was a Schlieffen plan, that proves there was a Schlieffen plan. But Dieckmann never described the Schlieffen plan, there is no proof that he saw the actual document, and his manuscript stopped before the plan was even written. Foley fails to give a credible explanation as to how the Schlieffen plan, which was written for a one-front war, could be executed in a two-front war, nor where the 24 missing divisions were going to come from. In the end, the only thing that concerns Foley is maintaining German 'war guilt' by whatever means necessary.

In 'The Real Schlieffen Plan' [\[13\]](#) Robert Foley asserts that my work on the 'Schlieffen Plan' has only been part of a 'wider argument' and that I am really only the most recent member of a plot by 'interwar German soldiers and historians' who 'twisted facts and the historical record in an attempt to prove that Germany fought an essentially defensive war in 1914.' As an American infantry officer, it is not clear why I have any interest in lying in order to defend the reputation of Imperial Germany. I'm not even German: my family is from Alsace and my closest European relatives are French. Foley's statement not only betrays his confusion concerning what both I and the 'interwar German soldiers and historians' actually said, it also reveals more about Foley's objectives than mine – Foley's sole interest in the Schlieffen plan is in using it to establish German guilt for starting the Great War.

The soldiers of the 'Schlieffen School' – Groener, Kuhl, et. al. – maintained that there was a Schlieffen plan, and had the younger Moltke only followed it, the Germans would have beaten the French in a matter of weeks. I say that they invented the Schlieffen plan in order to protect the reputation of the General Staff and certain officers in it – in particular, Kuhl himself. If I am in cahoots with the General Staff, saying that it lied to save its own skin is a strange way to show it. Anyway, for the 'Schlieffen School', war guilt was not an issue.

Hans Delbrück, who is presumably the 'historian' Foley disapproves of, thought that there was a Schlieffen plan, and that the invasion of Belgium blackened Germany's good name. He also thought that it was the wrong plan, and that the Germans should have attacked in the east. But Delbrück said that Russian general mobilization, not the Schlieffen plan, was the proximate cause of the war. I was not much kinder to Delbrück than I was to the General Staff. I said that Delbrück was being wise after the fact, and that Schlieffen never intended to attack at all, but wanted to counterattack against Franco-Russian offensives.

Since the 1950s the orthodox view of German strategy prior to the Great War has been that of Gerhard Ritter. For Ritter, the principal questions concerning Germany strategy were war guilt and militarism; operations were peripheral, and the operational inconsistencies in the Schlieffen plan were of little consequence. This is essentially Foley's position.

Inventing the Schlieffen Plan demonstrated that the 'Schlieffen plan' was operationally absurd...Due to *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan* few historians, including Foley himself, are prepared directly to defend the 'Schlieffen plan' as described by the General Staff, Delbrück and Ritter. Nevertheless, Foley defends a ...'Schlieffen plan' without any serious operational basis whatsoever – because it is the prime piece of evidence for German war guilt...For Foley, the Schlieffen plan is a code word or slogan which supports a political evaluation.

However, Foley knows that he must make it appear that the Schlieffen plan was operationally feasible. He has now found an interesting way around the thorny operational problem. For several years, Terence Holmes and I have been engaged in a Schlieffen plan debate focused on Schlieffen's operational intent. Foley says that he will 'leave aside the operational detail of the Zuber/Holmes debate'. He then goes on to cite Holmes's views on operations as though they were established facts: how very clever. I am going to take Foley at his word, if not his deed, and act as if Foley never mentioned Holmes.

Schlieffen's *Generalstabsreisen* and *Kriegsspiele* are fatal to Foley's thesis that the Schlieffen intended to conduct an aggressive war. The 'General Situation' in these exercises usually involved simultaneous or near-simultaneous coordinated French and Russian offensives against Germany, often on the 15th-18th days of mobilization. The exercises in the west assumed French offensives into Lorraine, or Belgium, or both. The Germans counterattacked against these French offensives. The exercises in the east generally assumed that the French attack had been defeated and that the Germans were transferring 6-11 corps to the east to counterattack against the Russian offensive. In Schlieffen's great 1905 *Kriegsspiel* the Germans counterattacked first against the Russian offensive, then transferred forces to the west to counterattack against the French offensive in Belgium.

Some of these exercises were so accurate that they provided templates for the German army's operations in 1914. Most striking is the similarity between the 1894 *Generalstabsreise Ost* and the battle of Tannenberg: the two are practically identical. On 15 August 1914 Moltke thought that the French were going to launch their main attack in Lorraine. In the 1914 *Aufmarschanweisung* 5th Army had been deployed in depth behind Metz to meet just such a

contingency. Moltke now ordered 5th Army to be prepared to attack through Metz into Lorraine. This is the antithesis of the 'Schlieffen plan', in which the attack into Lorraine is a *Liebesdienst* which is to be ignored. However, Moltke's actual orders on 15 August cover the same scenario – main French attack in Lorraine – practiced in the 1904, 1905, 1906 and 1908 *Generalstabsreisen West*. On 24 August, Moltke decided to shift six corps to the east. Again, this is the antithesis of the 'Schlieffen plan', in which the entire German army pushes the French army into Switzerland. Moltke's 24 August orders are, however, fully compatible with the concept of the 1897, 1899, 1901 and 1903 *Generalstabsreisen Ost*, in which the French are defeated, but not destroyed, whereupon the Germans transfer forces east. Ludendorff's attack towards Lodz in the fall of 1914 closely parallels the concept of Schlieffen's 1901 and 1903 *Generalstabsreisen Ost*. In all these cases, the Schlieffen doctrine is employed: counterattack against Franco-Russian offensives, making maximum possible use of rail mobility...It would be interesting to see how Foley explains this direct relationship between Schlieffen's exercises and German actions in 1914, but Foley refuses to confront unpleasant facts.

Instead, Foley contends that Schlieffen's exercises were conducted only to provide a mechanism for 'staff training' and promotion. [14] Foley offers no proof at all for his assertion.

Foley's recognition that Schlieffen's exercises are operationally meaningless must have come to him in a revelation. In 2003 Foley published *Alfred von Schlieffen's Military Writings* which included translations of the 1894, 1897, 1899, 1901 and 1903 *Generalstabsreisen Ost* and the 1905 *Kriegsspiel*. Nowhere does he say that these are only 'staff training' exercises. In fact, Foley wrote that Schlieffen's General Staff rides and *Kriegsspiele* served 'as a means of trying out ideas for his war plans and for testing strategic concepts'. [15] In 2003 Foley also wrote 'The Origins of the Schlieffen Plan', [16] in which he said that Terence Holmes had 'comprehensively demonstrated' that Schlieffen's 1904-05 exercises led directly to the Schlieffen plan. Foley has made a 180 degree reversal and now says that these same exercises had no connection to Schlieffen's planning at all. Foley has thereby repudiated the first 150 pages of *Alfred von Schlieffen's Military Writings* as well as 'The Origins of the Schlieffen Plan'. Foley now believes that General Staff training took place in an operational and doctrinal vacuum. If Foley is to be considered a serious military historian, such a radical *volte face* demands a detailed explanation. Foley offers none whatsoever.

In 1938 the General Staff published five of Schlieffen's *Generalstabsreisen Ost*. In the preface the Chief of the General Staff said: 'The conduct of these exercises served as tests of his strategic thought; during these exercises his thought ripened and was then embodied in continual development of his operational intent. On every exercise he wanted to make the General Staff aware of his concepts and train it uniformly in his principles.' [17] ...Nevertheless, Foley says that these exercises had *nothing* to do with Schlieffen's military thought. Who do we believe, the Chief of the General Staff or Foley?

Foley says that, according to Ludendorff, Schlieffen did test the Schlieffen plan in the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West*. Ludendorff said no such thing; he didn't even mention a connection between the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* and the Schlieffen plan. In fact, Ludendorff's description of the exercise shows that it had *nothing* to do with the 'Schlieffen plan'. [18] This source document chosen by Foley himself contradicts Foley on every particular. Ludendorff said that in the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* the French attacked with their main body in Lorraine. Ludendorff's boss, *Oberquartiermeister* General von Hausmann, was the leader of the German side. Using Schlieffen's doctrine, he counterattacked from the fortresses of Metz

and Strasbourg and decisively defeated the French. There is no mention of a right-wing attack through Belgium and northern France whatsoever. In Ludendorff's description, this exercise is little different from the 1904, 1906 and 1908 *Generalstabsreisen West*, which Foley says had no basis in German war planning and were held merely for 'staff training' and promotion. The French attacked in Lorraine and were defeated there. How can Foley possibly think that this helps prove his charge that the German war plan was aggressive? According to Foley, in 1905 Schlieffen thought he could fight a one-front war against France and that the French would be on the defensive, and for those reasons Schlieffen was able to conduct a war of aggression against France. Ludendorff on the other hand says Schlieffen always expected a coordinated Franco-Russian attack: the French offensive would be immediate and would pass north of Diedenhofen. Schlieffen wanted to decisively defeat this attack, that is, Ludendorff expressly says that Schlieffen employed a counter-attack doctrine. Ludendorff then says that only if the French unexpectedly did not attack would the Germans have either to attack the fortified Verdun-Belfort line or to 'try to go around it to the north. Given the German *Westaufmarsch* this would be an uncommonly difficult undertaking' [!] Ludendorff confirms what I have always contended, that Schlieffen did not think that the attack through northern France was a brilliant manoeuvre, but a risky, desperate measure born of necessity. It would appear that Foley did not even bother to read what Ludendorff had to say, but merely assumed that Ludendorff would confirm the 'Schlieffen plan' dogma. Foley is raising contempt for operational military history to a new level.

Foley fails to understand the significance of military doctrine in training for and conducting modern operational warfare. He does not use the word 'doctrine' once. For Foley (and Ritter) what is important is 'the Plan', which is the creation of a Napoleonic chief of the general staff. As became clear in 1812 and 1813, even Napoleon was poorly served by this over-centralized command and control. With the rise of true mass armies in the 1880s, decentralized execution of a flexible plan became unavoidable. It is no accident that this period produced the first two creators of military doctrine, Bonnal and Schlieffen. Doctrine allowed subordinates to understand the commander's concept of the operation even when they were separated by hundreds of kilometres and by poor communications. Bonnal's was a manoeuvre doctrine based on the *batallion carrée* and its advanced guard. From 1894 to 1905 Schlieffen developed a doctrine based on counterattacks delivered with speed and surprise through the use of rail mobility. The mechanisms Schlieffen used to test and disseminate this doctrine were the *Generalstabsreisen* and *Kriegsspiele* (Bonnal used similar exercises the same way). Most of chapter 4 of *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan* – some 85 pages – concerns itself with tracing the development of Schlieffen's doctrine.

Foley's reply to this is a non sequitur. He says that I have not shown that these exercises led to the development of the war plan. I would never attempt to. Foley is the advocate of the all-encompassing Schlieffen plan, not I. In fact, the real-world 'war plan', the 1914 *Aufmarschanweisungen*, consisted merely of the deployment plan and the initial mission. To a great degree, the initial deployment was dictated by geography as much as strategy: million-men armies needed exhaustively to utilize the available rail nets and space. The army mission statements in the *Aufmarschanweisungen* were couched in very general terms and, true to the dictum of the elder Moltke that "no plan survives contact with the enemy", did not prescribe actions beyond the initial forward (or in Lorraine, rearward) movement.

Once contact was made with the enemy, doctrine took over. On a battlefield dominated by the will and actions of the enemy, massive firepower, and a crippling lack of information concerning both friendly and enemy forces, only doctrine would provide a framework for operational decision-making.

Doctrine is learned through practise. The head of the operations section of the OHL (*Oberste Heeresleitung* – the senior German headquarters) said that the order for the right wing to begin its advance on 18 August 1914 could be kept short and sweet because 'the Chiefs of Staff of the army headquarters had been made fully aware of the intent of the OHL through the *Aufmarschanweisungen* as well as by participation in general staff rides and the war games.' [19]

Foley quotes Hermann von Kuhl, who said that Schlieffen's exercises 'tested how an operation would take place under particular circumstances'. For Schlieffen, testing doctrine was contingent on a number of factors, not the least of which were enemy action and the results of combat. Foley thinks this is a strange way to test a war plan. For Foley, a test of the war plan should look like the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift*, in which the entire campaign is laid out in advance. Enemy actions are of little or no consequence. Subordinate commanders merely execute orders in lockstep. There is no need for doctrine.

Foley notes that Schlieffen's exercises were only classified 'Secret' and were widely distributed, which would have been reckless had they been tests of the war plan. [20] On the other hand, if it is true, as Foley contends, that these exercises served merely as vehicles for 'staff training' and promotion, then the German army was classifying utter junk as 'Secret' and then carefully preserving it for years in the corps operations sections safes. The problem here is not one of security classification, but of Foley's inability to distinguish between the war plan and doctrine. Schlieffen's exercises played scenarios based on doctrine, which had to be disseminated to the general staff officers in order to be effective.

Foley's concern with document security is hardly consistent. In August 1914 the original 'Schlieffen plan' documents – ostensibly the real super-secret war plan itself – were in the possession of Schlieffen's daughters, a scenario straight out of "Arsenic and Old Lace". I made this point in 1999. Foley has resolutely refused to address it. [21] Foley hopes that if he ignores unpleasant facts they will go away.

A central document in understanding German pre-war planning is Wilhelm Dieckmann's 'Der Schlieffenplan'. [22] Foley argues that since Dieckmann thought that there was a Schlieffen plan, then there must have been a Schlieffen plan. My failure to agree with this premise can only be based on my conviction that I possess, as Foley says, 'secret knowledge'. From Foley's point of view, I probably do...I show in my translation of Dieckmann in *German War Planning* and in *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan* that it is important to distinguish between (a) Dieckmann's own opinions, which are pedestrian right-wing nationalist, and (b) the information Dieckmann provides concerning documents which have been irretrievably lost. Foley will have no truck with such subtlety: Foley maintains that everything Dieckmann wrote is the gospel truth. Even though there is no evidence that Dieckmann ever saw the Schlieffen plan, Foley argues that, because 'Dieckmann was intimately familiar with sources that we do not have today', Dieckmann's belief that there was a Schlieffen plan must therefore be credible.

By his own logic, Foley would also have to accept Groener, Kuhl and Wolfgang Foerster as being credible too. Foerster was Dieckmann's boss and reviewed the *Schlieffenplan* manuscript. Groener and Kuhl had access to Reichsarchiv documents and were on the board that supervised the Reichsarchiv. On the other hand, Foley says these officers 'twisted the facts and the historical record'. Is the opinion of these officers – Dieckmann included – concerning the 'Schlieffen plan' reliable or not? Foley wants to have it both ways.

Foley argues that I don't see the big picture. I fail to appreciate that the military and political situation in 1905 made a one-front war possible and that this situation led to the birth of the Schlieffen plan, which, Foley maintains (along with Groener), was an actual war plan. The proof that this was so, say both Foley and Groener, was that Schlieffen concentrated the entire army in the west, all 72 divisions. This trick worked for Groener, because the in the 1920s the actual 'Schlieffen plan' was still secret. But as I pointed out in 1999, the 'Schlieffen plan' required an army of 96 divisions in the west, that is, 24 divisions that did not actually exist. Twenty-five percent of the units employed in the 'Schlieffen plan' are 'ghost divisions'.

Why would Schlieffen use what Foley says is a unique moment in history, when Germany could fight a one-front war, to write a war plan for an imaginary German army that included 24 ghost divisions? Because the 'Schlieffen plan' was arguing that *even in a one-front war Germany did not have enough troops to attack in the west*. Schlieffen was saying that Germany needed to utilize all of her trained manpower and create 24 new divisions. This required massive planning and preparation. And even this would not be enough! Germany needed to create still more units by implementing genuine universal conscription.

By 1914 the German army's manpower situation had improved very little. The 1914 *Aufmarschanweisungen* provided for a German field force of 79 active and reserve divisions for a two-front war. Six ersatz divisions were to be created, but were not initially intended for field operations and for that reason did not have any service support units – no ration or ammunition supply columns or medical units. Once the war started, it was decided to employ the ersatz divisions in the field after all and these support formations had to be improvised. In a two-front war in 1906 the 'Schlieffen plan' required more than 105 divisions. In 1914, by using every possible expedient, Germany had 85. And between 1906 and 1914 all three Entente armies had gotten much stronger.

Foley noted in *Schlieffen's Military Writings* that in the 14 years while he was Chief of the General Staff, Schlieffen was unable to obtain the increases in the size of the army that he wanted. [23] Nevertheless, Foley is now saying that, *after Schlieffen had retired*, Schlieffen thought that increasing the size of the German army by 1/3 should have been no great problem. This is simply not credible.

Foley cites a source which stated that in 1914 the German army raised four new army corps in six weeks, thereby implying that creating a mass of new units was not a problem. Had Foley consulted the Reichsarchiv [24] official history, he would have seen that the *six* corps he is referring to (XXII-XXVII Reserve Corps and a Bavarian division) were created on 15 August in order to utilize the mass of enthusiastic young men, mainly students, who had volunteered. These were not the ersatz units made up of trained personnel that Schlieffen had advocated. Nor were part of the war plan at all. No peacetime preparations whatsoever had been made to create these units. There were practically no cadres available. Recourse had to be made to overage officers of all kinds, including retired Landwehr and Landsturm officers. No plans had been made for training, with the result that the unqualified cadre focused on formal discipline instead of combat training. In any case, their knowledge of tactics was one generation out of date. Equipment, including uniforms, rifles (captured Russian and Belgian weapons had to be used), rucksacks and field kitchens were completely lacking. These new corps could not be moved until 9 October 1914 and were not committed to combat until 17 October – 11 weeks from the start of the war, a full 5 weeks after the battle of the Marne. Obviously, this was far too late to have been of any use in the 'Schlieffen plan'. Since the soldiers in the new corps created in 1914 had only eight weeks of inadequate training, they were completely unready for any sort of operations. Once these units began to move,

thousands of unfit and untrained soldiers went on sick call due to immobilizing blisters and other physical ailments. In the 'Schlieffen plan' these troops would have had to conduct forced foot-marches from the German border to Paris! Many of these troops had hardly fired their weapons in training. In combat, their casualties were staggering and they rarely accomplished their assigned missions. Even the Russians thought these units were poor! This proves exactly the opposite of what Foley has intended; the German army had *not* planned to raise new units to implement 'Schlieffen plan', and when Falkenhayn did try to raise entirely new units, the result was a fiasco.

There is a German plan that is almost surely the basis for the younger Moltke's eventual (5 September 1914) orders, [25] but it is not the 'Schlieffen plan'. In 1900 General Hans-Hartweg von Beseler, one of the most respected officers in the pre-war German army, wrote a *Denkschrift* for a right wing attack through Belgium followed by a concentric attack against the front and rear of the French fortress line, which was to be broken between Epinal and Verdun. [26] But Foley is intent on using the militaristic nimbus of the 'Schlieffen plan' to prove German war guilt. Excoriating the evil 'Beseler plan' hardly makes the same impact.

Foley believes he can defend the 'Schlieffen plan' with his own insights concerning permanent fortifications. Foley does not trouble himself with the task of actually studying siege tactics in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In 'The Origins of the Schlieffen Plan' he said that Schlieffen could not implement the plan until the construction of Fortress Metz had been completed. I showed that in the plan itself Schlieffen said exactly the opposite. Now Foley has found a single document – a letter from the General Staff to the War Ministry asking for money for artillery – which he says proves that in 1906 the Germans had discovered that the French fortress line was impregnable (his description of the document itself is not enlightening). [27] Therefore, Foley says Moltke had to implement the 'Schlieffen plan'. Foley builds an entire strategic edifice on the slender reed of this one document. Foley needs to explain why his conclusions stand in complete contradiction to everything known about fortress warfare between the mid-1880s and the war, to wit: that while the major French fortresses of Verdun, Toul, Epinal and Belfort had been provided with some 'armoured' gun positions that could withstand high-explosive artillery shells, most of the *Sperrforts* in between them, which made up the bulk of the French fortress system, were unreconstructed masonry works, whose protected areas were designed only to withstand black powder explosives and which did not afford overhead cover for the gun positions. They were vulnerable to fire from standard German corps and army-level weapons – heavy howitzers and 21cm mortars – and the Germans knew it.

In any case, Schlieffen was never enthusiastic about a frontal attack on the French eastern border which, even without the fortresses, stood on eminently defensible terrain, and he continually said that a victory here would only push the French to the rear. Hence Schlieffen's desire to counterattack against the French after they had advanced in front of their border or – worst case – Beseler's 1900 plan to attack the fortress line from both the front and the rear. All this was discussed in exhaustive detail in *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, which includes an extensive bibliography of archival documents and contemporary secondary literature on fortress warfare.

The Germans made the decision to extend their right flank as far as northern Belgium and Holland in 1904, and they implemented it in the 1905/06 *Aufmarsch*, [28] because they thought that the French had already extended their left as far as Mézières [29] and not because of the 1906 'Schlieffen plan' or because the Germans had suddenly discovered in 1906 that the French fortresses were impregnable.

Foley contends that the younger Moltke retained the concept of the 'Schlieffen plan', although none of the preconditions which Foley himself says made the Schlieffen plan possible in 1906 applied any longer. The 'Schlieffen plan' was for a one-front war. Foley goes to great lengths to duplicate my research showing that the Russian army was fully recovered by 1914 and that Germany would have to fight a two-front war...At the beginning of the war the Germans could deploy only 68 divisions in the west, not the 96 required by the 'Schlieffen plan'. Nevertheless, Foley says that Moltke made the quixotic decision to employ the 'Schlieffen plan' in order to wage aggressive warfare against France. Therein lies Germany's war guilt.

There is no resemblance between the August 1914 situation and the 'Schlieffen plan' whatsoever. In fact, the situation in 1914 most closely resembles the scenario of Schlieffen's great 1905 *Kriegsspiel*. In both the war game and in the actual campaign, the French and Russians launched a coordinated attack against Germany. [30] In both the war game as well as in August 1914, the initial battles were all fought on German territory, with the Germans *counterattacking* in East Prussia, Alsace and Lorraine, while the French left wing met the German right wing inside Belgium.

The success of these counterattacks in the west in 1914 demonstrated the power of Schlieffen's operational doctrine, even when it was indifferently executed. When employed properly, the Schlieffen doctrine was devastating. Using Schlieffen's *Generalstabsreisen* and deployment plans, Ludendorff was able to defend the entire eastern front in 1914 with a handful of divisions, while destroying one Russian army and severely battering two more.

The Schlieffen plan was actually saying that an advance between Paris and Verdun would be brought to a halt on the Aisne-Oise, or the Marne, or the Seine. Lo and behold, when Moltke tried to advance between Paris and Verdun, the French stopped the Germans on the Marne. The Schlieffen plan was actually saying that an advance into France with fewer than 96 divisions would not succeed, because the Germans had to be strong enough to advance to the west of Paris to outflank these river lines. Lo and behold, in 1914 an advance into France with fewer than 96 divisions failed.

Schlieffen advocated a counterattack doctrine that worked and he counselled against an advance into France that did not. He deserves much better than to have his good name blackened by Delbrück, Ritter and finally Foley.

Fundamentally, it does not matter to defenders of the 'Schlieffen plan' such as Foley whether the Germans were fighting on one front or two, or if the Germans had 96 divisions, 72 divisions or some other number. For such advocates of the 'Schlieffen plan' operational planning is merely a hindrance on the way to recognition of the profound evils of German militarism. However, the faith of the true believers is not sufficient to convince the sceptical, rational world.

Since there never was a 'Schlieffen plan', Foley had best find some other justification for German war guilt. I recommend the evil 'Beseler plan'

Annika Mombauer, 'Of War Plans and War Guilt: The Debate Surrounding the Schlieffen Plan' in: *The Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 28, No. 5, October 2005

Mombauer maintains that the Schlieffen proves German war guilt: it was an aggressive war plan which led to the German invasion of France.

Terence Zuber, 'Everybody Knows there was a "Schlieffen Plan": A Reply to Annika Mombauer' in: *War in History* 2008 (1) pp. 92-101.

Annika Mombauer contends that the Schlieffen plan was an offensive war plan, which proves German guilt for starting the Great War. She does not find it necessary to prove this assertion by referring to the actual war planning documents or the official military histories. Instead, Mombauer relies on 'common knowledge' and 'truthiness' (if it sounds true, it must be true).

In fact, the French and Russians attacked the Germans, and the first battles of the war were fought in East Prussia, Alsace and Lorraine – on German territory. Of the four great land powers, the Germans were the last to begin major offensive operations.

Since Mombauer says that offensive war plans equals war guilt, she must maintain that in the first battles of the war the Russians and French were not attacking, and the Germans were not on the defensive. Mombauer thinks that it is 'generally accepted' that the Great War began 'with a German attack on France and Belgium'.

'Common knowledge' notwithstanding, it is clear that in the first major battles, the French and Russians were attacking and the Germans were on the defensive. On 14 August the Russians began their advance into East Prussia with the 1st and 2nd Armies, including 20 infantry and 8 cavalry divisions, roughly 500,000 men, while the French 1st and 2nd Armies attacked into German Alsace and Lorraine. The first major battles of the war, at Stallupönen and Tannenberg in East Prussia and in Alsace and Lorraine, were fought on German territory.

In fact, of the four great land powers in 1914, the German army was the *last* to conduct major offensive operations. The right wing of the German army in the west did not begin its forward movement until 18 August, four days after the French attack into Lorraine, and did not make serious contact with the French, who were also attacking into Belgium, until 22 August. [\[31\]](#)

Mombauer asserts that the Germans had *planned* to attack first: 'Even if France and Russia had agreed to march into Germany by the 15th day of [Russian] mobilization, as Zuber repeatedly underlines, this fact was irrelevant in August 1914, because Germany's actions were based on completely different considerations and in any case left its opponents with no opportunity to implement their own offensive plans. By the 15th [Russian] mobilization day the German troops were expected to be deep in French territory and a French offensive at this point would be highly unlikely'. Mombauer, who uses 101 footnotes in 23 pages of text, strangely fails to enlighten us as to where she came by these *outré* ideas. [\[32\]](#)

The Germans never planned to be 'deep in French territory' by the 15th day of mobilization. Both the French and German armies in 1914 were mass armies; they had to be mobilized in their peacetime garrisons and then transported by rail to the frontier. Except for the German covering force, the German army would not begin to deploy by rail to the border until 6 August. The German rail deployment lasted to 17 August. It was physically impossible for the German army to have been 'deep in[to] French territory' by 14 August, the 15th day of Russian mobilization. German forward movement would only start on 18 August, the 19th day of Russian mobilization and four days after the French offensive into Lorraine. There is no indication in the German war planning in 1914 that the Germans had any intent to begin their advance from the German-Belgian border before 18 August: even on the 'Schlieffen plan'

map, by the 15th day of mobilization the right wing is nowhere near the French border, and crosses it only on 23rd German mobilization day. The mass of the German right wing did not cross the French border until 24 and 25 August, the 25th and 26th days of Russian mobilization. In any case, whatever the Germans may have planned to do, the French and Russians crossed the German border first.

Mombauer says '... we know what actually happened in August 1914. German troops invaded Luxemburg and Belgium and were headed for France, while French troops were initially ordered to halt within ten kilometers of Germany...' Once again, this is completely wrong. Poincaré, the President of France, had ordered the deployment of the covering force (five corps of a 25 corps-strong French army) to the Franco-German border on 30 July with the stipulation that it remain 10 kilometers from the border. This stipulation was rescinded on 2 August, the day that the French and Germans began mobilization, and the entire French army was granted complete freedom of movement ('Le gouvernement rend donc au general commandant en chef *liberté absolue* du mouvement') [emphasis in the original]. Joffre made full use of this freedom of movement: the French VII Corps attacked into Alsace on 7 August. The French 1st and 2nd Armies began their offensive into Lorraine on 14 August. The German army did not begin to advance until 18 August.

Mombauer also says, 'Of course France also had an offensive war plan...but the difference is that France did not attack Germany in 1914 (false news of such attacks was spread in Germany to justify the German attack!), but rather Joffre ordered the French troops to remain behind the front until he was certain of Germany's approach.'

If the French had an offensive war plan, but weren't going to attack the Germans, who were they going to attack? In any case, Joffre's offensive intent had nothing to do with specific German actions. In Plan XVII, distributed to the army commanders on 7 February 1914, Section II – Intentions of the Commander in Chief – says: "In all cases, the intention of the commanding general is attack the German armies as soon as all forces are assembled". Joffre reiterated this intention in his famous General Order No. 1 on 8 August 1914. The intelligence estimate included in this order makes it clear that Joffre did not think that the Germans were 'approaching', but rather were massing behind Metz.

Mombauer has been hoist on her own petard: she argues that the Schlieffen plan was an offensive war plan, which proves German war guilt. But the military facts show incontrovertibly that the Russians and French attacked before the Germans: small wonder that she prefers 'common knowledge' to military history.

That the French and Russians had an offensive war plan does not prove French and Russian 'war guilt' any more than an offensive German plan would prove German 'war guilt'. The decision to go to war is *political*, not military. Whether politics were 'moral' or 'immoral' in 1914, indeed whether politics are now or can ever be ethical, is not a question for the military historian to decide. The actual war planning shows only that the French and Russians thought it was militarily advantageous to attack and the Germans thought it militarily advantageous to counterattack. Neither strategy is intrinsically 'moral' or 'immoral'. The purpose of military history is to determine what actually happened, not to develop a sliding scale for assigning degrees of moral guilt and innocence.

Mombauer's idea of German strategy is a confused muddle. Mombauer contends that both the Schlieffen plan and Moltke's 1914 war plan envisioned 'attempting to fight two wars in succession, rather than a war on two fronts'. Wrong again. As far as the 'Schlieffen plan' is

concerned, the *first line* of the 1906 *Denkschrift* says '*Krieg gegen Frankreich*' – war against France – that is, a one-front war against France only. In fact, in the 'Schlieffen plan' *no* German forces were ever deployed in the east, and there is no mention whatsoever of a war against Russia. Mombauer thinks that the difference between Moltke's plan and Schlieffen's was that 'he [Moltke] wanted to deploy more troops in the east'. [33] This is actually true – the 'Schlieffen plan' sent no troops to East Prussia, so any troops Moltke sent to East Prussia would be more than none at all – but also implies that both Schlieffen and Moltke were planning for a two-front war. Asserting that both deployed troops in the east is inconsistent with her assertion that the Germans wanted to fight 'two wars in succession, rather than a war on two fronts'. According to Mombauer, Moltke was both planning for a two front war and he wasn't.

The Germans always wanted to conduct a war on interior lines (a military term that Mombauer does not use). This had been the German intent since the days of the elder Moltke. In 1914 preparations were made to shift seven corps from the west to the east. This must have been the maximum likely redeployment, limited by the rail net in East Prussia, and it made up about 15% of the total German force. [34] Had such a maximum redeployment been conducted after the initial battles in the west, it would have reduced the force in the west from about 76 divisions to 62 and increased the force in the east from 9 divisions to 23. This is consistent with the scenarios for Schlieffen's two-front war games. The result is clearly that Germany was still engaged in a two-front war, not Mombauer's successive one-front wars.

She repeats Gerhard Ritter's old argument that the Germans had a fixed war plan that would be executed under all circumstances: 'For Moltke, and for the war plan of 1914, it mattered little what France was planning: the majority of the German troops would be employed on the German right wing in an effort to outflank the French and avoid the fortified frontier'. Once again, Mombauer provides no proof. In fact, the German 'war plan' was contained in the *Aufmarschanweisungen* (deployment orders) for 1914/15. The right wing was ordered to march through Belgium to France. There is no mention of outflanking the French fortress line for the simple reason that by the time the Germans reached the French border the Germans expected a battle and 'no plan survives contact with the enemy'. It is quite clear from the *Aufmarschanweisungen* that if the French launched their main attack into Lorraine, then Lorraine was where the decisive battle would be fought. The 6th and 7th Armies would defend Lorraine and northern Alsace, the 5th Army would move through Metz to counterattack to the south and the 4th Army would guard the rear of the 5th. [35] In a similar situation in Moltke's two surviving *Generalstabsreisen West* the mass of the right wing marched south to the Ardennes, not west to France, and the decisive battle would have been fought on German territory, east of the French fortress line. On 15 August 1914 Moltke thought that the French were going to make their main attack into Lorraine with 38 to 40 divisions and prepared to fight the decisive battle in Lorraine. He called off these preparations only when he found out that the French were not this strong. [36] The idea that a war plan does not have to consider enemy actions is ridiculous.

In fact, the 'Schlieffen school' argued that the 1914/15 *Aufmarschanweisungen*, and Moltke's 1906 and 1908 *Generalstabsreisen West*, which played a French attack into Lorraine, proved that Moltke did not understand the Schlieffen plan, in which a French attack into Lorraine was a *Liebesdienst* that should have been disregarded. Mombauer refuses to talk about the charges that Moltke didn't understand the Schlieffen plan, [37] for that would undermine her whole thesis that they had, in concept, essentially the same plan.

Mombauer repeatedly states that the 'German troops intended to march into France and defeat it. [38] Wrong. The Germans intended to defeat the French. Where and how that happened was dependant on French actions. Between 20 and 24 August the Germans did defeat the French in the Battle of the Frontiers – concerning which Mombauer apparently knows nothing – which was fought in Lorraine and Belgium. Had the German senior commanders been more skillful, then the British Expeditionary Force and the French 5th Army would have been enveloped and annihilated in Belgium, or the French 1st and 2nd Armies might have been destroyed in Lorraine, and the war would have essentially been over.

Mombauer would also have us believe that any mention of Schlieffen's planning prior to 1920 can only refer to the 1906 *Denkschrift*. So when Groener mentions a Schlieffen "plan" (without further elaboration, the quotation marks are Groener's) in September 1914, when Germany had 85 divisions and faced a two-front war, to Mombauer he can only be referring to the 1906 *Denkschrift*, which assumed Germany had 96 divisions in a one-front war. It is much more likely that references to Schlieffen's planning before 1920 are to his *real* deployment plans between 1891 and 1905 and his *Generalstabsreisen* and *Kriegsspiele*, and not the fictitious 'Schlieffen plan'. I have also shown that when the Bavarian military representative at the German headquarters, Karl Ritter von Wenninger, also made reference to a Schlieffen plan in September 1914, he described what he meant, and it was not the 1906 *Denkschrift*, but Beseler's 1900 attack on the French fortress line.

Mombauer even distorts my assertion that 'there never was a Schlieffen plan' to conform to her 'German war guilt' *idée fixe*. Mombauer says that 'Zuber does not achieve his ultimate goal of convincingly arguing that no Schlieffen Plan means no German war guilt'. This is not my argument, and there is no basis whatsoever for Mombauer to have arrived at such a conclusion.

In the last eight years my actual 'Schlieffen plan' thesis has become well-known. I argue that the 'Schlieffen plan' was operationally absurd: the 'Schlieffen plan' employed 24 German divisions that never existed in a one-front war that never happened. I say that Schlieffen's purpose in writing the 'plan' was to argue for a much larger German army. Using the actual German war planning documents, I show that in Schlieffen's real war plans he intended to counterattack against the anticipated Franco-Russian offensive.

I contend that in the 1920s the General Staff invented an infallible 'Schlieffen plan' in order to explain the failure of the Marne campaign. When, in the 1950s, Gerhard Ritter used the Schlieffen plan to prove German war guilt, the Schlieffen plan was 'common knowledge'. Ritter was not a military historian and the details of the plan were unimportant to him. According to Ritter, offensive war planning proves war guilt. Since the Schlieffen plan was an offensive war plan, the Schlieffen plan proves German war guilt. My analysis of the 'Schlieffen plan' and German war planning resulted in exposing both the General's Staff's lies and Ritter's sophistry.

Since there never was a 'Schlieffen plan', Ritter's assertion that the 'Schlieffen plan' was the proximate cause of the war has to be wrong. But the overall question of German war guilt (High Seas Fleet, *Weltpolitik*, Blank Check, etc.), or of French and Russian war guilt, or even if the idea of 'war guilt' itself makes any ethical or political sense at all, are not questions for a study of German war planning to decide, and I do not make the attempt. I never concluded, as Mombauer contends, that 'no Schlieffen plan means no German war guilt'.

According to Mombauer, I said that 'neither Moltke nor Schlieffen intended to attack France in case of a European war'. Untrue. What I have always maintained is that Schlieffen was never enthusiastic about an attack into France and would have preferred to counterattack against a French offensive. The concept for a German offensive into France was provided in a *Denkschrift* written by Hans Hartwig von Beseler in 1900, in which the Germans would advance through Belgium to break the French fortress line by attacking from the front and rear. This is the plan that Moltke was attempting to implement with his 5 September 1914 orders, and not the 'Schlieffen plan'.

Mombauer also contends that 'Zuber's thesis [is] of a Germany that was defending itself from a French attack through Belgium'. This is 1/5 of a correct statement. I said, in fact, that in the vast majority of German war plans, *Generalstabsreisen* (General staff exercises) and *Kriegsspiele* (war games), Germany faced a two-front war, and that both Schlieffen and Moltke believed that while the Russians attacked into East Prussia, the French attack could come in Lorraine, or simultaneously to the north and south of Metz, or solely in the Ardennes.

According to Mombauer, I contend that the Germans were reacting in August 1914 to a French provocation. This is also untrue. I have always said that the Germans were responding to the Russian general mobilization, with the 1st day of Russian general mobilization being 31 July. Russian general mobilization forced the Germans to mobilize in turn, but not until 2 August. Most important, Russian general mobilization started the clock ticking on the Russo-French attack plan. The French and Russian armies had agreed to launch their offensives against Germany by the 15th day of Russian mobilization, 14 August, exactly as Schlieffen's war games had predicted.

Mombauer says that 'Zuber even dismisses the argument that the General Staff was opposed in its demands for more troops by the War Ministry's reluctance to conscript Socialists'. She arrives at this conclusion by misrepresenting what I said, my actual point being that *Schlieffen* was not afraid of conscripting socialists.

Mombauer contends that the only contemporary source I mention concerning the development of the 'Schlieffen plan' was Hermann Stegemann. The first chapter of *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, which is 51 pages long, discusses the early published material on German war planning, which shows how it was that Schlieffen's epigones, Groener, Kuhl and Foerster, invented the Schlieffen plan. I also discuss the other contemporary commentators, Hans Delbrück, Friedrich Immanuel, Georg Steinhausen, Captain Ritter (no relation to Gerhard) and Ludwig Beck.

Even though Mombauer is purporting to give a summary of the Schlieffen plan debate, she fails to clearly present the single most important issue. The 'Schlieffen plan' required an army of 96 divisions in a one-front war. Every available source shows that the German army had no more than 72 divisions available in 1906, when the Schlieffen plan was written. In 1914, Mombauer notwithstanding, Germany faced the certainty of a two-front war. Implementing the 'Schlieffen plan' under those conditions would have required 105 divisions. In 1914, employing every possible expedient, the German army had only 85 divisions total and initially could deploy only 68 divisions in the west – fewer than in 1906; and between 1906 and 1914 both the Russian and French armies had grown much stronger. There were never enough divisions to execute the 'Schlieffen plan'. I contended that the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift* was actually saying that an attack into France would not succeed with fewer than 96 divisions – a quantity that the Germans never had. Schlieffen was arguing for a massive expansion of the German army, based on the complete use of the trained German manpower,

as well as true universal conscription, both of which Schlieffen had been advocating since 1889.

Mombauer characterizes most of my debate with Holmes as 'focused increasingly on minutiae, disagreeing among others on operational and linguistic details'. In military planning, in combat and in military history, operational details are never 'minutiae' and attention to detail is essential. The focus of the entire Zuber-Holmes debate concerns Schlieffen's operational intent, which is as it should be.

Mombauer maintains that I have 'failed to convince most experts in the field.' Really? At the Potsdam conference in 2004, and in Mombauer's presence, Stig Förster announced to the assembled company that the 'Schlieffen plan' was dead and should be buried. Jeremy Black said of *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan* that 'Zuber has produced an important work that throws much light on war planning and also on the process by which strategic interpretations become part of the historiography'. Samuel R. Williamson said that *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan* 'is an important book'. Niall Ferguson incorporated my Schlieffen plan argument in *The War of the World*. Förster, Black, Williamson and Ferguson are four of the most important contemporary military historians.

In summary, Mombauer has systematically misrepresented my 'Schlieffen plan' argument and the subsequent Schlieffen plan debate. More important, Mombauer has gotten the basic military facts of the initial month of the Great War completely wrong. If Mombauer wants to use military history to support her theories concerning German morality and politics, first she has to get the military facts straight.

Gerhard P. Gross, 'There Was a Schlieffen Plan: New Sources on the History of German Military Planning' in: *War in History* 2008 (4) pp. 389-431.

Gross makes seven criticisms of my thesis that 'there never was a Schlieffen plan'. He also contends that he has discovered Schlieffen's 1905 General Staff ride in the west, which he says Schlieffen used to test the Schlieffen plan. He concludes with his appreciation of Schlieffen's 'operational-strategic doctrine', which was 'strictly adhered to' by Moltke.

T. Zuber 'There Never Was a "Schlieffen Plan": a Reply to Gerhard Gross' in: *War in History* 2010 (2) pp. 231-250.

This article presents a refutation of Gross' seven criticisms of my 'Schlieffen plan' thesis. It also shows that Gross did not discover the 1905 General Staff ride in the west, which has been well-known since the 1930s, and he failed to accurately describe the information about the exercise that he did find, which shows that this exercise was not a test of the 'Schlieffen plan'. A thorough analysis of Document RH61/v.96, a summary of the war plans of Schlieffen and Moltke, further demonstrates that there never was a 'Schlieffen plan'.

Gross' Arguments

(1) I contended that from the time of Schlieffen's retirement in 1906 to his death in 1913 the 'Schlieffen plan' was in Schlieffen's personal possession. Thereafter, it was the possession of Schlieffen's daughters, who stored it with the family photos, until 1931 when it was turned

over to the Reichsarchiv. This is not the way the German army would have treated the real German war plan.

Gross' point number 1 is supposed to refute this. In fact, Gross makes no rebuttal of my argument whatsoever. [39] Rather, he argues that [there were many copies of the Schlieffen plan]. This is pure speculation: none of Gross' other copies of the Schlieffen plan have ever appeared...[and has] no bearing on the fact that on the day the war started and for years thereafter the supposedly super-secret original *Denkschrift* and Moltke's 1911 typed copy and marginal comments were undoubtedly in the possession of Schlieffen's daughters.

(2)(a) I contended that Schlieffen always preferred to counterattack. Gross says that this is wrong, that counterattacks were Schlieffen's second choice, and that Schlieffen only intended to counterattack if the Germans were numerically inferior. Logically, Gross should then go on to show that the Germans were numerically superior. He does not do so, because he can't: in a two-front war, the Germans never had numerical superiority.

(2)(b) I used Schlieffen' war games to show that his actual war planning had nothing to do with the 'Schlieffen plan'. Rather, Schlieffen was developing a doctrine which used rail mobility and Germany's interior position to counterattack against the expected Franco-Russian offensives.

According to Gross, Schlieffen's war games and general staff rides had no relation to Schlieffen's strategic thought whatsoever: they were held merely for 'staff training' and as promotion tests. This is not a new argument: Robert Foley made it in 2006 [40] and I refuted it in 2007. [41]

In 1938 the German General Staff published a magnificent volume including five of Schlieffen's *Generalstabsreisen Ost*. The introduction was written by the Chief of the German General Staff. On the first page, he said:

Of the means that Schlieffen used as a thinker and teacher, his Great General Staff rides stand in a privileged position.

The conduct of these exercises served to test his strategic thought; during the exercises it ripened and then found its expression in his continual rewriting of his operational plans.

In every ride he wanted to make the general staff aware of his concepts and intentions and educate them to uniform action. He wanted to train subordinates and assistants who would be capable of independent action in a war of million-man armies on battlefields of enormous size.

So whom do we believe, the Chief of the German General Staff or Gross? In fact, Schlieffen was training his subordinates – in his doctrine, which was the basis of his war plans. The proof of this is to be found in the first exercise: the 1894 *Generalstabsreise Ost* is obviously the template for Tannenberg. Foley and Gross assiduously avoid mentioning this exercise.

(3) I said that Schlieffen never tested the 'Schlieffen plan' in a war game or staff ride. In spite of the fact that he has just said that Schlieffen never used war games or staff rides to test war plans, Gross now says that he has found the staff ride – the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* – in which Schlieffen tested the Schlieffen plan! Furthermore, in the German version of his article Gross says that 'without going into the conduct of the exercise...in detail', that it is 'obvious'

that this exercise was the foundation of the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift*. [42] This simply will not do. If the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* is really the test of the Schlieffen plan, it deserves serious analysis.

The 'Schlieffen School' always maintained that Schlieffen had tested the concept of the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift* in his 1905 *Generalstabsreise West*. [43] [For a description of Boetticher and Zoellner's description of the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* in articles published in the 1930s and the lack of any connection to the 'Schlieffen plan', see 'The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered' p. 291-3 or p. 6 of this summary.]

In Boetticher's papers at the *Militärarchiv* in Freiburg, Gross found some of the materials on which Boetticher and Zoellner had based their articles. In making his analysis of these documents public, Gross did not mention the articles written in the 1930s by Boetticher and Zoellner. Instead, he proclaimed that he had found the war game that Schlieffen used to develop the Schlieffen plan, as though he had made a spectacular discovery. [44] In fact, the documents that Gross found add only details to what has been widely known for 70 years.

It is important to note that Boetticher's papers did *not* include the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* exercise critique. We are once again dealing not with a primary source, but a secondary source, which requires additional evaluation, caution and attention to detail, none of which Gross provides.

From the published articles by Boetticher and Zoellner we know that Schlieffen replayed all three scenarios of the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West*, but neither treat this as being important or give any specifics. Now Boetticher's notes for these articles tell us that Schlieffen replayed these scenarios not as part of the *Generalstabsreise* proper but as a 'study', a far less extensive format than the *Generalstabsreise*.

In Boetticher's notes the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* is described in four documents. [45] Document 1 is titled 'General General Staff Ride 1905. Initial Situation for all three scenarios Freytag – Kuhl – Steuben. May 1905', which is 38 pages long. It was written by Wilhelm von Hahnke, Schlieffen's son-in-law and adjutant, who was personally present. It describes only the *Generalstabsreise* proper and not the study which followed. Document 2 is titled 'Exercise Critique', the stenographic notes for the exercise critique Schlieffen gave at Freiburg on 17 July 1905. It is 19 pages long, including a cover letter by Hahnke. Hahnke's letter describes the original situation. He cites three original documents – the individual critiques for Freytag, Kuhl and Steuben – all of which have been lost. Document 2 also concerns only the *Generalstabsreise* proper, and not the subsequent operational study. Document 3 is titled 'Great General Staff Ride 1905', is 13 pages long, and describes both the *Generalstabsreise* and the subsequent operational study. The author of this document had only the exercise critique and the working papers of one player available (which one isn't specified). These original documents have been lost. He attached twelve sketches and three maps. Document 4 is titled 'Great General Staff Ride 1905', is seven pages long, was probably written by Boetticher, and describes both the *Generalstabsreise* and the operational study.

Document 1 gives the initial French situation, including [the] French deployment, which was the same as the current 3rd Department intelligence estimate: 1st Army on the right with centre of mass at Epinal, 2nd in the centre at Toul, 3rd on the left at Revigny, 4th in reserve at Charlerange. The French deployment would be complete by the 18th day of mobilization. The strength of the French armies was not given, other than the fact that they had 10 Territorial divisions available for field operations. Document 4 says that the French had to leave two

corps and two reserve divisions on the Italian border. There is every reason to believe that the exercise was also based on the size of the French army in the German 1905 intelligence estimate: 37 active divisions, 12 reserve divisions, 49 divisions in total. [\[46\]](#)

Document 4 says that situation was 'particularly favourable for the Germans due to the assumption that all forces could be employed against France and that it was unnecessary to leave forces in the east'. On page 21 of Document 1 Hahnke gives us the German order of battle: 26 corps, 19 reserve divisions, 72 divisions total (I Corps had three divisions), which was the actual strength for the entire German army at that time. The Germans also had 20 Landwehr divisions, which did not exist (in the 1905/06 *Aufmarsch I* there were 26 Landwehr *brigades*). Schlieffen's imaginary 1905 Landwehr divisions also had twice as much artillery as comparable Landwehr units would have in 1914. Document 3 concludes by expressly calling attention to the fact that Schlieffen used 20 Landwehr divisions in these exercises, but the German army in the west in 1914 had only 20 Landwehr brigades. Gross fails to give the German and French force structures, a serious lack of attention to detail.

In the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* Schlieffen employed 92 divisions, 20 of which did not actually exist. Twenty divisions are equal to the strength of two entire armies. The 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* has this much in common with the 'Schlieffen plan', which employed 96 divisions, including 24 divisions that did not actually exist.

Small wonder that in the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* the Germans always won: in the August 1905 west front intelligence estimate that the French had 49 active and reserve divisions (which was essentially correct), against 72 German divisions – the Germans were 23 divisions stronger. If the 10 French Territorial and 20 German Landwehr divisions are added, that makes 59 French divisions against 92 German. The Germans now had 35 more divisions than the French did.

The Germans began the 1914 campaign in the west not with 92 divisions, but 68 divisions. They were faced by 92 French, Belgian and British divisions. [\[47\]](#) In 1914 it was the Germans that were outnumbered by 24 divisions.

There is no possibility that the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West*, which employed 20 divisions that did not exist, and which gave the Germans considerable numerical superiority, could have any relevance to the 1914 war plan. As we will see, Gross denies that this is a problem – Gross thinks that it is perfectly acceptable to write war plans which employ masses of imaginary units. [\[48\]](#)

Document 1 says that the French solution was worked out by 11 officers. Hahnke shows us that there was a French solution, in addition to those of Freytag, Kuhl and Steuben, which was not mentioned in the articles by Boetticher and Zoellner. It was presented by Colonel Matthias, and in Hahnke's opinion it was 'masterful'. Upon completion of the French deployment Matthias conducted a redeployment. A 5th Army with six corps was sent to Lille-Maubeuge (Hahnke emphasized this with an exclamation mark!). 4th Army, with two corps and four reserve divisions, was moved to the north of Mézières, 3rd Army with five corps was between Mézières and Verdun, 2nd Army (three corps, three reserve divisions) between Verdun and Toul, 1st Army (two corps, seven reserve divisions) between Toul and Epinal, with one corps between Epinal and Belfort. Matthias had 13 corps to oppose the German right wing. The three corps in the centre, at Verdun-Toul, were positioned to attack against the left flank of the German right wing, a French manoeuvre that was the constant bugbear of German planning. Only three corps and eight reserve divisions held the front opposite Alsace and

Lorraine. The French front from Toul to Namur would be covered by the Meuse River, which is perhaps the most significant natural defensive line in Europe, being not only deep and wide, but lined with cliffs and dense woods. Most important, Matthias intended to remain on the defensive and allow the Germans to conduct their march through Belgium.

Schlieffen not only refused to play Matthias' solution, he refused to comment on it. Gross' description of Matthias' solution is so cursory as to be nearly incomprehensible, perhaps intentionally so. The reason is not far to seek. Using the terrain and border fortresses as force multipliers and *by standing on the defensive*, Matthias, outnumbered as he was, might still have been able to bring the great right-wing attack to a screeching halt on the Belgian border. Moreover, there was a chance that the French might actually have adopted this solution in wartime, which Hahnke noted looked very much like the war plan proposed by General Michel in 1911.

Document 2 is a transcript of stenographic notes of Schlieffen's exercise critique given at Freiburg on 17 July 1905. At the top, under the title *I. Grosse Generalstabsreise 1905*, is a heading which says 'From his Excellency to the 1st Adjutant. For the Collection W. Ha. [Wilhelm Hahnke] 31 December 1905.' The next line is 'Exercise Critique'. The line below that says: 'From the original stenographic notes of Captain Hellfeld. A copy was apparently not made.' A comment by Hahnke on the first page says that Schlieffen did not subsequently rework and polish these notes. A second comment by Hahnke says that while cleaning out Schlieffen's desk preparatory to his retirement on 1 January 1906 he had the transcript typed and gave it to his successor, Moltke's adjutant, Major Dommès.

So, all we have of the exercise critique of what that Gross says is the sole exercise in which Schlieffen tested a war plan, and the sole test of the Schlieffen plan to boot, is a copy of some stenographic notes taken by a captain, which Schlieffen did not even bother to read, and which was passed along as an afterthought from the outgoing to the incoming adjutant. Schlieffen himself didn't keep a copy of it.

Document 2 adds interesting details to what we already knew from Zoellner's and Boetticher's published articles. Schlieffen says that the only way that the French border fortifications can be avoided is if the neutrality of Luxembourg, Belgium and Holland are violated. He says that this may be forbidden politically, but could be considered as an academic exercise without any harm being done! This is a fascinating statement, which of course Gross does not mention. In the exercise that Gross says was the centrepiece of Schlieffen's war planning, Schlieffen could be considered as disavowing aggression against Belgium!

Schlieffen assigned additional officers to assist the French commanders. Steuben got a general officer to command 1st and 2nd Armies, another to command 3rd, 4th and 5th Armies, and two colonels to command the 6th and 7th Armies. Freytag was assisted by three generals and a colonel, Kuhl by two generals and two colonels.

Document 4 says expressly that the 'on the day of the exercise critique Schlieffen began the operation again and conducted it as a study'. There is no mention of this study in documents 1 and 2, which concern the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West*. A study would have been far quicker and much less formal than a *Generalstabsreise*. There is no mention of the involvement of anyone other than Kuhl, Freytag, Steuben and Schlieffen. There is no evidence that the orders were written down at army level, as in the *Generalstabsreise*. Gross failed to notice this, too: Gross thinks that this study was really a *Generalstabsreise*.

Gross does not mention Steuben's scenario in the study because this time Steuben is not just attacking into Lorraine, he is also attacking into Alsace! As in the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West*, Schlieffen moved the right wing *southeast* into Lorraine. No resemblance to the 'Schlieffen plan' here.

Gross says that the other two study scenarios, Kuhl's and Freytag's (but not Steuben's), are the direct predecessors of the 'Schlieffen plan', indeed, these are the only times that Schlieffen tested the 'Schlieffen plan' or any other war plan. According to Gross, in *no* other exercise did Schlieffen test war planning: all the other *Generalstabsreisen*, war games and the like were held for 'staff training'. [49] Why are the Kuhl and Freytag scenarios the only exception? Because Gross thinks they look like the 'Schlieffen plan'. Gross' 'proof' is based on circular reasoning.

Gross has said it is unnecessary to describe the Kuhl and Freytag scenarios in detail. True to his word, Gross does not provide a description of the forces involved, the enemy estimate, the decisions taken or the results of combat. Gross' sole proof that these scenarios test the Schlieffen plan consists of two maps of France which show only two French positions and lots of little arrows representing the German troops, which in a vague way looks like the famous 'Schlieffen plan' map. For armchair strategists, 'little maps, big arrows' has always been the principal 'proof' for the Schlieffen plan.

In fact, in Kuhl's scenario, the French attacked into Lorraine with two armies, held the Meuse and the Aisne with Territorial troops and concentrated nine corps near La Fère. Schlieffen once again counterattacked into Lorraine, swinging the German 5th and 6th Armies to the *south-east*. Half the French army was in Lorraine, where the two sides were equal. None of this could be easily determined from Gross' map. Not much resemblance to the 'Schlieffen plan' here.

In Freytag's scenario both the French and German armies are assembled north of Metz-Verdun: the German right wing includes all 26 active corps (52 divisions). Since the French had only 37 active-army divisions they were decisively outnumbered. Wherever the French turned, the Germans were stronger. Naturally, the Germans won. None of this is evident in Gross' map either. Neither exercise had any relevance to the German situation in 1914.

Nor is Gross honest about how little evidence is available. In document 4, Kuhl's scenario is described on one double-spaced page, Freytag's in a page and a half. In document 3, Kuhl's scenario is described in two double-spaced pages, Freytag's scenario in two and one-half pages. By way of comparison, the exercise critique for Schlieffen's 1905 *Kriegsspiel* is 36 pages long, with 42 maps.

Freytag's scenario lasted until the 56th day of mobilization. The German right wing moved from southern Holland to southern France, more than 800 kilometres. All we know about the conduct of this enormous march is what can fit on four double-spaced pages, and much of that is repetitious.

Boetticher and Zoellner both maintain that the three scenarios of the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* proper were the predecessors of the 'Schlieffen plan'. The study conducted after the *Generalstabsreise* was over was mentioned only in passing. Why? Because, if the contention that 'Schlieffen plan' was actually the template for the German war plan is to be plausible, Schlieffen had to have tested it beforehand, and the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* was the only exercise that was ever conducted that bore the slightest resemblance to the 'Schlieffen plan'.

The 'Schlieffen school' was not willing to invent evidence, although they were more than happy to spin whatever documents were available to suit themselves. The study conducted after the *Generalstabsreise* was over was simply inadequate to bear the load of being Schlieffen's greatest wargame.

About four months after he supposedly tested the 'Schlieffen plan' in the 1905 *Generalstabsreise* West, in November and December 1905 Schlieffen held a massive 42-day two-front war game in which the German army counterattacked on both the east and west fronts – no resemblance to the 'Schlieffen plan' here. Gross' answer to this conundrum is that the 1905 *Kriegsspiel* was held only for 'staff training' and promotion.

Gross is using the same dubious methods as Foerster, Kuhl and Groener – withholding information and spinning the facts – to prove the existence of a Schlieffen plan.

(4) I contend that the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* was actually arguing for the complete use of Germany's trained manpower, as well as universal conscription, as he had during his entire tenure as Chief of the General Staff. Ostensibly, Gross' point 4 is supposed to refute this idea. Instead, he asks why, since the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift* was such an important document, did Schlieffen give it to Moltke instead of to the Kaiser or the war minister? Gross concludes this digression by saying that I failed to answer this question.

This is actually a problem for Gross, not me. Gross is the one who says that the *Denkschrift* was important – I say that this importance was a post-war fabrication. Schlieffen didn't send the *Denkschrift* to the Kaiser and the war minister because he had been arguing for a bigger army for the last 14 years. If they didn't listen to him while he was on active duty, they weren't going to listen to him after he had retired. Moreover, by 1906 the Kaiser was busy building the High Seas Fleet. In 1911, when the pre-war arms race was at full tilt, Moltke pulled the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* out of the files precisely because it addressed increasing the size of the German army.

(5) I noted that the Schlieffen plan called for 96 divisions in a one-front war (and 106 divisions in a two-front war). In 1906 the Germans had 72 divisions total, in 1914, 68 divisions in the west. There were never enough divisions to conduct the 'Schlieffen plan', which included at least 24 'ghost divisions'.

In a marginal note on Dieckmann's 'Schlieffenplan' manuscript, Wolfgang Forester noted that '[in the mid 1890s] Schlieffen must have known that the required number of 21 cm howitzers were not available' and asks how this was possible. No answer was given, the most likely answer being that somebody had made a mistake. For Gross, the missing mortars are proof that Schlieffen wrote war plans with equipment that didn't exist. Gross then makes an enormous leap of logic – the possible absence of an indeterminate number of 21 cm mortars 'proves' that Schlieffen's last war plan included 24 to 34 non-existent divisions, the equivalent of two to three *armies*.

In addition, Gross said in (2) that there was no connection between Schlieffen's *Generalstabsreisen* and his war planning, Gross now says that since Schlieffen used imaginary units in his 1904 *Generalstabsreisen*, this proves he used imaginary units in his war plans. Gross' opinion of the purpose of Schlieffen's *Generalstabsreisen* changes to suit his whims.

Gross adds two more arguments. The first is that Schlieffen wasn't *really* counting on having 96 divisions, because he felt that what would be decisive was the quality, not the size, of the German army. If that were the case, why did Schlieffen mention the need for 96 divisions at all? In the German version of this article, Gross pulls out Groener's old argument that the required number of divisions actually was available: *Aufmarsch I*, Gross says, included 26 active corps, 12 reserve corps and 3 reserve divisions [39½ corps]. [50] This, Gross maintains, is close enough to the actual 'Schlieffen plan' figure (40 active and reserve corps) for government work. However, even the Reichsarchiv official history notes that 'a number of the reserve corps which were employed [in the Schlieffen plan] as complete [two-division] corps, did not have the second division. The mobilization plan [also] did not provide for the immediate creation of the ersatz corps'. [51] In fact, even in 1907/08 eight of the reserve corps were still short one division: there were only 72 divisions available in 1907/08, or the equivalent of 36 corps, not 39½. Including the ersatz corps, the 'Schlieffen plan' required a force of 48 corps; in a one-front war the Schlieffen plan was 12 corps short: 25% of the required force didn't exist. In the 1906/07 *Aufmarsch II* Schlieffen deployed 6½ corps in the east: in a two-front war, the 'Schlieffen plan' would have required 54½ corps. The 'Schlieffen plan' is now 17½ corps short: in a two-front war almost one-third of the 'Schlieffen plan' force didn't exist. It gets worse. The 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* expressly says that this force was not adequate and even more – nonexistent – manoeuvre units needed to be raised. [52] The 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* was arguing for a massive increase in the German army, not, as Gross contends, for a campaign conducted with 'ghost divisions'.

(6) I contended that the Schlieffen plan was an anomaly: the idea for a great right-wing attack through France is not present anywhere else in Schlieffen's planning. Faced with a two-front war, it is clear from Dieckmann's 'Schlieffenplan' manuscript that Schlieffen simply did not have the forces or the time to attack into France. Instead, in his *Generalstabsreisen* and *Kriegsspiele* Schlieffen developed a doctrine of counter-attacking against one enemy, usually but not always the French, then quickly shifting forces to counter-attack against the other.

Gross repeats the standard 'Schlieffen plan' assertion, that all of Schlieffen's 'deployment plans, staff rides and war games' led in a direct line to the right-wing invasion of France. There are two fatal flaws here.

The first is that Gross is contradicting himself. In (2) he said that Schlieffen's war games and staff rides (except the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West*) had nothing to do with Schlieffen's planning, they were held merely for 'staff training' and as promotion tests. Now he says that Schlieffen's war games and staff rides lead to the Schlieffen plan. Which is it to be?

The second flaw is that Gross never describes or analyses Schlieffen's plans or exercises; he merely makes a bald unsupported statement. In fact, from 1900 to 1905 Schlieffen's deployment plans and war games had little to do with the 'Schlieffen plan'. Schlieffen's deployment plans in 1900/01 and 1901/02 were *Ostaufmärsche* – two-thirds of the German army was in the east. In the 1903 *Generalstabsreise West* Schlieffen played an *Ostaufmarsch*. In the 1903 *Generalstabsreise Ost* the Germans defeated a French attack in Lorraine by the 27th day of mobilization and immediately transferred 11 corps to the east for a counterattack. In the 1st 1904 *Generalstabsreise West* the battle is fought in German Lorraine. In the 2nd 1904 *Generalstabsreise West* the German army gets wiped out along the Moselle: that's *not* the way the 'Schlieffen plan' was supposed to work! In the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* the French attack is defeated in Lorraine and Belgium. The 1905 *Kriegsspiel* involved an initial massive counterattack in the east, followed by a transfer of forces west. How does any of this lead to the 'Schlieffen plan'?

(7) Gross accepts Dieckmann's thesis that Schlieffen changed his war plan to suit changes in German political planning. Dieckmann's ideas concerning German foreign policy were bizarre and not supported by evidence or analysis: they are pulled straight out of thin air. They probably also got Dieckmann dropped from the Schlieffen plan project. As I noted in 1999, Wolfgang Foerster, Dieckmann's boss, took him to task for suggesting that Schlieffen's 1894 east front planning ran *counter* to German foreign policy. [53] Foerster's marginal comments then stop, Dieckmann's manuscript quits in 1903/04 and was never completed, indeed there is no proof that Foerster never let Dieckmann even see the Schlieffen plan. Dieckmann's attempt to connect Schlieffen's strategy to German politics was a failure.

Gross' Conclusions

Gross concludes that 'Moltke adhered to the basic principles on the conduct of a two-front war as developed by Schlieffen' by:

- taking the offensive
- using interior lines to turn a two-front war into a one-front war
- placing the *Schwerpunkt* in the west and delaying in the east
- planning a quick battle of annihilation in the west, either in Lorraine [!] or by means of an advance through Belgium to surround the French fortress system
- transferring the German army in the west to the east.

Gross calls this Schlieffen's 'operational-strategic doctrine'. [54]

Where did these conclusions come from? The 'Schlieffen plan' *was for a one-front war in the west*. The title of Gross' article is 'There was a Schlieffen plan'. Except for the first statement, 'taking the offensive', none of Gross' conclusions have anything to do with the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift*. Gross hasn't mentioned anything in the preceding 40 pages that would serve as a basis for these conclusions. In fact, most of Gross' conclusions are contradicted by Gross' own previous statements.

The only proof for the manner in which Schlieffen would conduct a two-front war comes from Schlieffen's *Generalstabsreisen* and *Kriegsspiele*, which Gross maintains in (2) had nothing to do with Schlieffen's war planning. Nevertheless, to prove his conclusions concerning Schlieffen's planning for a two-front war, Gross is reduced to quoting the 1901 *Generalstabsreise Ost*. [55]

Gross' second conclusion, that the 'Schlieffen plan' showed that Schlieffen had intended a strategy based on the use of interior lines, is absurd: the first line of the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* says *Krieg gegen Frankreich* – war against France. The only time that the Russians are mentioned says that they won't support France.

Gross' second and third points are contradictory: if the Germans are delaying in the east, then they have *failed* to turn a two-front war into a one-front war. In any case, there was also no way for Schlieffen to turn a two-front war into a one-front war, and Schlieffen never said that he could.

Gross' assertion that the 'Schlieffen plan' provided for a decisive battle in Lorraine is pure invention. Perhaps the most famous quote from the *Denkschrift* is that a French attack into Lorraine is a *Liebesdienst*, which should be ignored.

Gross never defines what constituted a 'quick' decisive battle: most apologists for the Schlieffen plan say that the Germans were to have annihilated the French in 30 to 40 days. The idea that there could be a 'quick' battle of annihilation in France is ridiculous. On the 'Schlieffen plan' map it takes the German army 31 days to march to the Somme, north of Paris. How long it would take to march around Paris and then to Switzerland is anyone's guess: another month or six weeks at least. Then the Germans would have to foot-march back to the railheads in Germany. According to the 1914 *Aufmarschanweisungen* the Germans had the rail capacity to move seven corps at once: moving even part of the army east would take weeks. Even if everything went perfectly, the whole 'Schlieffen plan' operation would have taken four or five months. In two or three months the Russians could have deployed 110-120 divisions against 9 German and 40 Austrian divisions. Far from providing the prospect of a 'quick' victory, the 'Schlieffen plan' was far too slow.

In fact, Moltke never thought that there would be a battle of annihilation in the west, where he was sure that the campaign would be long and drawn-out, and he said so in the exercise critique for the 1908 *Generalstabsreise West*. The last German pre-war intelligence estimate agreed. [\[56\]](#)

As far as Gross' fifth point is concerned (transferring the German army from the west to the east) the 1900/01 and 1901/02 war plans and the 1905 *Kriegsspiel* (Schlieffen's last and greatest war game) all involved an *Ostaufmarsch*: the mass of the German army didn't need to be moved east because it started the war there.

Gross' 'conclusions' repudiate everything he has previously said about the one-front 'Schlieffen plan' and maintain that what Schlieffen was *really* doing was planning for a two-front war. The fact that none of his conclusions are supported by the contents of the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* fazes him not one bit.

The German Plans, 1893-1914 [\[57\]](#)

At the Potsdam *Schlieffenplan* conference in 2004 Gross based his presentation on the fact that document RH 61/v.96, a summary of the German war plans from 1893/94 to 1914/15, had been discovered in the *Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv*, the German army archive. [\[58\]](#) This proved, Gross said, once again without troubling himself about the details, that Schlieffen had implemented the Schlieffen plan in 1906/07. [\[59\]](#) Now he says that the 1906/07 plan is 'based on' the 'operational considerations' of the 1905 [sic, 1906] *Denkschrift*. [\[60\]](#) In fact, RH61/v.96 shows that the 'Schlieffen plan' was never implemented, not in 1906/07 or later.

RH61/v.96 was probably compiled after the Great War by either a Reichsarchiv historian or a historian from the Wehrmacht historical section (*Kriegsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt*). There are numerous indications in internal Reichsarchiv documents that it was intended to publish a second, revised, edition of at least the first, third and fourth volumes of the official history (the Marne campaign). This document was probably written in the late 1930s and early 1940s in preparation for this second edition.

It survived the destruction of the Potsdam archive in 1945, probably because it was not being stored in the archive proper but was being used in a nearby office building. It was confiscated

by the Red Army and returned to the East Germans sometime after 1955 and was kept in the East German army archives in Potsdam until the fall of the Wall. It remained in Potsdam until this archive was closed in January 1996...The document was again available to researchers in Freiburg only in 2002. [\[61\]](#) It is listed in the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv index (*Findbuch*)RH 61 titled *Kriegsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt des Heeres*.

Based on guidance from the chief of the general staff, the Imperial German Army revised its war plan each winter and the new plan went into effect on 1 April of that year: therefore the plans were designated by two years, such as 1904/05, that is, effective 1 April 1904 to 31 March 1905.

The preceding year's plans and most of the supporting planning documents were usually destroyed. It was therefore difficult for German army official historians working both before and after the Great War to reconstruct the German war plans. The documents and maps available to the author(s) of RH61/v96 were not reproduced but only summarized. None of these original planning documents survived and were probably destroyed when the Reichsarchiv was bombed. The author(s) of RH61/v.96 influenced the nature of the document by their choice and description of the original documents. RH61/v.96 must therefore be considered a secondary, not primary, source material.

These are, as the name expressly states, deployment plans, not operations orders. The commander's overall intent and concept of the operation are almost never given. The deployment is described, and sometimes the initial advance as well. As of the 1906/07 year the *Aufmarschanweisungen* – the initial instructions to the army commanders – were generally available. The initial German actions were also contingent on enemy behaviour. Subsequent actions were dependent on the results of the first battles. The war plan seldom stipulated any actions after initial contact was made with the enemy.

The summary of each deployment plan begins with a list of the planning materials that were available. Sometimes general map sketches are included. Occasionally there is an enemy estimate. Border security is often discussed in great detail.

It is essential to re-emphasise that RH61/v.96 was a summary of whatever information was available to the German official historian who compiled it: we do not get to see the original documents. Moreover, the compiler was both aware of the Schlieffen plan dogma and worked for the organization that was the origin of that dogma. The author(s) selection and interpretation of the material available to him could have been influenced by a desire to emphasize the importance of the Schlieffen plan. Nevertheless, like the rest of the output of the 'Schlieffen school', there is no evidence that the author(s) actually falsified documents.

RH61/v.96 is organized by mobilization year from 1893/94 to 1914/15. It gives us the first detailed description of the 1904/05 and 1905/06 plans, Schlieffen's last plans, which are not in Dieckmann. Most important, for the first time we are given detailed information concerning the development of Moltke's planning from 1906/07 to 1913/14. There are only three pages of stenographic notes available concerning the 1912/13 plan. There are only five pages of stenographic notes concerning 1914/15 deployment plans, which was the plan actually used in 1914.

RH61/v.96 shows that Moltke did not slavishly follow the 'Schlieffen plan' but developed his own plans in order to meet the changes in the European military and diplomatic situation. Most important, RH61/v96 conforms that the 1914 war plan was not the 'Schlieffen plan'.

There were thirteen original documents from the 1906/07 *Aufmarsch* available to the author(s) of RH 61/v96: the deployment schedule, the order of battle for *Aufmarsch* I, II *West*, II *Ost*, and *Nord* (north), the covering force maps in the west and east, the deployment maps with the enemy situation in the west (1:300,000 and 1:200,000), the east (a rail map) and in the north (1:300,000), a coastal defence map, and the initial instructions (*Aufmarschanweisungen*) to the army commanders in the west, including the Italian army, and in the east, (without annexes). None of these documents survive.

The summary of these documents comprised ten typed pages with handwritten annotations, a handwritten force structure table and a deployment map (1:2,000,000) for the west only. Only *Aufmarsch* I is discussed, probably because the author wanted to highlight the Schlieffen plan.

It is physically impossible that the 1906/07 plan was based on the 'Schlieffen plan', as Gross asserts. Schlieffen was still working on the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift* in February 1906, far too late to allow it to be implemented by 1 April 1906, when the 1906/07 *Aufmarsch* went into effect: compiling the march tables was an immense operation which took all winter. In fact, the 'Schlieffen plan' should have been written in the fall of 1904 (for the 1905/06 deployment plan), when the Russo-Japanese war began, and not in January and February 1906, by which time the Russo-Japanese War had been over for nearly half a year. With each succeeding month the chances of fighting a one-front war, which were never very good, became less.

Aufmarsch I states that 'Holland's attitude is expected to be friendly rather than hostile, while the Belgian attitude is expected to be hostile.' This estimation of the Dutch reaction to a German invasion was wishful thinking. In 1907/08 the attitude of Holland would be characterized as 'doubtful'.

This is the first plan that reckons with British hostility. *Aufmarsch* I says: 'It is not out of the question that the British army will support Belgium. The British can land in Antwerp or move through Holland.' IX Reserve Corps was retained to guard against a landing on the North Sea coast.

The plan included an estimate of the French deployment. The French 1st Army, with four corps and four reserve divisions, would deploy between Belfort and Charmes. The 2nd Army (five corps, four reserve divisions) was deployed between Charmes and Toul, 3rd (six corps, three reserve divisions) behind Toul-Verdun, 4th Army (four and one-half corps, four reserve divisions) Ste. Menehould-Vouzières and then to the north of Rethel. The French centre of mass was at Toul-Verdun and the French left was pulled well back to the west. The French had 54 divisions (39 active, 15 reserve). The entire German army contained 72 divisions (52 active, 20 reserve). Only in a one-front war did the Germans enjoy numerical superiority.

In *Aufmarsch* I there are three German armies north of the Meuse. 2nd Army, with four active corps, deployed north of the Roer around Krefeld. It was instructed to march on Brussels. It was to be followed by 1st Army, with five reserve corps, which was to deploy on the east side of the Rhine in the area of Düsseldorf-Essen with the mission of guarding against Antwerp. The 3rd Army, with four corps and a reserve corps, was south of the 2nd, between Aachen and Cologne, with the mission of advancing between Liège-Namur on the left and Brussels on the right. It was instructed, 'not to allow its advance to be delayed', which meant that if the Belgian fortresses could not be taken immediately, they must be bypassed. Since there were no special instructions for the 2nd and 1st Armies to follow the 3rd through Aachen and past Liège, in all likelihood they would have been required to transit Dutch territory. 4th Army,

with four corps and a reserve corps, had instructions to send a corps and a reserve corps across the Meuse at Huy to join 3rd Army. The rest of the army was to advance to the Meuse between Givet and Namur. The 5th Army, with five corps, deployed around Bitburg and Trier opposite Luxembourg. It was to advance to the Meuse between Givet and Sedan. 6th Army (five corps) deployed east of Diedenhofen. It was to advance just across the border, to Longuyon, followed by 8th Army, with an active corps (at Metz) and four reserve corps, which would cover the 6th Army's left flank. 7th Army included three corps and a reserve corps. It was to fix the French in place on the Meurthe and Moselle. It had to be prepared to withdraw as far as Metz and the Nied river position (*Niedstellung*) if faced with stronger enemy forces. It was also to be prepared to reinforce the right wing. As in the 1905/06 plan, the 1906/07 plan notes that the arrival of Italian forces 'was dependent on the political situation'. Nevertheless, the deployment of five Italian corps to the upper Alsace was written into both plans. This was one reason that the German army could be shifted so far to the north.

In the corner of the first page a handwritten note says that *Aufmarsch* I was similar to the December 1905 Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift*. In fact, in the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* there is a total of 96 divisions. In this plan there are only 72 divisions – unless one would like to count in the 10 Italian divisions. In the 'Schlieffen plan' there are eight corps of ersatz troops. The only mention of ersatz troops in 1906/07 is that ersatz units from six corps areas were to be prepared to conduct coast defence operations in Schleswig-Holstein. Most important, as the 1906/07 *Aufmarschanweisungen* for the 7th Army expressly states, the German army was to conduct a left wheel *through Belgium*. None of the 1906/07 *Aufmarschanweisungen* direct the armies to march into France, much less, as in the 'Schlieffen plan', to surround Paris and push the French army into Switzerland. This is not accidental. The 1906/07 plan clearly anticipates a battle in Belgium or Lorraine, following which a new plan would be made. If the battle was in Lorraine, as was the case in most of Schlieffen's exercises, the war might end there and German army would not have to enter France at all.

The 'Schlieffen plan' rests on the rosy assumption of a one-front war, which was obviously not entirely valid because in the 1906/07 plan there is an *Aufmarsch* II for a two-front war, and this plan has no resemblance to the 'Schlieffen plan' whatsoever. In *Aufmarsch* II an army is deployed to East Prussia with three active corps, three reserve corps and a reserve division, probably 13 divisions in total. These forces are mostly drawn *from the right wing*. The forces north of the Meuse are reduced from 16 corps to 10. The crucial 2nd Army is dissolved entirely. The *Westheer* is now only about 58 divisions strong, that is 38 divisions short of the force required by the 'Schlieffen plan', and in effect the French and Germans are numerically equal. Moreover, it is this *Aufmarsch* II that most closely resembles the two-front situation that the Germans faced in 1914, and not *Aufmarsch* I.

In fact, the discovery of the 1906/07 *Aufmarschpläne* changes little concerning our perception of Schlieffen's planning: the most important revelation is that the plan counted on the arrival of an Italian army. As I noted both in 'The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered' and *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, every description of the 1906/07 plan, including those by Kuhl, Groener, Foerster, the Reichsarchiv official history and Ludendorff, said that Schlieffen intended to march north of the Meuse. Foerster and the Reichsarchiv history then freely acknowledged that Schlieffen did not have enough divisions to execute the plan outlined in the January-February 1906 *Denkschrift*. Ludendorff said outright that even in a one-front war against France alone Schlieffen was 24 divisions short of the total force required. According to the 'Schlieffen school', the task of creating the necessary divisions was Schlieffen's legacy to

Moltke. They all admit that these divisions never were established. The 1906/07 war plan could hardly have been 'based on' the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift*.

In fact, the two really interesting things that RH61/v.96 shows us are not mentioned by Gross at all. The first is that in 1909/10 Moltke revived Schlieffen's plan for a east-front first strategy, a *Grosser Ostaufmarsch*: 45 divisions would deploy for an all-out offensive to the east, the other 29 divisions would remain in their garrisons and would not march until the French did. So much for Gross' contention that Moltke was bound by the west-front only 'Schlieffen plan'. The *Ostufmarsch* was retained until 1913/14. Second, RH61/v96 confirms that in 1913/14 Moltke wrote only one plan, deploying 68 divisions in the west, two on the North Sea coast and nine in the east: Moltke's final plan was not the west-front only 'Schlieffen plan' *Aufmarsch I*, but the two-front *Aufmarsch II*.

Conclusions

Gross says that new documents prove that there actually was a Schlieffen plan. He then fails to give even a cursory description of these documents. This should send alarm bells ringing. In fact, professional analysis shows that his principal document, a summary of the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West*, merely expands on what we have known since the 1930s. The additional information it provides shows that Gross is wrong – it was not a test of the 'Schlieffen plan'. The summary of the German war plans, document RH61/v96, contradicts the 'Schlieffen plan' dogma in every particular. It shows that there were never enough German divisions to implement the plan, that the 'Schlieffen plan' was not the 'perfect German war plan', and that in fact it was never the German war plan at all.

The bulk of Gross' article consists of assertions that have neither the support of documentary evidence or simple logic. He maintains that Schlieffen used 'ghost divisions' in a real war plan. He says that none of Schlieffen's war games played real situations, except when he finds it convenient to say they *did* play real situations. He tries to sweep under the rug the fact that in August 1914 the super-secret 'Schlieffen plan' was in the possession of two elderly women. Finally Gross' 'conclusions' concerning Schlieffen's two-front war planning have no connection whatsoever either to the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* itself or the rest of his text.

Terence Holmes, 'All Present and Correct: The Verifiable Army of the Schlieffen Plan' in *War in History* 2009 (1) pp. 98-115.

Holmes now concedes my central point – that the Schlieffen plan was not the German war plan in 1914. Holmes now contends that the extra divisions necessary to conduct the Schlieffen plan either actually existed in 1906 or that Schlieffen felt in 1906 that he could raise them. Therefore, Schlieffen could have executed the Schlieffen plan in 1906.

T. Zuber, 'The Schlieffen Plan's "Ghost Divisions" March Again: A Reply to Terence Holmes' in: *War in History* 2010 (4) pp.1-14.

Holmes' contention that Schlieffen could have raised a Schlieffen plan-sized army in 1906 can be refuted in one paragraph. It doesn't matter what Holmes thinks Schlieffen could have done in 1906. As of 1 January 1906 Moltke was the chief of the German general staff, not Schlieffen. In 1906 Schlieffen was not in a position to tell the German army to do anything. And as Holmes acknowledges, Moltke did not implement the Schlieffen plan. Holmes'

argument, that the Schlieffen plan was viable from April to September 1906, is a chain of 'could haves' and 'would haves', none of which ever actually happened.

For anyone who is, however, still curious, I will refute Holmes' argument in detail. This is very complex and the following pages will be pretty heavy going.

In his fourth attempt to prove that there was a Schlieffen plan, 'All Present and Correct: The Verifiable Army of the Schlieffen Plan', [\[62\]](#) Holmes says that Schlieffen's actual 1906/07 deployment plan, his last, which was written in November 1905, was not the Schlieffen plan. The Schlieffen plan was written only after Schlieffen had retired on 1 January 1906, in January and February 1906, when it was passed on to Moltke, who did not implement it. [\[63\]](#)

This is one of the most important developments in the Schlieffen plan debate, in which I have always acknowledged that Holmes is my most capable opponent. After eight years of study of the Schlieffen plan, Holmes has decided that the Schlieffen plan was not the German 1914 war plan.

German Strategy and the 'Schlieffen Plan'

The 'Schlieffen plan' was for a one-front war in the west. It has been generally assumed that Schlieffen thought that the Russians would be too distracted by the Russo-Japanese War and internal disorder to support the French. In 2003 Holmes explained why he thought Schlieffen held his 1905 *Kriegsspiel*, which involved a two-front war. Holmes said that 'Schlieffen foresaw that Russia would recover her military capability in Europe within a year from the end of her war with Japan, which meant that by the latter part of 1906 Germany would once again face a serious threat on two sides'. [\[64\]](#) The Treaty of Portsmouth, ending the Russo-Japanese War, was concluded on September 1905. By Holmes' own reckoning, the Germans were faced with the probability of a two-front war as of September 1906. Holmes' time frame to execute the Schlieffen plan was therefore from April to September 1906.

The usual description of the 'Schlieffen plan' maintains that it would have brought the Germans victory over France in 30 to 40 days. Holmes himself has convincingly disposed of this idea. [\[65\]](#) In fact, to march the German right wing around Paris, push the French into Switzerland and then redeploy the mass of the German to the east would have taken, optimistically, five or six months. The Germans therefore had to launch their attack on France no later than April 1906, and even then the Germans had only five months to finish off the French and be ready to fight the Russians in September 1906.

Was there the political will to launch a preventive war against France in April 1906? Baron Holstein, whom it has been alleged favoured war during the first Moroccan crisis, was dismissed on 5 April 1906. The Algeçiras Conference, which ended this crisis, concluded on 7 April. It is obvious that neither Bülow, the German chancellor, nor the Kaiser wanted a preventive war in April 1906. There is no evidence that either was even shown the 'Schlieffen plan'. If war, as Clausewitz says, is politics by other means, then the 'Schlieffen plan' was a dead letter.

German Force Structure and the 'Schlieffen Plan'

I contend that the 1906 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* required 96 divisions in a one-front war, but that only 72 were available in 1905, 1906 or 1907, years in which the various fanciers of the Schlieffen plan have said it was implemented as the real German war plan. [\[66\]](#) The

'Schlieffen plan' was short by eight reserve divisions and 16 ersatz divisions, short a total of 24 divisions, which I called 'ghost divisions'. Indeed, ten of these ersatz divisions *never* existed. In 1914 the Germans were initially able to deploy 68 divisions in the west, 12 short of the 80 required, and six ersatz divisions, 10 short of the 16 required. In 1914 the Germans were 22 divisions short of a 'Schlieffen plan' size army. [\[67\]](#)

Since the 2004 discovery of document RH 61/v.96 at the German army archives, we now have for the first time a summary of the German deployment plans from 1904/05 to 1914. This shows that *Aufmarsch I* (for a one-front war against France) in 1906/07 included 26 corps, 13 reserve corps and a reserve division. Since seven of the reserve corps had only one division, 52 active divisions and 19 reserve divisions, or 71 divisions in all, were deployed against France. IX RK (*Reserve-Korps*, reserve corps) with only one reserve division, was assigned to coast security duty against a possible British landing in northern Germany. [\[68\]](#) The 'Schlieffen plan', on the other hand, needed 96 divisions (80 active and reserve, 16 ersatz, organized into 48 corps).

Holmes acknowledges that the Schlieffen plan called for 48 corps, but he contends that these included only 90 divisions: 53 active, 21 reserve, 14 reserve brigades and 16 ersatz divisions. And he says that Schlieffen could have made all these units available in 1906.

To prove his case, Holmes notes that the 1907/08 plan called for 14 reserve brigades to fill up the 7 corps that was short by a division (two brigades – the infantry component of a division – for each corps), so that, even though there were only 20 reserve divisions, all 13 reserve corps were at full strength. That being the case, he says that Schlieffen could have done the same thing in 1906/07 too, even though there is no mention of this either in the 1906/07 deployment plan or in the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift*.

Holmes says that the 1906/07 plan included two Landwehr divisions and four ersatz divisions, to be sent to Schleswig-Holstein for coast defence, so that the German army in 1906/07 actually included 78 divisions. He also contends that Schlieffen could have raised 16 ersatz divisions in 1906/07. [\[69\]](#)

Holmes further says that Schlieffen would have raised a new active-army 43rd Division and used the 30th Reserve Division, the reserve for Fortress Strasbourg, in the open field.

Voilà. According to Holmes, the Schlieffen plan would have *really* called for 90 divisions, and even though the 1906 German army contained, by Holmes' own reckoning, only 78 divisions, he says that in 1906 Schlieffen could have raised all 90 divisions, and that this provided the equivalent of all 48 corps required by the Schlieffen plan.

The Real War Plans

There is no evidence of any of these new formations in the plans from 1905/06 to 1909/10. [\[70\]](#)

All the plans from 1905/06 to 1909/10 included 72 divisions (52 infantry divisions and 20 reserve divisions). The 1907/08 plan says in one passage that 13 reserve and 1 reserve division equalled 20 reserve divisions, that is, seven reserve corps had only one division. It says in another passage, on the same page, that 12 reserve corps and one reserve division would be deployed in the west, that these made up 19 reserve divisions, while IX RK, which had one division, would defend the North Sea coast: so, once again, the German army had 20

reserve divisions. In another passage, still on the same page, it says that 'it was intended' that two reserve brigades and ersatz artillery batteries were to be assigned to each of the seven corps that included only one division. No time frame for the execution of this 'intention' is mentioned. Holmes leaps to the conclusion that this vague 'intention' would make these one-division corps the equivalent of a two-division corps. The author of RH 61/v96 obviously did not agree because he explicitly said – twice – that there were 20 reserve divisions. There is no mention of reinforcing these seven reserve corps in any other German war plan until 1910/11, when all the reserve corps had two divisions, that is, only then were there 27 reserve divisions.

The 14 extra reserve brigades are mentioned once, in the 1907/08 plan, not in 1906/07 (which was supposedly the basis of the Schlieffen plan), and at no time thereafter. On the basis of this unstable foundation, Holmes constructs a vast edifice, increasing the number of German reserve divisions by one-third.

In 1905/06 the ersatz troops from five corps and one divisional area were to 'be prepared' to deploy to Holstein in northern Germany for coast defence. In the 1906/07 plan IX Ersatz Corps (composition not specified) was to deploy to the North Sea Coast. The Guard ersatz corps and a Landwehr corps were to deploy 'on order' after an enemy landing. If no landing occurred (and none ever did) then these corps were moot. The German army still had only 72 divisions available, plus two static coast defence divisions in Germany. In the 1907/08 plan the ersatz troops of the IX AK (*Armee-Korps*, army corps) area alone were to 'be prepared' to defend the North Sea Coast. The only specific mention of ersatz troops was that 13 squadrons of ersatz cavalry are to be prepared to move 'on order'. Ersatz troops were not mentioned in the 1908/09 plan. In the 1909/10 plan there was no specific mention of ersatz units, but elements of the 'Home Army' were to 'be prepared' to reinforce the IX RK in the coast defence mission. There is no further mention of ersatz units until 1913/14, when it was first planned to raise 6 (not 16) ersatz divisions.

On the basis of this even shakier foundation, Holmes says that in 1906/07 Schlieffen could have immediately, and with no prior preparation, raised 16 ersatz divisions and then marched 12 of them to the west side of Paris.

If the German army could easily have had 90 divisions in 1906, as Holmes contends, why did it have only 72 in 1909?

Let's do a detailed audit and investigate Holmes' foray into creative accounting.

Active Divisions

The last active-army infantry divisions the Imperial German army formed were the 41st and 42nd Infantry Divisions, in 1912. [\[71\]](#) Holmes says that in 1906, after he had retired, Schlieffen planned to create a 43rd Infantry Division. Holmes says Schlieffen could have done so by throwing together an extra brigade from XVI AK, a spare regiment from XV AK and an active regiment from XV Reserve Corps, to which he added the artillery of two reserve divisions, which would receive ersatz batteries in compensation: instant infantry division.

What is the '43rd Infantry Division' short? The 'division' had no command and control: it lacks a division headquarters, as well as headquarters for a brigade, the artillery regiment, and the supply command. It had no support and service support: no bridging, ration, ammunition and

medical units. This is characteristic for Holmes, who seems to think that an army consists solely of infantry battalions and artillery batteries.

Most important, the 43rd Infantry Division illustrates the fallacy of Holmes' argument in a nutshell. Never ever in the history of the Imperial German Army between 1871 and 1919 was there a 43rd Infantry Division. We now have our first non-existent 'ghost division'.

Reserve Divisions

The Reichsarchiv official history says that 'Schlieffen used more troops than were actually available. For this reason the *Denkschrift* also established a programme for the further expansion of the army and its mobilization'. A footnote at the end of this passage said: 'A number of reserve corps, which were employed as though they were complete corps, in fact lacked the second division.' [72]

Holmes' answer to this is that 'the Reichsarchiv had no special authority to make such a pronouncement: it was simply their reading of the Schlieffen plan, and as such can be checked by reference to the Schlieffen plan'. [73] According to Holmes, there is no requirement in the Schlieffen plan that all the reserve corps have two divisions. Holmes fails to say why the Reichsarchiv had 'misinterpreted' the number of divisions Schlieffen used or why Holmes thinks that one of the prime purposes of the *Denkschrift* was not to establish a 'program for the future': Holmes believes the Reichsarchiv did not have his insight into the meaning of the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift*.

Holmes is being too clever by half. He acknowledges that the Schlieffen plan required 48 corps, and that in the 1906/07 seven of the corps had only one division. He concludes from this that the Schlieffen plan needed 90 divisions, not 96. [74] On the other hand he argues that the one-division reserve corps also included extra 14 reserve infantry brigades, plus enough artillery to make them the equivalent of full-strength two-division corps, so that the 48 corps actually existed. What Holmes is saying is that these 14 reserve brigades don't count to make up seven reserve divisions, but they do count to make up seven reserve corps.

Holmes then adds these 14 brigades to his estimate of the Schlieffen plan order of battle. These 14 brigades are nowhere in the Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift*.

In any case, Holmes maintains that the Schlieffen plan was implemented in 1906/07. There is no mention of these 14 reserve brigades in the real 1906/07 deployment instructions. The first and only time they were ever mentioned is 1907/08. Holmes has proven only that in 1906/07 seven reserve corps were too weak to perform their Schlieffen plan mission. If these corps were beefed up in 1907/08 to implement the Schlieffen plan, then Holmes is arguing that Schlieffen was still running the German army a year after he retired.

As far as raising new units was concerned, Ludendorff says that Schlieffen had argued with the war ministers von Goßler and von Einem over the adequate composition of reserve and Landwehr units to no avail: they hid behind a supposed lack of money. Ludendorff criticizes Schlieffen for failing to 'commit his entire person', that is, to threaten to resign. [75]

Ludendorff said that he found that on mobilization there were 600,000 unassigned reservists (this was no great discovery: it was common knowledge in all European mass armies). Ludendorff does not say whether these men had modern rifles or even uniforms – in 1914 some reservists had to do with obsolete or captured weapons and blue peacetime uniforms. He

says that at his urging Count Schlieffen sent a proposal to the war ministry that on mobilization unassigned reservists be organized into 'supplementary units'. This request was also turned down. 'The war ministry' Ludendorff says, 'maintained the same [negative] attitude towards all the proposals of the general staff'. There is no reason to think, given Ludendorff's gloomy assessment, and the fact that the strength of the German army was stagnant between 1900 and 1911 [76], that the situation had changed significantly in 1906: Ludendorff also stated explicitly that there were no new units in 1906. Ludendorff says that in 1914 the attempt to organize new corps (he meant XXII, XXIII, XXIV, XXV, XXVI and XXVII RK) met 'considerable difficulties, because nothing had been done to prepare for it.' [77] These new reserve units did not move until mid-October 1914, far too late for the 'Schlieffen plan'.

The proximate surviving table of organization for the reserve divisions in 1905 is from 1902. [78] In 1902 there was exactly one excess reserve brigade. Holmes says that in 1906 there were 14. Somehow, in spite of the horrible environment that Ludendorff describes, according to Holmes the German army created 13 reserve brigades, which is to say it found 13 brigade and 26 regimental commanders and staffs, 78 battalion commanders, 312 company commanders [79] and about 2,000 non-commissioned officers. Regiments had enough support only for their immediate needs. Nevertheless, the regimental trains included 72 wagons and 210 horses. Multiplied by 26, that's 1,872 wagons and 15,120 horses.

These extra 13 brigades in 1907/08 remain something of a mystery. They appear for three lines in 1907/08 deployment plan and nowhere else. No other source mentions them: in particular, Ludendorff doesn't mention them. It would appear that if this experiment was tried in 1907/08, it was not repeated.

Holmes also says that I RK had 21 reserve infantry battalions, VII RK and IX RK had 23, which was close enough to the required 24 battalions to call them infantry corps. In the 1907/08 plan, these were all officially 'one-division' reserve corps. If, according to Holmes, these corps already had enough infantry to be considered combat-effective, why did they need to be filled up with two more reserve brigades (12 more reserve battalions), giving IX RK, for example, 35 battalions when it was authorized 24?

Holmes notes that these three reserve 'corps' only had 6 batteries of artillery instead of the required 12. Holmes does not see this to be a significant problem. Holmes is now maintaining that all a reserve corps needs is infantry battalions.

As I have shown in *The Battle of the Frontiers*, *Ardennes 1914*, and *The Mons Myth*, German doctrine emphasized combined-arms tactics. [80] Most of all, this involved artillery support for the infantry. An active corps had 24 field gun batteries, 12 per division, and 4 heavy howitzer batteries, but a reserve corps only 12 field gun batteries, 6 per division. This was considered to be a significant weakness of the reserve corps. The three reserve corps Holmes cites had only 6 field gun batteries, that is, in terms of the fire support required by German tactics, these corps had the combat power of a single reserve division, which is surely a big reason why they were rated as one-division corps.

But there were other reasons. From the 1902 table, it becomes clear why the reserve units were so weak, and why no further reserve units could be raised. Six reserve divisions had no division headquarters whatsoever. Nine reserve divisions had no ammunition supply unit, seven had no artillery ammunition section staffs, four no divisional bridging trains, six no telegraph companies. Six divisions had no support command headquarters, there was a

shortage of 14 ration supply columns; 11 divisions had no ration supply vehicles at all. There was a shortage of 11 regular supply units, in spite of the fact that 9 were to be organized on mobilization. Five divisions had no field bakeries, including four that had no ration vehicles either. There was a shortage of five field hospitals. In sum five, perhaps six, of the 19 reserve divisions in 1902 were hardly combat-ready. [81] Ludendorff says that the expedient of beefing up a reserve division HQ so that it acted 'half as a corps headquarters, half as a division headquarters' was a failure, 'an unfortunate half-measure'.

Compared with 1914, when there actually were 13½ reserve corps (and even in 1914 there were still significant shortages, in particular in medical personnel), then Holmes' additional 'ghost' reserve corps had only 12 of 27 required ammunition staffs, 78 of 160 required ammunition supply columns, 17 of 39 engineer companies, 15 of 23 bridging trains, 13 of 27 support command staffs, 14 of 23 ration supply columns, 46 of 81 supply columns, 14 of 27 field bakeries, 19 of 27 ration columns and 52 of 77 field hospitals. Holmes' 'ghost' corps are completely lacking in essential categories of combat support and service support, such as ammunition, supply and rations.

Infantry divisions and corps are not, as Holmes maintains, merely an armed horde. A combat unit needs fire support, command and control, ammunition supply, ration supply, bridges and medical support.

Holmes is actually short seven reserve divisions, at the minimum. We now have eight 'ghost divisions'.

Ersatz Divisions

Holmes said that Schlieffen believed he could raise eight ersatz corps in 1906/07. In fact, Ludendorff expressly says that 'Count Schlieffen's mobilized ersatz corps did not exist at all' and were not organized until he, Ludendorff, gave impetus to it in 1910. [82]

Ludendorff characterized the period between 1 April 1905 and 1 April 1906 as 'especially difficult'. On 1 April 1905 Ludendorff submitted a proposal to mobilize ersatz units for the field army in case of war: it was denied. The war ministry wanted to use the ersatz units to train replacements for the active and reserve units. [83] The obvious problem, which Holmes refuses to recognize, was that, according to Ludendorff, establishing new units on mobilization would cost 'a not inconsiderable quantity of money' to stockpile 'weapons, uniforms and other military equipment', which the war ministry refused to do, saying that the money was not available. [84] The Reichsarchiv official history said that 'the immediate establishment of ersatz corps was not addressed in the preparation for mobilization [in 1906/07]'. [85]

By some method that is not clear, Holmes thinks that four Guard divisions could raise 16 ersatz battalions. [86] There were actually five Guard divisions, with ten infantry brigades total. As Holmes notes, when *Moltke* decided to raise mobilized ersatz formations, the requirement was one ersatz battalion per brigade. That would theoretically produce ten battalions. [87] In 1914 the Guard actually raised *six* ersatz battalions. The other nine battalions of the 'Guard Ersatz Division' came from regular army brigades. Holmes says Schlieffen thought – after he had retired – that he could raise some 214 ersatz battalions. In 1914 the German army actually raised 86. [88]

If it was so easy, as Holmes says, to 'tap into a genuine resource', why hadn't Schlieffen done so in the 14 years he was chief of the general staff?

In fact, eight corps calls for eight corps commanders and staffs, 16 ersatz division commanders and staffs, 48 brigade commanders and staffs. [89] Each ersatz brigade in 1914, when there actually were ersatz brigades, had four to six battalions, for about 240 battalion commanders. [90] Eight ersatz corps would also need about 6,400 non-commissioned officers.

Looking at the seniority of the ersatz brigade and divisional commanders (one division was commanded by a retired full general, a former army commander) it was clear that some very old senior officers were being put back into harness. Even raising 86 ersatz battalions strained German resources to the limit.

This brings us to ersatz artillery batteries, of which Holmes thinks there was an endless supply. In 1906 he says there were (theoretically) 186 ersatz batteries, all of which were to be mobilized and deployed in the field. In fact, in 1902, 99 gun and 23 howitzer ersatz batteries were to be mobilized. [91] Most of them were destined to reinforce fortress artillery. To meet Holmes' figure, the number of ersatz batteries had to increase by 50% in four years, at a time when the German army was otherwise stagnant. Holmes says that 42 of these batteries would reinforce the seven one-division reserve corps. Twelve batteries would make up for reserve batteries assigned to the 43rd Infantry Division. He says that each ersatz corps would have 12 batteries. This is wrong. In fact, in 1914 each ersatz *division* had 12 batteries. Eight ersatz corps would require 96 ersatz batteries, not 192. With the seven reserve division batteries and 43rd Infantry Division replacements, this is a total of 143 batteries. Even if the Germans mobilized 186 ersatz batteries, as Holmes contends it could, it would still be 43 ersatz batteries too few for eight ersatz corps, with nothing left over for fortresses or training replacements.

The ersatz divisions actually raised in 1914 did not have any corps headquarters, bridging, ammunition, ration, supply and medical units. They were the only infantry units that did not have field kitchens. Turning the ersatz divisions into fully-capable formations would involve finding a staggering number of service and service support units that were simply not available. Which is why they were sent to Lorraine, which was German territory and could provide at least some of this support. Nevertheless, Holmes thinks they were going to march to Paris.

To do so, they would have to catch up with the 1st Army, which had begun forward movement from the assembly area on 12 August. The ersatz divisions did not begin to arrive in their assembly areas until 18 August. To protect the 1st Army flank and rear from Fortress Paris, the ersatz units had to reach Paris about the same time as 1st Army, according to the Schlieffen plan map, roughly 8 September (38th day of mobilization). 1st Army had 27 days to get there, the ersatz units had 21: the ersatz units were going to have to march much faster than the active-army units. The ersatz divisions, which were composed of older reservists, had to march about 400 kilometres with no logistical or medical support whatsoever, and would have soon been reduced to an exhausted, hungry mob crippled with blisters. Any ersatz men that actually arrived at Paris would have been combat-ineffective.

That adds 16 'ghost ersatz divisions' to seven 'ghost reserve divisions' and a 'ghost active division' for a grand total of 24 'ghost divisions', the equivalent of two or three 'ghost armies'.

The 'Schlieffen plans' 'ghost divisions' are all present and accounted for.

The Real 1906/07 War Plan and the 'Schlieffen Plan'

Holmes cites Ludendorff, who says that: 'In November 1905, shortly before his retirement, Count von Schlieffen issued his instructions for the 1906 deployment.' [92] Holmes then says that Schlieffen tried to modify these instructions in January and February 1906 with the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift*. Some 'modification': the 'Schlieffen plan' added 24 ghost divisions, along with the mission to march an army and six ersatz corps to the west side of Paris. This 'modification' had to be put into the plan by 1 April. The truly interesting thing about the 'Schlieffen plan' is that Ludendorff, who would have had to implement it, never mentions doing so. He doesn't even mention seeing or knowing anything about the Schlieffen plan in 1906. The 'modification' of the 1906/07 plan isn't mentioned in RH61v/96, the history of the German war plans. There is no evidence Moltke saw the 'Schlieffen plan' before 1911.

Ludendorff was in fact saying that the 1906/07 deployment *wasn't* based on the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift*. Ludendorff said that the real 1906/07 war plan was based on lessons learned from the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West*. [93] In the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* the Germans had 26 corps (52 divisions), four reserve corps (eight reserve divisions) and 13 independent reserve divisions, 20 reserve divisions in total (plus perhaps the Fortress Strasbourg reserve division). This is 72 active and reserve divisions all together, which is the number of divisions that actually existed in 1905 and 1906, but not the 78 that Holmes insists existed, and certainly not the 80 divisions the 'Schlieffen plan' required. There is no mention in the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* of Holmes' theory that Schlieffen wanted to create the 43rd Infantry Division, nor of 14 excess reserve brigades filling up seven one-division reserve corps.

There are only five ersatz brigades in the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* (one and two-thirds ersatz divisions), not 16 ersatz divisions in the 'Schlieffen plan', and in the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* the ersatz units did not follow the right wing but are attached to the XVIII Corps (3rd Army) and XIII Corps and II Bavarian Corps (5th Army). In the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West*, instead of 20 Landsturm brigades, there are 20 Landsturm divisions. How these were employed is unclear.

The 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* had only 15 'ghost' brigades (10 non-existent Landwehr and five non-existent ersatz brigades), while the 'Schlieffen plan' had 24 'ghost divisions'.

In the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* the French were attacking; in the 'Schlieffen plan' such an attack was a *Liebesdienst* – a great favour. In one of the scenarios in the 1905 *Generalstabsreise West* the French are defeated in Belgium, in the other two in Lorraine. In the 'Schlieffen plan' the French were driven into Switzerland.

Conclusions

According to Holmes, in retirement in 1906 Schlieffen would have been able to establish the equivalent of 24 new divisions. Holmes says that Schlieffen could have raised more divisions in 1906/07 (90) than the German army actually had in mid-August 1914 (85), in spite of significant increases in army strength between 1911 and 1913. Why didn't Schlieffen organize these new units in the 14 years while he was chief of general staff?

Because it was politically and militarily impossible. The reservists were probably available, but there were not sufficient individual weapons and equipment, leadership personnel, artillery, communications equipment, ammunition, ration, supply, bridging or medical support: all the stuff that distinguishes an army from Holmes' fantasy horde.

Holmes' argument is consistent – consistently contrary to fact. He argues in the subjunctive. He contends that *if* Schlieffen had been chief of general staff in 1906, then he *would* have been able to increase the size of the German army by one-third. None of this is true and none of it ever actually happened.

Schlieffen had been advocating for over 15 years that the German army needed to utilize all of its trained manpower and introduce universal conscription. There had been only one significant increase during his tenure as chief of general staff – in 1899. Otherwise he had been singularly unsuccessful; the government was unwilling to buck the Socialist party to appropriate the necessary funds or implement universal conscription. The Reichstag found building battleships to be much more fun. There is no reason to believe that in January 1906, after he had retired, Schlieffen had miraculously discovered the silver bullet that would solve the force structure problem. Even had he found this silver bullet, he had no authority to use it. There is every reason to believe that in the 'Schlieffen plan' *Denkschrift* Schlieffen was arguing, as he had before, for massive increases in the German army. These increases never occurred while Germany was at peace.

T. Holmes, 'Absolute Numbers: The Schlieffen Plan as a Critique of German Strategy in 1914' in: *War in History* 2014 (2) pp. 193-213

Abstract: *It is generally believed that the younger Moltke altered the Schlieffen Plan in 1914 by reducing the relative strength of the German right wing, but that is a myth: in proportion to the rest of his forces Moltke's right wing was just as strong as Schlieffen's.. The real difference lay in the absolute number of troops involved in their respective plans. From his assessment of French defensive capability Schlieffen concluded that the German army would need 48.5 corps to succeed with attack on France by way of Belgium, but Moltke planned an attack through Belgium with just 34 corps at his disposal in the west. The Schlieffen Plan amounts to a critique of German strategy in 1914 since it clearly predicted the failure of Moltke's underpowered invasion of France.*

William D. O'Neil, *The Plan That Broke the World. The "Schlieffen Plan" and World War I* (2014).

O'Neil works from secondary sources. He generally agrees with me concerning the "Schlieffen Plan", but also says a number of things I don't agree with.

[1] Gerhard Ritter, *Der Schlieffenplan: Kritik eines Mythos* (München, 1956). English edition: *The Schlieffen Plan: Critique of a Myth* (London, 1958).

[2] *Grosser Generalstab, I. Abteilung, I Nr. 44, Jahresbericht 1906 Russland, Abgeschlossen 5. Dezember, 1906*. Bayerisches Kriegsarchiv, Generalstab 207.

[3] *Geheim! Grosse Generalstabsreise 1906*, BA-MA PH 3/663.

- [4] *Grosse Generalstabsreise 1908*, BA-MA PH 3/664.
- [5] A. Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen and Prussian War Planning* (New York, Oxford, 1991), pp. 202-203. Bucholz does not say where he obtained this information.
- [6] The 1905 *Generalstabsreise* was in fact a *Kriegsspiel*.
- [7] E. Ludendorff, *Mein militärischer Werdegang*, (Munich, 1933) pp. 137-138.
- [8] *Aufmarschanweisung 5. Armee* BA-MA PH 3/284; just as the French operations plan called for the French 3rd Army to be prepared to attack into Lorraine.
- [9] A. Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen and Prussian War Planning* (New York, Oxford, 1991), p. 205.
- [10] T. Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, (Oxford, 2002) pp. 291-5.
- [11] Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, pp. 37-8.
- [12] Rolf, *Panzerfortifikation*, p. 111.
- [13] R. Foley, 'The Real Schlieffen Plan' in: *War in History* 2006 13 (1) pp. 91-115.
- [14] *Ibid*, p. 97. Foley also asserts that I borrowed the idea that Schlieffen's general staff exercises were related to Schlieffen's war planning from Arden Bucholz (footnote 25). Untrue.
- [15] R. Foley, *Alfred von Schlieffen's Military Writings* (London, 2003), p. 11.
- [16] Foley, 'The Origins of the Schlieffen Plan', p.220.
- [17] Generalstab des Heeres, *Die Großen Generalstabsreisen – Ost – aus den Jahren 1891-1905* (Berlin, 1938), p .V.
- [18] E. Ludendorff, *Mein militärischer Werdegang*, (Munich, 1933), p. 97.
- [19] Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg I* (Berlin, 1925) p. 187.
- [20] *Ibid*, p. 97.
- [21] Foley says that *after* the war the 'Schlieffen plan' documents were the property of Schlieffen's daughter Elizabeth and her husband, Wilhelm von Hahnke (p. 94). The real question is, who had possession of the Schlieffen plan documents *before* the war? The note in the Schlieffen plan file says they belonged to Elizabeth and Maria von Schlieffen. Hahnke is not mentioned. This is confirmed by the official history of the German archives. (*Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, p. 45).
- [22] T. Zuber, *German War Planning 1891-1914: Sources and Interpretations* (Boydell and Brewer, 2004), pp. 49-121.
- [23] Foley, *Schlieffen's Military Writings*, p. xxiii.

[24] Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg V*, (Berlin, 1929) p. 5-6, 272, 282, 297, 300ff. See also Historical Evaluation and Research Organization, *German and Allied Reserves in 1914*, (Dunn Loring, VA, 1980) pp. 5-64.

[25] The *Aufmarschanweisungen* to the 6th Army provided a "be prepared" mission to attack the French fortress line from the front between Toul and Verdun.

[26] Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, pp. 163-4.

[27] Foley, 'The Real Schlieffen Plan', p. 109.

[28] Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, RH61/v 96 'Aufmarschanweisungen 1893/94-1914/15'.

[29] Greiner, 'German Intelligence Estimate' in: Zuber, *German War Planning*, p. 22

[30] The principal differences were that in the 1905 *Kriegsspiel* the Germans did not attack Liège and the Entente attacked later in order to be able to use their reserve divisions in the initial offensive. Moltke did not nearly make such bold use of German rail mobility as Schlieffen would have.

[31] Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg II*, (Berlin : Mittler, 1925) 68ff. Ministère de la Guerre. État-major de l'armée – service historique, *Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre. Tome Premier, Premier Volume*, (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1922), deuxième partie, chapitre VII. Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg I* (Berlin: Mittler, 1925), vierter Teil, Die Grenzschlachten.

[32] Mombauer says I don't use enough footnotes (865). As proof, she cites a one- page discussion of the European military-political situation in 1886-1888 in *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*. One half-page described the Boulanger and Bulgarian crises, which I regard as reasonably common knowledge. I am sure that a pedantic academic would have filled another half-page with bibliographies on Gambetta, Freycinet, Déroulède, Boulanger and the history of Bulgaria. On the other half-page I summarized my conclusions to that point. According to Mombauer, I should have footnoted myself. She found a spot on page 117 where she thinks there should have been a footnote. She transforms this into a charge that I massively invented source material. This is ridiculous. It is obvious from the content that I was quoting Greiner's history of the German intelligence estimate. And what kind of information was I supposed to be falsifying? German knowledge concerning the French Plan VIII in 1887 – a real hot button topic if there ever was one. The tone of these criticisms, as well as Mombauer's evident pleasure at finding typos in my text, says far more about Mombauer herself than it does about me.

[33] Mombauer, 'War Plans', 875.

[34] Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg I*, 152.

[35] 'Aufmarschanweisung 5. Armee' BA-MA PH 3/284. Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, p. 259. See the maps of Moltke's *1906 Generalstabsreise West*, which portrays a situation similar to the French main attack in Lorraine that Moltke expected on 15 August in Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, 226-7.

[36] Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, 267-8.

- [37] Mombauer, 'War Plans', 876.
- [38] Mombauer, 'War Plans' 876.
- [38] Mombauer, 'War Plans' 876.
- [39] T. Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 44-5.
- [40] R. Foley, 'The Real Schlieffen Plan' in: *War in History* 2006 13 (1), pp. 96-7.
- [41] T. Zuber, 'The "Schlieffen Plan" and German War Guilt' in: *War in History* 2007 14 (1) 97-100. Generalstab des Heeres, *Die großen Generalstabsreisen – Ost – aus den Jahren 1891-1905* (Berlin, 1938).
- [42] G. Gross, 'There was a Schlieffen Plan [German version]', in: *Der Schlieffenplan*, H. Ehlert, M. Epkenhans, G. Gross (eds.) (Paderborn, 2006), p. 140.
- [43] F. Boetticher, 'Der Lehrmeister des neuzeitlichen Krieges' in *Von Scharnhorst zu Schlieffen 1806-1906*, von Cochenhausen (ed.) (Berlin, 1933), pp. 249-316, esp. pp. 309-312.
- [44] G. Gross, 'There was a Schlieffen Plan', p. 396.
- [45] Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA) Freiburg, *Nachlass Boetticher N323/9*.
- [46] T. Zuber, *German War Planning 1891-1914, Sources and Interpretations* (Boydell and Brewer, 2002) 22-3. The total French force was 41 active and 14 reserve divisions, from which four active and two reserve divisions were assumed to be on the Italian border.
- [47] *Der Weltkrieg I*, (Berlin, 1925), pp. 22-3.
- [48] G. Gross, 'There was a Schlieffen Plan' [German version], pp. 144-6.
- [49] Gross, 'Schlieffen plan', p.416.
- [50] Gross, 'There was a Schlieffen Plan', p. 146. Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, p. 38.
- [51] Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg I*, p. 55.
- [52] Having discussed the movement of the right wing around Paris, which included the employment of the 8 non-existent ersatz corps and 8 non-existent reserve divisions, Schlieffen wrote (Zuber, *German War Planning*, p. 195): *'...it will soon become clear that we will be too weak to continue the operation in this direction (italics mine – Z). We will have the same experience as that of all previous conquerors, that offensive warfare both requires and uses up very strong forces, that these forces continually become weaker even as those of the defender become stronger, and that this is especially true in a land that bristles with fortresses.'*
- [53] T. Zuber, 'The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered' in: *War in History* Volume 6 Number 3 1999, p. 271.
- [54] Gross, 'Schlieffen Plan', p. 430.

[55] Gross, 'Schlieffen Plan', p. 426.

[56] Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, pp. 232, 250.

[57] T. Zuber, *The Real German War Plan 1904-1914* (History Press, 2011).

[58] Letter from Dr. Büttner, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA) dated 14 December 2004.

[59] Gross' presentation at the 2004 Potsdam Conference bears little resemblance to this article. At Potsdam he announced that RH 61/v.96 proved that Schlieffen implemented the 1906 *Denkschrift* in the 1906/07 plan outright.

[60] Gross, "Schlieffen Plan", p. 427.

[61] It was not available from 1996 to 2002, when I was conducting my research for *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*.

[62] T. Holmes, 'All Present and Correct: The Verifiable Army of the Schlieffen Plan', in: *War in History* 2009, 16 (1) 98-115.

[63] Holmes, 'All Present', p. 112.

[64] T. Holmes, 'Asking Schlieffen: A Further Reply to Terence Zuber' in: *War in History* 2003 10 (4), p. 475.

[65] T. Holmes, "One Throw of the Gambler's Dice", in: *The Journal of Military History* 67 (April 2003) pp. 513-16.

[66] It must be noted at the outset that at no point in the 1906 Schlieffen plan *Denkschrift* is there a concise summary of the force required. Coming up with this total involves some complicated searching. The usual 'Schlieffen plan' force structure is given as 26 active corps (52 divisions), 14 reserve corps (28 divisions, a total of 80 active and reserve divisions) and 8 ersatz corps (16 divisions), for a grand total of 48 corps (96 divisions).[66]

[67] IX Reserve Corps was sent west from coastal defense duty in Schleswig-Holstein to blockade Antwerp, while the Guard Reserve Corps (2nd Army) and XI Corps (3rd Army) were sent to East Prussia.

[68] Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv RH 61/v96, 1906/07. An extensive summary and analysis of this document, as well as other new or previously unused German war planning documents, will be presented in my forthcoming book *The Real German War Plan 1904-1914* (The History Press, 2111).

[69] T. Holmes, "All Present", 115.

[70] Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv RH 61/v96

[71] Curt Jany, *Geschichte der Preußischen Armee vom 15. Jahrhundert bis 1914* IV, 297. These divisions already had a shadowy existence as elements of the *Kriegskorps*, which since 1902 were to have been organized on mobilization.

- [72] Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg I* (Berlin, 1925), 55.
- [73] T. Holmes, 'All Present', 107.
- [74] Holmes adds in the 30th Reserve Division, the reserve of Fortress Strasbourg.
- [75] Ludendorff, *Mein militärischer Werdegang*, 100-2, 135ff.
- [76] Ludendorff, *Mein militärischer Werdegang*, Anlage 6.
- [77] Ludendorff, *Mein militärischer Werdegang*, 103.
- [78] Reichsarchiv, *Kriegsrüstung und Kriegswirtschaft* (Berlin, 1930), Tables 11-18.
- [79] In German reserve units, all these commanders were regular-army officers.
- [80] T. Zuber, *The Battle of the Frontiers, Ardennes 1914* (Tempus, 2007); *The Mons Myth* (The History Press, 2010).
- [81] In 1904 two *Kriegskorps* were disestablished. The reserve combat support and service support units that were freed up thereby would have served only to bring the remaining corps-level units of the other three *Kriegskorps* up to strength.
- [82] Ludendorff, *Werdegang*, 100-2, 135ff.
- [83] Ludendorff, *Werdegang*, pp. 100-2, 135ff.
- [84] Ludendorff, *Werdegang*, p. 102.
- [85] *Weltkrieg I*, 55.
- [86] Holmes, "All Present" 112ff.
- [87] *Weltkrieg I*, Annex 1.
- [88] *Kriegsrüstung und Kriegswirtschaft*, Tabelle 18.
- [89] A 1914 ersatz division had three ersatz brigades.
- [90] Once again, regular-army officers, either active-duty or retired.
- [91] *Kriegsrüstung*, Tabelle 11 (4).
- [92] Holmes "All Present", 102.
- [93] Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA) Nachlass Boetticher, *Grosse Generalstabsreise 1905*.