

THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN

Critique of a Myth

by
GERHARD RITTER

Foreword by
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FOREWORD

by B. H. Liddell Hart

FOR two generations the Schlieffen Plan has been a magic phrase, embodying one of the chief mysteries and "might have beens" of modern times. The mystery is cleared up and the great "If" analysed in Gerhard Ritter's book—a striking contribution to twentieth-century history.

In the years following World War I German soldiers spoke of Graf Schlieffen with wistful awe as their supreme strategist, and ascribed the failure of the 1914 invasion of France to the way in which his masterly plan, worked out when Chief of the Great General Staff from 1891 to 1905, had been whittled down and mishandled by his successor, the second Moltke.

The repulse of that opening offensive was followed by years of trench-deadlock, and eventually by Germany's collapse in 1918. By the time she and her allies collapsed, her surviving European opponents were themselves near to exhaustion, Russia had turned Communist and gone out of the war, while the United States had become the world's leading Power. So the consequences were immense and far-reaching.

It was very natural, in retrospect, that German soldiers and war historians should have placed so much weight on the second Moltke's departure from the Schlieffen Plan as the prime cause of their military calamities. That view also gained general acceptance in military and historical circles abroad, as it was so obvious that the operational plan pursued by the German Supreme Command of 1914 had gone wrong, and that the repulse of the German armies in the Battle of the Marne had been a turning-point in the war. Moreover the evidence that became known, from German staff disclosures, tended to confirm the conclusion that Schlieffen's plan had been much more promising and that his successor had violated Schlieffen's principal prescriptions.

The course of the campaign was exhaustively examined during the postwar years, and there was voluminous discussion of the fateful changes which took place in the German plan. But the examination and discussion were conducted on an inadequate basis of knowledge about

the Schlieffen Plan itself. Detailed information about its content was too sparse to be satisfying. Only broad outlines and fragmentary passages were published. That state of insufficiency has continued until the publication of Gerhard Ritter's book. He unearthed Schlieffen's papers during a visit to the United States in 1953. After lying for many years in the German archives at Potsdam, where they had been deposited by Schlieffen's son-in-law, they had been carried away to the American archives in Washington after World War II, along with a mass of other military documents.

It was fortunate that the papers should have come into the hands of Gerhard Ritter—an historian of high quality, whose discernment is matched by his trustworthiness, and a gifted writer. He presents the full text of Schlieffen's military testament, and the relevant parts of other memoranda which shed light on the evolution of the Plan. They are preceded by Professor Ritter's masterly exposition of their content and significance, while his accompanying notes add to the illuminating effect.

The whole forms a book of outstanding historical importance. But it is also extraordinarily interesting to read for a book of its kind. At first glance it may look too scholarly in form to be of wide appeal. But that impression soon changes as one gets deeper in the book. It might well be described as an "historical detective story"—and is fascinating when read in that way.

Going on from clue to clue, it becomes evident that the secret of the Schlieffen Plan, and the basis of Schlieffen's formula for quick victory amounted to little more than a gambler's belief in the virtuosity of sheer audacity. Its magic is a myth. As a strategic concept it proved a "snare and delusion" for the executants, with fatal consequences that were on balance inherently probable from the outset.

The basic problem which the Plan had to meet was that of two-front war, in which Germany and her Austrian ally faced Russia on the East and France on the West—a combination whose forces were numerically superior although separated from one another. Schlieffen sought to solve the problem in a different way from that contemplated by his predecessors, the elder Moltke and Waldersee. His way, in his view, would be quicker in execution and more complete in effect.

The elder Moltke, despite the triumphant result of the offensive against France which he had directed in 1870, doubted whether it could be repeated against the reorganised and strengthened French Army. His plan was to stay on the defensive against France, nullify Russia's

threat by a sharp stroke at her advanced forces, and then turn westward to counter-attack the French advance. It was essentially a defensive-offensive strategy. His aim was to cripple both opponents, and bring about a favourable peace, rather than to pursue the dream of total victory. Moltke's immediate successor, Waldersee, showed more bias in favour of offensive action and aggressive policy. But he did not change Moltke's decision to stay on the defensive in the West, and when he urged the case for a preventive war against Russia his offensive impulse was curbed by Bismarck.

But Schlieffen, in his very first memorandum after taking office in 1891, questioned the assumption that the French fortifications were such a great obstacle as "to rule out an offensive" in the West, emphasizing that "they could be by-passed through Belgium." It was an early indication of a tendency to view strategic problems in a purely military way, disregarding political factors and the complications likely to arise from a violation of neutral countries. In the next year his mind began to turn against the existing plan of taking the offensive in the East, along with the Austrian Army, since his calculation it would be very difficult to gain a decisive victory there, or prevent the Russian Army retiring out of reach. For him it did not suffice to lame the opponents—they must be destroyed. His conception of war was dominated by the theoretical absolutes of Clausewitzian doctrine. So when he came to the conclusion that such absolute victory was unattainable in the East, he came back to the idea of seeking it in the West.

Initially, he considered the problems of a direct thrust into France, but soon concluded that success was impossible in that way. While hoping that the French might take the offensive, giving him the chance to trap them and deliver a counter-thrust into France, he felt that such self-exposure on their part was too uncertain a hope to provide the quick victory he desired. By 1897 he became convinced that he must take the offensive from the outset, and as it could only be successful by outflanking the French fortress system it meant that the German Command "must not shrink from violating the neutrality of Belgium as well as of Luxembourg." For the turning manoeuvre must be wide enough for the deployment of ample forces, and too wide for the enemy to block it by a short extension of his front.

The plan was developed by degrees during the years that followed. At first his idea was only to march through the southern tip of Belgium, aiming to turn the French flank near Sedan. But by 1905 he planned

to go through the centre of Belgium in a great wheeling movement, with his right wing-tip passing into France near Lille.

To avoid it being checked by the Belgian fortresses of Namur and Liège in the deep-cut stretch of the Meuse valley, he decided that it must sweep through the southern part of Holland—which meant violating another neutral country. To avoid being blocked by Paris or exposing his right flank to a counter-stroke from Paris, he decided to extend his wheel wider still and sweep round west of Paris. That, he felt, was also the only way to ensure that the French armies were cut off from the possibility of escaping southward. Such a large wheel required correspondingly large forces for its execution, taking account of the need to leave adequate detachment on guard over the fortresses by-passed, while keeping up the strength of the long-stretched marching line. Thus he was led to shift the weight of his forces so heavily rightwards that nearly seven-eighths of the total was dedicated to "the great wheel," and barely one-eighth left to meet a possible French offensive across his own frontier.

It was a conception of Napoleonic boldness, and there were encouraging precedents in Napoleon's early career for counting on the decisive effect of arriving in the enemy's rear with the bulk of one's forces. If the manoeuvre went well it held much greater promise of quick and complete victory than any other course could offer, and the hazards of leaving only a small proportion to face a French frontal attack were not as big as they appeared. Moreover if the German defensive wing was pushed back, without breaking, that would tend to increase the effect of the offensive wing. It would operate like a revolving door—the harder the French pushed on one side the more sharply would the other side swing round and strike their back.

But Schlieffen failed to take due account of a great difference between the conditions of Napoleonic times and his own—the advent of the railway. While his troops would have to march on their own feet round the circumference of the circle, the French would be able to switch troops by rail across the chord of the circle. That was all the worse handicap because his prospects mainly depended on the time factor. The handicap was further increased because his troops would be likely to find their advance hampered by a succession of demolished bridges, while their food and ammunition supply would be restricted until they could rebuild the rail tracks and rail bridges through Belgium and Northern France.

The great scythe-sweep which Schlieffen planned was a manoeuvre that had been possible in Napoleonic times. It would again become possible in the next generation—when air-power could paralyse the defending side's attempt to switch its forces, while the development of mechanised forces greatly accelerated the speed of encircling moves, and extended their range. But Schlieffen's plan had a very poor chance of decisive success at the time it was conceived.

The less he could count on an advantage in speed the more would depend on having a decisive superiority of strength, at any rate in the crucial area. His recognition of this need was shown in the way he whittled down the proportion of the German strength to be left on the Eastern Front and on the defensive wing in the West. His main device to produce an actual increase of attacking strength was to create a number of additional army corps from reservists of various grades, and incorporate them in the striking force for subsidiary tasks. But even then the Germans' total forces in the West would have only a slight margin of numbers over the French, and that margin would disappear with the addition of the Belgian and British armies (small as these were) to the forces with which the Germans would have to deal—as a consequence of going through Belgium.

It is evident from Schlieffen's papers that by the time he finally framed his Plan he had come to feel very doubtful whether Germany had or could attain the superiority of force needed for a reasonable assurance of success in such an offensive venture. But he seems to have taken the technician's view that his duty was fulfilled if he did the utmost with the means available, and "made the best of a bad job" in compliance with the customs and rules of his profession. He did not consider that he had the higher responsibility of warning the Emperor and the Chancellor that the chances of success were small compared with the risks, and that German policy ought to be adjusted to that grave reality.

Still less was he conscious of a responsibility to humanity. When, in further reflection after leaving office, he came to realise how dubious were the chances of success for his offensive Plan, his only fresh suggestions for improving its chances were to make a wider sweep through Holland and hasten the advance through Belgium by threat of a terror-bombardment of the town populations.

During these later years Russia's recovery from the effects of her war with Japan, and reorganisation of her forces, made the overall

situation more adverse to the prospects of his Plan. But he showed no realisation of the changed situation, and in his last memorandum at the end of 1912—a week before his death, just short of his eightieth birthday—he virtually ignored Russia's power of interference and the likelihood that it might compel a reinforcement of the Germans' slender strength on the Eastern Front at the expense of their concentration on the Western Front. He had become obsessed with the dream of a quick knock-out blow against France, and his dying words are reported to have been: "It must come to a fight. Only make the right wing strong."

His successor, the second Moltke, was not happy about the Plan that came to him as a legacy, and found little help in the advice which Schlieffen offered after his retirement. It is not surprising to learn from a note by Schlieffen's son-in-law that by 1911 neither Moltke, Ludendorff (the head of the Operations directorate, 1908-13), nor any other of the chief members of the General Staff thought it worth while to consult "the master" about the problem.

Moltke, with more political sense and scruple than his predecessor, decided to avoid violating Holland's neutrality in addition to Belgium's, and found an alternative solution in a swift capture of the Liege bottleneck by a surprise *coup*. This was achieved in 1914 under the personal direction of Ludendorff, so the German offensive enjoyed a successful start. It was helped even more by the recently recast French operational plan, which played into the Germans' hands far better than Schlieffen could have expected.

This was due to a new school of thought in France, which was intoxicated with the offensive spirit. In 1912 the leaders of this school ousted the then Chief of the General Staff, Michel, who had expected the Germans to come through Belgium and planned a defence against the move. The new school ignored the danger in their eagerness to launch an offensive of their own across the German frontier. This ran headlong into a trap, and the French Army was caught badly off balance when the Germans swept round its left wing. Nevertheless the French were able to switch reinforcements thither by rail, while the German advance dwindled in strength and lost cohesion as it pressed deeper into France. It suffered badly from shortage of supplies, caused by the demolition of the railways, and was on the verge of breakdown by the time the French launched a counter-stroke, starting from the

Paris area—which sufficed to dislocate the German, right wing and cause a general retreat.

After the event, Moltke was blamed for the way he exposed his flank to such a riposte by wheeling inwards before Paris was passed, contrary to the Schlieffen Plan. But it now becomes clear from Schlieffen's papers that he himself had come to recognise that his forces were insufficient for such an extremely wide stretch, and that he contemplated wheeling inwards north of Paris as Moltke did. Another charge brought against Moltke is that he spoilt the Plan by allotting more of the newly raised corps to the left wing than to the right. But here again we find that Schlieffen had also come to see the need of strengthening the left wing. In any case the course of events amply proved that the right wing could not have been made stronger than it was, nor its strength maintained as the advance continued—because of the rail demolitions. It is useless to multiply numbers if they cannot be fed and munitioned.

In the light of Schlieffen's papers, and of the lessons of World War I, it is hard to find reason for the way he has so long been regarded as a master mind, and one who would have been victorious if he had lived to conduct his own Plan.

Schlieffen very clearly grasped the value of turning the opponent's flank—but that was no new discovery. He further saw that the effect depended on successive by-passing moves, progressively pressed deeper towards the opponent's rear. But that had been appreciated and excellently brought out as far back as 500 B.C., in Sun Tzu's teaching on "The Art of War." Schlieffen's operational expertness in war games has been acclaimed by many of his subordinates. But it was never tested in war, and does not suffice as proof of his mastery of strategic theory. This can now be examined in the light of his papers. On their evidence, his grasp of strategy was broad but shallow, more mathematical than psychological. Although he was a strong believer in the virtues of indirect approach, he seems to have regarded it principally as a physical-geographical matter—rather than as a compound way of applying pressure upon the mind and spirit of the opposing commander and troops. There is little in Schlieffen's papers that suggests understanding of the finer points of strategy, and the subtler ways in which it can decisively change the balance.

Nor do his papers show any clear realisation of the extent to which strategic success depends on what is tactically *possible*. The papers

12 provide little evidence of concern with the vital change in tactical conditions that was being produced by the tremendous development in the fire-power of weapons, and their multiplication. His discussion of the strategic problem of invading France, and achieving a quick victory there, recognises that the fortresses are likely to be serious obstacles to the German advance, and emphasises the need of heavy field artillery to overcome them. But it does not take account of other and newer tactical hindrances. There is no mention in Schlieffen's military testament, handed to his successor in 1906, of the quick-firing field artillery developed by the French—the famous "75s"—nor of machine-guns. Even in his final thoughts on the war problem set forth in his memorandum of December 1912, there are only two incidental mentions of the machine-gun—which, when war came in 1914, proved the greatest obstacle to any advance, paralysing operations once the front had been extended to the coast and no open strategic flank could be found. Nowhere does Schlieffen consider barbed-wire entanglements, which became such an important supplement to the machine-gun in producing the trench-deadlock. Moreover he did not take adequate account of the effect of demolitions, particularly of rail bridges, as a brake on the supplies needed to maintain his strategic advance. In one of the early drafts of his 1906 memorandum for his successor he devoted a lengthy paragraph to the matter, but dropped this out in the final draft, and skated over the problem. That is symptomatic of a tendency to discount difficulties in becoming more ardent for a long cherished plan.

Worse still—not only for Germany but for the world—was his lack of understanding of the wider political, economic, and moral factors which are inseparable from the military factors on the higher plane of strategy that is aptly termed "grand strategy." His failure to understand these non-military factors and their influence is ably examined by Gerhard Ritter, and forms one of the most interesting parts of this book.

In previous generations, state policy had governed the use of military means—as it must, if policy is to fulfil its purpose, and make sense. But that proper relationship began to be altered, and in effect reversed, when Bismarck's removal from the Chancellorship in 1890 was closely followed by Schlieffen's appointment to be head of the General Staff. As Ritter has pointed out, the Schlieffen Plan forms the prime example of "state-reasoning" being distorted by a purely military way of thinking. The consequences were disastrous.

INTRODUCTION

THE deployment and operational plans of the Chief of the General Staff, Graf Schlieffen, here published for the first time in their entirety, are without doubt among the most controversial documents of recent military history. Probably no general staff study ever aroused such widespread interest and excitement among the general public. It has let loose a whole flood of military and political literature. Yet these plans have so far been known to the public only in the form of a summary of their contents by military writers—and these refer mostly only to the memorandum of 1905. Of the complete text, all that has so far appeared is a few sentences. Relatively the fullest reproduction may be found in the official publication of the *Reichsarchiv*.¹ Yet this too is incomplete, partly for political reasons. In the midst of the quarrel over the famous "war guilt question" German officials, particularly in the Foreign Ministry, had grave hesitations about publishing those passages of Schlieffen's memoranda which discuss marching not just through Belgium but through Holland as well. For these would have presented Germany's accusers (and slanderers) with new propaganda material. Such fears lost their foundation with the appearance in 1922 of the memoirs of the younger Moltke, which included a memorandum of 1915 setting out his different point of view on this question as a kind of apology. But the qualms of the Foreign Ministry persisted, since no one wanted to get involved in ticklish explanations to the Dutch about Schlieffen's views on Dutch policy. Later on, publication was planned within the framework of Schlieffen's *Dienstschriften*, which were issued by the

¹ *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918*, herausgegeben vom Reichsarchiv, *Die militärischen Operationen zu Lande*, Bd. I (1925), pp. 55-61. Partly quoted by W. Groener, *Das Testament des Grafen Schlieffen* (1927), p. 15 ff., together with reflections on the offensive of August 1914. W. Foerster, *Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg* (1925), pp. 29-38 and 41-3. Idem, *Aus der Gedankenwerkstatt des deutschen Generalstabs* (1931), offers some indications. H. von Kühl, *Der deutsche Generalstab in Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Weltkriegs* (1920), pp. 166-70. Hugo Rochs, *Schlieffen. Ein Lebens- und Charakterbild für das deutsche Volk* (2. Aufl., 1921), pp. 51 ff. and 74 ff. (5. Aufl., pp. 64 ff. and 95 ff).

reconstituted General Staff from 1937 onwards. But the series was never completed because of the outbreak of the war.²

The manuscripts on which the second part of this book is based are among the Schlieffen papers originally handed over to the Army archives (subsequently incorporated in the *Reichsarchiv* in Potsdam) by Schlieffen's son-in-law, Major von Hahnke. Along with other military documents, they fell into the hands of the American Army, which turned them over to the National Archives in Washington. It was there that I found them, after my attention had been drawn to the matter by Professor Fritz Epstein, during a visit undertaken for quite separate purposes in the spring of 1953. Not only was I granted free access to the manuscripts, but I asked for, and received, photostat copies of the papers which most interested me. In the meantime the entire Schlieffen papers have been returned to Germany. The official manuscripts are in the hands of the Federal Defence Ministry, to whom I am greatly obliged for further access to the documents and permission to publish them, as well as for help in making sketch-maps and further photostats.

The significance of the Schlieffen Plan extends far beyond purely military history. Its political consequences made it nothing less than fateful for Germany. In latter times it has been looked on as a design for a preventive war against France, made in collusion with the leading brain of the Foreign Ministry, Baron Fritz von Holstein, towards the end of 1905. In consequence, the Schlieffen Plan has become the centre of every discussion about the role of the German general staff before 1914, and about the whole question of German "militarism." Such are the special circumstances which may justify its present publication, not by an officer schooled in the methods of the General Staff, but by a political historian who has long made this kind of problem the object of special study. The author feels that this publication is indispensable

²¹ base this information on a letter from Professor Wolfgang Foerster (the former president of the historical department of the Reichsarchiv) and on a reply by Foerster to a slashing attack made by P. Rassow (*Historische Zeitschrift*, 173, p. 301 ff.) on the "mystery-making of military writers" about the "Schlieffen legend." This reply appeared in the *Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau* (December 1952). Cf. also H. von Moltke, *Erinnerungen, Briefe, Dokumente 1878-1916*, p. 429 ff., and the essay by W. Foerster, "Wollte Graf Schlieffen Holland im Ernstfall vergewaltigen?" in: *Die Kriegsschuldfrage* (1925), pp. 22-7—an essay which, in my opinion, tries to tone down passages quoted from Schlieffen's memorandum. I would like to take this opportunity of expressing my sincere gratitude for the invaluable help I have derived from W. Foerster's personal assistance and also from his scholarly writings. My need to express this is all the greater as my own researches have led me to conclusions which are often in direct contrast to his.

as a preliminary study and supplement to the second volume of his book *Staatkunst und Kriegshandwerk, Das Problem des "Militarismus" in Deutschland*, of which the first volume appeared in 1954.³ Of course, lie does not feel called upon to appear as an expert in purely military matters—to appreciate, for example, Graf Schlieffen's strategic achievements as such. He is not tempted by the role either of "civilian strategist" or "historical umpire" in the quarrel of the military experts. But what must be accomplished within the framework of such a publication, and what may be achieved by a civilian, is threefold:

An analysis of the historical features of Schlieffen's strategic plans compared with those of his predecessor and his successor.

A portrait of Schlieffen as a man and as the holder of his office.

An appreciation of the political significance of his plans—in their intent as well as in their consequences.

GERHARD RITTER

Freiburg im Breisgau, March 1956.

PART ONE

EXPOSITION

I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCHLIEFFEN'S OPERATIONAL IDEAS

i. The shift of emphasis from East to West

THE difference between Schlieffen's campaign plans and all the operational and deployment* plans of his predecessor is the concept of a great offensive in the West—an offensive which would annihilate the entire French Army at a single blow and achieve quick and total victory on the Western front. It is true, as Peter Rasso has recently pointed out,¹ that the 1905-6 memorandum occupies a special position in that it did not envisage a war on two fronts but a campaign aimed exclusively against the two great Western Powers, while Russia, rendered momentarily impotent by defeats in the East and revolution at home, was left out of consideration. But in appreciating Schlieffen's plans as a whole, this is of no great importance, for in the event of a two-front war he had essentially developed the same basic ideas long before, and was to do so again in 1912.

What was it, then, that led him to such a sharp and fundamental departure from the plans of his predecessor, who had envisaged an offensive defence in two directions; whose aim, since the late seventies, had been to move the weight of the offensive thrusts not westwards but eastwards? This is the first of many questions which we must ask of the Schlieffen Plan. And before anything else, its answer demands a closer look at the deployment plans of the elder Moltke.

The notion of a two-front war, against Russia and against France, had occupied him again and again throughout his career as Chief of the General Staff. As early as 1860 he had thought it necessary to make

* *Translators' note:* Here and elsewhere "deployment" has been used for the German *Aufmarsch*. A common rendering is "concentration," but this is no more satisfactory. It is particularly unsatisfactory in connection with the Schlieffen Plan, which visualised an extension of the *Aufmarsch*—the forming up of an army in preparation for a campaign—over a very wide front.

¹ *Historische Zeitschrift*, 173 (1952), p. 303 f. The heading "War against France allied to England" is quoted by Rasso from Groener's book, *Das Testament des Grafen Schlieffen*, p. 8, which has a facsimile reproduction of the opening of one of the drafts in Schlieffen's own handwriting. Our Text shows, however, that the headings were changed several times.

long-term provision against "co-operation between the Slav East and the Latin West against the centre of Europe"—a prophetic view which was typical of his military thinking,² and one in which he stayed unshaken, even though he found Russia's enmity for Germany difficult to understand on political grounds, and a Franco-Russian alliance fundamentally unnatural and "unlikely."³ An operational study made in 1859 suggests, in the event of two fronts, "the establishment of one front with a minimum of resources; as rapid and effective a campaign as possible on the other; finally the recovery of whatever may have been lost in the first theatre."⁴ This sounds like the first appearance of the Schlieffen formula. But in 1871, after the unexpected experience of the People's War in France, Moltke began to grow much more doubtful. In a very detailed operational plan designed in April 1871 for the event (even then quite unlikely) of a war on two fronts, he reached the conclusion that "Germany cannot hope to rid herself of one enemy by a quick offensive victory in the West in order then to turn against the other. We have just seen how difficult it is to bring even the victorious war against France to an end"—an astonishingly sober judgment for the man who was just then at the moment of his triumph in the Wars of Unification! So now Moltke planned to split the German Army into two almost equal parts, ready to take the offensive in both East and West—but only as a means of defence. He viewed territorial conquests in Russia or anywhere else with extreme disfavour; a Polish "buffer state" with its territorial demands on East and West Prussia would be merely a liability.

Only for a moment, during the Balkan crisis of 1877, did Moltke's thoughts turn towards an unequal distribution of German strength with a shift of emphasis towards the West. The interval had witnessed extensive rearmament by the French, and it was France with her faculty for quick mobilisation who now struck him as the most dangerous opponent, against whom Germany should turn first. But observe that although Moltke expected a "great, decisive battle" in

² See also my book, *Staatskunst und Kriegshatidwerk*, I, p. 300.

³ Memorandum of February 3rd, 1877. Quoted by Schmerfeld, *Die deutschen Aufmarschpläne 1859-1870 (Forschungen und Darstellungen aus dem Reichsarchiv, VII, 1929)* p. 65. Moltke's judgment on international politics often varied. In 1871 he thought that between Germans and Russians there was "a mutual antagonism of faith and habit, a variance in material interests" and that Russia's ally in the fight against the Central Powers would "probably" be France. (*Ibid.*, pp. 85 and 8.)

■ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

Lorraine in the third week of mobilisation, there is no mention of a total victory in the West. "If victory is ours, we shall try to exploit it, but we cannot extend the pursuit to Paris. It must be left to diplomacy to see if it can achieve a peace settlement on this front, even if only on the basis of the *status quo ante*." So it came to that—a separate, negotiated peace with a France defeated in the field! If this were unobtainable, or the battle went against Germany, the defence in the West was to be carried on with diminished forces, withdrawing, if need be, to the Rhine. Then the largest possible forces were to be thrown eastwards, where Moltke judged that the Vistula line, at least, should hold for the first few weeks.⁵

All Moltke's later deployment and operational plans are based on the primary assumption of a powerful offensive in the East, with a more or less offensive defence in the West. France, having meanwhile greatly strengthened and enlarged her system of fortresses, including Paris, and having built up her forces to something like the German level, no longer seemed to offer a fruitful field for invasion, whereas Russian territory, for various reasons, offered good prospects. Thanks to the great fortresses, the mighty obstacle of the Rhine, and the narrow gap between the Vosges and Belgium, Germany's Western front was eminently suited to defence. But the East with its vast spaces offered much more scope for offensive operations. Here, moreover, the salient of East Prussia was threatened with immediate encirclement and strangulation, while on the other hand it provided an excellent sally-port against a Russian army concentrating in Poland or advancing from Kovno. Furthermore, the only way to defend the 750-kilometres-long Eastern frontier from Lyck to Katowice was by units dispersed over a wide arc advancing in an offensive and linking up on enemy soil. Finally, Germany had to be strong enough in the East to avoid dependence on the decisions of her Austrian ally. Even after the signing of the Dual Alliance in 1879, Moltke did not at first count on the Austro-Hungarian army advancing from Galicia; instead he feared that it would hang on to the Carpathian ridge in a purely defensive role. At the same time he was convinced that even with the main German strength alone he could launch a vigorous offensive on "interior lines" between the Russian armies round Warsaw and Kovno, thus preventing their union and defeating them separately. In the West, meanwhile, the plan was to hold, for as long as possible, a defence

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65 ff. (Memorandum of February 3rd, 1877).

position on the Saar. This lay between Forbach and Saarunion, with echeloned cover on the right and left flanks. Moltke believed this position to be very strong. In addition it was covered in front by the advanced fortress of Metz and on its southern flank by Strasbourg. He judged it "a mistake immediately to launch a strategic offensive and so forgo the advantage undoubtedly offered by a tactical defensive." The offensive was rather to be left to the French, who after all wanted to retake Alsace-Lorraine. At the same time he seriously considered the possibility that the Germans would have to retreat to the Rhine, and intended to reunite all three retreating German armies behind the Main between Mainz and Frankfurt. Here a "decisive battle" could be fought. "When and where we shall be able to bring help from the Austrian theatre to the Rhine will depend on the success achieved on the Vistula." There is no mention of total victory in the East (January 1880).⁶

The underlying principles of this strategy stayed unchanged until Moltke's retirement in 1888. During his last years of office, however, the Austrians undertook (in the Waldersee-Beck agreement of 1882) to launch an offensive against Russia, with the result that the aged Field Marshal's last campaign plan, made in February 1888, was able to provide for collaboration between the allied armies on the Eastern front. There was to be a simultaneous offensive from Galicia and from West Prussia for the encirclement of the main Russian force behind Warsaw and a surprise attack while it was deploying. It was to force the Russians to "come out of their fortified positions behind the Vistula and the Bug, and in one direction or the other to try to seek a decision in the open." Again there is no mention of encirclement, a battle of annihilation or an advance into the Russian interior.⁷ On the contrary, the new situation only resulted in the Eastern front being allocated the smaller part of the German Army—eighteen divisions.

From all this it is clear (1) that Moltke, in spite of his military

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87 ff. (Memorandum No. 22) and p. 123 (No. 29, 1887).

⁷ In 1879 Moltke wrote: "To follow up a victory in the Kingdom of Poland by a pursuit into the Russian interior would be of no interest to us, but this victory would enable us to move the greater part of the army to the Rhine, using suitable railway connections." (Schmerfeld, No. 19, p. 80.) The Waldersee-Beck agreements of 1882 described the aim of the operations in Russia as being to achieve a front line Kovno-Brest-Litovsk-course of the Bug to the Austrian frontier, "i.e. taking possession roughly of Congress-Poland. If and how the operations are to be continued after that must be left to later agreements." Wolfgang Focrsrer, *Gedankenwerkst;itt d;rs Generahtabs*, p. 44.

triumphs, did not count on achieving a total victory in a two-front war, i.e. on being able to defeat each opponent in turn. Instead he was content with a defensive which was to exploit any opportunities for offensive thrusts. (2) that in direct contrast with Schlieffen he split the German Army in two parts, instead of accumulating its whole weight on a single front where a "battle of annihilation" might allow him to carry on what would then be virtually a one-front war. Perhaps the latter point has not been brought out with sufficient clarity by military writers up to date. For most would make it appear that Schlieffen merely transferred the idea of a main thrust from East to West, whereas in fact the difference goes much deeper. Thanks to Bismarck's masterly diplomatic preparations and to the vast technical and material superiority of the Prussian-Germany Army, Moltke had been able to start all his wars with a high expectation of success (one might almost say 80 per cent). Now, from decade to decade, this expectation had diminished. Only by studying Moltke's deployment plans after 1871 can one understand why Bismarck felt so oppressed by the *cauchemar des coalitions*, and why he employed such elaborate, and finally such daring, tricks to avoid a conflict with Russia. The new generation of diplomats, standing on the firm political foundation which Bismarck had created, were much more confident. They simplified their work by finally dropping the "reinsurance" with Russia and steered full ahead for the high seas of a "world policy" which was soon to antagonise England as well. The same confident attitude was reflected, after Moltke, among the younger generation of German chiefs-of-staff.

A curtain-raiser had already been staged by Count Waldersee, Moltke's quartermaster-general, deputy and immediate successor. In 1887 he urged a preventive war against Russia, to be conducted in the form of a double offensive by the Dual Alliance and agreed in detail with the chief-of-staff in Vienna. At once he found himself at loggerheads with Bismarck, who dreaded nothing more than an irresponsible Austrian war policy based on the expectation of German aid. In order that Germany's ally should keep strictly on the defensive, Bismarck prevented the two chiefs-of-staff from concerting a joint operational plan.⁸ As a result, Waldersee intensified his efforts to overthrow the old Chancellor. To this end, he made contact with a group of younger diplomats at the Foreign Ministry who favoured a more vigorous, pro-Austrian, line in German foreign policy and who were

⁸ See also my book quoted above, p. 294 ff.

finally, under the leadership of Baron Holstein, to bring about the downfall of the treaty of reinsurance with Russia. As for the Western front, Waldersee clung essentially to the concept of a defensive campaign, but he was clearly uncast about the idea of position warfare in the Saar. He developed various projects on this theme, which were to facilitate the transition from a tactical defensive to an offensive. Space for it was to be gained, if necessary, by an early, planned withdrawal to the Rhine. Perhaps it was Waldersee's influence which led Moltke, in his final deployment plans, to increase the German forces on the Western front. But on the whole, Waldersee's projects were mere variants of Moltke's basic ideas; he repeated them, with small alterations and some reservations in favour of the tactical offensive, in a memorandum on deployment in the West in 1890.⁹ The chief and fundamental change in the German operational plans was brought about by Schlieffen.

His very first memorandum as Chief of the General Staff, in April 1891, expressed regret that in the threatened two-front war the decision to attack or defend in the West was not in German hands. Since the French fortifications could not be penetrated, "we shall have to let them run up against us." But they would not come so very quickly; they would wait for the German attack before advancing against Alsace-Lorraine. So, of necessity, the "decision" would have to be found in the East, especially as it was feared that the Austro-Hungarian front would not hold together without German help. The offensive which up to now had been planned against the Russians on the Narw and the Niemen was becoming more and more difficult. Every year the two rivers were being further fortified, and there was scarcely a chance of crossing the swampy lowlands. Soon the German offensive from East and West Prussia would be as difficult as the offensive against France. What was to be done?

To begin with Schlieffen wanted to try a joint German-Austrian offensive from Silesia and Galicia into southern Poland—a plan to which he held for only a few years, and to which we shall refer later.

⁹ Further details are given by W. Foerster, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 21 ff. Copies of a number of Schlieffen's and Waldersee's memoranda were put at my disposal during my researches among the Army archives in Potsdam in 1943 by W. Foerster, then president of the Knecsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt des Heeres. In the following notes I refer to them as "A.F." In the first, written by Waldersee in 1890, the author wants to leave the offensive to the French, as did Moltke. In the "unlikely event of our being able to use our whole army against France, I would not change the operational plan."

More short-lived still was his first suggestion for the defence in the West—the construction of fortifications at Molsheim and Saarburg. "However much it goes against our tradition to build fortifications, we cannot, as the weaker side, reject the means used by our opponent to paralyse our military plans." The formulation of the sentence already shows how much the expedient went against the grain for him; later he even opposed the strong fortification of a defence line because he regarded a French thrust into Alsace-Lorraine as positively desirable.¹⁰ The direction in which his inner thoughts were already turning is shown by his regret that the German and Austrian forces did not form a coherent whole; otherwise it would have been possible to throw their whole weight against France at the outset, thus surprising the enemy before he was ready. "Against this vast force, the French fortifications—since they could be by-passed through Belgium (!)—would not form a great enough obstacle to rule out an offensive."¹¹

It was probably this memorandum to which the horrified criticism of old Moltke refers, when he talked to Waldersee on April 23rd and 24th, 1891, about the new plans of his second successor. "I am greatly relieved," he told his former assistant sadly, "that you share my opinion."¹² They were his last words on military affairs, for he died that same evening. Had he sensed that a new spirit was at work, altogether different from that of his own strategy?

A year later Moltke's ideas were being even more patently abandoned. In a memorandum of August 1892 Schlieffen expected an enemy offensive in the West as well as in the East, but judged the greater danger to come from a French attack. In Galicia, he felt, Austria alone was more than a match for the Russians (twenty-eight divisions against twenty). A separation of German strength, such as Moltke had planned, would be wrong. Germany should defeat first one enemy, and then the other, decisively. (Here one can detect the beginning of

10 Cf. A. Grabiu, *Das Festungsproblem in Deutschland und seine Auswirkung auf die strategische Lage von 1870 bis 1914*. (Dissertation, Berlin, 1935), p. 21 ff. Also, contradicting each other, the accounts of Colonel General von Einem, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten* (1932), p. 95 ff. and von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Generalfeldmarschall Graf von Schlieffen* (1920), p. 4 ff.

11 A.F., April 1891. The basic attitude of this memorandum corresponds with what von Boetticher tells of the "principles" which Schlieffen had written down while still Waldersee's subordinate. Amongst them is the following: "Success depends on a quick and complete victory" (von Boetticher, "Der Lehrmeister des neuzeitlichen Krieges," in: *Von Schamhorst zu Schlieffen 1806-1906*, ed. by von Cochenhausen (1933), p. 257).

12 Waldersee, *Denkunterschiede*, II, p. 205.

the idea of a total victory.) First the more dangerous enemy, France, was to be put out of action; the decisive battle in the West must be sought "as soon as possible." (Moltke had planned to wait quietly till the French ventured from their line of fortifications to within range of the German defence positions, and then "to pounce on them.") For Schlieffen's purpose it was necessary to concentrate all the troops available. With thirty-seven divisions, perhaps reinforced by ten Italian, the Germans should at least be equal to the French.¹³

While a fundamental change was thus coming about in the operational plan for Lorraine, and thoughts were already turning towards an overall shift of emphasis towards the West, the Russian campaign plans of Schlieffen's two predecessors also fell by the wayside. With Moltke's consent, Waldersee had made some changes already. Taking account of a change in the Russians' deployment plans, he had planned since February 1890 to advance the deployment area of the main German forces farther to the East, along the line Ortelsburg-Lyck, while at the same time increasing the forces intended to engage the Niemen army. The offensive thrust was to be made by two armies, one going in the direction of Bialystok, the other against the Niemen above Kovno. In conjunction with a big Austrian offensive right of the Vistula, this amounted to a somewhat extended enveloping manoeuvre with the object of forcing the Russian army thrown out to Warsaw to come prematurely out of its fortified triangle and stand a decisive battle. The weakness of the plan was that the German army advancing across the Narew and Bobr against Bialystok would not only come up against the Russian fortifications at Lomza and Osowicz, but would also have to cross swampy lowlands which at a bad time of year could be an insurmountable obstacle.¹⁴ As we have seen, Schlieffen had already expressed anxiety over this in April 1891. But this technical obstacle does not seem to have weighed so decisively with him as did the general fear that he would be unable to achieve such quick and decisive victories in the East as those for which he hoped in the West. In a memorandum of December 1892 he argued that the Moltke-Waldersee plan had had a chance of success as long as the Narew crossings at Lomza had not been fortified, and as long as the main Russian attack was planned against the Austrians. But now the greater part of the Russian army was to be concentrated against

¹³ AF. See also W. Foerster, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 25 f. (quoted only briefly).

¹⁴ Waldersee, February 1890. A.F.; W. Foerster: *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 45 ff.

Germany, and behind Lomza in particular. All this meant that there was no hope of surprising the Russian army while it was assembling, especially as the Russians were fairly well informed about German intentions. But should it be possible to cross the Narew after all, or to by-pass the Russian fortifications, the enemy would hardly be likely to withdraw southwards into the open arms of the Austrians; he was more likely to fall back to the east, into "the interior of his enormous empire," where he could make use of his railway system, "while our own communications would be as unfavourable and vulnerable as anyone could imagine." "We would not achieve a decisive battle or the destruction of the Russian army, but a series of frontal battles" (without subsequent annihilation). For early and effective help from the Austrian army (on which Moltke counted) the distance between Galicia and the theatres in northern Poland would be too great—375 to 450 kilometres to begin with. So not only the operation against Lomza must be abandoned, but an offensive beyond the Narew as well. The required strength (at least twenty-two divisions) "would be more than we could bring up quickly on the inadequate railways right of the Vistula, and much more than we could spare in the West."¹⁵

The last clause of the sentence gives the essence of Schlieffen's whole train of thought. How far it was justified is difficult for a civilian to check, particularly for an historian without access to technical data such as the General Staff's information about the enemy at the time. However, we cannot altogether let it pass, because we are now touching on the central problem of the later Schlieffen Plan. This argument of the Chief of the General Staff embodied more or less the same objections to a major offensive in the East which were to be repeated time and again until 1914. We may thus put the following questions:

(1) The elder Moltke had approved Waldersee's deployment plan (which was merely a variant of his own) as late as the end of March 1890. Could the situation in the East already have changed so fundamentally by December 1892 that the whole plan was impractical and

¹⁰ A.F. See also W. Foerster, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 48 ff.—Reichsarchiv, *Die militärischen Operationen -> Lande*, I (p. 8). Here the reflections in Schlieffen's memoranda of August and December 1892 are connected with the conclusion of the Franco-Russian military convention of August 17th, 1892. But the memoranda themselves offer no clue to this. They merely discuss the change of the Russian deployment plans: main thrust against Germany instead of Austria.

out of date? In an "operational plan *re* German-Austrian joint action against the Russians in Poland," which Schlieffen had drawn up in November 1893 and (according to a note) "agreed with General Oberhoffer,"¹⁶ it was assumed that the Russians would inarch half of their army (thirty divisions) against Austria, and the other half (thirty-two divisions) against Germany.¹⁷ How can this be reconciled with Schlieffen's supposition of December 1892?

17 If it had become hopeless to try to surprise the Russians while they were still deploying, and if the attack in the direction of Bialystok presented such enormous technical difficulties, were things any better in the West? Surely nobody could doubt—and Moltke had often stressed this point¹⁸—that Germany's eastern frontier, endlessly long and without natural defences, could only be defended by strong offensive thrusts; not, like the Western frontier in Alsace and Lorraine, by defensive positions or chains of fortresses. What guarantee was there that the German offensive in the East would not come too late, if France was to be defeated first and the Russians were to be given time to deploy their masses, bring up their reserves from Asia and overrun the Austro-Hungarian front—as was indeed the case in September 1914? And was it so certain that a "decision" would be reached more quickly in the West than in the East, in view of the purely defensive attitude of the French General Staff at that time?¹⁹

18 The fear that the Russian Army might avoid a "decisive battle" and retreat into the interior seems to have weighed less heavily on the elder Moltke than did the opposite—that it might overrun Germany's eastern frontier, which was difficult to defend, and reach the Vistula across East and West Prussia. Was it really quite hopeless to launch an immediate attack and defeat the Russian Army so heavily that its striking power would be broken for some time, thus making it

¹⁶ A.F. Also W. Foerster, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 50, and *Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg* (2 Aufl.), p. 27 (quotation in full).

¹⁷ I am not sure if this is a slip (in my notes of 1943?). In the same memorandum "a million Russian rifles" are mentioned. Counting only the infantry rifles of a Russian division (17,000), one arrives at fifty-nine divisions. Taking account of cavalry and artillery, one arrives at forty-four, at the most. In August 1892, twenty divisions against Austria are mentioned, in December 1893, twenty-two to twenty-four against Germany. Again, this gives a total of forty-four.

¹⁸ See also Reichsarchiv, *Die militärischen Operationen zu Lande*, II, p. 3 f.

¹⁹ More about this below. Considering the documents of the French General Staff it seems strange that Foerster can say that in 1892 "an early French offensive was to be expected with near-certainty" (*Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 50).

permissible to risk moving German troops westward to strengthen the front in Lorraine? In a study found among his papers²⁰ Colonel-General Ludwig Beck, Chief of the General Staff from 1933 to 1938, expresses the opinion that the anxiety of Schlieffen and the younger Moltke lest the offensive should come to no more than a frontal battle went too far. At least Germany would have achieved a new defence line, much farther east and only half as long, which would have relieved her of worry about her rear. Furthermore, Schlieffen himself laid frequent stress on the possibility of operating successfully on "interior lines" in the East, thanks to the Russians being obliged by their poor railway system to deploy their armies in widely separated areas, i.e. to split up their strength. In this way even a numerically inferior enemy could hope to conduct successful small-scale operations. Did Schlieffen perhaps invest the phrase "decisive battle" with a different meaning from that of the elder Moltke, who never included a total "pulverisation" of the Russian Army in his plans?

19If there were not enough railways beyond the Vistula for the execution of Waldersee's deployment plan in sufficient strength, would there not have been time to build them? Waldersee had demanded such railways, and this demand of the General Staff had been granted unreservedly in 1892.²¹ Furthermore, in so far as there was a threat to German lines of communication on Russian soil, did it really make any operation impossible? Surely this cannot have been Schlieffen's opinion?

20If it was difficult to muster enough troops against the Russians in the East, was this not still the only front where Germany, together with Austria, could achieve numerical superiority, even if Germany sent only the smaller part of her army there?

If vast marching distances ruled out joint action with the Austro-Hungarians (like an encirclement or double envelopment of the Russian Army) to achieve a battle of annihilation, would not the Germans have derived an enormous operational relief from a joint allied offensive from both south and north? And if this joint action were rejected, was there not the danger mentioned by "Waldersee in

²⁰L. Beck, *Studien* (1955), p. 175. Beck here seems to refer to the situation (to be discussed below) of a "Grosser Ostaufmarsch" (a war initially only against Russia) and does not say clearly whether he has in mind the Russian deployment plan for this situation (deployment around Brest-Litovsk) in force since 1912. But his views are already worth noting here.

²¹W. Foerster, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 45.

1891—that "Austria would at once lose heart for the offensive"?²² As we have already seen, in April 1891 Schlieffen himself expressed the fear that the Austro-Hungarian front would not hold without German assistance: but in August 1892 he held the opposite view.

He seems to have been somewhat uncertain in this matter. In any case, he first tried a compromise: an offensive in close collaboration with the Austrians, not from East Prussia but from Silesia. Perhaps this solution expressed the distrust, which he seems to have had from the beginning, of the Austrians' fighting qualities. The 1893 memorandum, which developed the new plan, was emphatic: an eccentric offensive from East Prussia and Galicia, such as Moltke had planned, would be disastrous; it would make not for co-operation but for a splitting of forces, and it had to be replaced by a "concentrated attack" by the allied armies. It looks as if Schlieffen had poor expectations of the Austrians, unless they had German leadership and could be immediately reinforced. At their first meeting in April 1891 Beck, the Austrian Chief of Staff, already found him "taciturn and not very obliging" and later on he met with a definite disinclination on Schlieffen's part to engage in an intimate discussion of joint operational plans.²³ In the course of a long correspondence Beck found it very hard to convince him that if it came to war the Austrian Army would really attack, and that the past ten years had seen a considerable improvement both in the Austrians' military capacity and in the railway system available for deploying their forces.²⁴ In August 1893, Beck—to his great surprise—was informed by Schlieffen that the idea of an offensive across the Narew had been abandoned. Only four infantry divisions and one Reserve division were to remain to defend East and West Prussia; the rest of the German East Army (fourteen infantry and three cavalry divisions) was to advance from German Silesia against the Upper Vistula (on the line Zawichost-Annopol, i.e. in the direction of Lublin) and beyond the river was to join up with the main Austrian army. From there they were to strike at the Russian Polish army in the region of Warsaw and to annihilate it with their superior

²²Waldsee, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, II, p. 208 (diary entry of May 23rd, 1891).

²³*Grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette*, VII, p. 110 ff. (Nos. 1433, 1434).

²⁴Von Glaise-Horstenau, *Franz Josephs Weggefährte* (1930), p. 344, p. 346 f. This distrust can also be found in the book by von Kuhl (who was Schlieffen's collaborator), *Der deutsche Generalstab in Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Weltkriegs* (1920), p. 165. Here it is emphatically stated that the only reason why Schlieffen had developed the new offensive plan was that "otherwise the Austrians won't attack."

strength in a battle between the Vistula and the Bug. According to Steininger, the Austrian military attache, Schlieffen counted on the main Russian forces advancing on East Prussia, where they were expected to make a "lunge in the air" to the Vistula; and the two easternmost provinces of Prussia were to be sacrificed to them. They would arrive too late for the main battle east of the Vistula, provided it was possible to keep the new plan absolutely secret.²⁵ All this was an attempt to realise Moltke's idea of "surprising" the Russians during their deployment by a rapid advance; but from the south instead of the north, and with weaker German forces, which were to be reinforced by the Austrian main army.²⁶

The plan had several weaknesses. The Austrians entered into it most willingly. Not only did they have reason to fear a Russian flank attack from Podolia, but they also felt that the German advance to Zawicliost was threatened on its left flank (from the bridgeheads at Ivangorod and Warsaw). Schlieffen himself was soon convinced that he could not sacrifice East and West Prussia without endangering Mark Brandenburg. He informed the Austrians of this in May 1895 and agreed again to deploy the German army right of the Vistula (i.e. on the southern border of East Prussia) if the Austrians would cover Upper Silesia by a left wing-army and from there attack the Vistula front between Warsaw and Ivangorod. Beyond the Vistula, the Austrians were to act in accordance with the situation, linking up with the main Austrian army advancing from the upper San, or else coming to the assistance of the German Narew army.

Understandably enough the Austrians declined to risk such a glorious gamble for their allies. So for the time being it was still to be a joint southern offensive from Silesia. But shortly before Christmas 1895, Schlieffen told the Austrians that he had reverted to Moltke's old scheme of advancing from East Prussia across the Narew, though with weaker forces and with the main effort directed at Rozan, i.e. with a much more restricted objective. Apart from this, a Reserve division

²⁵ Oberst Rudolf Kiszling, "Generalfeldmarschall Graf Schlieffen und die Kriegsvorbereitungen Österreich-Ungarns" in: *Militärwissenschaftliche Mitteilungen*, hg. vom Österreichischen Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung, 64 Jahrg., 1933, pp. 153-9. Also: von Glaise-Horstenau, *ibid.*, p. 351 f.

²⁶ The total strength of the German East Army remained unchanged, however: eighteen divisions. When Schlieffen informed the Austrian Chief of Staff, Beck, of this figure at the end of 1892, the latter can hardly have been surprised, as von Glaise-Horstenau, *ibid.*, p. 346. seems to think. Nor can one say that the shift in the emphasis of the German offensive to the West had already occurred in 1892.

and a few *Landwehr* brigades were to cover Silesia and maintain contact with the Austrians.

To the end of Schlieffen's term of office this is the last we know of the matter. The ratio of strength between the German armies in the East and the West was reduced from, 1 : 2 to 1 : 4, and later to 1 : 8.

The liaison between the German and Austrian General Staffs was broken off completely. Henceforward they developed their deployment and operational plans separately, the one for East Prussia, the other for Galicia.²⁷ Intelligence of the enemy led the Austrians to fear more than ever that Russia would open with a great offensive from the Volhynian fortress triangle, and they adjusted their plans to meet this thrust by an offensive defence on their right flank before advancing northwards in accordance with the plans of the elder Moltke. According to W. Foerster, this is why Schlieffen dropped further negotiations with Vienna.²⁸ But was it really the sole and ultimately decisive reason? After 1892, was he really at all interested in a joint German-Austrian offensive? The Austrians felt he had not treated them very well. They complained of his reticence and claimed to have been better informed about German operational plans in Waldersee's time. What Schlieffen himself thought about all this is shown in a letter of March 1896 to the German military attaché in Vienna, Count Hiilsen-Haesler, which brought to a close the long correspondence with General Beck.²⁹ In it he complains of the Austrian Chief of Staff's importunate requests for information. Beck, he says, was very reticent himself, and Waldersee, about whom he was always talking, had never really given him detailed information. All he could pass on were the *ordres de bataille*. Unfortunately Moltke had let himself be pinned down to providing eighteen divisions for the East Army. He,

²⁷In 1943 I saw a memorandum by Schlieffen of April 5th, 1902: "Deployment in the North and Operation against Russia." It only deals with the German offensive against the Narew with cover provided against Warsaw; no reference to co-operation with the Austrians. *A.F.*

²⁸W. Foerster, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 50 f. Idem, *Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg* (1925), p. 25. Schlieffen had not been able to make General Beck "adhere to the idea of a joint offensive," since he planned his initial operations in the direction of Volhynia and Podolia. Thus is in contradiction to the documented presentation of Kiszling, *ibid.*, and it cannot easily be reconciled with Schlieffen's letter to Hiilsen-Haesler, quoted below. I have found documentary verification impossible. But I suspect that here Foerster has followed Schlieffen's retrospective view in the latter's memorandum of 1912 (text IV), the historical reliability of which I doubt.

²⁹*A.F.* In a letter from Vienna of February 2nd, 1896, *Flügeladjutant* Count Moltke had reported to the Chief of the General Staff a talk with Beck about joint deployment plans.

Schlieffen, could not get out of that, but he was going to include a higher proportion of Reserve divisions.³⁰ "We cannot let ourselves be beaten by the French on the fifteenth or seventeenth day of mobilisation while the Austrians are happily completing their deployment in Galicia." It would depend on the battle in France whether a single Austrian crossed the San. The unspoken antagonism between the two Chiefs of Staff was a consequence of this situation. "I say we must beat France first; His Excellency, of course, says that Russia is the main thing." Consequently Beck did not trust Germany's intentions and smelted a political change of front behind his (Schlieffen's) attitude, for it coincided with the time of the confused situation in the Near East. The recent letter from the ambassador to Kaiser Wilhelm was connected with this too.³¹ "It is impossible (writes Schlieffen) to tell Beck that the emphasis of German operations is now in the West, or he will become even more suspicious. It is unnecessary to try to get further information from Beck. We already know that the Austrians' transport for deployment is inefficient, that the Austrian troops cannot be very highly rated, and that the Austrian advance from Galicia will be very hesitant."

Was this contempt for Austria based on something more than military considerations? Did it perhaps betray a kind of political

³⁰ Apparently it did not stay like that. The strength of the forces intended for the East seems to have fluctuated repeatedly. The average is given by Foerster (*ibid.*, p. 51) as three army corps, four Reserve divisions (i.e. only ten infantry divisions) and two cavalry divisions.

January 31st. 1896. Eulenburg to Wilhelm II in the form of a "private letter." *Crosse Politik*, XI, p. 109 ff., No. 2670, also 2671-2. The question was whether Germany would come to her ally's help if she became involved in a military conflict with Russia over the Straits question. Berlin's reply was negative. Beck had complained to the German Ambassador Graf Eulenburg about Schlieffen's exaggerated reticence. "A letter from Schlieffen, which arrived a few days ago, created the impression that our political attitude was rather uncertain. . . . It was short and its contents vague and over-cautious. The letter was as taciturn as the writer showed himself in conversation, and it deepened, as he had already said, the impression of this uncertainty. He, Beck, had only one wish, one conviction: to hold fast to Germany. And he was grateful for any advice. But he would like to receive this advice, to be told exactly what the position was in certain cases and situations." Beck asked if Schlieffen could be induced to enter into a detailed correspondence. Eulenburg transmitted this request to the Kaiser, who discussed Eulenburg's letter with Hohenlohe and had Schlieffen informed of its contents. The verdict of the discussions was that "for the time being there was no call for the talks between the two Chiefs of Staff which were desired by the Austrians, nor in particular for a definition of the question, repeatedly mooted by the Austrians, as to when we would consider the *casus foederis* established." On the Straits question it was desirable that Austria should come to an agreement with England.

dyed-in-the-wool Prussianism of which the elder Moltke had been so completely free?³² One could almost believe so, when one reads what Schlieffen had to say about the alliance with the Habsburg Empire in 1912, long after his retirement.³³ He repeats it several times, both in the drafts and in the final version of the memorandum: It is only for Austria's sake that Germany has become the enemy of Russia, and that "because of personal irritations which might nevertheless have soon given way to traditional friendship again, had they not been aggravated by the signing of a treaty with Russia's enemy." In other words, Schlieffen considered the Dual Alliance of 1897 a disastrous mistake by Bismarck. Yet he could not regard Austria without a touch of envy. He thought her task "relatively easy." She had only the smaller part of the Russian Army against her and had "always forces to spare for the pursuit of her aims in the Balkan peninsula." Germany, on the other hand, not only attracted the greater part of the Russian Army, but also "faces the entire French Army without the slightest support." "How the war is to be conducted in such a situation must be left to Germany. She has done her duty as a member of the Triple Alliance by making an enemy of Russia . . . and by drawing upon herself the greater part of the Russian Army."

In other words, in 1912 Schlieffen saw no need, either military or political, to assist the Austrians against Russia's superiority. He believed then (as his further arguments show) that he was acting within the intentions of the elder Moltke. He was not going to leave any German troops on the eastern frontier at all and would first throw his undivided strength against the Anglo-French. This *was* in the strange hope that the absence of an enemy on their own front might induce the Russians not to attack but "to see how their allies fare and then to declare peace as soon as they meet with an accident." The Austrians, he thought, could wait until the Germans were in Paris. "Austria need not worry: the Russian army intended against Germany will not march into Galicia before the die is cast in the West. And Austria's fate will be decided not on the Bug but on the Seine." Without doubt, this is a final exaggeration of the idea of an offensive in the West which can only be called grotesque. The historian will hesitate to relate an utterance of extreme old age to an earlier stage of planning. Yet it strikes me as an illuminating symptom of a political way of thinking; a way which could not depart from the tradition of seeing in France

³² Sudelniarm, *Moltke und der Staat* (1950), p. 117 ff.

³³ See text IV.

the "real enemy" and in Russia the "real friend"; which understood the motives of Bismarck's policy of alliances as little as it did the dangers of the new Russian imperialism, nationalism and pan-slavism of the twentieth century or the internal difficulties of the Danubian monarchy.³⁴

After the memorandum of August, 1892, with its decision on a main offensive in the West, Schlieffen by no means stopped making plans for an eastern campaign. Planning continued, of course, long after he had discontinued correspondence with the Austrian General Staff. Latter-day military literature mentions war games, General Staff needs and tactical-strategical problems, in which every conceivable method for the conduct of war in the East was "played out." These included the defence of East Prussia on the Masurian Lakes and from Kiuuisberg, a defence against Russian attacks on the Vistula, and even a major attack to clear the air on the Eastern front before starting an offensive in the West.³⁵ There was an annual General Staff ride through the eastern frontier districts just as in the West. And during the winter, war games allowed the constant invention of new military situations and the testing of new solutions. But from all this it should not be imagined that after 1892 Schlieffen had any solution to the two-front problem other than the great offensive in the West. For him, the theoretical exercises of the General Staff had no practical importance except as a means of testing individual problems in his tactical-strategical planning. The planning itself can only be found in the annual *Aufmarschpläne* of the General Staff, and in the preparatory operational drafts of its Chief.

³⁴ Symptomatic of Schlieffen's attitude towards Austria are the revealing comments which he made in the margin of a letter drafted by his deputy, Quartermaster-General Oberhoffer, to the Minister of War, von Gossler, October 30th, 1899. Oberhoffer had written: "We must still count on a war on two fronts, and we should not count on the immediate intervention of our allies." Schlieffen's comment was: "The war on two fronts need not be taken into consideration at all. The war against France alone is quite enough to strain every nerve. Counting on the intervention of our allies!! What an illusion!" Soon afterwards he repeats: "Enough of the war on two fronts! One front is ample." Reichsarchiv, *Kriegsüstung mit J Kriegswirtschaft*, 1, *Anlageb.md* (1930), pp. 73-6.

³⁵ Von Cochenhausen (ed.). *Aid.*, pp. 271-81, obviously based on ample material in the archives of the General Staff. H. von Kuhl, *ibid.*, pp. 166, 172, 175 f. Schlieffen's *Die taktisch-strategischen Aufgaben*, hrsg. vom Generalstab des Heeres, Bd. I: "Taktisch-strategische Aufgaben" (1933); Bd. II: "Die grossen Generalstabsreisen Ost" (1938). Von Zoellner, "Schlieffens Vernehmlichnis" in: *Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau*, 1938. W. reenter, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, PP-54-9-

Of the former, by far the most important is the so-called *Grosse Ostaufmarsch* (the plan for the Eastern front), which Schlieffen caused to be worked out concurrently with the *Westattfymarsch*. But this was only against a situation which he himself regarded as most unlikely, and which after the Franco-Russian Military Convention of 1892 was indeed almost unthinkable; namely one in which France would at first stand idly aside in the event of a war between Russia and the Central Powers. In this case, nearly the whole German Army (sixteen army corps, seven Reserve divisions and six cavalry divisions) was to be thrown eastwards in four armies and deployed on a single front from Thorn to the Memel, reaching much farther to the north-east than Waldersee had planned. From there the intention was to launch a major offensive across the Narew and in the general direction of Bialystok. In a way this was like the operational plans of the elder Moltke and Waldersee, but Schlieffen wanted to make his envelopment from farther north, hoping that with the collaboration of the Austrians he could encircle and annihilate the main Russian forces between the Vistula and the Bug. He was always very doubtful if this would succeed, for he still rated the Narew obstacle very highly and did not trust the Austrians to arrive in time for the main battle.³⁶

According to Foerster, these doubts were shared by Schlieffen's successor, who particularly feared that the Russians would move their deployment area so far back (to Brest-Litovsk) that the chances of enveloping their main forces would be extremely questionable. In the south they could use the cover of the Pripet marshes, and they could scarcely be outflanked from the north, because the German left wing (which Moltke had meant to strengthen substantially) was itself open to outflanking by strong Russian reserve armies from Courland. Furthermore, there were great technical difficulties to be overcome in the way of railway transport both for deploying troops and for advancing through Lithuania. Schlieffen, as well as the younger Moltke,

³⁶ W. Foerster, *ibid.*, p. 55 ff. Russian resistance on the Narew is rated much lower here than it was in December 1892 (see above, also Foerster, p. 49). This may be connected with the news that the Russians were going to move their deployment farther back to the east. I fail to see the relationship between the operational plan described by Foerster and the great offensive in the East mentioned by von Kuhl (*ibid.*, p. 166). According to Kuhl, the plan was to leave "the smaller part" of the German Army in its garrisons, ready to entrain. As soon as the French advanced to the attack, these reserves were to be transported to the West and to make a surprise attack on the French flank.

feared the only outcome would be "frontal victories," which would not bring a quick decision; meanwhile the French would come in and attack in strength in Lorraine and Alsace without meeting any real German resistance. To disengage the German East Army from prolonged fighting, from the by-pass and pursuit marches of the Eastern front, and then to transport it from the roadless, almost railwayless vastness of Russia to the Rline, would all take too long to save the Western front.

These are very serious arguments, and they cannot be refuted by proving that Schlieffen and his successor were wrong in assuming that the Russians would avoid a decisive battle and withdraw into the vast interior of their country without a serious trial of strength. We have already touched on this question (above, p. 26 f.) when mentioning Schlieffen's criticism of his predecessor's deployment plan for the East. It is as then a question of an offensive defence in the East and the West simultaneously, and particularly of whether such a defence could be expected, in the East, to smash major formations and so paralyse the Russians' fighting power and will to attack. The idea seemed plausible—at least it was not provenly hopeless. But here it is a different matter. The question is whether Russia was so placed strategically as to offer the Germans a serious chance of quick total victory if only the main attack could be shifted from West to East at the very beginning. For political reasons alone, it is unlikely that the Russians could have dared to retreat before such a major offensive, for that would have contradicted every obligation which bound them to France. Furthermore, it would have severely shaken the domestic position of the Tsarist Government and might have brought on the danger of a revolt in Poland or the Ukraine. In 1914 this was not the intention of the Russian High Command or its irresponsible, rather than cautious, head, Grand Duke Nicholas.

On the other hand, the younger Moltke was fully justified in his fear that as soon as large German forces appeared in the East, the Russian area of deployment would be moved back to Kovno-Grodno-Brest-Litovsk. From 1912 onwards there existed two variants of the Russian deployment plan. The first (A, or Austria) assumed—as did the Western general staffs—that the first main German attack would be against the West. In this event, the Russian main forces (sixteen army corps) were to overrun Galicia from the north and east, while the smaller part of their army (twelve army corps) was to be deployed

on the Narew, Bobr and Niemen and invade East Prussia as far as the Vistula. But in the event of the main German deployment being in the East (variant G, or Germania) the western frontier districts of Russia, particularly Poland, were initially to be abandoned and the main Russian force was to be assembled in the fortified area north of the Pripet marshes.³⁷

It cannot be denied that these precautionary measures would have made "total victory" very difficult for the Germans if they had marched their main forces against Russia. It only remains for us to see whether they would have stood a better chance had they managed to deceive the Russians about their ultimate intentions, i.e. if besides the plan for a main deployment in the West, they had held a second one in readiness, which would have allowed them to confine themselves to an active defence in the West at the beginning of the war and then, while the Russians were advancing on Galicia, to appear in unexpected strength both in East Prussia and in the rear of the main Russian forces (perhaps from Silesia).³⁸ But this speculation is purely theoretical. For one thing, it raises the question whether a very quick advance of large forces in the East would have been possible without large-scale railway construction, which would have prevented a complete surprise. For another, it presupposes giving up the idea of a major offensive in the West completely and dividing the German Army into two (albeit unequal) parts in the manner of the elder Moltke. But this went directly against Schlieffen's basic idea—the defeat or annihilation of each enemy in turn. If this idea was impracticable, or at least highly uncertain of success, then it was probably the same in the East as in the West. A simple shift of the main offensive from West to East, as recommended by many critics of Schlieffen and his school after 1918, would have wrought a fatal weakness in the

³⁷ Youn Dauivov (Quartermaster-General), *La Russie dans la Guerre Mondiale (1914-1917)*, Paris, 1927, p. 145 ff. Idem, "Les premières opérations de l'armée russe de 1914" in: *Revue militaire française*, vol. 93, No. 23, p. 160 f. (May 1923). Von Kuhl, Schlieffen's most gifted pupil, did not believe that the Russians would retreat into the "interior of the empire" either *ibid.*, p. 185 f), nor did Conrad von Hotzendorf. But both doubted whether a l'uyre-solc battie of envelopment against the Russian mam army at Brest-Lirovsk was possible, and feared that the attackers' flanks would be threatened in the north as well as in the south of the front. The view of those supporting the major offensh e in the East is presented, among others, by Major K. Mayr, "Kriegsplan und staar*-niannische Voraussicht" in: *Zeitschrift für Politik*, XIV, 1925, p. 385 ff., but with insufficient arguments.

³⁸ See also the speculative reflections by L. Beck, *Studieu*, p. 176 ff.

German Western front without offering a great enough chance of success to justify the experiment. After the Military Convention of 1892 it was impossible for the French to stay neutral in a Russo-German war. Faced with a weak German holding army, they were unlikely to stay their attack and wait behind their fortified line for a German offensive. This would have meant a serious breach of article 3 of the convention,³⁹ especially if a major German offensive were endangering Russia. Besides, the French Army was growing in confidence and aggressive spirit from decade to decade. If, therefore, the decision in the East were to be delayed for any length of time, it would probably come too late for the Western front.

in 1913, the younger Moltke decided to discontinue work on the German *Ostatiemarsch* because he thought it superfluous.⁴⁰ When, on the afternoon of August 1st, 1914, Wilhelm II asked him to deploy the whole army in the East instead of the West—in the vague hope of keeping France out of the war after all—this was no longer possible for technical reasons. After 1918 some critics reproached the German General Staff bitterly for this, seeing in it the origin of Germany's commitment to a fatal, one-sided course.⁴¹ That it was just this is undeniable—and it will occupy us a great deal later on. But a total victory in the East was not at all certain; and a *quick* total victory was unlikely in the extreme. If the *Grosse Ostaufmarsch* was not an assured formula for victory, did the formula lie in the great offensive in the West, through Belgium? Was it so certain of total success that one could stake everything on this single card and leave the Austrians temporarily to their fate; that one could accept the political consequences of a breach of neutrality and the precipitate declaration of war? To answer this question, we must take a closer look at Schlieffen's plans for an offensive on the Western front.

2. Preliminary stages of the operational plan of 1905

As the memorandum of April 1892 already indicates, Schlieffen's main aim was to fight the decisive battle in the West "as quickly as

J' "Los forces disponibles qui doivent être employées contre l'Allemagne . . . s'engageront à tond et en toute diligence, de manière que l'Allemagne ait à lutter à la fois à l'Est et à l'Ouest." *Dokuments Diplomatiques Français*, série L t. 9, p. 61<, N0. 44.].

" Reichsarchiv, *Dir mi'Mnschen Operativ'na: - n Lande*, I. p. 17.

" Thus K. MAYR: /i'sj-rjifjir I'oliik, XIV. :><2<.,

possible," so as to be free, after total victory, to defeat Russia. In his memorandum of April 1891 he assumed quite rightly (as we now know) that the French, behind cover of their strong fortifications on the Upper Moselle and the Meuse, would not immediately come out into the open but would wait for the Germans to attack. How could the period of mutual waiting be shortened, how could the Germans seize the initiative? This question had already occupied Waldersee (see above, page 22). Schlieffen's apprehensions went even further. Already during "tactical discussions" in 1892, he is said to have considered the possibility of the French outflanking the German right wing by a violation of Luxembourg neutrality. (A fear which Waldersee too is said to have expressed.) Thus the 1893-4 *Westaufmarsch* already presented the picture of a very strong wing army north-east of Metz-Diedenhofen. In 1894 Schlieffen produced an elaborate new memorandum which, in contrast with that of 1891, expected an immediate offensive by the French and urged moves to forestall it. He feared that the French would not, as Moltke had assumed, advance on a wide front against the German position in the Saar, thus exposing their flanks to the danger of envelopment, but would try to break through in strength at a single point. He particularly feared the threat to the salient of Saarburg. This might force the Germans to advance from the cover of the Saar position and risk an offensive with numerically inferior forces. One can see how he doubted the feasibility of a lengthy defence in prepared positions and how much he preferred to take the offensive. "To win, we must endeavour to be the stronger of the two at the point of impact. Our only hope of this lies in making our own choice of operations, not in waiting passively for whatever the enemy chooses for us." This sentence is very characteristic of the General Staff's strategic thinking. The attitude it expresses is almost the opposite of what one finds in the contemporary deployment plans of the French General Staff, whose ideas under the influence of General Bonnal can best be expressed in terms of the "strategic defensive" and "security." Schlieffen did not appreciate this; he wondered how the German deployment could be so arranged that in spite of the rapid French mobilisation, Germany would keep the initiative—for example by de-training farther forward. In any case he counted on the possibility of a head-on battle between the two advancing armies. Should the enemy hesitate, Schlieffen was for attacking him in his line of fortresses. The forward position Frouard-Nancy-Pont St. Vincent

was to be bombarded by concentrated heavy artillery; the plateau west of Nancy was to be taken, and the French defence system broken up.

This, the first of Schlieffen's operational plans for the West, was remarkable in more ways than one.

In the peace treaty of 1871 Bismarck had insisted on the annexation of Lorraine only because the German General Staff declared Metz indispensable to the defence of Germany's western frontier—a decision which he is known to have found very hard, because he foresaw the devastating political consequences of this annexation of French territory. Moltke had great faith in the defensibility of this new German frontier. The deep, wide barrier of the Upper Rhine, the Vosges, Strasbourg, Metz, the Saar, the narrow field for operations between the northern Vosges and the Luxembourg frontier—all this seemed to him to offer splendid opportunities for defence. But he always looked on the new province of Lorraine as a kind of defensive foreground, well suited to the fighting of large battles; and he was always willing to withdraw as far as the Rhine if need be. Plainly Schlieffen did not share this faith in the defensive but wanted to carry the attack into France immediately. The military literature of the Schlieffen school often produces a military-economic argument for this: that in a two-front war under modern conditions with the increased consumption of munitions and materials, Germany could not have done without the Saar coalfields or Lorraine ores. I have not found such considerations in Schlieffen's own memoranda, and their soundness is questionable, for there was still the Ruhr, the whole of Upper Silesia and, if necessary, the Swedish ore mines. The truth is that the considerations which decided Schlieffen were probably exclusively strategic, and this in the narrow sense of the word. In this context it is significant how optimistically he expressed himself on the defensibility of the Saar line once the decision on a major offensive through Belgium had been made, i.e. after about 1897. From then on, we are told, he repeatedly let the General Staff establish in war games that a French attack on Lorraine would meet with great difficulties and that the strong Metz-Diedenhofen position would force the enemy to divide his forces and advance north and south of it in strategic defiles unsuitable for the deployment of large forces. According to von Kuh], the attacks in the war games miscarried "almost regularly"

because of German flank ripostes.¹ These "games" seem to have been intended to prove that the left wing of the German army could be much weakened in favour of the right (which was to bring the decision), without incurring the danger of a counter-envelopment from the left. Of course, it would make all the difference if the French forces advancing through Lorraine had to contend simultaneously with a big German offensive through Belgium. But in any case Schlieffen must have had great faith in the German position in Lorraine, because later he decided against its systematic improvement (still planned in 1891). Lie even opposed it because it would impede mobile warfare: the French must not be deprived of the opportunity of "running into a sack" between Metz and Strasbourg. How, then, can one explain the anxiety about a French break-through expressed in his 1894 memorandum? Did he at that time underrate the defensive strength of modern field fortifications, particularly as he could not have known the fire-effect of the machine-gun (only introduced in the German Army in 1901)? Or was it simply a wish for quick decisions which made him abhor position warfare and urge an accelerated offensive—and were these anxieties only subsidiary motives without great significance? In any event, his plan to break into the French positions if the enemy held back was most unhappy; for on the very spot he suggested for the purpose—the heights of Nancy—the French Army was at that time expecting the main German attack. (Deployment plan No. 13 of General Miribel.²) Such an assault—even if there had been a break-through—would have run straight into the arms of the French armies assembled on the flanks to receive it. One can well understand Waldersee's horror when he heard rumours of this plan, which he believed mistakenly to be the Kaiser's. "We are doing exactly what the French have hoped and prepared for," he wrote in his diary. He believed, like the elder Moltke, that the only

¹ Von Kühl, *ibid.*, p. 173. See also the interesting descriptions of the staff rides of 1904 and 1905 by von Cochenhausen, *ibid.*, p. 301 f, and von Zoellner, "Schlieffens Vermächtnis," in *Militärwissenschaftliche Rundschau*, III Jahrg., 1938 (Sonderheft) p. 28 ff., p. 42 f. According to this, in 1905 Schlieffen even counted on the possibility (which was regarded as quite unlikely) of the whole French Army advancing for an attack between Metz and Strasbourg. He planned to allow it to penetrate deeply into Alsace and then to encircle it without violating Belgian neutrality.

² W. F. »erster, *Gedankenwerkstätt*, p. no ff. (after Boucher), also (only very short, but with sketch-man) ; *Les armées françaises dans la grande guerre*, t. I, vol. 1 (new ed., 1936), p. 24 ff.

hope of" breaking through the French front line lay in a battle of pursuit following the repulse of a French attack.³

In fact, Schlieffen himself was not happy with Ins new operational plan for long. He soon gave up, for ever, the idea of a break-through. In a memorandum of August 2nd, 1897, he explained that 111 the gap between the Vosges and the Belgian frontier a German advance was impossible. There was no chance of spreading out. "An offensive which seeks to wheel round Verdun must not shrink from violating the neutrality of Belgium as well as of Luxembourg."⁴ This gave the cue which was to determine all future operational plans. Their further development up to 1905 was made not in detailed memoranda of the Chief of the General Staff, but in war games, General Staff rides and the annual deployment plans. According to Foerster's information the Army archives contained only one, undated, memorandum by Schlieffen on this question. This could have been written about 1899, since it agrees with the *Westaufmarsch* as it was envisaged (with certain variations) in the deployment plans of the General Staff between Spring, 1899, and 1904. It has a number of interesting points.⁵

It shows that before 1904-5 Schlieffen had not decided to stake everything on one card and rely on the great envelopment, cutting across Belgium to Dunkirk. On the contrary, it even contains a caution against such boldness. "The envelopment must not be extended too far, because the deployment has a double task: a counter-attack if the enemy advances immediately after completing his deployment (i.e. in Lorraine), and an offensive if he stays behind his fortifications." The main question, as before, was how to hasten the decision in the West if the French, as was still uncertain, should forgo the advantage of faster mobilisation and wait for the German attack behind their chain of

³ Waldersce, *DenkwUrdigkeita*, II, p. 318. Von Cochenhausen, *ibid.*, p. 259, contains critical remarks by Schlieffen on these plans but unfortunately without dates or further details.

⁴A.F.

⁵ \V. Foerster, "1st der deutsche Aufmarsch an die Franzoscu verraten worden?" *BeiHaer Monatshfte*, X. 1932, p. 1060 ff". In 1943 I saw this memorandum, entitled: "Autmarsch West und Operation gegen Frankreich." The need is stressed for quick successes against France, in view of the danger from Russia. The deployment was to take place on the line St. Vith-Trier-Saarbrücken-Saarburg-Strasbourg. In the West everything available was to be put in the field; in the East, only the troops already stationed beyond the Vistula in peacetime, since they might not be easy to withdraw. Not just two-thirds of the army in the West to one-third in the East, but an even higher ratio. In the East, retreat to the Vistula if necessary. A.F.

fortresses. For reasons already given, "an attack exclusively on the fortress line Verdrin-B effort does not seem to recommend itself" But such a frontal attack was not altogether rejected; it was retained and complemented by an envelopment manoeuvre through Luxembourg and Belgium. It could even happen that the enemy advanced his left wing through Luxembourg and Belgium. But even if he did not, and instead advanced south of Diedenhofen and Metz, an envelopment of his left wing through Luxembourg "and perhaps Belgium also" promised the best chance of success.

This corresponds with the deployment plan of 1904-5. The West Army, comprising twenty-three army corps and fifteen Reserve divisions, was divided into seven armies. These were to be deployed flank to flank between Basle and the neighbourhood of Aachen.⁶ The strongest group (nine army corps and four Reserve divisions) was to be in Lorraine, while two strong wing armies (in all, seven army corps and six Reserve divisions) would be farther north with the task of advancing through Luxembourg and the southern tip of Belgium towards Mézières and Stenay. This amounted to an enveloping battle, possibly in the Verdun area, using every available man to extend the front, dispensing with a reserve and—like all Schlieffen's operational plans—banking on a quick decision. The frontal advance in Lorraine (aimed at the Nancy plateau) was only intended to open the campaign and tie down strong enemy forces on that front. The real decision was to be achieved by an enveloping movement in the north. Yet the right wing-army was not stronger—indeed, it was somewhat weaker—than the offensive forces in Lorraine, and the latter were furthermore covered in the south by two strong wing armies in Alsace (comprising seven army corps and five Reserve divisions). If one studies the French strategic plans in force from 1898 to the beginning of 1906 (Plans 14 and 15),⁷ it appears that this time Schlieffen guessed the enemy's intentions with astonishing accuracy. The French were mainly concerned to cover the frontier with Lorraine and to intercept any move to penetrate the chain of fortresses. True, since 1882 the French General Staff had been considering what was to become an increasingly

⁶ Sketch-map: *Berliner Monatshefte*, X, p. 1061. Sketch-maps of the deployment plans for the *Westaufmarsch*, 1893-4, 1899-1900, 1905-6 can be found in von Coehnenhausen, *ibid.*, p. 263.

⁷ W. Foerster, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 112 ff. French General Staff documents, published by the Service Historique de l'État-Major de l'Année, *Les Années Françaises dans la Grande Guerre* (zième éd., Paris, 1936), 1.1, vol. 1, p. 29 ff., and maps 1 and 2.

favourite theme of international military literature—the possibility of a German attack outflanking the fortress line from the north through Belgium. But this possibility does not seem to have been taken seriously in Paris till 1905. In any case, the defending forces assembled for this contingency on and behind the left flank were quite inadequate, and Schlieffen's offensive, planned since 1899, would certainly have involved the French front in great confusion, if not collapse.

Why was this deployment plan changed so suddenly and radically in 1905, as one can see from the operational plan in our Text? Why was the right wing of the German offensive forces suddenly reinforced, leaving only an eighth part of the West Army's strength for the left? And why was the envelopment through Belgium so far extended that it reached to Lille and Dunkirk instead of Mézières, that it crossed the whole of Belgium and southern Holland instead of only Luxembourg and the southern tip of Belgium? This strikes me as a central problem in the correct historical appreciation of the great Schlieffen Plan. The great change cannot be explained as an adaptation to shifts and changes in French strategic plans filtering through to Berlin and making German operational plans look out of date; for although the French General Staff was continually discussing the possibility of a German offensive through Belgium, there were no such changes until 1906. On the contrary, the documents of the French General Staff leave no doubt that the modification of French strategic plans received its first impetus from intelligence reports during the winter of 1904-5, pointing to the serious intention of the German General Staff to make an envelopment from the north-east.⁸ But even these did not cause an essential change. The change was not undertaken until the winter of 1905-6, and then "feverishly" (*fiévreusement*); it only took final shape in a completed variant (15 bis) in

⁸ *Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre*, t. I, vol. i, p. 31 ff. Discussed are: the German troop concentrations in the West; the speeding up of German mobilisation; the improvement of the railway network north of Trier, in the Fifel and on the Belgian frontier; improvement of the fortifications of Metz and between Strasbourg and Molsheim, which seems to indicate a defensive rôle for the German left wing. There is no mention of the fantastic story told by Paléologue of the alleged betrayal by a senior German staff officer of the Schlieffen Plan in the winter of 1903-4, which Foerster proved beyond doubt to be an instance of the French Intelligence being taken in by an impostor; *Berliner Monatshefte*, X, 1932, p. 1035 ff. (Foerster knew only the first edition of the French General Staff Documents of 1922.) It is well known that until 1914 the French General Staff was ignorant of the full magnitude of the German operational plans.

December 1906. Even this was inadequate and little suited to counter Schlieffen's offensive plans of 1899 to 1904. So the decisive impetus to the further development of strategic plans came from Schlieffen, and not the other way round.⁹

One might be tempted to suppose that if it was not a change in French General Staff plans which influenced Schlieffen's decisions, it was possibly the great political crises of 1904-6: the paralysis of the Tsarist empire by the Russo-Japanese war, the ensuing revolution, and the Morocco crisis leading to Franco-German tension. But on closer inspection even this explanation is unsatisfactory. At least the change in the political situation cannot have given the *initial* impetus to a change in Schlieffen's operational plans. Although the Russo-Japanese war began on February 5th, 1904, it did not take a definitely unfavourable turn for the Russians until late summer. The revolution in St. Petersburg broke out in January 1905. And the Morocco crisis began with Wilhelm II's visit to Tangier, where he landed on March 31st, 1905. But Schlieffen's operational plans had obviously been conceived on the great "general staff ride West," which took place in June 1904.¹⁰ Here for the first time he expressed his doubts as to whether a movement extended to Mézières would be enough to force the French to evacuate their fortified line. Perhaps they would stand their ground, and the German army would be split up east and west of their line of fortresses. "Another possibility is to by-pass the position entirely and to march with the whole army, or at least its main part, round Verdun. In other words, one would not attack the line Verdun-Belfort, but the line Verdun-Lille, because one must extend that far west in order to achieve the necessary freedom of manoeuvre." The new front had its fortresses also, but they did not present the same difficulties as those on the Meuse front. "The lines of communication would not be unfavourable. If anywhere, it is through the Belgian railways that a connection can be found between the German and French railway systems. But against these advantages are substantial

⁹ Reichsarchiv, *Die militärischen Operationen zu Lande*, I, p. 54, mentions the extension of the French left wing from Verdun to Mézières as the decisive motive for Schlieffen's bold plan of 1905-6. As his draft of 1905 shows, Schlieffen counted firmly on this extension and gave it as the reason for his far-reaching envelopment. But such an extension is not shown clearly even in "Plan 15 bis." Cf. Foerster's very critical appreciation of these plans in *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 116.

¹⁰ Cf. H. von Moltke, *Erinnerungen, Briefe, Dokumente 1877-1916*, p. 292. Diary entry of April 18th, 1904. It was on this staff ride that Moltke found himself at the greatest variance with Schlieffen's views.

drawbacks: the breadth of northern Belgium is considerable, it will take so long to cross it that the French will have time for all kinds of counter-measures. There can be no question of surprise." Besides, the deployment area would be very wide and "the left flank of the deploying German army (which must reach Strasbourg) will be served to the French on a platter."¹¹

Here, obviously, is the nucleus of the new plan of 1905; and it resulted from purely technical considerations. It could happen—Schlieffen reasoned—that the envelopment at Mezieres failed to achieve the collapse of the fortress front round Verdun as quickly as was hoped. So why not reach farther, as far as Lille? But in that case the deployment would have to be made in great breadth, if only for technical reasons due to the railways; the whole of Belgium would have to be crossed, and there would be a weakening of the left wing (a situation which in the plan of 1899 had prompted a warning against overreaching oneself in Belgium!). But the staff ride of 1904 produced a startling result: the right wing of the Blue (German) army, advancing between Trier and Aachen against Liege-Namur, proved too weak and got tied down in frontal battles, whereas the left wing defeated the French, who had come out of their fortress chain, by flank attacks from Metz and Strasbourg.¹² The moral was obvious—to strengthen the right wing without undue concern for the left. The strategic plan of 1905-6 was the first to draw it.

This plan was probably conceived during the winter of 1904-5, perhaps about the time the revolution broke out in St. Petersburg. Russia could be ruled out as an opponent so far as the next year of mobilisation was concerned, and Schlieffen could use the whole German Army on the Western front. This he did. In the strategic plan for 1905-6,¹³ which came into effect on April 1st, 1905, the distribution of forces already resembles that in the great memorandum of December, on which, in turn, the deployment plan for 1906-7 was based.

On the last "staff ride West" (1905) which Schlieffen was to conduct, he tried out the operational possibilities of the new plan by taking

¹¹ Von Zoellner, *Militärwissenschaftliche Rundschau*, 1938 (Sonderheft), p. 42 f. Also (less fully) von Cochenhausen, *ibid.*, p. 265 f.

¹² Von Zoellner, *ibid.*, p. 43 f. (with sketch-map).

¹³ W. Foerster, *Berliner Monatshefte*, X, p. 1064. Idem, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 70. Reichsarchiv. *Die militärischen Operationalen*, I, p. 55- Sketch-map of the deployment plan 1905-6 in von Cochenhausen, *ibid.*, p. 267.

command of the Blue Army himself. He put his cards on the table for the first time, showing those taking part in the ride that he meant to cut through neutral Belgium in great breadth. The strategic plan of 1899 was explicitly rejected. In the words of the final discussion, the French position on the Meuse was no ordinary one. Even if attacked frontally and simultaneously enveloped on its northern flank, "the cornerstone of the position will not be shaken," while the enveloping army, separated from the left wing, would run the danger of being attacked by vastly superior forces. So the position as such was not to be attacked at all but enveloped on a grand scale. But since such an envelopment would meet several defence lines (behind Lille-Maubeuge was a second line, La Fere-Laon-Rhcinis), and because furthermore the enemy could obstruct the advance from Antwerp and split the army in two by the obstacles of Liege and Naniur, "the whole Germany army, at least all Active army corps," would have to be brought into the line Diedcnhoten-Brussels. The result, therefore, was to be a great left wheel of almost the entire German Army, with Metz-Diedenhofen as the pivot—a Metz which was to be reinforced and was to cover the left whig, enabling further reinforcements to be drawn to the right.¹⁴

One can already see in this the complete strategic plan of December. Since, in the course of the exercise, three of the enemy side's attempts at defence came to grief, Schlieffen must have been convinced of the excellence of his new plan. Non-technical considerations—particularly political ones—played no part in its development. The whole thing emerges as a purely theoretical operational study. Schlieffen, discussing it with his officers on the staff ride, called it "purely academic." For him the great easing of pressure on the Eastern front did no more than confirm, and perhaps intensify, a change which was taking place in his operational ideas. It may have lent wings to his military imagination, encouraging him towards a more daring envelopment of France; but it was not decisive for the new "gigantic" envelopment plan. This is shown, too, by the fact that besides "Deployment Plan I" Schlieffen prepared a second plan, "Deployment II," for the event of a two-front war (with which possibility he still reckoned). It amounted to exactly the same distribution of forces in the West, except that about ten divisions were taken from the West Army and allocated to the East.

"This was done in such a way that the whole of the Western front was a flanked equally.¹⁵ The great envelopment on the left was to be the programme whatever happened, even if the chances of success were already diminished by drafting troops to the East.

This unwavering offensive spirit is typical of Schlieffen's military thinking and that of his staff. After all, one could imagine the disappearance of Russia from the ranks of Germany's opponents having quite the opposite effect. There was not the terrible pressure of time which had weighed on German strategic plans hitherto. In war, it meant the chance of saddling the French with the initiative, as Moltke had planned in 1887 in the event of a preliminary one-front war against France. One could wait calmly to see if and how the enemy would venture from his fortress line. If he advanced on Lorraine he was already lost, according to the calculations of the war games, in the case of the undivided German army. If he advanced through Belgium, the strong German defending army would have no difficulty in cutting off his line of withdrawal and breaking his impetus with flank ripostes. Furthermore, the Belgians would certainly have resisted a French invasion, instead of adding themselves to the number of Germany's enemies. Nor would England in 1905 have been in any position, militarily or politically, to support the adventure of a French attack on Germany through Belgium. On the other hand, the French themselves would never have dared to undertake such an adventure without Russian help. So the great Schlieffen Plan of 1905 would be quite inapprehensible if, instead of being seen in the context of successive theoretical studies, it had to be interpreted as the product of a specific historical situation—unless it were understood as a plan for a surprise attack on France. This possibility will occupy us later on. For the moment, suffice it to say that the idea of waging a war against France in a purely defensive fashion never occurred to Schlieffen. With France "the account had to be settled," i.e. there had to be a German attack leading to a quick decision.¹⁶ Behind all this was his repeatedly expressed conviction, first, that a modern war must not be long drawn out because it ruins the highly developed industrial economy of the participants; secondly, that "one cannot defeat the enemy without

L\\V. Foerster, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 39. Reichsarchiv, *Die militärische Organisation, I*, p. 55, footnote 1. They were: three Active corps, four Reserve divisions, seven *Landwehr* brigades and two cavalry divisions.

"Thus the aforementioned plan was entitled: "Der **Angriffskrieg** gegen Frankreich."

attacking him";¹⁷ and thirdly, that a real victory is achieved only by completely destroying the enemy's striking power.

Who would dispute these general principles? The only question is whether Schlieffen's plan of 1905 had such great chances of total victory in the West that all the attendant political and military disadvantages were outweighed.

3. The military testament of 1905

The great memorandum generally known as the Schlieffen Plan was composed by its author in December 1905 and January 1906 as a kind of military testament for his successor, to whom it was handed in February 1906. As our critical edition shows, it was drawn up with a quite extraordinary number of preliminary drafts, fair copies and corrections. Some of the latter are material, others are only stylistic variations which show how much store the author set by a good, clear exposition. The result is impressive enough. Certain repetitions are explained by the many revisions, as well as by the fact that in the middle (see below, page 144) the introduction recommences—obviously because of the later inclusion of a parallel draft.

Nobody can read the memorandum without being affected by the breadth and boldness of its offensive concept, combined as it is with careful attention to tactical-strategical detail. For long it has been regarded as a showpiece of German General Staff-work. A whole generation of Schlieffen's disciples and admirers considered it a work of genius, an infallible formula for victory which unfortunately fell into the hands of an inadequate 'successor, a mere epigon, who "watered it down" so that it was incapable of full success in 1914.¹ Our task is not to award praise or blame, to emphasise or question the ingenious qualities of the memorandum, but only to pose the sober question: did the campaign programme in itself offer so great a chance

¹⁷ Final task 1S93, in von Zoellner, *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹ The foremost exponent of this view is W. Groener. See his books: *Das Testament des Grafen Schlieffen* (1927), and *Feldherr wider Willen* (1930). In *Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg* (2 Aufl., 1925), p. 34, Foerster calls it a sin against the spirit of Graf Schlieffen to assume that with his memorandum he wanted to bequeath his successor a "formula for victory" the minute observance of which would guarantee victory. All the same, he himself (*Gedankenferkstatt*, p. 12) has credited Schlieffen's bequest with holding the "secret of victory." and in his earlier *Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg* he repeats with approval on p. 79 Greener's remark about a "Siegesbreric" which in 1914, unfortunately, remained in its pigeon-hole.

of success that its political and military disadvantages (of which more later) were offset?

The first thing which strikes us is that in contrast to all the known operational memoranda of the elder Moltke, we are not dealing with a mere programme for the first few days of a campaign, but with a plan embracing almost the whole of a campaign until the moment of total victory. Moltke, as is well known, thought that "no strategic plan goes with any certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy's main forces. Only the layman believes he can see in the course of a campaign the carrying through of an initial idea, thought out in advance, considered in every detail, and adhered to right to the end." Such reflections had at times come to Schlieffen, too.² Yet he built up his whole plan of campaign on a single idea "thought out in advance, considered in every detail, and adhered to right to the end": the constant envelopment of the enemy by extending the front line or by outflanking marches. Because Moltke distrusted "methodical" long-term campaign plans, he sometimes called strategy a system of mere "expedients." "The theory of strategy," he wrote in the *Instruktion für die höheren Truppenführer* of 1869, "scarcely goes beyond the first premises of common sense."³ But this must not be taken to have meant that strategy was nothing but improvisation, the leaving of everything to chance.⁴ It need hardly be added that Moltke, too, acknowledged certain general principles in the conduct of war—concentration at the decisive point, moving divided and striking united, the combination of frontal and flank attack, active defence by a tactical offensive instead of passive waiting, the need to keep the initiative, and so on. These were maxims derived from historical experience, particularly from the study of the Napoleonic wars; they had been modified and brought up to date in accordance with Clausewitz's teaching and with the needs and opportunities of modern generalship in the age of mass armies, the railway and the telegraph. But Moltke kept free of all

² in Draft V (repeated in Draft VI) he says: "The first line of fortresses (Lille-Maubeuge) will be broken through. The further course of the operation should not be predicted. But in this instance, the positions and fortresses govern the future moves of both sides and up to a point make them predictable."

³ "Taktisch-strategische Aufsätze," quoted after von Caemmerer, "Die Entwicklung der strategischen Wissenschaft im 19. Jahrhundert" (*Eibl, für Politik und Volkswirtschaft*, Heft 15, 1904), p. 165.

⁴ Cf. General von Schlichting's very instructive articles "Moltkes Vermächtnis" (Beilage zur *Allgemeinen Zeitung*, Nos. 222-4, PP-²8, 229, 233-4, 277, September-October 1901).

doctrinairism; so much so, that military historians and theorists were later to quarrel about the main ideas of his strategy in relation to Napoleon's.⁵ Compared with the multitude of Moltke's ideas, Schlieffen's campaign plans look rigid and one-sided. A sentence like "Flank attack is the essence of the whole history of war"⁶ would be unthinkable from Moltke, though he, too, lays down in the *Instruktion für die höheren Truppenführer* that strategy has achieved "the utmost of which it is capable" when it succeeds in so designing an operation that the enemy is attacked in front and in flank simultaneously. "Great results are bound to follow." For Schlieffen, the flank attack became something of a doctrine, and after his dismissal he sought to justify it in his *Cannae Studien*, using all manner of examples from Hannibal to Frederick the Great, Napoleon, Gneisenau and Moltke, not without twisting historical fact and also, curiously, failing to distinguish between tactics and operational strategy.⁷ His disciples say that during war games, manoeuvres and staff rides Schlieffen showed himself a great master in the number of strategical-tactical "expedients" and ideas which he could produce at any moment. It would be improper to doubt such statements. All the same, anyone who studies his final discussions on these exercises, published in 1937-8, cannot help noticing the preponderant part played here as well by the idea of envelopment, flank attack and outflanking. It seems to be the "patent solution" for any attack by a numerically inferior force.⁸ Time and again the frontal attack is criticised on the ground that it can achieve victory only if made with overwhelming superiority, and that even then the victory will be an "ordinary" one, i.e. a mere dislodgement of the enemy's front, not his annihilation. A break-through (it is argued) can only succeed in certain special cases, i.e. when the enemy's front presents gaps, and when these gaps are obvious to the attacker.⁹

⁵ Von Caemmerer, *ibid.*, p. 139 f. Also von Schlichting, *ibid.*

⁶ Letter to Freytag-Loringhoven of August 14th, 1912, quoted by von Zoellner, *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷ Graf Alfred von Schlieffen, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. I, 1913, pp. 25-266. In an essay "Der Schlachterfolg, mit welchen Mitteln wurde er erstrebt?" the historical department of the General Staff had to prove that it had always been the envelopment which led to the enemy's annihilation. Freiherr von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Generalfeldmarschall Graf von Schlieffen* (1920), p. 58.

⁸ Example: Strategic task of 1901 in: *Dienstschriften*, hrsg. vom Generalstab des Heeres, Bd. I, 1937, p. 87. Particularly characteristic is the final discussion of the staff ride East (*ibid.*, II, 1938, p. 302), in which the envelopment is recommended as the classic means of defeating the enemy decisively. Further examples quoted by von Zoellner, *ibid.*, p. 17 f.

⁹ Staff rides 1897 and 1901, quoted by von Zoellner, *ibid.*, p. 30 f. Further quotations in Foerster's *Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg*, p. 9 ff.

There can be little doubt that Schlieffen's influence as teacher and exemplar of his staff officers was partly due to the constant reiteration of these simple and impressive ideas. And unquestionably he showed practical sense in preferring enveloping manoeuvres and appreciating that the fire-power of modern warfare had made successful frontal attacks a rarity. The campaign of August-September, 1914, showed his warning against trying to break through the French line of fortifications to be fully justified. Finally, Schlieffen always regarded himself as Moltke's faithful pupil and often repeated the latter's warning that there was no panacea or formula in strategy. All the same, probably under the strong impression made on him by the victory at Sadowa, he believed in outflanking manoeuvres as in an "unalterable law."¹⁰ His essay *Der Krieg in der Gegenwart* is inspired with this belief. In order to extend the attacking front to the utmost and outflank the enemy, and to increase the fire-power of the initial attack, he wishes to dispense with reserves altogether. "The best reserves (he writes) are motor loads of cartridges following up behind." In any case, reserves are best employed in the front line¹¹ (an idea which crops up frequently elsewhere in his writing). Schlieffen does not envisage a prolonged frontal struggle between the two armies, lasting perhaps for weeks, in which it will be necessary to bring up wave after wave of reserves to feed the attack. On the contrary, everything is to be settled "at one stroke," the whole campaign is to be brought to an end with a major coup—a single "battle of annihilation." The infallable means to this is the great envelopment.

Even before 1914 there was no lack of critics in military circles who regarded this scheme as far-fetched and one-sided. General von Bielow, Schlieffen's own pupil and colleague, who was to command the 2nd Army in 1914, was not fully convinced that the envelopment would be effective; he tended more to the view that disposition in depth and co-operation among the different arms were decisive.¹² Similar doubts seem to have been entertained by von Schlichting.¹³ An outstanding critic of Schlieffen's basic ideas—not without an obvious touch of

¹⁰ *Denkschriften*, I, p. 87. The Moltke-speech in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, II, p. 441. Cf. W. Elze's Lecture: "Graf Schlieffen." 1928 (*Veröffentlichungen der Schleswig-Holsteinischen Universitätsbibliothek*, No. 20, p. 12 f.).

¹¹ *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, p. 17 f. Cf. the treatment of the question of reserves at Metz in Appendix, 4 (memorandum of 1912).

¹² Von Cochenhausen, *ibid.*, p. 317.

¹³ According to von Caemmerer, *ibid.*, p. ~oi f.

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ment—was Friedrich von Bernhardi.¹⁴ Without mentioning Schlieffen by name, Bernhardi maintains that to do without strong reserves is irresponsible, that repeated envelopments must lose their effectiveness, since the enemy will prepare for them and take counter-measures in time. He talks of a relapse into the linear tactics of Frederick the Great; and since the defender, too, can extend his front line, he sees nothing but trouble for a weaker aggressor who has to use up his last man in an attempt to extend his front line interminably.

It is clear that Bernhardi misunderstands or distorts Schlieffen's ideas of strategy, treating them only as tactical manoeuvres and a mere extension of the front line.¹⁶ Schlieffen saw for himself that a relatively thin, far-stretched offensive front without strong reserves might eventually split when both enemies extended their front lines in an attempt to envelop each other, and he discussed this in a war game in the spring of 1905.¹⁶ If in his great strategic plan of December of that year he staked everything on the one card of the great envelopment, we must be cautious of calling it simply doctrinairism. The strategy of the elder Moltke had never aimed at inflicting a quick, total defeat on a numerically superior coalition. In the Wars of Unification he confronted his enemies with an army which was superior in quality and at least equal in strength; he also had an almost inexhaustible reserve of trained conscripts, which his enemies did not possess. Schlieffen did not have this superiority. If he was not to restrict himself to active defence, as his great predecessor had planned to do after 1871 (and we know this was the last thing he ever wanted), his only course was the great strategic manoeuvre, which had to be carried through by the immediate employment of all available forces. And the only manoeuvre open, in view of the strategic situation on the Western front, was to envelop the French line, of fortresses and the defence army beyond by marching through Belgium. Convinced of the iron necessity of avoiding a long-drawn-out war at all costs, he chose the great risk instead of the defensive.

For the risk was great indeed—his fact, it was immense. Nobody who studies the complete text of the Schlieffen Plan carefully can fail to gain this impression—particularly when comparing the final version with

¹⁴ Fr. von Bernhardi, *Vom hertigen Krieg* (1912), II, p. 42 ff".

¹⁵ This is partly the fault of Schlieffen's essay "Der Krieg in der Gegenwart," which Bernhardi attacked. In this essay, tactical and strategic treatment is often not clearly distinguished.

¹⁶ W. Foch, *Le Graf Schlieffen and der Weltkrieg*, p. 10.

the preceding drafts. The former represses or suppresses many doubts and objections which come out clearly in the latter. They are all the more serious because the plan of December 1905 only reckoned with a war on one front—a different situation from that in 1914—and only with an enemy who was firmly resolved—again in contrast to 1914—to stay cautiously on the defensive. Here we touch on the first of the doubts which the great Schlieffen Plan raises: did its author assess the defensive and offensive power of the enemy correctly? So little did he fear a French counter-attack that he would have welcomed it as a "good turn," as the best chance to beat the French decisively in the open field. He was utterly convinced of the superiority of the German Army in open battle. His only worry seems to have been that the enemy would hide behind his chain of fortresses or behind a succession of river valleys, or even withdraw to the south of France and so prolong the war indefinitely. The envelopment was an attempt to avoid both these contingencies.

It is certain that Schlieffen's idea of the French operational plan corresponded closely with the defence plans of the French General Staff (plan 15 *bis*).¹⁷ It is equally certain that this no longer held good for the enemy in 1914 who, as we know, launched two offensives at the very start of the war. One was a feeble advance into Alsace-Lorraine, planned merely as a diversion; the other a large-scale attempt to break through the centre of the German front in southern Belgium, in the direction Dinant-Namur. The encounters which followed gave proof of the Germans' superiority in attack, which Schlieffen had foreseen. But at the same time his hope that these encounters would lead to the enemy's "annihilation" received its first disappointment, not through any lack of offensive spirit on the part of the Germans, but through the army commanders' inadequate orientation and those "frictions" inevitable in war. The attacker was not "annihilated" but only driven back in an "ordinary frontal victory," to use Schlieffen's expression. In the course of this action and all subsequent ones, it became clear that the central leadership of a million-strong army, for which the German General Staff lacked all practical experience and therefore technical preparation, was much more difficult than Schlieffen had imagined. His idea was that "all army commanders should fully acquaint themselves with the plan of the supreme

¹⁷ It is interesting that in 1912 he no longer counted on the French remaining on the defensive, but was convinced that they were now "lusting for the offensive." P. 178, below.

commander, and one thought alone should permeate the whole army." General Staff officers at the higher levels were to be mere "chessmen" of the Supreme Command, and the advance through Belgium was to be carried out "like battalion drill."¹⁸ Later on, the younger Moltke was often accused of allowing his army commanders too much independence (in which he followed the example of his great uncle) ; and it may well be that a strategic plan like Schlieffen's of 1905 could only have been carried through by means of tight control from the centre. But was it only the shortcomings of the Supreme Army Command in 1914 which caused this central control to fail? When Moltke took over, he already had doubts as to whether a central control of battle and manœuvre in Schlieffen's sense would be practicable in the event of war. And Schlieffen's method of directing manœuvres was under fairly widespread criticism before 1914.¹⁹

Schlieffen was right in appreciating the French aversion from using the gap between Metz and Strasbourg to break through eastward, and generally from threatening the left wing of the German army by an offensive against the Upper Rhine. His successor, like Ludendorff (who from 1908 to 1913 was head of the Operations directorate), thought the danger of such an advance much greater and ordered that strengthening of the left wing which was so often to be blamed as the real reason for the failure of the German August offensive.²⁰ Moltke and Ludendorff feared that a French break-through in Lorraine might sever the operation through Belgium from its lines of communication before the right-wing attack could become effective against French communications behind the Meuse. In view of this danger, they did not

¹⁸ Cf. von Zoellner, *ibid.*, pp. 32, 7, 18; H. von Kuhl, *ibid.*, p. 172; W. Foerster, *Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg*, p. 31 f.

¹⁹ Moltke. *Erinnerungen, Briefe, Dokumente*, p. 308 (report to Wilhelm II, 1905): "We have now thirty years of peace behind us, and I believe that our views have largely become peacetime views. Whether it is at all possible to control by a unified command the mass-armies we are setting up, and how it is to be done, nobody can know in advance." Criticism of the Kaiser Manœuvres: Bernhardt, *ibid.*, II, p. 358 f.; von Zoellner, *ibid.*, p. 15; von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Schlieffen*, p. 53 ff.

²⁰ E. Ludendorff, *Kriegsführung und Politik* (1922) p. 71 ff. (Agrees entirely with Moltke's re-distribution of strength.) Similarly in: *Mein militärischer Werdegang* (1933), pp. 125-8. and *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, 1920-1, Bd. 18,1, p. 375. For this and Ludendorff's lurcher criticism of the Schlieffen Plan, see Foerster, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 32 ff. Ludendorff stresses, quite rightly, that although Moltke had changed the ratio of strength between the right and the left wing by reinforcing the latter, he had not diminished the troop strength of the right wing. To make the right still stronger was impossible, because of the confined area of the advance and the lack of railways. Cf. Tappen, *Bis zur Alarme 1914* (1920), p. 7 f.

share the astonishing optimism of the Schlieffli Plan, which culminates in those bold last words: "If the Germans persevere in their operations | through Belgium] they can be sure that the French will hastily turn back . . . in the direction whence the greatest danger threatens." For a French invasion would mean that "the garrison was leaving the fortress just when the siege was about to begin."²¹ It is true that subsequently, in 1914, French action seemed to justify these bold prophecies. But does this mean that the danger never existed? Was it quite unthinkable that the campaign might open with a French offensive in Lorraine or Luxembourg (as the elder Moltke had hoped), thus giving the Germans a chance to fight their decisive battle on the soil of Lorraine, without the long and difficult march through Belgium?

The younger Moltke has been accused of inadequacy and of misunderstanding the great Schlieffen Plan, in that during war games and staff rides he declined to continue the offensive through Belgium if the French led off with an offensive, be it in Alsace-Lorraine or north of Metz. "If the French come out of their fortress," he declared in one of his summing-up discussions, "they come out into the open field. There is no sense in continuing the march in strength through Belgium, if the main French army is advancing in Lorraine. There can only be one thought: to attack the French army with all available forces and beat it wherever it may be. The march through Belgium is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end. Here (on the staff ride in question) the decision lay in Lorraine, and that was where we should have assembled all our available strength without delay."²² Well, Schlieffen developed the same idea, and it was a misunderstanding of it which led those who came after him to turn the great march through Belgium into an end in itself, invoking the doctrine that one should "impose one's will on the enemy and disregard his counter-moves." In contrast to this is the reported decision of Schlieffen on the last of his staff rides, in the summer of 1905. In the event of the French main forces between Metz and Strasbourg advancing on the German south flank in Alsace-Lorraine, he was not going to retain the great wheel against Lille. Instead, he wanted to turn sharp left against the French invasion and fight a battle of encirclement in Lorraine.²³ This corresponds with the

²¹ Below, p. 147. On the second staff ride of 1904 he said ironically: "That a part of the French Army crossed the Rhine was the best thing that could have happened; at least we had got rid of a part of the French for some time." Von Cochenhausen, *ibid.*, p-

²² W. Focrster, *Gedankenwerhtatt*, p. 38.

²³ Von Cochenhausen, *ibid.*, p. 311.

ideas expressed in the earliest of his drafts of 1905, about the possibility of an enemy advance from Belfort, or across the Moselle between Nancy and Epinal. To deal with it, part of the main army would have to turn about and cross to the right bank of the Moselle. How large a part would depend on the timing of the attack. If it were made in strength right of the Moselle soon after French deployment was completed, much the greater part of the German army, perhaps still in the process of deployment, would turn to meet it. But if the spearheads of the German right wing had already reached the French frontier, they would continue the movement. Between these two extremes were other possibilities which "needed reflection."²⁴*

A parallel passage in Draft II is similar:²⁵ if at an early stage the French should launch an offensive against the German left flank, the German northern offensive army was to turn left towards Lorraine—having defeated the French left wing first if possible—and encircle the enemy there. Here Schlieffen refers explicitly to earlier operational studies and General Staff war games. Since the younger Moltke had taken part in these games, he could easily justify his idea of a great battle in Lorraine by reference to the plans of his predecessor, particularly as Schlieffen's later memorandum of 1912 even regarded a major German offensive from Belfort to Nijmegen as necessary to counter the re-awakened aggressive spirit of the French (see below, page 178).

Schlieffen never discussed the political repercussions of such a move, which would have started the campaign by laying open to invasion Alsace-Lorraine, the industrial Saar, possibly the whole left bank of the Rhine down to Coblenz, and even Baden-Württemberg as far as the Main and Iller. These things were outside the purely military considerations of our strategist, whereas, according to Ludendorff, they weighed heavily with Moltke.

But there were other instances in which a French attack could not be regarded as altogether a "good turn." It would be very unwelcome, for instance, if quicker mobilisation enabled the French to strike before

²⁴ Draft I (see below, p. 151). The parallel passage (p. 152, par. 1), is also very interesting with its rather vague-sounding reflections.

²⁵ p.g. 15[^] below. A further parallel passage in Draft III stresses the point that any attack right of the Moselle would weaken the French on their main front. "Such an offensive, however strongly or weakly it is carried out, inevitably involves the French in a detachment. This is a disadvantage to the enemy which we must not offset by weakening our own forces left of the Moselle." This is already the optimistic view of the final version.

the German attack took place.²⁶ It would be particularly dangerous if they were the first to reach the "defile between Brussels and Namur." This was the point where the German advance had to be speeded up.²⁷ The danger would be greater still if the French were to advance rapidly on the line Namur-Antwerp and so reach a position where they could join up with the Belgians and English (whose landing Schlieffen expected at Antwerp). In such an event, an envelopment by the right wing would become impossible. "The plan must be changed," Schlieffen writes in the postscript added to the December memorandum in February 1906 (see below, Table II). The original version of this text gave a fuller picture: "We must try to envelop the enemy from the left and force him towards the sea by means of a strongly echeloned left flank. However, the German left wing will then be very vulnerable. But a break-through between Maubeuge and Namur may well become possible."²⁸ Less dangerous, but still very inconvenient, would be an early French attack right of the Meuse. Defence would be difficult because of the cover afforded to the attacker by the Ardennes forests, and also because of the fortresses of Longwy and Montmédy.²⁹

Clearly the success of the great enterprise depended on the speed and surprise of the German advance through Belgium. The enormous pressure of time is an essential feature of the whole Schlieffen Plan. In 1914 it was an incredible stroke of luck that the French General Staff, who, after all, had counted for decades on a German invasion of Belgium, should have underrated the boldness of the Schlieffen Plan and directed counter-measures to the wrong area. A similar stroke of luck was the success of the daring *coup de main* on Liege (planned by Moltke), for this enabled the Germans to advance rapidly across the Meuse valley through Schlieffen's dreaded "defile" between Brussels and Namur.

Schlieffen himself had planned to cross the Meuse not above but below Liege. The deeply cleft Meuse valley between Namur and the French frontier, and also the sector between Namur and Liege,

26 Draft III: "But it is also conceivable that they [the French] adopt the offensive in their turn, and being faster than we in mobilisation and deployment, beat us to the attack." The possibility of the deployment of the far left wing (on the Saar) being disrupted is discussed several times, most fully in Draft V. Cf. also the final version, p. 139, below.

27 See final version p. 139, below; similarly Drafts IV and VII.

28 Cf. also memorandum of 1912, p. 176, below.

29 December memorandum, 1905, p. 139, below.

appeared to him an almost insurmountable obstacle. He even feared he might get caught in a trap here, a "blind alley" prepared for him by the French and their allies. FIC felt this danger could only be avoided by a wide movement to the north, quite apart from the fact that (as long as the railway junction of Liège was only surrounded but not taken) the railway system made such a wide movement unavoidable.³⁰ But this meant nothing less than that now it was not only Belgian and Luxembourg neutrality which must be violated, but Dutch also, since the Dutch frontier ran closely below Liège. Once more a military "exigency" had been created (or recognised) and vital political considerations went by the board.

When the chain of obstacles in Belgium had been safely surmounted, and the flank threat from Antwerp warded off, there remained the great problem of ensuring a sufficient supply of men and material for the far-extended right wdng, on whose rapid advance everything ultimately depended. It had to achieve prodigious feats of marching and fighting, and the great danger was that it would quickly become exhausted. From the very first this was one of Schlieffen's major worries, but again it comes out more in the drafts than in the final version. His principle of throwing everything into the front line in order to achieve its maximum extension conflicts with the need to safeguard it with reserves. "It is necessary," he writes in Draft IV, "that the Germans should always form a strong reserve on their right wing." But at the same time he is emphatic that salvation lies in constantly extending the front line for the envelopment. "Should the enemy try to prevent such an envelopment by extending his left wing, he will so weaken his front line that a break-through at some point may well become possible."³¹ This seems reasonable enough. But one cannot help asking if the German front did not run the same danger. Did not the catastrophe of the Marne in 1914 occur just when the connection between the 1st and 2nd Armies was broken through Kluck's having to throw the left wing of his army, in a series of exhausting night marches, across to the endangered right flank, and because there were no reserves available to extend the German right wdng to the sea? Schlieffen tried to counter such dangers by greatly strengthening

³⁰Sec Draft I, extracts from Draft III, and Draft IV (Appendix, 5). A further parallel version in Draft V. The problem of railways appears in the final version on p. 13S. below. Cf. memorandum of 1912, p. 173, below.

³¹ Draft IV (Appendix, 6), p. 157.

the right wing (he would have been the last to weaken it, as Moltke did in 1914, by drawing off two divisions to the East), and by planning to move at least two army corps by rail from the left wing to the right as soon as they could be spared in Lorraine. But when or whether they^r would become available depended on the enemy's behaviour on his eastern front and on the capacity of the Belgian railways.

On the last point the drafts offer little encouragement. Neither in northern France nor in Belgium would there be railways left intact to take reinforcements across the Meuse. "Lines of communication must therefore be sought mainly through Belgium north of the Meuse" —in plain words, via Aachen and the southern Netherlands. But by this route it was impossible to transport more than two army corps to the right wing in time.³² It is never explained how the many reserves were to be brought up for the envelopment and encirclement of Pans (of which more later on). "The right wing must make very great exertions," says the final text of our memorandum. But at least there would be no lack of provisions in this rich country.

But even if all went well and supplies of ammunition, weapons and reserves arrived in time (which they did not in 1914), the situation and task of the right wing would remain very difficult. Schlieffen's repeated exhortation to make this wing very strong arc due, as the drafts show, to the sure knowledge that this was the critical point of the whole campaign plan. Would this shock army really be strong enough not only to force an entry into the French interior, but also to envelop the whole French army, prevent it from escaping south, and annihilate it? True, the fortresses on the French northern front were not very important. But the enemy could occupy a succession of river valleys: apart from the Aisne, there were the Oise, Seine, Somme and Marne among others. Schlieffen worked out how strongly these lines could be occupied. From the cornerstone of Verdun the distances were almost equal to Dunkirk, Abbeville (via La Fere) and Paris. The length of the front from Belfort to these final points was roughly 500 kilometres. This gave an average of only two infantrymen of the field army per yard; or, deducting garrison troops and including Territorials, an average of four. Thus there was a reasonable hope of breaking through the line Verdun-Dunkirk (for the envelopment was meant at the

1,2 Draft IV (Appendix, 6), p. 156. Parallel passage: Draft II (copy). Here railways west of the Meuse are mentioned as a connection with Germany. It is obviously a slip. Text IV is in Schlieffen's own writing.

same time to be a break-through in a general attack). There was the further hope that the French would not be able to man the line La Fere-Abbeville throughout its whole length.³³ But would the Germans also be able to rip open the innermost defence line Verdun-La Fere-Paris? Would they still have enough strength for that as well—in face of the impregnable cornerstone of Paris?

At this point in his reflections, Schlieffen obviously had doubts. They appear in all his drafts, even in the final version. The problem was how to isolate or eliminate the gigantic fortress of Paris, the rallying point of all French reserves and the centre of the entire railway system. Paris seems to have been the sphinx whose mystery even Schlieffen's strategical wisdom could not quite solve.³⁴ The fortress and the railway centre for troop movements; both were a threat to German victory.

At first Schlieffen planned to steer the advance within the French interior in the same way that it was carried out in 1914 (and which was later so often criticised as a mistake). The right wing, marching round the west side of Paris, was to force the French army away from the capital "against its own fortresses on the eastern frontier, against Switzerland and against the Rhine."³⁵ The considerations which finally weighed against this solution are discussed in the December memorandum (in its final form).³⁶ The French would be able to take up a position behind the Oise, their left wing forming a turned-back "defensive flank" which would rest on the "colossal fortress of Paris." Even if an attacker broke through in front, he would find himself in a most uncomfortable position; if he advanced southward, his right flank could be attacked from the fortress. The enemy, however, could escape and withdraw to the south of the country, to prolong the war indefinitely. This had to be avoided at all costs. So there was nothing for it but to "include the whole of Paris in the envelopment"—an envelopment

³³ Draft VI, see Appendix, 7, below.

³⁴ I am told that during the last war games of the Great General Staff in 1911-13, the sphinx-like character of the problem of Paris became depressingly obvious (Capt. J. H. Frank-Lindheim). This fits in with an account by Hahnke of Schlieffen's last staff ride (Markirch, April 29th, 1905), published in an article in the *Berliner Borsenzeitung* of May 6th, 1930. When the commander of "Red" was about to declare himself defeated, Schlieffen drew his attention to the possibility of "improving the apparently desperate situation by quickly transporting all troops which could be spared from less busy sectors of the front, and all the forces available behind the front, to behind the French left wing; there they could be formed into a new army group to counter-envelop the German right wing."

³⁵ Drafts II, IV (Appendix, 6) and VI.

³⁶ Uelow, pp. 140 f. and 145. First hint of the new objective in Drafts V and VI.

from the west and south whose aim was to get behind the enemy's lines, and this rapidly enough to prevent him withdrawing to the south. At the same time the battle along the line Verdun-La Fere-Paris would have to be obstinately continued so long as the "cornerstone" of Verdun had not fallen. Furthermore, Paris had to be firmly invested.³⁷ Unfortunately it became clear that the German strength was insufficient for this enormous task—even if the right wing were to be made very strong.

"Before the Germans reach the Somme or the Oise," he says in Draft VI, "they will have realised that they are too weak for the enterprise they have undertaken." He adds (in the final version also): "We shall find the experience of all earlier conquerors confirmed, that a war of aggression calls for much strength and also consumes much, that this strength dwindles constantly while the defender's increases, and all this particularly so in a country which bristles with fortresses."³⁸

Certainly the troop requirements for the envelopment and investment of Paris alone were enormous. Schlieffen estimated that he needed seven army corps for the former and five or six for the latter altogether more than a third of the total strength (thirty-three and a half corps) necessary for the attack on the line Verdun-La Fere-Paris. But in actual fact this strength did not exist. It was only assumed theoretically—a fact which was already recognised by Ludendorff as a serious defect of the plan. Schlieffen must have been acutely aware of it when he realised that since the enemy was covered on his left by Paris and could still escape southwards, the scheme to draw the main French forces from Paris to the east would not succeed, and that therefore the advance would have to envelop the fortress.³⁹ This required strong forces, since the right wing had the enormous task of piling down the whole French army north of the Marne and Seine, perhaps even of fighting off a British expeditionary force, which Schlieffen thought had to appear in the West!

³⁷For a more detailed description of this attack see final version, p. 144, below, and (slightly different) Draft VI (Appendix, 9) where he talks of a "bombardment of Rheims" and an attack "against the Marne from the south, with the right enveloping army."

³⁸One is reminded of Clausewitz: *On War*, VII, 5: "Most attacks lead only to a point at which the forces remaining are just enough to maintain a defensive and wait for peace. Beyond that point the scale turns, there is a setback. The violence of such a setback is generally much greater than the force of the thrust."

³⁹One can see this quite clearly in the part of Draft VI which is obviously based on Draft V (reproduced in Appendix, 7), where the envelopment of Paris is considered for the first time.

Schlieffen's first reaction to this was to think of moving the whole German army farther to the right in order to narrow the front and so release an army for the envelopment of Paris. But would it be practicable? In the final version there is no more mention of this. Instead, there is the further elaboration of a thought which had already occurred in earlier drafts (particularly in numbers V-VII): that vast re-formations would be necessary to utilise the reserves still available at home, not only to relieve the fighting troops of subsidiary tasks such as masking fortresses and securing the lines of communication area (a task for the *Laudwehr* and *Landsturm*) but also, primarily, to form at least eight new army corps. Their formation was to start on the first day of mobilisation, using *Ersatz* battalions, Reserve troops, and if necessary even *Landwehr*. Since they would see action within a few weeks, they had to be fully trained men. This meant that almost the whole of Germany's trained manpower was to take the field in the first weeks, leaving no reserves for a prolonged war. Everything depended on a quick success; everything was staked on this one card. The new army corps were to be the grand reserve, as it were, for use at critical points soon after the frontier battles. Where did Schlieffen expect these critical points to be?

In the fragmentary Draft VII he mentions four areas which would need urgent reinforcement (see below, Appendix, 8): in northern France, against a possible British landing in the rear of the German right wing; on the Meuse below Verdun, as reinforcement for the attack on the Aisne; in Lorraine between Metz and Verdun, for the attack on the Meuse fortresses; and finally on the Meurthe and in Upper Alsace, for the attack on the Moselle forts. Surprisingly enough Schlieffen intended to allocate his main reserves to the left wing, not to the right, hoping for great successes on the Meuse and Moselle fronts as soon as the northern frontiers of France had been crossed. The two wings were to combine in a pincer movement from the north-west and south-east. (This seems to resemble the idea pursued in vain by the Supreme Command in 1914.) But the envelopment of Paris was as yet only half hinted at in the fragmentary Draft VII. In Draft V (and VI), which calls the envelopment a necessity, the points where the reserve is to be used have shrunk to three (the attack on the Meuse forts having gone by the board); and even these three were later dropped in Draft VI (the relevant sentences being crossed out). The final version says, as one might expect: "The eight

army corps are most needed on, or behind, the right army wing." But how to get them there in time, i.e. by rail? As we know, the Belgian railways were completely destroyed in the Belgian retreat of 1914. For many weeks the right army could only be reached by marching and would have been without supplies had the Supreme Command not given it almost the entire stock of lorries.⁴⁰ Schlieffen was very uncertain on this point. We saw earlier how poorly he rated the efficiency of the French and Belgian railways during the first weeks of war. In the earlier drafts two army corps were the most he expected to transport from the left to the right wing. In the final version the question of the railways' capacity is left open. Anything they cannot move will have to be used on the Meuse, at Metz, or "right of the Moselle."

But how does this tally with the simultaneous statement that no less than six "new army corps" are needed for the cordon west and south-east of Paris? Schlieffen's *Nachlass* provides no answer. Is it surprising that in 1914 Moltke preferred to dispense with the western envelopment of Paris? It may also have been made easier for him by the fact that there was no longer the immediate threat of a British flank attack from the Channel ports, which Schlieffen, in 1905, was still expecting, without being able to suggest an effective counter-measure.⁴¹

But these considerations have not touched the really vital danger: that the enemy might counter the great envelopment with the most obvious move of all—the rapid extension of his left wing and perhaps the envelopment of the attacker himself. The radial French railway system with the fortress of Paris as its centre offered every opportunity. Troops could be switched from one part of the front to another at very great speed, while the woods surrounding Paris made it possible to mass troops unnoticed for a counter-attack on the German right wing. Would not the inevitable consequence be a race for the sea in which the Germans with their inferior railway connections would ultimately be at a disadvantage? As we know, in September 1914 the sudden appearance of the strong French army under Maunoury on the west flank of the German right wing-*army* wrecked the whole plan of campaign, because the Supreme Command considered, rightly or wrongly, that it had not enough reserves both to fight off this army tactically (which was done, at great sacrifice, on the Ourcq) and also to eliminate it strategically by further outflanking, so as permanently to secure the German right flank.

40 Ta ppen, *Bis zitr Marne 1914(1920)*, pp. 7,14et. al. ⁴¹ Cf. his footnote, p. 142, below.

Schlieffen discusses this problem with conspicuous brevity. "The French will not hesitate (he writes in Draft II) to shift troops from the main front to the endangered subsidiary front, or to move up reserves, for example the corps from the Alpine frontier." However, he argues, "this will hardly succeed so far as to block the area and to provide their left wing with the desired extension and strength."⁴² We already know his estimate of the possible density of the French front line.⁴³ It led him to hope for a break-through, especially if the enemy extended his left wing very far. He also hoped that the French, who would "first have to assemble their corps," would not be able in the confusion and haste to reach their northern frontier in such good order as the Germans, who were deploying there. Their efforts to extend the front to the Somme would come too late, and their attempt to outflank the attacker by an offensive round the left wing of the La Fere position would, "it is to be hoped," not succeed. But what was to happen, one wonders, if during the battles for the Oise and the Marne the enemy moved great reserves from his eastern front and concentrated them in the Paris area, thus threatening the German right flank?

Schlieffen does not put the question like this.⁴⁴ But he was certain that it would be possible to hold down considerable portions of the enemy's army on the Meuse and Moselle fronts by means of subsidiary attacks. In the drafts, the role of the German forces remaining on the right bank of the Moselle is conceived as a very active one. In Draft VI their number is put higher than in the others—but they are "expected to take Nancy," advance against the Moselle line and if possible on Ballon de Servance, "continuing, in case of a success in the direction of Chalons-sur-Marne."⁴⁵ So they were to break through the Moselle line and outflank the Meuse forts in the south! Other drafts speak only of attacks on the line Pont-à-Mousson-Nancy-Luneville and against the Meurthe, reaching with the left wing beyond St. Die to the passes of the central Vosges. If the enemy did not advance, Reserve divisions, *Landwehr* brigades and *Jäger* battalions on the Meurthe and Seille were to be pushed out further, against the Moselle and against Belfort,

⁴² Similarly in the final version, p. 137, and Drafts I and IV. Slightly different in Draft 111.

⁴³ P. 59, above. Cf. Appendix, 7.

⁴⁴ But compare Hahnke's report, footnote ³⁴, p. 60, above.

⁴⁵ See Appendix, 9 (from Draft VI). The composition of the army right of the Moselle is planned differently in the different drafts. It varies between twelve and nine divisions, including Reserve corps and Reserve divisions.

while two corps were to be moved by rail to the far right wing of the main army. Here, then, there is no talk of breaking through, but only of pinning down the enemy on the Moselle—an enterprise in which the left wing of the main army was to help by "attacks left of the Moselle as far as possible towards the Meuse forts above Verdun."⁴⁶ If the enemy should attack, the armies right of the Moselle were not to risk a decisive battle, but slowly to retreat before the attacker, attracting as many enemy as possible with a minimum of their own men, and holding them with the help of the enlarged fortress of Metz.

One can see that the operation planned for the German subsidiary force (east of the Moselle) was much more ambitious in the drafts than ¹¹¹ the final version, which only makes a brief mention of a diversion against Nancy to tie down enemy forces (pages 138 and 146) and which puts the main emphasis on drawing the enemy eastwards, if necessary by a retreat. It looks as if Schlieffen was earlier hoping to find the Moselle positions so weakly occupied after the advance of the main German army through Belgium that a surprise would succeed there. Then, after further reflection, he may have become more cautious; or more likely he did not want to deflect his successor from his main task, the offensive by the right wing, by going into too much detail over a subsidiary operation.

In any case, in contrast to Moltke (and also Ludendorff), Schlieffen was not anxious to secure a great victory in Lorraine, and it may have been his quiet hope that the French would not advance across the Moselle—making possible, by this act of restraint, the dispatch of two army corps to the right wing. But was it certain that the subsidiary operation he had planned on the Moselle would tie down the French army so firmly on their eastern front that they would not dare to pull out strong forces and transport them to their left wing for a counter-attack against the German right flank? The course of the campaign in 1914 cruelly disappointed such hopes, which were also shared by Moltke. The attacks of the German 6th and 7th Armies on the French Moselle front were much stronger and more persistent than anything ever planned by Schlieffen, yet they were only able to tie down the enemy temporarily in this area and never to the extent hoped for. They were unable to do anything about the catastrophe on the Marne. Schlieffen's judgment had been right about only one thing: the French

⁴⁶ Drafts I, II, IV, VI.

eastern front was so strongly fortified that it could be held with very few men. Nowhere in his great plan is there any evidence that he appreciated the resulting danger to the German attack.

What is the result of all these reflections? Discussion of the Schlieffen Plan up to date has missed the point. It has hardly touched on its inherent problems. Instead it has always tried to discover a formula for success in the one-sided massing of attacking forces on the right wing—a rather primitive formula in view of the restricted deployment area on the upper Meuse, the destruction of the Belgian railway network and the consequent enormous marches needed to outflank the enemy front line! The great Schlieffen Plan was never a sound formula for victory. It was a daring, indeed an over-daring, gamble whose success depended on many lucky accidents. A formula for victory—needs a surplus of reasonable chances of success if it is to inspire confidence—a surplus which tends quickly to be used up by "frictions" in the day-to-day conduct of war. The Schlieffen Plan showed an obvious deficit in these chances: it was, in Schlieffen's own words, "an enterprise for which we are too weak." True, he wanted to cure this weakness by improvising at least eight *Ersatz* corps. But he could neither say how such improvised corps were to be made militarily efficient and provided with equipment, nor show how they were to be brought to the decisive point of the front in time. In his justification, Foerster quotes the archives of the War Ministry to show that on November 4th, 1905, i.e. shortly before his retirement, Schlieffen requested that preparations for the war-organisation and equipment of *Ersatz* formations should already be made in peace.⁴⁷ This must have been the result of thoughts which came to him while working out his operational plans. Thus the *Reichsarchip* (I, 55) referred to the Schlieffen Plan as "at the same time a programme for the further enlargement of the army and for its mobilisation."

Well, if it was a programme, it remained ineffective as such: a strictly guarded secret in the safes of the Great General Staff. The request to the War Ministry does not alter the fact that during his fifteen years in office as Chief of the General Staff, Schlieffen did very little to

⁴⁷ *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 41. By showing, *ibid.*, p. 40, that Schlieffen counted on the war strength of the mobilisation plan of 1906-7, Foerster still does not touch the *ptinrtum saliens*.

expand the German Army to the figure needed for the fulfilment of his plans.⁴⁸ Nor did his successor do anything in this direction until 1911, whereas naval rearmament was even further intensified from 1906 onwards. This is not the place to go into the reasons or allot the responsibility, political as well as military, for the misdirection of German rearmament policy. But there remains a strange disproportion between the high aims of the German General Staff and the forces available to them in practice. For active defence, as the elder Moltke envisaged it, the existing forces would have sufficed; during a war there would have been time enough to expand them. But for what Schlieffen had in mind, a quick, total annihilation of the enemy, Germany's strength was simply not adequate, particularly when, after the French, the mighty Russian Army was to be "annihilated" too! Looking at the Schlieffen Plan, one hardly dares imagine how much time would have been needed to defeat France completely on the basis of it, and how little there would have been, on the other hand, before the offensive against Russia could no longer be postponed. On occasions even Schlieffen seems to have worried about this. In the final discussion of his last operational war game in 1905 (which once again assumed a two-front war) he expressed himself as follows:⁴⁹ "The theory of the decisive battle has been much talked about, ever since war with France and Russia became a threat to Germany. The theory is roughly this: we go with all our forces into France, fight a decisive battle which, of course, ends in our favour, and on the evening of the battle, or next morning at the latest, the trains are ready and the victors roll eastwards to fight a new decisive battle on the Vistula, the Niemen or the Narew. That is not the way of wars today. After the battle comes the pursuit, you can read that in any basic manual; and this takes a long time. You can take . . . Sedan as a decisive battle. If the

⁴⁸ However, he entered into negotiations with the Ministers of War von Gossler and von Einem, and pressed for the immediate formation of new army corps in case of mobilisation. The War Ministry raised serious technical objections against such re-formations during deployment. To judge from a minute of autumn, 1903, von Einem regarded this as the whim of an old man ripe for retirement: cf. Reichsarchiv, *Kriegsrüstung und Kriegswirtschaft, Anlage zum 1. Band* (1930), Document No. 23. Also correspondence with Gossler of autumn, 1899, *ibid.*, Nos. 17-19. Later Ludendorff, together with Moltke, pressed for the formation of immediate reserve formations, and this with some success, though the Ministry of War had strong misgivings about its effect on the supply of Ersatz troops. Six and a half mobile Ersatz divisions were provided. (Ludendorff, *Mein militärischer Werdegang* (1933), p. 134 ff.)

⁴⁹ W. Foerster, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 51 f.

German armies had been transported to the Vistula on September 2nd, 1870, what would have become of the campaign in France? . . . If we want to make war in France for several months, we can't ignore the Russians entirely. We can't watch them march across the Vistula or the Oder or the Elbe, while we ourselves go on making war in France. That is out of the question. If we can't pull out troops after the decision, we must try to drive back the Russians at the very start of the war."

How this is to be reconciled with his proposal of 1912 to leave Germany's eastern frontiers completely undefended at the start of the war remains Schlieffen's secret. Was he, after all, quite confident in the end of fighting the "decisive battle" quickly in France and being able to withdraw large masses of troops before it was too late in the East? In 1914 the younger Moltke seems to have calculated that French reserves would soon be exhausted because of the three-year conscription period introduced the year before. Was Schlieffen already entertaining similar hopes? Such faith in victory could well be called heroic—a heroism coming dangerously close to *hubris*. The only possible explanation is that in 1912, when almost an octogenarian, he was politically naïve enough to trust that the Russians would not open hostilities until the fate of the French had been decided before Paris—as he prophesies in his last memorandum. Those who do not share his faith in miracles must judge that in any case he overrated German strength enormously.

But this is entirely in the tradition of the Wilhelminian epoch.⁵⁰

50 As far as I know there exists no operational plan by the younger Moltke, but in 1943 I saw a memorandum of 1913 signed by him: "Germany's conduct in a Triple Alliance war." It was probably for the Chief of the Military Cabinet (entry in the Chief of the General Staff's secret journal of January 20th, 1913). I reproduce the following (from my notes) for comparison with Schlieffen's plans:

Moltke turns against Schlieffen's idea, expressed in his memorandum of 1912, of leaving the Eastern Front completely unoccupied. All the successes in the West will be unavailing if the Russians arrive in Berlin. Without Germany's help Austria will remain purely on the defensive. She will only become active if a German army holds down the Russian Narew-Army. In the West an envelopment of the French fortress front is unavoidable, but it is beset with great difficulties. "It is not pleasant to open a campaign by violating the territory of a neutral neighbour." We must try to come to an agreement with Belgium. Perhaps we could promise her territorial acquisitions if she becomes our ally or at least remains passive. In any case, we must guarantee her full sovereignty and only regard the country as an area for marching through. Our war aim must exclude annexation. But in fact Moltke considers the possibility of an agreement as good as hopeless. Therefore we shall have to fight a new enemy of 150,000 men. Then England will and *must* join our enemies. It is vital for the English to prevent Germany occupying the Channel coast. That she has no intention of doing so, London will never believe. A

4. Operational memoranda after retirement

Schlierfen's military testament of December 1905 displays an obvious omission: only in passing (111 the form of a footnote, added later to the final draft) does it mention the possibility that England might come to the help of France. In the drafts it is mentioned only very occasionally; in the main text of the final version, not at all.¹ This is very odd, in view of all the information which since May had been at the disposal of the Foreign Ministry about Britain's intention to come to the aid of her friend in case of an unprovoked German attack. It is even more astounding in view of the (vastly exaggerated) "revelations" about alleged British promises, which Delcassé made to the French Press after his talk as Foreign Minister (*Gaulois*, July 13th, *Matin*, October 6th-13th, 1905). In these there had been talk of the British Fleet blockading

German occupation on the Channel would permanently tie down British naval forces there and thus make it impossible for England to keep up her world position.

Should we give up the march through Belgium if England guarantees her neutrality? This would be very dangerous, because it is quite uncertain whether England would keep her promise; at the same time we would abandon our only chance of the quick and resounding success we need so badly. The renunciation of the march through Belgium would only be possible if England went along with us. But this is out of the question, because England considers Germain' stronger than France, is afraid of German hegemony and wants to preserve the balance in Europe. England and France are already tied to each other, count on a German advance through Belgium and are going to oppose it together. The British expeditionary force will probably land at Dunkirk. A landing in Antwerp seems to have been abandoned, probably from fear of the German Navy. So British troops will appear in Belgium, too. Therefore we must make our right wing very strong, and it is impossible to attack the whole of the French eastern front as well. But with English and Belgian help the French intend to bring the right wing of our army to a standstill and to break through the German front in strength from the direction of Verdun. We must count on this. It is not possible to plan beyond the basic ideas of the operation and the preparation of the deployment. But our aim must be to envelop the enemy's left wing if possible and to rest our own left wing on Metz. On no account must we violate the Dutch province of Limburg. In the event of war, we need neutral Holland as a "windpipe." But it is of paramount importance to overcome the obstacle of Liège as quickly as possible.

The memorandum (according to the secret journal) seems to be connected with a communication from the Military Cabinet informing the General Staff of opposition to its great demands for army increases.

¹ But compare the passage in the final version, page 136 f, below: "The Netherlands regard England, *allied to France*, no less as an enemy than does Germany." In Draft II there is the following passage: The Belgians will threaten the German attack in a flank position between Liège and Namur, "and from this position, *reinforced by the French or English*, they can advance to the attack." Draft III mentions a similar action, "possibly with English support." At the same place in V, the possibility is again discussed of an enveloping attack by the French and Belgians from the Meuse position between Namur and Liège, "perhaps supported by the English, who may have landed in Antwerp."

the mouth of the Elbe and the landing of 100,000 men in Schleswig-Holstein.² Did Schlieffen refuse to take this piece of news (denied by England) seriously? Did he think it lost all importance with the fall of Delcassé? Or did he share the deliberate optimism of Holstein at the Foreign Ministry—intentionally fostered by Bülow—that the British were incapable of military action against Germany after the fall of Balfour and the advent of the Liberal Government of Campbell-Bannerman and Grey?

But towards the end of 1905, intelligence of British promises of military assistance to France became so definite and reliable that it was no longer possible to doubt their seriousness. Even the Kaiser became worried.³ Perhaps the addition of the above-mentioned footnote is due to information which Schlieffen received from the Foreign Ministry in December (through Holstein?). At the beginning of February 1906 the General Staff received from the German military attaché in London, Count von der Schulenburg, a report giving very explicit information about the strength, armament, composition and mobilisation of the expeditionary force which Britain was to send to help the French in the event of war. At the moment there were roughly 116,700 men available, but their number was to be increased to 150,000, while army reforms would bring them to the same level of efficiency as modern Continental troops. The military attaché was certain that the expeditionary force would be dispatched, but he could only guess at its intended area of employment. The approach Dunkirk-Calais seemed unlikely "because it leads across the German front and would suit us admirably." A landing in Jutland would be very daring and only feasible "if France were to provide landing forces to accompany the English." Probably the choice would fall on the safest way: disembarkation at Dunkirk for an attack on the German right flank.⁴ This

² Cf. *Grosse Politik*, XX (2), p. 631 ; also *ibid.*, Nos. 6849, 6863, 6864, 6866, 6867, 6873, *et al.* Also P. Kluge, *Heeresaufbau und Heerespolitik Englands vom Burenkrieg bis zum Weltkrieg* (1932), p. 139 f. It is quite possible that Delcassé's much-discussed statement was based on private remarks by Edward VII, whom he could not quote in public, and that the latter had repeated confidential remarks by Admiral Sir John Fisher.

³ Letter to Bülow of December 29th, 1905 (*Grosse Politik*, XX (2), No. 6887) and of December 31st, 1905, in: Bülow, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, II, p. 197 f. The letter is misrepresented in Billow's book; for the original wording see J. Reimann, *Fürst Billows Denkwürdigkeiten und die deutsche Marokkopolitik* (1935), p. 110 f.

⁴ *Grosse Politik*, XXI (1), No. 6946, Anlage, dated January 31st, 1906. By special order, a copy was sent to the Foreign Ministry together with a telegram from Metternich of February 9th; the original, together with technical enclosures, is therefore likely to have been sent to the General Staff somewhat earlier.

last corresponded with Schlieffen's guess, mentioned—though only as a possibility—in Draft V (see above, footnote Moltke received Schlieffen's memorandum at the beginning of February, and I would assume that he asked the author to complete it with regard to the British intervention. For this purpose he would have passed on the report from London.⁵ Whatever it was, Schlieffen's additional memorandum is based precisely on the two possibilities which the military attache thought most likely.

One sees from Text II below that the new danger caused Schlieffen very little worry. The expeditionary force could easily be shut up, along with the Belgians, in Antwerp. They would be "securely billeted there," he says with a touch of the irony he used to show in exercise discussions, "much better than on their island, where they are a serious threat and a standing menace to the Germans." If at an early stage they should land in Jutland (at Esbjerg in Denmark, for example) the German advance into France was to be interrupted and a vastly superior force sent against them. In this way, the French would be forced to come to the assistance of their allies, i.e. to give up the cover afforded by their fortresses and launch the offensive into Germany for which the German General Staff had long been prepared: a highly welcome opportunity to come to grips and defeat them! If the British landing came later, it would be enough to confront it with quickly raised reserves and "crush the English invaders." But after Germany's initial successes in France, the English were unlikely to risk a landing at all. Under no circumstances was a single division to be withheld from the great Western offensive on their account.

It is clear that Schlieffen had little respect for the fighting power of British infantry—as little as had the London military attache, who was actually looking forward to "giving them a reception they will remember for centuries." But is it not strange that in this whole plan there is no thought of the British Navy and the danger of a sea blockade? True, Schlieffen counted on a quick total victory, in which case (he thought) the danger of a blockade was unimportant. (This is in contrast to the view of the Ambassador in London, Count Metternich, who prophesied that war would mean the destruction of German maritime trade and a relentless blockade until Germany's

⁵ In *Mein militärischer Werdegang* (1933), p. 126, Ludendorff tells how worried Moltke was about an English landing at Esbjerg, because of the danger of destruction to the Kiel Canal, damage to the naval installations in Kiel and the threat to Hamburg and Lübeck.

submission.) But Schlieffen had not the least use for the German Navy either, though its development reached a new and decisive stage in 1906. It was to be used neither as an offensive weapon to support the Western front, nor in the Baltic, where its superiority was already unquestioned and where one might have thought its task was to secure sea lanes and enable the German Army to operate in the Baltic coastal provinces—perhaps even to force Russian harbours. But the Navy was not the province of the Chief of the General Staff (perhaps it was even beyond his military horizon); and as he estimated the danger from England so lightly, he saw no reason to utter a word of warning against the extravagant policy of the Naval Board and its imminent political consequences, although, as we know, he was privately opposed to it as the most difficult obstacle in the way of building up army strength.

A man so filled with tireless zeal and convinced of the great responsibility of the General Staff could not tear himself away from it all when he retired from active service. In his seventies, Schlieffen turned to military writing, to the technical and strategical studies which fill two handsome volumes of his *Nachlass*. In this way he tried to propagate his ideas permanently among the German officer corps; and successfully enough, for he had a fluent pen. He wrote concisely and trenchantly. In popular articles like the soon-famous essay *Der Krieg in der Gegenwart*, which appeared in January 1909 in the *Deutsche Revue*, he showed even brilliance and power. His style was borrowed, probably quite consciously, from Moltke, without, however, reaching the great master's richness and subtlety of ideas. Yet when his collected writings appeared shortly after his death in 1913, they were read by younger members of the officer corps with undivided admiration as the legacy of one who was already thought of as the "grand old man" of the General Staff.

The core was the elaborate *Cannae Studien*, already mentioned. It was the old man's tragedy that he could no longer develop his basic idea, but only project it with ever increasing one-sidedness and rigidity. This becomes clear—almost pathetically so—from the last two campaign plans found in his papers: the memorandum on a war with France and Russia, dated December 28th, 1912 (Text IV), and his operational plan for "Red" (France) of 1911 (Text VI).

The plan of 1911 (Text VI) is without practical significance, since it

was a casual work on the occasion of a staff ride in which Schlieffen himself took no part. All the same, it is highly characteristic of his strategic thinking in later years that now he could not envisage even French strategy except in the form of a double envelopment on a 250-kilometre front, with reinforced wings and a depleted centre. The most surprising feature of his proposal is its complete disregard for international law. "On the first word of mobilisation, before the declaration of war," the French right wing is to advance across the upper Rhine, while the Belgians, and even the Dutch, are to be used as auxiliaries on the left. But since simple "defence" is not enough, and the enemy must be "annihilated" at all costs, the French, no less than the Germans, have no choice (and this is again stressed by von Hahnke's comments) but to stage a *coup Ac main* against their neutral neighbours.⁶ By contemporary standards, the envelopment here proposed was gigantic. But between 1905 and 1912 the strategic plan for the Germans, too, became more and more "gigantic." In the course of the Morocco crises of 1905-6 and 1911, it became clear that in war one would have to count on spirited resistance by the Belgians, as well as intervention by a substantial British expeditionary force. Schlieffen's fear, already expressed in 1905, that the enemy might prevent a German advance across the Meuse between Liege and Namur, or in the area between Namur and Antwerp, increased still further. Belgium was now regarded as the certain ally of France, and her army as the "offensive flank" of the French army. Nor did Schlieffen count any longer on benevolent inaction by Holland. He speaks of the latter as dependent on England's goodwill because of her colonies. She has already made preparations against the Germans outflanking the forts of Liege, and will defend the Meuse line, at least at Maastricht. The French command, meanwhile, has become much more aggressive. Schlieffen assumes the French will not hesitate to march into Belgium, probably accompanied by a British expeditionary force, to block the Meuse crossings between Givet and Liege. He cannot have been acquainted with the great plan for an offensive submitted to the French War Council by General Michel at the beginning of 1911, particularly as it was not accepted. But the French counter-move to the German invasion of Belgium, assumed in his last memorandum of December 1912, corresponds fairly closely with Michel's suggestions. So Schlieffen

⁶ In *Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg*, p. 77 ff., Foerster reproduces the plan almost in its entirety—with admiration and approval.

constructed his new plan on the assumption of the most disadvantageous conditions on Germany's western front.

He completely disregarded only one fact: that Russia had meanwhile recovered from her attack of weakness and built up an enormous army, vastly superior in numbers to the Austrians. This is the more astonishing since the Balkan crises of 1908-9 and 1912 had shown the whole world from which quarter of Europe the next great danger of war was threatening—i.e. the Russian-Austro-Hungarian conflict over the Balkans question. Because of this, Germany's ally would be obliged to employ at least part of her forces against Serbia, thus establishing Russian superiority even more. How much greater was the danger to Germany of a two-front war as a result of all this! But Schlieffen does not mention it. With staggering one-sidedness the octogenarian keeps his spellbound gaze on the Western front.

What is his reaction to the situation which had developed there? Not a hint of defence plans, but schemes of attack, growing more and more daring. Now the attack is to be launched along the whole front simultaneously in order to forestall a French offensive; and all this without maintaining large reserves—for the sake of simplicity, as he puts it, and "to gain the initiative oneself." The obvious question—whether one ought not to count on certain unpredictable points being held by the enemy in much superior strength, against which one would need reserves urgently—is not even asked. This is the more surprising, as the attacking front has now been so far extended as to be capable of outflanking France's "Belgian offensive flank" and its Dutch continuation. The front of the attack is to reach from Belfort to Nijmegen. In order to force the crossing of the Meuse below Liege against Dutch resistance, the whole of the lower Meuse as far as the Waal is to be crossed by several attacking columns together, in expectation of the Dutch Army not being able to defend all the crossing points. But there is also the chance of a British landing in Flanders. To cover the right flank against this and against the Dutch Army, two divisions are to advance westwards, north and south of the Waal, the northern division as far as the waterline Naarden-Utrecht-Gorinchem, the southern as far as the delta of the Scheldt, Meuse and Waal south of Rotterdam. Corresponding to this wide-sweeping movement of the far right wing, the advance of the main army against France is to be directed farther west than in 1905. No longer will it follow the direction Brussels-Lille, but instead go via Ghent to St. Omer and

Abbeville, i.e. close to the sea, with an echeloned covering corps to the right, which will follow the coastline from Dunkirk to Gravelines, Calais and Boulogne.

This represented the full development of the older plan: the enveloping movement of the right wing was now to swing out far beyond Paris up to the coast. To deploy the necessary forces, the operation would involve not merely the southern corner of Holland at Maastricht (as in 1905) but practically the whole country. The German Army was to pour through the whole region of the lower Rhine and its delta, flooding Northern France like a spring tide. But more than that, it was simultaneously to attack the whole French eastern front from Belfort to Verdun—an enterprise whose prospects Schlieffen now seemed to regard as more promising than before. But would the German Army have enough troops to carry through the whole of this enormously enlarged offensive? That is the question Schlieffen asks himself. He thinks he can solve it partly by reorganising the army. He suggests disbanding the old corps of the line and putting twice the number of divisions in their place. These could be strengthened by mixing Active with Reserve troops in such a way that their manpower would be almost equal to that of the old corps of 1870 but with greatly increased fire-power. Furthermore, they would have the advantage of the shorter columns-of-march and better equipment of the former Reserve divisions with artillery. This was a very modern suggestion for improvement, whose basic idea was put into practice during the war. But it could not, of course, achieve an increase in the overall number of troops. And with the repetition of the demand, already made in 1905, that the *Laudweir*, *Ersatz* troops and mobilised *Landsturm* should follow the army into the field at the first opportunity, one's doubts are reawakened, for such a suggestion obviously presupposes only a very short war without setbacks, otherwise it could hardly be justified.

The extent of Schlieffen's uncertainty as to whether there would really be enough troops to inundate and occupy so many areas, and to invest so many fortified positions, is shown by his suggestion that the Germans should resort to terror measures if necessary. In his memorandum of 1905 he expressed the hope that Belgium might discover some advantage in handing over her fortresses voluntarily and refraining from hostilities (Text I, p. 146). Now he simply advocates giving the Belgian Government the choice of "a bombardment of its fortified towns, particularly Liege, as well as a considerable levy—or of handing

over all fortresses, railways and troops." To be able to carry out the bombardment if necessary, and also to force French towns like Lille or Nancy to capitulate quickly, the heavy artillery is to be suitably equipped.

But there was another possible emergency in which the heavy artillery might have to help. As his memorandum of February 1906 shows, Schlieffen had formerly entertained a very low opinion of the fighting power of the British expeditionary force. In the meantime this had been considerably improved by Haldane's army reforms—a development which seems to have left the old Marshal not unimpressed. At any rate, he was now very seriously concerned with the danger that the march through Belgium might encounter severe hindrance from a united Anglo-Belgian army. It might then become necessary (he thinks) to force a break-through with the help of massed heavy artillery at some suitable point—a phrase which, coining from him, is surprising.⁷

The operational plan of 1912 remained without practical effect, although Major von Hahnke handed it to Moltke, the Chief of the General Staff, as a kind of bequest from the nearly octogenarian author (who died almost immediately after completing it). Moltke's rejection is understandable. This new plan added to the daring of the earlier project; above all, it increased the brutality of the action against the Dutch, whom the younger Moltke wanted to leave completely alone, as we know from various remarks of his. But Schlieffen's plan had an even greater weakness, which was finally decisive: he intended to keep no reserve of troops against Russia, in the hope that German victories in France would deter the Russians from entering the war altogether; and this at a time when it was quite certain that Russia, and not France, would start the avalanche the day one of the Balkan quarrels led to armed conflict between the Great Powers. Moltke at once recognised, as his marginal note (Text IV, p. 172) shows, how impossible was Schlieffen's analogy with the years 1866 and 1870, when in one case France, and in the other Russia, had sat on the fence. But it is odd he should have thought that Russia might stay neutral in the event of France and Germany coming into conflict with each

⁷ Focster's reproduction of the memorandum of 1912 (*Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg*, p. 41 ff.) gives the impression that the idea of a break-through was the core of the new plan. The offensive through Holland is suppressed (for the political reason mentioned earlier).

other without the intervention of Austria. The Military Convention of 1892, of which Moltke seems to have had only a hazy idea, stipulated quite the opposite.⁸

We have already discussed the strange political-historical ideas behind Schlieffen's suggestion that Austria should be left initially to her own devices, knowing that her fate would be decided not on the Bug but on the Seine. It was the same conviction which made him leave the German east open to a Russian invasion, and again it was based on a false analogy. "Frederick the Great," he writes, "was ultimately of the opinion that it was better to sacrifice a province than to split up the army with which one seeks, and must achieve, victory." As if the conduct of war and the cabinet politics of that time could be compared with those of today—militarily, economically or politically!

But this dubious sentence confirms once more that the Schlieffen Plan of 1905 was based on strategic principles which had long hardened into rigid doctrine in the mind of its author.

⁸ Article 1 : Si la France est attaquée par l'Allemagne ou par l'Italie soutenue par l'Allemagne, la Russie emploiera toutes ses forces disponibles pour attaquer l'Allemagne. Article 3: Les forces disponibles qui doivent être employées contre l'Allemagne . . . , s'engageront à fond et en toute diligence, de manière que l'Allemagne ait à lutter à la fois à l'Est et à l'Ouest. *Documents Dipl. Franc*, série I, vol. IX, No. 444 et 460 annexe.

II. THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN

i. The breach of neutrality

OUR examination of Schlieffen's various plans has shown that the idea of marching through Luxembourg and Belgium in order to envelop the French line of fortresses on the Moselle and Meuse occupied him from his first weeks as Chief of the General Staff (see above, page 23). The idea took further shape in 1897. A German offensive which sought to wheel round Verdun, he said, "must not shrink from violating the neutrality of Belgium as well as of Luxembourg." (See above, page 41.) The reason was purely strategical, i.e. the narrow field for operations between the Vosges and the Franco-Belgian frontier. In the next memorandum (about 1899) a second reflection was added—that perhaps the enemy might attack by marching his left wing through Belgium and Luxembourg. But even if he did not, an envelopment of his left wing through Luxembourg "and perhaps Belgium also" promised the greatest chance of success for the German attack (see above, p. 42). Both these arguments were now used again and again, but after 1905 in a sharper vein: "If, blindly trusting hi the sanctity of neutrality, we were to attack along the whole front Belfort-Montmedy," he writes in Draft III, "a practical and unscrupulous enemy would soon effectively envelop our right flank through Belgium and Luxembourg. Belgian counter-measures would be too weak or too late to be effective. In a war of aggression against France, the laws of self-defence would make it impossible for Germany to respect Luxembourg and Belgian neutrality. The French are now as convinced of this as we."¹ Only in the memorandum of 1912 does he seek a political justification: "This country (Belgium) is regarded as neutral, but in fact it is not. More than thirty years ago it made Liege and Namur into strong fortresses to prevent Germany from invading its territory, but towards France it left its frontiers

¹ Similarly Draft IV. Danger of the French marching through Belgium already in I. Law of self-defence also in II.

open."² This thought is still absent from the drafts of 1905. Schlieffen must have picked it up from the German Press, which during the second Morocco crisis, in 1911, became somewhat excited over rumours of Franco-Belgian and Anglo-Belgian agreements. But certainly it was not political but military reasons which originally gave him the idea of violating neutrality. He does not seem to have worried unduly about the grave political consequences; certainly less so than about the military effect—the possibility of tenacious Belgian resistance.

He seems a little more disquietened by the necessity of violating Dutch neutrality for the sake of a quick advance on a wide front. Because of the narrow field of advance in Belgium, he writes in the first draft (see Appendix, 1), "it is necessary to violate the neutrality not only of Belgium but also of the Netherlands. But as long as no other expedient can be found, one has to make the best of these difficulties." Draft II repeats this sentence, but crosses out "as long as no other expedient can be found" and adds the (very important) footnote: "Discussed with the Chancellor." At a later point there is the strange sentence, retained in the final form (and received by Moltke with a sceptical note in the margin): "The Netherlands regard England, allied to France, no less as an enemy than does Germany. It will be possible to come to an agreement with them."³ Schlieffen soon divested himself of this illusion, for in 1912 he was convinced of the opposite—that Holland was completely dependent on England.

How about his fear that the French might envelop the German position in Lorraine by marching left through Luxembourg and Belgium? This fear was to be expressed time and again in subsequent German military literature, sometimes by pointing to the great dangers entailed for the Ruhr. Was it justified?

We know that the idea of forcibly raising the Belgian frontier barriers played a great part at the height of the French struggle for hegemony under Napoleon III. After his fall there could be no thought of a French offensive for many decades. But when French chauvinism flared up again under Boulanger in 1887 and there seemed to be an immediate threat of a Franco-German war, European public opinion was not at all certain that Belgian neutrality would be respected by either belligerent, since both had secured their positions on the Lorraine

² See p. 173, below; similarly: plan of 1911, Text vi.

³ According to a story then current in the General Staff this was based on certain anti-British remarks in Dutch military circles.

front by strong fortresses. In England there were uneasy memories of the obligation assumed in 1839, and renewed in 1870 by treaties with France and the North German Bund, to guarantee Belgian neutrality. British diplomacy at first assured Brussels that the obligation would be honoured; but soon it was advising the Belgians not to count on effective British help, for which there were too few military resources, but to try to defend their frontier on their own. At the same time there appeared in the semi-official Press some very strange articles, obviously inspired by the Foreign Office, which can only be regarded as "kites" to sound public opinion on the question of neutrality. They discussed whether, in the event of a German inarch through Belgium into northern France, England could not accept the situation provided Bismarck gave his word not to infringe Belgian sovereignty and only to use a "right of way" through the country. The question was answered in the affirmative. Other newspapers, too, gave warnings against going beyond paper protests—an indication of how much the Liberal England of that day disliked being drawn into Continental quarrels. Furthermore it was clearly noticeable that Lord Salisbury regarded France, not Germany, as the country threatening European peace, and that his sympathies were far more on the German side. The British Government was unable to refute this conclusion when during the war, on August 19th, 1917, the semi-official *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* made the fact public, using Belgian official documents.⁴

This was the time, in 1887, when the German General Staff, too, was discussing the possibility of the French Army being able to out-flank the German position in Lorraine through Belgium. But Count Moltke was not in the least disturbed by this, as one sees from his great strategical plan of 1887: "On the right our position could only be outflanked at any distance by a violation of neutral countries, Luxembourg or Belgium. This would result in an entirely changed military situation which we need not discuss here, but which would obviously develop unfavourably for the French. However poorly one may estimate the military resistance of these countries, the invasion would be weakened by the need to keep watch on their troops and hold their populations in check. The whole operation would come to a standstill on the R.Jiine, while we ourselves would advance in mass

⁴ For details see Schwertfeger, *Der geistige Kampf um die Verletzung der belgischen Neutralität*, i. Aufl., 1919, pp. 104 ff., 164 ff., also G. P. Gooch, *History of Modern Europe 1878-1919* (1923), P- 134 f-

from the south. It, incidentally, anything could spur England into action, it would be the occupation of Belgium by the French Army. For all these reasons, the whole enterprise seems highly unlikely."⁵ This fitted in with the declaration Bismarck had caused to be published in the semi-official *Post*: the British reflections were not only premature but also groundless. Germany would never open a war with the violation of a European treaty. If one supposed that the German General Staff was bound to contemplate a break-through ha Belgium, it had to be pointed out that this far from exhausted the ingenuity of the German General Staff. It was furthermore an error to suppose that the conduct of German policy was subject to the views of the General Staff.⁶

Bismarck, then, resolutely refused to open a war with a violation of international law, even if British public opinion were prepared to reconcile itself to this. Moltke thought a French enveloping march through Belgium was as unlikely as it was harmless, and never even considered the possibility of a German advance in the opposite direction. This in spite of the fact that European military literature had long been discussing it; that in 1882 the French General Sere de Rivieres had declared an invasion through Belgium to be the natural line of advance from the German standpoint; and that the French General Staff had since ordered certain counter-measures such as fortifications on their northern front from Hirson to Dunkirk.⁷ Nor was there in the 'nineties any lack of French military authors who made light of Belgian neutrality, saying it should not be regarded as a serious obstacle to the great Franco-German duel.⁸ Gradually it became a commonplace of European military literature that Belgium offered the natural means of passage for such a duel, and the British General Staff seems to have taken the most matter-of-fact view of all.

General Robertson records that he discussed with his Government as early as 1902 what was to happen in the event of the Germans feeling obliged to march through Belgium in their attack on France. Salisbury refused, as he had done in 1887, to commit the British attitude in advance. Three years later a conference of the British General Staff at Cambrley discussed the problems of a Franco-German war. A war

⁵ Graf Moltke, *Die deutschen Aufmarschpläne 1871 bis 1914*, ed. Schmerfeld, 1929, p. 125.

⁶ Schwertfeger, *ibid.*, p. 112.

⁷ W. Foerster, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 106 f.

* Cf. the account of the Belgian Chief of Staff, Ducarne, in 1900: Schwertfeger, *ibid.*, p. 64 f.

game was ordered which presupposed a German march through Belgium (on a very large scale). This happened in January 1905, i.e. before the outbreak of the Morocco crisis and long before the working out of the great Schlieffen Plan, doubtless without detailed knowledge of the German plans in the event of war, and simply on the basis of general strategical considerations. The war game was held in March-April. General Robertson (later to be Chief of the General Staff in the war) commanded the "German" side. He, too, advanced his forces north of the Meuse and Sambre, and came to the shattering conclusion that France by herself would be incapable of holding off such an advance. This technical conclusion became the cast-iron basis for all future plans of the British General Staff, which had in fact become very anti-German since the Boer war. All agreements between the British and French military from 1905 to 1914 about the dispatch of a British expeditionary force to the Continent were based on the firm conviction that France would be lost if Britain did not come to her aid.⁹ If our critical analysis of the Schlieffen Plan has been correct, it must be concluded that the British vastly overrated the danger to France. And if so, this was historically a catastrophic error.

One can see that just as Schlieffen imagined Germany's "practical and unscrupulous enemies" to be capable of violating Luxembourg and Belgian neutrality, so the British General Staff was convinced that the Germans were capable of violating all international laws. Alas, one must concede that in this case the British mistrust was more justified. We have already seen (I, 2) that up to 1906 there was no French operational plan designed for anything more than pure defence. Nor did the Morocco crisis of 1905 and all that had meanwhile transpired about German invasion plans through Belgium change the purely defensive character of the measures taken by the French General Staff. How far French fears of a German march through Belgium and Luxembourg were increased by the British in the strategical discussions

⁹ The above, and the arguments that follow, are based on a study of the part of the Belgian and French General Staffs in the prehistory of the Great War, which I have completed in manuscript together with further studies of the French and British military system. I intend to publish these within the framework of Vol. II of my book *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk*. Bibliographies of the literature used may be found in the following: P. Kluge, *Heeresaufbau und Heerespolitik Englands vom Burenkrieg bis zum Weltkrieg* (1932); C. Hossé, *Die englisch-belgischen Aufmarschpläne gegen Deutschland vor dem Weltkrieg* (1930); also in the dissertation (suggested by me) by J. Hanebuth, *Beiträge zur Entwicklung der Rolle der belgischen Neutralität in der französischen Aussenpolitik 1900 bis 1914*, Güttingen, 1947 (typescript).

which began between the two General Staffs in January 1906 it is difficult to say. In any case, a plan was now developed for the first time for a counter-attack on Belgian soil, at the special instigation of the British. They established contact with the Chief of the Belgian General Staff, Ducarne, and succeeded in reaching a detailed agreement about how and where a British expeditionary force was to come to Belgium's aid. This would be either by covering Antwerp or by blocking the Meuse crossings above Liege immediately the Germans set foot on Belgian soil. In the latter case, the British would probably have formed a kind of extension of the French left wing, but with operational independence.

Later these arrangements were cited on the German side as evidence that the Belgians had compromised their position as neutrals, and they were used as a political justification of the German invasion. It can hardly be disputed that they were incompatible with a strict view of a neutral's obligations under international law, since they meant favouring one of the belligerent parties—a favouritism which extended to giving the British complete insight into Belgian plans for mobilisation and deployment. However, the weight of the accusation is much reduced by the fact that the Belgian agreement sprang not from political caprice but from a very real need to seek help from one of the guaranteeing Powers against a very real and serious threat to Belgian neutrality. Again, this threat came unilaterally from Germany, not from France. Finally, it was not due to any fault of Belgium's but to a quarrel among the former guaranteeing Powers that Belgian neutrality became more and more of a fiction.

Furthermore, in making the agreements of 1906, the Belgian Government and General Staff had no intention of moving politically into the camp of the Western Powers. They had accepted the British offer of help, which came as a surprise, in face of the seemingly imminent danger of German invasion; but from the beginning they remained sceptical about the practical value of British promises and British military efficiency. With the peaceful conclusion of the conference of Algeciras, the Belgians became very chary of further overtures and attempts at reconnaissance by the Anglo-French; later these were entirely rejected. Obviously it was felt in Brussels that with the growth of French military strength and the recuperation of Russia, the French General Staff was gathering confidence, and with it the inclination for an offensive of its own. This aroused the suspicion

that in the event of war Belgium might have to count on an invasion from France as well. It was Ducarne who in the last years before the war started a lively and successful agitation for an increase in Belgian army strength, with the object of equipping Belgium to defend her frontiers with her own forces instead of being dependent on foreign Powers. And the Belgian General Staff in fact prepared defence plans in both directions.

After all this, Schlieffen's accusation (in the memorandum of 1912) that the Belgians had long ago surrendered their neutrality can only be dismissed as unjust.¹⁰ But did the French plan a march through Belgium after 1906?

As a matter of fact, the French General Staff did move, in the last years before the war, from the pure defensive to ideas of an offensive—not without obvious influence from German military theories. Another influence, of course, was increased self-confidence resulting from assurances of British and Russian help and from the great increases in French army strength and military reforms of the last pre-war decade. Added to this, there seem to have been the spurtings of the British General Staff, which was apparently more convinced than the French that the Germans would launch an offensive through Belgium, and wanted to stop this in time by a counter-attack. In February 1911 General Michel, vice-president of the Supreme War Council, submitted to the War Minister a strategic plan in accord with the ideas of General Wilson, Director of Military Operations on the British General Staff.¹¹ Both saw quite clearly that the Germans would not be content to march through the south-eastern corner of Belgium south of the Meuse and Sambre, but would use the whole country as a theatre of war. To counter this they decided that the bulk of the French Army would have to be assembled on the French northern frontier between Dunkirk and Montmédy ready to launch an immediate counter-offensive into Belgium, while the defence of the eastern frontier would have to be left to the covering troops stationed there.

¹⁰ One would be more justified in accusing the British military of levity towards Dutch neutrality, since their plan to make Antwerp the base of the British Expeditionary Force disregarded Dutch sovereignty over the Lower Scheldt. Cf. *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, HI, p. 195 (No. 221, C7). Only paper protests were expected. When in 1911 the Dutch seemed to be on the point of reinforcing the barrier forts of Vlissingen there was great consternation in England and France, and also in pro-British Belgian circles. Cf. van der Elst in: *Revue tie Paris*, XXX, 2, 1923, p. 521 ff.

¹¹ *Les Armées françaises dans la Grande Guerre*, 1.1, 2nd éd., 1936, p. 37 ff. and Annexe 3-4.

Of all the plans thought out in Paris, General Michel's alone foresaw the whole boldness of the Schlieffen Plan. Yet it was shelved (on July 19th, 1911) without a discussion, because it required a re-organisation of French army formations, reminiscent of Schlieffen's scheme of 1912 with its mixture of Active and Reserve formations. This was regarded by the Supreme War Council as impracticable. General Michel, who had been *Général en Chef* designate, lost the vice-presidency of the Council, and Joffre became Commander-in-Chief in his place.

But Joffre, too, favoured the principle of an offensive—except that his aims were much more modest. It seems that the French General Staff shared the view of General de Castelnau, who remarked in 1912 that an eccentric movement like a deep advance of large German armies from Malmédy to Lille and their deployment as an offensive front towards the south would be so hazardous that one could not imagine the German General Staff capable of such imprudence.¹² All that was expected was a German break-through in Belgium south of the Meuse and Sambre. Joffre was particularly anxious to occupy the sector of the Meuse between Givet and Namur in good time, and we already know how much the success of this advance depended on getting there before the Germans had crossed the Meuse. On several occasions, therefore, Joffre asked for freedom to advance into Belgium without having to wait for the German invasion to become a fact. But in this decisive matter one can observe the difference in structure between the French Republic and Imperial Germany. In the latter there were no formal discussions whatever between political and military departments about the General Staff's campaign plans, while in Paris care was taken to see that such questions could not be decided by the military alone. The Prime Minister was chairman of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale*, in which he was supported by the most important departmental ministers, while the Chief of the General Staff took part only in an advisory capacity. Even the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*, technically the supreme army command, was

¹² Quoted from Foerster, *Gedankenwerkstatt*, p. 130. According to General Percin, 1914, *Les erreurs du Haut Commandement* (1920), p. 8, the French General Staff considered it impossible for the Germans to man such a long front line with sufficient forces; to do it they would have to use a million reservists in the first line, and this was regarded as out of the question. Percin's book is full of bitterness over the fall of General Michel. The latter's report of November 10th, 1911, is reproduced on p. 42 ff. (also in *Les Armées françaises* as annexe 3). in connection with Michel's questioning before a committee.

dependent on any of the Great Powers and in its determination to defend its freedom to the limit of its resources. Borne along on a strong current of nationalist feeling, it became a matter of pride and honour. The spying activities of English and French officers in Belgium after 1906 created only general annoyance. During the last years of peace, Belgium's rearmament reached such a pitch that with her three army corps she was quite a considerable power. But it was certainly not fear of driving this force into the arms of the Germans by a premature invasion which prompted Grey; his decision was due to exclusively political considerations. England must not lose the enormous advantage of being able to enter a war in the role of selfless guardian of European treaties. Ultimately this was not for moral reasons, but for sober reasons of state, sober consideration of Britain's own interest. After all, it was not a question of helping Belgium and her claim to neutrality, but of saving France—as was shown by the integration of the British expeditionary force into the French front line in 1911. A second object may have been to guard the Belgian coast against German occupation, in the interest of the British Navy. But if these were not moral impulses, at least they were still a victory of political reasoning over the wishes of "unscrupulous" strategists. And that meant a great deal. In any other way, Grey could hardly have carried his people into the war. German politics, on the other hand, now laid itself open to the accusation of the whole world that it was governed and directed by "unscrupulous" militarists—an accusation which has since lain on Germany like a curse and became her doom not only at Versailles but also, even more, at the conferences of Moscow, Teheran and Yalta in 1944-5, when the terrible deeds of Adolf Hitler seemed subsequently to have justified it.

Seen in the light of these latter-day events, the Schlieffen Plan appears to be nothing less than the beginning of Germany's and Europe's misfortunes. The often-made speculation that England would have entered the war even without the Schlieffen Plan and the German invasion of Belgium makes no difference. It is true that the British Empire would not have stood by and watched Germany crush France, whose survival was vital to its interest in maintaining the balance of power on the Continent. That is why Grey answered Prince Lichnowsky evasively when he asked him on August 1st, 1914 (incidentally without authority from Berlin) whether the British Government would undertake to stay neutral if Germany refrained from marching

through Belgium. Yet it seems certain that such an act of German restraint would have made it impossible, at least in the beginning, for Grey to rouse the British nation to war and send British troops into Lorraine, there to help the French beat the Germans, who, following Moltke's formula, were staying on the defensive,¹⁷ while their best troops fought to save Austria-Hungary from annihilation. The attitude of the French, too, would have been different if, for the sake of the treaty with Russia or the conquest of Alsace-Lorraine, they had been obliged to start the war with a murderous offensive, instead of defending French soil against a German invasion. In the debate on German war guilt it has often been asked whether the English would have been prepared to defend Belgium against a French invasion. Certainly they would not have done so at Germany's side, thus enabling her to conquer France. But if the French invasion had taken place, they might very well have withdrawn into a passive attitude and confined themselves to paper protests, as they had announced their intention of doing in 1887 in the event of a German invasion of France to suppress Boulangism.¹⁸ With that the British Army would have been eliminated, and the Belgian Army would have fought on Germany's side. But it is unnecessary to go into all this, because it is most unlikely that the French would have dared, against England's express will, to invade Belgium and thus incur the indignation of the whole world.

When the long-expected crisis broke in July 1914, Germany had prepared nothing diplomatically, not even the ultimatum to Belgium.¹⁹ She had nothing but a plan for a military offensive, whose rigid timetable robbed her diplomacy of all freedom of manoeuvre. Otto von Moser, in his shrewd book *Plaudereien über den Weltkrieg*, suggests that diplomacy should have prepared the ground for the German invasion by offering to refrain from it if the English would renew the treaties of neutrality of 1870, that is to say, would guarantee that France, too, would respect the neutrality of Belgium. If England had declined, Germany's advance through Belgium would have been morally

¹⁷ Moltke, jun., writing in November 1914, doubted this too. England, he thought, would probably only have "intervened when the danger became apparent that France was about to be overpowered by us." *Erinnerungen, Briefe, Dokumente* (1922), p. 10.

¹⁸ A possible indication seems to be Sir Charles Hardinge's note (and Grey's agreement with it) on a memorandum by Crowe of November 15th, 1908: *British Documents*, VIII, No. 311.

¹⁹ Moltke drafted it himself, offering Belgium conquests in exchange for her remaining passive—a passage which Bethmann fortunately suppressed at once. Moltke, *ibid.*, p. 17.

justified before the world.²⁰ Against this it might be argued that the English would possibly, or even probably, have agreed to the German suggestion. Well, in that case Germany would have had to reject the Schlieffen Plan and there would have remained only the defence of the Lorraine front, or at the most a gigantic attempt at a breakthrough, which Moser thinks would not have been altogether hopeless if it had been well enough prepared beforehand. As our exposition has shown, this defence would have been a return to the plans of the elder Moltke.

Of course, it is always a dubious business trying to construct afterwards what might have happened but in fact never did. But without trying to work out such possibilities, there could be no political-historical criticism. In any case, one thing emerges. Even if the German invasion of Belgium offered great initial military advantages, it was a most unhappy solution politically.

It is particularly tragic that by refusing to violate Dutch neutrality and making provision for the *coup de main* on Liege instead, the younger Moltke should have aggravated the political situation even further. If his *coup de main* was to succeed at all, it had to be set in motion immediately after the declaration of a state of war. Consequently the pressure of time on the statesmen who were making political decisions at the end of July 1914 was much increased. It is well known that it was due to this pressure of time, to the uncanny precipitancy of mobilisations, deployments and declarations of war, that all efforts at a political settlement of the Serbo-Austrian crisis came too late. The outbreak of the war in 1914 is the most tragic example of a government's helpless dependence on the planning of strategists that history has ever seen.

In allowing themselves to be drawn into this state of dependence, in regarding the planning of war as unreservedly the affair of military specialists, lies the historical guilt of Bismarck's successors. Plans of aggression, to say nothing of conquest, were, as everybody knows today, entirely foreign to them; nor could anybody reproach Bethmann-Hollweg with having conducted his foreign policy with any kind of frivolity. On the contrary, he was almost crushed by his heavy responsibilities and the difficulties which were mounting on all sides against his policy of peace and mediation. And yet, like his predecessor, he was unfaithful to the attitude of Bismarck, who had

²⁰ *Ernsthafte Plaudereien über den Weltkrieg* (1925), p. 36 f.

let it be known in 1887 that it was an error to suppose that the conduct of German policy was subject to the views of the General Staff.

There can be no doubt that the Chief of the General Staff kept the Government informed from the beginning of his plan to march through Belgium in case of war—of course, only confidentially, without there remaining a trace in the documents of the Foreign Ministry,²¹ for it was, after all, a military secret of the first order. But this did not preclude confidential discussions between the Chief of the General Staff and the Chancellor. The first of these discussions seems to have taken place shortly after the completion of that third strategic plan for the Western front, in which Schlieffen committed himself for the first time to violating Belgian neutrality. Count Hutten-Czapski, who at the time played the role of confidential adviser and "private secretary" to Prince Hohenlohe, records that in May 1900 the Chief of the General Staff asked him to come and see him. He then asked Count Hutten if he would agree to sound Holstein and the Chancellor confidentially on the following matter: "After long and conscientious reflection he had become convinced that in the event of a two-front war, success might possibly depend on Germany's not allowing international agreements to restrain her strategic operations. It would mean a great deal to him if Holstein could give him his personal point of view." The whole conversation lasted only a few minutes. The name of the country to which Schlieffen referred was never mentioned, but Count Hutten immediately thought of Belgium.²²

He first reported this conversation to his friend Holstein, who fell to lengthy brooding, but finally declared that "if the Chief of the Great General Staff, and particularly a strategic authority like Schlieffen, thought such a measure to be necessary, then it would be the duty of diplomacy to adjust itself to it and prepare for it in every possible way." Count Hutten claims to have been of a different opinion—that it was a momentous decision which would need careful thought. Fundamentally he was against any violation of neutrality without the permission of the states involved, because the consequences could not be predicted. Both gentlemen expressed their views next morning to Prince Hohenlohe, who likewise became thoughtful, but said no more. Hutten told Schlieffen about the audience and the opinions which had

²¹ See the story of the request to Bülow by the Reichsarchiv and its sequel (p. 92 and footnote 23, below).

²² Graf Hutten-Czapski, *60 Jahre Politik und Gesellschaft* (1936), p. 371 ff.

been expressed. He, too, remained silent "and seemed content." But the intermediary soon afterwards arranged a social gathering in Iiis house at which the Chancellor and the Chief of the General Staff were present. To his satisfaction, the two gentlemen withdrew after dinner into an adjoining room for a long and lively conversation, probably on the question of Belgian neutrality.

If this assumption is true, it must be said that from the political standpoint Schlieffen acted correctly and gave Hohenlohe an early opportunity to object to his politically dangerous plan. Count Hutten-Czapski was not informed of Hohenlohe's attitude, but one may assume that it was not very different from Holstein's. In any case, it did not hold up the further development of the Schlieffen Plan. The same applies to Hohenlohe's successor, Count Biilow.

Biilow, in fact, tried to lay a kind of smoke-screen over Iiis attitude. In the spring of 1920 he was asked by the *Reichsarchiv* whether he had known of the plan to march through Belgium, and if so, since when. First he had researches made in the political archives of the Foreign Ministry; then, after much hesitation, he said he seemed to remember learning about it by word of mouth.²³ In a conversation with the writer Eugen Zimmermann, published in March 1921 in the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*,²⁴ he tried to clear himself of any share of responsibility for the violation of neutrality: "At the threat of war I would have insisted on a full discussion of the situation and the necessary measures. I would not have made a declaration of war, but waited for the enemy's. . . . Perhaps I would have allowed myself to be convinced of the military expediency of a march through Belgium, which Clausewitz had already indicated a hundred years before, but certainly not until the enemy had invaded first, or the Belgian attitude had been proved to be hostile. I would certainly not have talked before the assembled *Reichstag* about a wrong done to Belgium. . . ." But this was mere hypocrisy. That Schlieffen discussed with him his plan to violate Belgian neutrality cannot be doubted. He says so in his footnote to Draft II,²⁵ and Biilow, in his *Denkwürdigkeiten*

²³On July 6th, 1920, Biilow received a reply from State-Secretary Haniel that between 1890 and 1914 the documents contained nothing about a written consultation on this question between the General Staff and the Foreign Ministry. (Biilow, *ibid.*, p. 79, and confirmed to me by Professor Foerster.) Nor did the Chief of Staff's secret journal, which I saw in 1943, contain anything on this matter. The same question was put by the *Reichsarchiv* to Bethmann-Hollweg and the former State-Secretary von Jagow.

24p. 381.

²⁵ See above, p. 79. It is unlikely that he referred to Hohenlohe.

published in 1930, suddenly developed a much better memory than before. He there reports in detail a conversation with Graf Schlieffen about his operational plans, in "1904 or 1905." Biilow says he accepted the latter's idea of marching through Belgium without surprise, and immediately supported it by a quotation from Clausewitz (which already cropped up in the conversation with Zimmermann). But now he poses as a wise statesman and true heir of Bismarck. "For weighty political reasons," he claims to have said, "we should only take this action if and when Belgian neutrality has first been violated by our enemies." In support of this, he recalled the events of 1887-8 and Bismarck's article in the *Post*—events which had impressed him deeply, being a young diplomat at the time (and which, we may add, had been published anew in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1917 and were thus conveniently to hand when he wrote his memoirs). "Graf Alfred Schlieffen," Biilow continues, "rotated his eyeglass several times, as was his habit, and then said: 'Of course! It still holds good today. We have not become more stupid in the meantime.' Schlieffen added, however, that he tended to the view that Holland in case of war would see in us her natural ally against England. As for Belgium, she would hardly oppose a German invasion by force of arms, but would content herself with a protest. Furthermore he (Schlieffen) was of the opinion that, in the event of a large-scale war, the French, and possibly the English, would invade Belgium immediately. This would give us a free hand."

It is not easy to know what to make of this account. The illusions which Biilow puts into Schlieffen's mouth can only be found partially in his memoranda. Would the general have tried in this way to justify himself in front of the politician? Surely the whole thing is tendentiously coloured. Biilow here shows himself in the pose of the wise statesman in order to throw a correspondingly darker shadow on Wilhelm II, of whom he has just told the story of an outrageous piece of folly. In January 1904 (says Biilow) the Kaiser invited the King of the Belgians to Berlin and conjured up the *fata Morgana* of great conquests of old Burgundian territory in France, which Belgium and Germany were to make together—all in an effort to win him over to a close alliance. When he met with a shocked refusal, the Kaiser made brutal threats to the effect that he would violate Belgian neutrality in the next war.

The Belgian diplomat Baron van der Elst, who tells the same story as related to him by King Albert, knows nothing of these brutal

threats, only of an ominous-sounding alternative: "For us or against us!" So Billow must have exaggerated a Little (or perhaps the Kaiser already did so himself). But this does nothing to alter the hair-raising impression of the Kaiser's reaction to Schlieffen's campaign plans. It shows a political imagination which seems never to have outgrown boyish immaturity. Unfortunately the same is true of a long telegram which Wilhelm II sent soon afterwards to the Chancellor, in which he paints his picture of how to conduct war with England. He suggests occupying Belgium at once as a "pledge" and then handing it over to France for her annexation, thereby buying French neutrality.²⁶

But how did Billow react to the Kaiser's inspiration? "What your Majesty says about Belgium hits the nail on the head. Everything depends on the Belgians having no idea that in case of war we are going to confront them with such an *ant. . . aut* (for us or against us). Otherwise they might put all their money into building fortifications against us, and drop a hint to the French to make plans to cope with this eventuality." Actually he had long before suggested, in a letter to Holstein in December 1904, that in case of war with England the neutral countries of Belgium, Holland and Denmark should at once be occupied as a "pledge" and a spring-board for military operations.²⁷

No, Billow was certainly not the statesman whose wisdom and strength of character would exorcise the dangers implicit in the Schlieffen Plan. He claims to have discussed them occasionally with the younger Moltke, so one may assume that he left the Schlieffen Plan to his successor as an inheritance long recognised by the political leadership—an inheritance which could not now be disowned. Bethmann-Hollweg answered the question of the *Reichsarchiv* immediately (as did State Secretary von Jagow) to the effect that he had known of the intended violation of neutrality "long before the war"—but nothing of the details of the Schlieffen Plan and certainly nothing of Moltke's modifications.²⁸ The march through Belgium was also

²⁶ *Grosse Politik*, XIX (2), No. 6229, July 30th, 1905. The passage has obviously nothing to do with the Schlieffen Plan. Billow, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, II, pp. 72 ff, 76 ff. In the first of the two passages, Billow refers to notes made at the time. Report by van der Eist: *Revue de Paris*, XXX, 2, 1923, p. 530 f.

²⁷ Thimme: *Front wider Billow* (1931), p. 206.

²⁸ Letter to Zimmermann, *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, 18,1, p. 382. In his sensational essay "Der Krieg in der Gegenwart" (*Deutsche Revue*, January 1909, *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, p. 19), Schlieffen hinted rather imprudently at German plans for marching through Belgium (treating them as self-evident and generally expected); this led to awkward

discussed in the Moltke-Ludendorff rearmament memorandum of December 21st, 1912, which has the distinction of being the first document to dare draw the full conclusions from the Schlieffen Plan.²⁹ It is difficult to understand why the General Staff held back so long with their great demands for rearmament. Even odder at first sight is the fact that the Chancellor did not insist at once on consultation between military and political departments to find out if there were not an alternative war plan to Schlieffen's, which was bound to have such disastrous political consequences.

However, anyone who knows the jealous sectionalism of the administrative departments in the Wilhelminian empire, the gulf between Civil and Military, the overpowering influence of the military camp on the Kaiser, the "dashing" tone fashionable in the treatment of foreign affairs, the difficult position of the Chancellor wedged in between *Reichstag* and *Bundesrat*, Prussian Ministry of State and Prussian Diet, Military and Civil Cabinet, Naval Board and General Staff, and finally his helpless dependence on the favour of the sovereign without the backing of a political cabinet—anyone

diplomatic inquiries from Brussels. Cf. Biilow, *ibid.*, II, p. 78. According to Buchfink, *Köpfe der alten Armee* (unpublished) there were further diplomatic awkwardnesses. In an interview with the correspondent of the *Petit Parisien* (which was also printed by *Der Tag*), Schlieffen was obliged to tone down a number of his statements, particularly in the military-political field, or even to take them back.

²⁹ Reproduced in: Reichsarchiv, *Kriegsrüstung und Kriegswirtschaft*, I, Anlageband, Anlage 54, p. 158 ff; Ludendorff, *Französische Fälschung meiner Denkschrift*, 1919, and *Mein politischer Werdegang* (1933), p. 182 ff. Ludendorff States that the first draft was written by him, "re-written" by Moltke, and lastly brought into its final form by both of them together. The plan to march through Belgium is treated here as still being Most Secret, and the Chancellor and War Minister are asked to treat it as such. Could Bethmann-Hollweg have had no *official* information about this intention before that? When in 1911 Baron van der Eist asked Bethmann-Hollweg through the German Ambassador in Paris (Schön) and the Minister in Brussels (von Flotow) for a formal declaration that Germany would not violate Belgian neutrality in case of war, Bethmann said that Germany had no intention of violating Belgium's neutrality, but she could not make an official declaration because the French would then denude their northern front and reinforce their eastern front (van der Eist, *ibid.*, p. 527). If Bethmann-Hollweg really gave this answer, it was a very clever manœuvre agreed upon with Moltke, because he indicated as militarily undesirable the very thing which Germany most wanted. According to the same authority, who refers to a report in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, State Secretary von Jagow answered Social-Democrat questions in the budget committee of the Reichstag by declaring that Belgium's neutrality was safeguarded by international treaties. The Social-Democrat Ledebour censured this reticence in an open session of the Reichstag on June 12th, 1913 (*Stenographische Berichte*, XIII. Legislaturperiode, CCXC, Sp. 5491 D).

who knows all this³⁰ would, on the contrary, be rather surprised if the Chancellor had been capable, indeed had even thought, of controlling the operational plans of the General Staff through civilian departments. Bethmann-Hollweg's position was such that even after the lost war he had to defend himself against the accusations of the military that he had interfered without authority in military affairs. "In drawing up the plan of campaign," he says in his posthumous *Betrachtungen zum Weltkrieg* (Vol. II, page 7), "the political leadership had no share. Nor had it any in the changes to which Schlieffen's plan was subjected some time after the outbreak of war, or in the departures from the modified plan when it came to be executed in practice. During my whole term of office there was never any kind of council of war in which politicians intervened in the pros and cons of the military debate."

Much had changed since Clausewitz could write (*On War*, Book VIII, VI B): "It is an inadmissible and even harmful distinction to leave a great military enterprise or its planning to a 'purely military' judgment; more, it is absurd to consult professional soldiers on a plan for a war in order that they may judge from a 'purely military' standpoint what cabinets are to do. But it is even more absurd when theorists demand that the available means of war should be laid before the general as a basis on which to draw up a military plan for a war or campaign."

2. Schlieffen, Holstein and the Morocco crisis of 1905-6

We have called Schlieffen's great campaign plan of 1905 the beginning of Germany's misfortunes, because as the basis of operational plans in 1914 it robbed her policy of freedom of manoeuvre and forced her to assume the role of aggressor in the eyes of the world. But everyone knows that the world's accusation against the German General Staff went much further. It was accused of having constantly planned wars of conquest and having forced the German Government into the war of 1914. This accusation forms the basis of article 160 of the Treaty of Versailles: "The German Great General Staff and all similar bodies will be dissolved and may not be established again in any form." With this it was thought to stop up the main source of German "militarism," which in the view of the victorious Powers was constantly threatening world peace.

³⁰ Documentary research into the difficult position of Bismarck's successors has hardly begun. On the basis of researches by my students and myself, I will deal with this question in the second volume of *Staatskinst und Kriegshandwerk*.

But this conception had yet further consequences. During the Second World War it frustrated every effort of German patriots to find political help abroad, particularly in England, for a revolt against Hitler by German General Staff officers and army commanders under the former Chief of the General Staff, Ludwig Beck. Time and again these efforts met with the gravest suspicion. Across the Channel it was difficult to credit an enterprise by General Staff officers and members of the Prussian Junker caste with anything but reactionary and imperialist aims.¹ Indeed, when the heads of the great alliance met for the first time in Teheran, Stalin declared it necessary to shoot about 50,000 German General Staff officers and other military specialists; Churchill, who protested against this vigorously, nevertheless thought that about 150 main culprits among the General Staff would have to be executed. Finally, the Public Prosecutor at Nuremberg declared the German General Staff to be simply a criminal organisation, and it required great efforts to quash this general indictment.

We must remember these facts when, at the end of our discussion, we turn to the question whether Schlieffen's operational plan of 1905 might be understood, as a German historian supposed not long ago,² as a plan for a preventive war, i.e. an aggressive war against France, which the Chief of the General Staff had agreed on with Baron Holstein, the leading brain of the Foreign Ministry. According to this interpretation, Holstein intended to blow up the threatening ring of a political "encirclement," and Schlieffen's intention was to prove to his friend Holstein that an aggressive war would have a good chance of success.

Our discussion up to now has already shown that the *origin* of the Schlieffen Plan cannot be found in political considerations, but exclusively in military-technical ones; that it was not the Morocco crisis of 1905 which brought it to maturity, but strategical studies and the lessons of staff rides going back into the 'nineties. But it could have been that the strategist, inspired with the grandeur of his own conception and deeply convinced that Germany's position made a "settlement of accounts" with France inevitable, not only had an earnest desire to put his plans into operation himself but moreover used his personal connections with the Foreign Ministry to urge its leading

¹ Cf. my book, *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung*, 3. Aufl., 1956.

² Peter Rasso, "Schlieffen und Holstein" in: *Historische Zeitschrift*, 173, 1952, pp. 297-313.

figures to strike before the passing of the uniquely favourable international situation due to Russia's paralysis by defeat and revolution. In that case we should here have our first instance of a "militarist," warmongering influence being exerted by the General Staff on German policy. Whether this was really at work is thus a question which needs careful and unprejudiced examination.

In order not to conduct it within too narrow a framework, we will first cast a glance at the personality of Graf Schlieffen and the world of political ideas in which he lived.

Everything recorded of his life points to an exceptionally zealous officer, highly gifted from the military point of view but not richly endowed as a human being.³ He had not been a pupil of the Cadet Schools, but received a grammar school education to prepare him for the study of law. However, after his service as a one-year volunteer he embarked on a military career, pursuing it with a single-mindedness which distinguished him markedly from the two Moltkes. He possessed little of their liberal education. His austerity of character was perhaps accentuated by the loss, after only four years of marriage, of his wife, whom he had not been able to marry until 1868, when he was thirty-five. In the ensuing loneliness he threw himself into his duties with redoubled energy. As commanding officer of the 1st *Garde Ulanen* he was famous for his zeal which extended to the smallest details of day-to-day routine (including the inspection of stables at four in the morning)—but also, more than tradition demanded, to the welfare of his men. To judge from his own remarks, he accepted the high office of Chief of the General Staff in 1891 without overrating himself, regarding it as a hard task and trying to fulfil it with unsparing diligence. His colleague, Freytag-Loringhoven, was probably exaggerating when he drew a picture of Schlieffen's long working day, starting at six in the morning, extending throughout the evening, often

³ The biography by Hugo Rochs, *Schlieffen. Ein Lebens- und Charakterbild für das deutsche Volk* (published shortly after the Great War, 5. Aufl., 1940), is written by Schlieffen's doctor and personal friend and based partly on family papers and family legends. The book is quite uncritical, politically naïve and coloured with pan-Germanism: unreliable in detail. The essay by Frh. von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Generalfeldmarschall Graf Schlieffen* (1920), offers much that is of interest as a result of his personal and official contact. The same applies to the short chapter on Schlieffen in the memoirs of General E. von Eisenhart-Rothe, *Im Banne der Persönlichkeit* (1931). W. Elze's lecture "Graf Schlieffen" (see footnote ¹⁰, p. 51, above), offers a fine character study, perhaps over-emphasising the "intellectual" element. Less useful is the highly journalistic book by E. Bircher and W. Bode, *Schlieffen: Mann und Werk* (1937).

until midnight, finally prolonged until 2 a.m. by reading military history to his daughters. But there is ample evidence that he made almost superhuman demands on his own energies and those of his aides-de-camp and staff officers. During his only war—the fighting in South-West Africa—he is said often to have worked with his officers until three in the morning. He used to listen to reports with his eyes closed, receiving them critically, rarely, if ever, encouraging those who made them with a kind word. So the taciturn, sarcastically inclined Chief was surrounded by an atmosphere of timid admiration and worship, but not of human confidence. Perhaps the most characteristic picture of him is that given by his most faithful admirer and most gifted pupil, H. von Kuhl: "He lived exclusively for his work and Iiis great tasks. I remember how we once travelled through the night from Berlin to Insterburg, where the great staff ride was to begin. General Schlieffen travelled with his aide-de-camp. In the morning the train left Königsberg and entered the Pregel valley, which was basking prettily in the rays of the rising sun. Up to then not a word had been spoken on the journey. Daringly the A.D.C. tried to open a conversation and pointed to the pleasant scene. 'An insignificant obstacle,' said the Graf—and conversational demands until Insterburg were therewith met." "For several years the bell of my flat would ring on Christmas Eve. A courier would bring Iiis Christmas present, a great military situation designed by him for the set task of working out an operational plan. He would have been very surprised if the solution had not been in his hands on the evening of Christmas Day. Next day the continuation of the situation would arrive with further tasks. Sundays and holidays were, in his view, intended for those greater tasks which required quiet and continuous work, undisturbed by day-to-day business."⁴

It is not surprising that a man of such spartan professional zeal had little time or interest for anything but military matters—and not much for political problems. As a Potsdam *Gardeulan* Schlieffen had been educated in a monarchist attitude which made him a mere courtier so far as the Kaiser was concerned—and this became apparent not only in the Kaiser Manoeuvres.⁵ What Schlieffen has to offer in his writings

⁴ H. von Kuhl, *ibid.*, p. 132 f.

⁵ Cf. his farewell toast to Wilhelm II (*Gesammelte Werke*, II, 457 f.) which is almost insufferable to the republican sentiment of today; the subsequent toast by Moltke makes a pleasant contrast. Cf. also the account by the Minister of War, von Einem, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten* (1933), p. 95, of how Schlieffen reproached him for openly attacking pet ideas of Wilhelm II (of which Schlieffen did not approve himself) regarding fortress construction.

in the way of historical-political reflections does not rise above the general level of militant nationalism then fashionable in officer circles. He sees Bismarck as "the diplomat of blood and iron, who used his sword to cut the tangles of politics on the battlefield. The herald in battle, the mighty warrior, whose powerful voice roused Germany's sons to fight the enemies of the freedom and greatness of the Fatherland, was a soldier in all but name." In the constitutional crisis of 1862 he "saved the threatened crown of the Hohenzollerns" just when it looked as if "the Prussian kingdom might deliver itself into the hands of a parliamentary government" and give way to the "impossible demands" of bourgeois liberalism. The war of 1870 is described as a kind of preventive war against the threatening encirclement of Germany: "Germany was in a difficult position. Although she had no intention of making conquests, she could not watch quietly while the revengeful enemy waited in his lair for the best moment to break out. Attack is the best defence. Germany had to be at liberty to use this means if necessary."⁶ "Only quick action could help. As soon as Bismarck saw that war was unavoidable he did not hesitate to take up the cudgels, nor postpone the outbreak by negotiations." That England remained inactive could only be understood from her historical role as a nation of shopkeepers: "From the feuds of others, England reaps only advantages for her trade." But among the Continental Powers a coalition against Germany had been planned. "It would have come about if there had been long negotiations as in 1866. But war broke out before the treaties could be concluded. The cannon thunder of Worth removed any desire to repair the omission."⁷ This patriotic, hackneyed view of the past matches his description of Germany's situation in 1909. The whole Continent is bristling with arms and fortified frontiers; France has seen to the construction of a "Chinese wall" on her eastern front, reaching from "the Zuider Zee to the Mediterranean." In the centre of Europe "Germany and Austria stand unprotected; around them, behind moat and wall, are the other Powers. The political situation corresponds to the military. France has not given up her revenge, sworn in 1871. Having summoned all Europe to arms, the idea of *revanche* continues to form the pivot of her whole policy." Germany's enormous economic revival has gained her "a further implacable enemy"—England. "Hatred of a

⁶ *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, p. 18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 12, 14 f.; I, p. 9. The following in: I, p. It ff. (*Der Krieg in der Gegenwart*).

once-despised, competitor" cannot be disguised by fine speeches. "The depth of her grudge is determined not by emotion, but by her balance-sheet." Russia had joined Germany's enemies, from the "inherited antipathy of Slavs for Germanic peoples," from traditional sympathy with Latins, and from the need for credit. Finally Italy, prevented from expanding westwards by the French frontier barriers, wants to expand north-east and tolerate the Austrians "neither on the southern slopes of the Alps nor on the shore of the Adriatic."

"Enemies on all sides!" But why did they not strike during the Balkan crisis just happily surmounted? Well, there are several reasons. Whatever else, England has in Germany her best customer. She cannot afford frivolously to involve her empire in wars. "If she sets the world on fire, she has better things to do than let her army be arrested in Schleswig after Bismarck's formula." Russia has suffered sadly in the war with Japan. France "wants to enjoy storced-up revenge—but only in company of good friends," of whom she is not yet sufficiently certain.⁸ Finally they are all afraid to risk their precious instrument of war in a fight with a "well-armed enemy." In the last resort it is only German military power which safeguards Europe's peace for the time being.

However, "the coalition is ready." The Powers hostile to Germany are so favourably placed that they can choose their own moment. Germany is threatened and watched by them all the time. They have a disquieting effect on "the German nervous system, shaken by economic struggle and business crises. To relieve this pressure, one is tempted to give in, to accept unreasonable demands and let go of one advantage after the other." Meanwhile Austria-Hungary is tied down in the south-east by the Balkan crisis. "She demands support from her ally, but cannot offer any in return. By their tactics the enemy have managed to allot each country a separate theatre of war, to prevent both combining in overwhelming superiority to defeat their foes in turn. Austria has to take over the Southern front. Germany the Western. Russia retains freedom to strike decisively with all her might wherever she chooses."

Why, in spite of this favourable situation, do Germany's foes still hesitate to take up arms? "Even separated, Germany and Austria are still too strong. They must first be weakened by internal conflicts": Austria by the quarrel between the nationalities, to which fuel is being added busily; Germany by strife between the parties "And yet, for the

⁸ Cf. Memorandum of 1912, p. 170, below.

battle to come—be it with arms or otherwise—there must be, at least towards the outside world, a 'united band of brothers,' and a great, powerful, mighty army, led by a strong hand and inspired with absolute confidence."

Altogether a very sombre prognosis! Of course, it is not certain if and when war will come. "But an endeavour is afoot to bring all these Powers together for a concerted attack on the Central Powers. At the given moment the doors are to be opened, the drawbridges let down, and the million-strong armies let loose, ravaging and destroying, across the Vosges, the Meuse, the Königsau, the Nicmen, the Bug and even the Isonzo and the Tyrolean Alps. The danger seems gigantic."

When these patriotic warnings were sounded by the former Chief of the General Staff in the *Deutsche Revue* in 1909, Theodor Barth, the democratic publicist, spoke ironically of the hallucinations of a nationalistic professor of history.⁹ He failed to recognise that military minds would nearly always tend to see foreign policy essentially as a struggle for power, and peace merely as a pause for breath in which to acquire stronger armaments. Barth himself obviously underrated the extent of the international tensions and national passions uncovered by the Balkan crisis of 1908, as well as the seriousness of the situation in Central Europe, faced with the danger of war from both east and west. If one compares Schlieffen's political outpourings with the contemporary memoranda of his Austrian colleague, Count Conrad von Hotzendorf, one notices that the German does not base his fighting spirit on the embarrassing *Weltanschauung* which characterises the Austrian general: the "biological" view of political activity which sees it as an eternal "struggle for existence" in which war is an inevitable fate. It is true that Schlieffen, too, did not consider it avoidable in the long run, but he nowhere demands an opening of hostilities at the favourable moment—and he does not do so in the great memorandum of 1912.

Here the peace-preserving role of the German Army is stressed even more: "Secure behind fortresses, rivers, mountains and swamps," he says in retrospect of the crises of 1905 and 1909, "Germany's neighbours were lying in wait for their unprotected, weaker adversary who was entirely on his own. It was not the Triple Alliance, but solely the German Army which held Russia and France in check." Neither wanted to take up arms, "once Germany left no doubt about her

⁹ Eisenhart-Rothe, *ibid.*, p. 38.

determination to fight back." No word of regret here that German policy had failed to make use of the uniquely favourable military situation of 1905 for an attack on France.

But Schlieffen is very critical of German policy during the Morocco crisis of 1911. We failed, he says, to make it clear, as we did in 1905 and 1909, that we were willing to use our army if necessary; we let ourselves be intimidated by England's empty threats. Faced with Germany's outspoken resolve, England in 1911 would have given in, just as France did in 1905 and Russia in 1909. "But on this occasion it was Germany who yielded, and so the spell was broken which had so far made her army seem invincible. Nor could the lost prestige be restored by the army reform of 1912, which brought little more than changes in organisation—none in power. This time it was not Germany's promise to stand by her Austrian allies which secured peace" (a reference to the Balkan crisis of 1912) "but only England's wish, for economic reasons, to avoid a world war."

These are—as no historian would doubt today—gross political misjudgments. Behind them one senses the suspicion and distaste with which the senior generals followed Bethmann-Hollweg's policy of peaceful settlement with England. Yet even in this bitter criticism there is no word of striking a blow, of the idea of a preventive war. The draft of the 1912 memorandum makes this clearer still. It says explicitly: "It was not yet a question of peace or war, but there should have been a display of firm determination to stand fast in face of this threat, which later proved empty." Nor do the following sentences from the final text even hint at the possibility that Germany might deliberately take up arms to break the ring of diplomatic encirclement by force: "It is to be hoped that England's will may not for ever be decisive, and that Germany will one day regain the position of power necessary to her economic prosperity. Without a war this will scarcely be possible. How it will come about remains to be seen."

Taking all these remarks between 1909 and 1912 as a whole, Schlieffen's underlying attitude to the question of war seems to have been somewhat as follows: Germany was threatened by enemies on all sides, was mainly dependent on her own efforts and could not expect effective help from the Triple Alliance. It was only due to her strong army that peace had been preserved up to now. Since she need not be afraid of war, her military potential should be advanced as a factor in political discussions. But the decision "peace or war"

was a matter not for soldiers, but for statesmen. For the General Staff it was something which "remained to be seen."

Did Schlieffen display the same attitude during the Morocco crisis of 1905, or did he at that time go further and urge the Foreign Ministry to make an aggressive war against France?

As one might expect, the official evidence is extremely scanty. In April 1904, long before the onset of the Morocco crisis, Bülow made verbal inquiries through the Counsellor, Prince Lichnowsky, as to how the Chief of the General Staff regarded Germany's military prospects if a Franco-German war should now become necessary. The reason for this inquiry cannot (according to Tliimme, *Grosse Politik*, XIX (1), No. 6031) be detected in the documents. Perhaps it was the conclusion of the Anglo-French agreement on North Africa on April 8th, 1904, which gave rise to it; but it looks as if Bülow mainly wanted to know how far the Russo-Japanese war, which had begun in February, would work out to Germany's advantage by relieving military pressure on her in case of war. Schlieffen's answer, given verbally and in writing, was very carefully thought out and supported by precise information about the strength of the Russian Army. So far, he concluded, there had been no appreciable weakening of the Russians' strength on their western front; but a number of circumstances made it very unlikely that they would be willing or able to make war in Europe and the East simultaneously. In the end he did not answer the question about the chances in a Franco-German war. But from his remarks Lichnowsky concluded that "if war with France should become necessary, the present moment would doubtless be favourable."

All in all, the Chief of the General Staff could not have expressed himself with greater care or less "chauvinism."

This is the only original evidence which the great collection of German documents can offer in answer to our question. There is a piece of verbal information from Bülow (to E. Zimmerman) in 1921: "Graf Schlieffen never tried to influence my policy. Nor did he ever recommend a preventive war to me, or even try to urge me to make war."¹⁰ One may doubt the reliability of this testimony—but one cannot simply overlook it. Its value as evidence is certainly much greater than that of all the accounts originating from the circle of Schlieffen admirers—accounts whose relationship to each other will occupy us later.

¹⁰ *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, March 1921, p. 380.

First there is still a passage from Tirpitz's *Erinnerungen* (page 143) which has sometimes been quoted to prove that Schlieffen prepared for a war with France. Tirpitz speaks of a meeting at the Chancellor's on October 31st, 1904, when the question was discussed whether an alliance should not be offered to Russia, now that she was deep in "war-worries." Holstein hoped this would put pressure on the French to approach Germany in their turn. "Graf Schlieffen, who was present, took the military point of view. He estimated that the Russians would still be able to mobilise a few army corps for possible deployment against France. Now, as on the previous occasion when we discussed the expedition to China, I [Tirpitz] detected in the distinguished-looking and taciturn strategist, so eminent in his own subject, a certain neglect of non-military trains of thought!" Thus Tirpitz. It is a mystery how anyone can see more in this quotation than Schlieffen's agreement to Holstein's proposals and an attempt to support them by strategical considerations. Indeed, it is only possible by a complete distortion of the quotation such as one finds in the memoirs of the diplomatist Baron von der Lancken-Wakenitz.¹¹ But von der Lancken did not have the Tirpitz memoirs to hand; he gaily refers to the popular pamphlet on Schlieffen by Surgeon-General Rochs, a highly questionable source. Rochs refers to Tirpitz,¹² but refrains from quoting him verbatim and offers instead a completely different account of Schlieffen's remarks—the one von der Lancken then produces as a so-called original account—maintaining that Schlieffen made them "later, among a circle of intimates." Well, stories told "in a circle of intimates" cannot be checked by outsiders. But here the gravest suspicion seems indicated. Rochs dates the meeting wrongly (in 1905). He himself has to admit that his account is in direct contradiction to Billow's statement. He does not even try to make it plausible that Schlieffen, taciturn and extremely correct, should have chatted with outsiders about the substance of an official conference of such a highly political character. Finally, he embroiders his account in a most suspect manner: Schlieffen's remarks "so shocked the pacifist Chancellor" that he adjourned the meeting (this is contradicted by Tirpitz's account) and from then on became Schlieffen's declared enemy, urging his dismissal: a legend we

11 O. Frh. von der Lancken-Wakenitz, *Meine dreissig Dichtjahre 1855 bis 1915* (1931), p. 87. According to this, Schlieffen had said: "From a military point of view I see the only solution in an immediate war against France. England is still weak from the Boer war, Russia is still tied down in her war against Japan, France is isolated, and we should be able to cope with France on her own."

¹² 5. Aufl., pp. 46 and 85.

shall later disprove. All this shows the tendentious traits of a hero's biography. At all costs it must be a political intrigue that causes the great man's dismissal from his post; and since there is no evidence whatever of a political disagreement between Schlieffen and the Chancellor, Tirpitz's remark that the former took a purely military point of view at that meeting is greedily picked up and suitably embellished by quoting so-called "remarks among a circle of intimates."

On top of this comes the need of the biographer, a naive nationalist of pan-German hue, to present his hero as the only man who was thoughtful enough to discern the possibility of a successful preventive war at the right moment. Only as an afterthought does Rochs seem to have realised that at the time his pamphlet was published (1921) this might easily damn Schlieffen as one of the "warmongers" of 1914, and that on him and the General Staff would thus fall a shadow of "war guilt." And so he is naive enough to record, with full approval, on the very page on which he tells of the alleged remark in the Chancellery, Billow's assurance that Schlieffen never urged him to make war; indeed he later states emphatically (page 85) that the general never presumed to judge whether the international situation seemed to make war desirable but always kept strictly within the limits of his department.¹³

Obviously this is a worthless source for serious historical research. It is only with reservations that note may be taken of a second story of this biographer, telling of a private conversation with Schlieffen (page 40). It is said to have taken place "in the high summer of 1905." Schlieffen tells Rochs of his anxiety over a complete encirclement of Germany. "Now we could get out of the noose," and settle accounts with France, since Russia would not be able to take any action for a long time. France in a similar situation would not hesitate to attack us. Well, why should Schlieffen not have talked on such lines to a friend? It would almost be surprising if he had not entertained such sentiments as a soldier; they are reported of other senior members of the officer corps too.¹⁴ But all this has nothing to do with a political action as Chief of the General Staff.

It is strange how uncritically General Staff officers of the Schlieffen

¹³ On p. 71 (5. Aufl.) he even assures us that Schlieffen had proved with strategic insight that "the very inadequacy of Germany's military strength and that of her allies made it impossible for the idea of an aggressive or preventive war against the Entente even to suggest itself." The Schlieffen Plan had only been designed for the event of a defensive war.

¹⁴ Cf. the attitude of the War Minister, von Einem, *ibid.*, p. no f.

school have accepted Rochs' legendary account. W. Groener repeats some of his tales in order to prove Schlieffen's political far-sightedness, and he casts at Billow the strange reproach that he did not ask Schlieffen "the justifiable question whether under the prevailing political circumstances of 1904-5 it would not have been expedient for Germany to free herself of the encirclement by force."¹⁵ He has no other evidence than Rochs' account to prove that Schlieffen wanted a preventive war. But in his unpublished memoirs, written in 1938, occurs the following strange paragraph: "When, in May 1905, an article appeared in the English magazine *The Twentieth Century* demanding that England should at once conclude an alliance with France, Schlieffen took this article, perhaps in itself not so weighty, as an occasion to ask the Kaiser and Government to declare war on France and so break the net which—as he alone saw clearly—was tightening round us."¹⁶ How odd that an English magazine article should have led the Chief of the General Staff to demand "from the Kaiser and Government" a declaration of war against France! How does Groener know this? Certainly not from Schlieffen himself, because immediately afterwards he confesses that, at the time, he and his comrades on the General Staff "gave little thought to politics and their military consequences. . . . It was not generally known that Schlieffen had been in favour of a war, but we were all more or less of the same opinion."

Well, the riddle is solved very simply. Von der Lancken gives a more accurate rendering of the English magazine article.¹⁷ The author considered the European situation very serious and demanded the immediate conclusion of an Anglo-French alliance. "He concluded by saying that Germany's political and military situation was at the moment so favourable for a preventive war against France that even a monarch so well known for his love of peace as Wilhelm II would in the long run be unable to resist the temptation to attack France and so secure European hegemony." Schlieffen submitted this article to the Kaiser through a staff officer, Captain von Haeften. It came back

¹⁵ *Das Testament des Grafen Schlieffen* (1927), p. 6. W. Foerster in *Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg*, p. 5 ff, only hints (by referring to Rochs) that Schlieffen had been dismissed "because he did not fit into this era of illusions and Utopias [Billow's era]" and that he had felt this himself. Foerster also repeats from a newspaper article by von Gottberg in 1920 the allegation that on hearing the order for mobilisation Schlieffen had "cheered."

¹⁶ Extract from the American photostat of the Groener papers.

¹⁷ O. Eltzbacher, "The Balance of Power in Europe," in: *The Nineteenth Century and After*, May 1905, vol. 57, pp. 787-804.

with the Kaiser's marginal note: "No! Never will I be capable of such an action!" It looks as if von Haeften, who had an important function as political liaison officer of the Supreme Command during the war, told Groener of this occurrence and of the Imperial marginal note. What became of it in Groener's vague memory after many years needs no further comment. He makes of it a new monument to the political wisdom of the Schlieffen school's great master—and to the blindness of Imperial policy.¹⁸

Equally irrelevant is a further testimony: a newspaper article on Groener's book *Feldherr unter Willeu*, published by Schlieffen's son-in-law, W. von Hahnke, in the *Berliner Borsenzeitung* of May 6th, 1930.¹⁹ This, too, is quoted by von der Lancken, and to illustrate the master's wisdom so highly praised by Groener, we are told the following: "In 1904-5, when Delcasse was making threatening speeches and bandying about the idea of war against Germany, Graf Schlieffen pointed out to the Chancellor, Prince Biilow, the extraordinary advantages of Germany's military and political situation. If armed conflict with France were unavoidable (Graf Schlieffen advised) it would be desirable if the war were to be started by France at the moment most favourable to Germany: England was still suffering from the effects of the Boer War, Russia was tied down by her war with Japan, France was threatening war against Germany from a position of isolation." These are rather equivocal statements. But on closer inspection, one sees that Hahnke is not really claiming at all that Schlieffen had recommended an attack on France; on the contrary, he thought it desirable to leave the initiative in making war to the French. Germany need not fear them—quite the reverse! This would correspond with the phrase which von Eisenhart-Rothe quotes in a very definite (and thus more plausible) form. "Let them come!" the Chief of the General Staff is said to have cried excitedly when, at the time of the Morocco crisis, Major von Kuhl brought him the news of French

¹⁸ Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945* (1955), p. 284, quotes another passage from Groener's unpublished *Lebenserinnerungen* which is intended to prove Schlieffen's desire for war: a lecture which he gave to the General Staff (no date) about the campaign of 1806. In this he is reported to have said that indignation over the mistakes of the Army Command of that time would lead nowhere. "It would be more to the point to do like the men of 1813, who adopted the means by which Napoleon defeated us and used them to revenge themselves on the author of their suffering." I cannot see the connection between this historical platitude and our problem.

¹⁹ I am obliged to the Westdeutsche Bibliothek in Marburg for a photostat of this article.

rearmament.²⁰ That he should have replied optimistically to Bülow's or Holstein's questions about German military prospects if it came to a war with France (for instance in the vein of the official answer of April 1904) is perfectly natural: how could he have answered otherwise? The Minister for War, von Einem, also described the situation as favourable, when in the spring of 1905 Bülow, and later the Kaiser, asked him about the readiness of the Army—the latter with the emphatic rider: "I don't like war and don't want to make it, unless it is absolutely necessary."²¹

After all this, how can one accept the assurance of Schlieffen's family biographer, Rochs, that Bülow feared the Chief of the General Staff as a tiresome warmonger and so effected his dismissal by the Kaiser. In support of this claim, Rochs produces nothing but his own guesswork, which is unsubstantiated by any evidence²² and contradicted by a firm *dementi* from Bülow.²³ Above all, it becomes clear from the reports and documents published among the papers of the younger Moltke²⁴ that there was no connection between the Morocco crisis and Schlieffen's retirement. It is possible that Bülow furthered it—we shall go into that in a moment; but everything he did in this connection happened *before* the spring of 1905. When, at the beginning of 1904, Wilhelm II transferred Moltke to the Great General Staff as Quarter-master-General, it was obviously so that he should familiarise himself with the duties of its Chief. In the following summer he had to act as umpire in the Kaiser Manoeuvres and at their conclusion found himself in the position of defending his chief against the Kaiser's criticism, although he himself was in no sort of agreement with Schlieffen's strategical views or his attitude towards the Crown. As early as January 1905, that is to say long before the beginning of the Morocco crisis, he had certain interviews with Bülow and Wilhelm II, which seem to have decided his appointment as Schlieffen's successor. He relates how one morning, while they were riding together in the Tiergarten, Bülow asked him whether he would not soon succeed

²⁰ Im *Banne der Persönlichkeit*, p. 43 f. Similar statements in Freytag-Loringhoven, *ibid.*, p. 141.

²¹ Von Einem, *ibid.*, p. 112. Einem assures us that he "did everything to back up the Chancellor in his diplomatic battle against Delcassé" and "had the fervent desire to settle the whole matter with the sword." This was written in 1933! If it is true, it still means no more than a hope and an answer to questions, not the presumption of giving political advice.

²² Rochs, *ibid.*, p. 84 ff. It is not worth while discussing this further.

²³ *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, March 1921, p. 380.

²⁴ Moltke, *ibid.*, p. 288 f.

Schlieffen "with whom he [Bülow] evidently did not agree." Moltke merely said that he hoped the cup would pass from him. But a few days later he was called to an interview with Wilhelm II, who told him that he was dismayed to have heard from Bülow that he was reluctant to succeed Schlieffen. This led to a long conversation in which Moltke showed remarkable courage and great frankness. He radically criticised the present form of the Kaiser Manœuvres with their cavalry battles and the Kaiser's constant personal interference, as well as the General Staff war games with their regular enveloping of armies of 500,000 to 600,000 men a few days after the start of operations. He regarded all this as a purely theoretical, peacetime game, which had no practical value and could only lead to dangerous illusions. He doubted whether the uniform command of million-strong armies was possible, any more than the quick termination of wars, as formerly, by "decisive battles." The modern People's War would turn out to be a "long, arduous struggle with a country which will not admit defeat until the strength of the people is broken." Moltke dared to demand a completely free hand for a more realistic, warlike design of the strategic exercises and manoeuvres, and particularly a greater restraint of the sovereign in the Kaiser Manœuvres. But he carried both points and as a start was ordered to try his hand at producing a scheme for the manoeuvres of the following summer. Schlieffen found this very embarrassing and tried to ignore the Imperial wish by preparing the manoeuvres himself. But he only got himself into an awkward situation with the Kaiser, whom he decidedly vexed and who now relieved him of planning the manoeuvres by a formal order.

All this happened before the journey to Tangier and the outbreak of the crisis in France. The next development was only to be expected: Wilhelm II was highly satisfied with Moltke's performance and his new style in manoeuvres, and immediately after the Kaiser Manœuvres wanted to appoint him as Chief of the General Staff. Moltke had difficulty in arranging that Schlieffen should be kept in office at least until the end of the year²⁵ and that, as heir to his great predecessor, he should be allowed (on October 26th, 1905) to unveil the fine Moltke

²⁵ Cf. telegram from "Wilhelm II to Bülow of July 30th, 1905 (*Grosse Politik*, XIX (2), p. 479) where he mentions that "Moltke will replace Graf Schlieffen this winter." The Kaiser had discussed with him the fantastic plan of occupying Belgium as a pledge in case of a war with England—therefore he can hardly have been looking for a Chief of Staff less militant than Schlieffen!

statue in the Königsplatz, which he did with a speech full of genuine veneration and modesty.

What were the Kaiser's motives in dismissing him? There is no trace of political differences in either Wilhelm II's or Billow's remarks to Moltke. Both seem to have had serious fears of a war with England in the winter of 1904-5. Wilhelm maintained that this fear led both of them to the conclusion that Schlieffen, at seventy-two, was too old for the great tasks ahead. The Chancellor had been the first to mention it—an account which tallies with Moltke's impression of Billow's attitude towards Schlieffen, received during their talk in the Tiergarten.

But Billow was very anxious, in the eyes of posterity, to shake off all responsibility for Schlieffen's dismissal and replacement by Moltke. In the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* in 1921 he denied having contributed to Schlieffen's resignation. In his *Denkwürdigkeiten* he describes the conversation in the Tiergarten, which became known through the publication of the Moltke papers in 1922, quite differently, as if Moltke had not felt equal to his new post and had urgently asked him to remonstrate with the Kaiser against his appointment. This he had done, admittedly with reluctance.²⁶ The truth is probably that during his conversations with Wilhelm II, Billow had felt the Kaiser wanted to replace the taciturn and rather stiff old gentleman²⁷ by his own General, the well-educated, stimulating and amiable Moltke. So why shouldn't the courtier help the process along on the quiet? Further explanations from possible political motives²⁸ seem hardly necessary. The final decision was probably made the moment the new man impressed the Kaiser with his frank, courageous words, his criticism of the old routine of the General Staff, and his modern ideas.

Our inquiry has shown that there is no reliable documentary evidence for the statement that Graf Schlieffen urged the Kaiser or

²⁶*Denkwürdigkeiten*, II, 1930, p. 182 ff. Billow is careless enough to date the conversation Autumn, 1905. By then everything had been decided.

²⁷Cf. Holstein's apprehension in 1891 that Schlieffen "with his quiet manner will not impress the Kaiser": letter to Ida von Stülpnagel, in: F. von Holstein, *Lebensbekenntnis in Briefen an eine Frau*, ed. by H. Rogge (1932), p. 155. To want to "impress" the Kaiser was surely unthinkable to the monarchist Schlieffen.

²⁸From Roch's pamphlet one gets the impression that Schlieffen guessed at Billow's collaboration in his dismissal, but never assumed that it was due to political motives, supposing (quite rightly) that he had been declared "senile"—an accusation more wounding to a soldier than a civilian, and in this case doubly wounding, since the elder Moltke had remained in office till he was almost ninety.

Billow to make war against France during the Morocco crisis. But this negative proof is still incomplete at one point. We know that the Chief of the General Staff was linked to Baron Holstein by old ties of friendship²⁹ and that between the two, especially during the Morocco crisis of 1905, there were often confidential talks about the political situation.³⁰ Of the content of these conversations no details are known. Perhaps Schlieffen not only encouraged the *Gelwiivrat* with military arguments to use threatening language towards France, but also even urged him to seize the opportune moment for a diplomatic break, a declaration of war. Did Holstein mean to follow such advice—if it was ever given? Only if that were so, could one speak of a serious threat to European peace through the sabre-rattling of the German General Staff.

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To get to the bottom of this question we must study first the original sources from Holstein's own hand, i.e. his official memoranda and correspondence to be found in the great collection of documents on the prehistory of the Great War, and also his private letters ;³¹ secondly such of Billow's decrees and directives as are obviously based on Holstein's suggestions or are likely to have been drawn up by him; thirdly, and only in the last resort, the memoirs of various diplomats and Foreign Ministry departmental heads, in which genuine information is often difficult to distinguish from rumour and hearsay or mere subjective opinion.

Holstein's earliest memorandum on the Morocco question is probably his note of June 3rd, 1904, in which he considers the consequences of the Anglo-French agreement of the same year.³² It will (he thinks) lead to a "slow absorption" of Morocco by France. This, for a start,

²⁹ According to von der Lancken, *ibid.*, p. 58, Schlieffen, then a *Garde-Ulanenlieutenant*, introduced Baron Holstein, then a *Kammergerichtsreferendar*, into Berlin high society in the fifties. In 1891 Holstein tried to bring Schlieffen and Caprivi together, so that both men could counteract the Kaiser's tendency to personal direction in military matters (Holstein to Ida von Stiiipnagel, August 5th, 1891, in *Lebensbekenntnis*, p. 155 f.). In a letter of 1897 (*ibid.*, p. 187) he writes: "While I am writing, General Graf Schlieffen is sitting here reading documents, a thing he does about once a week in times of trouble."

³⁰ In a letter to Schlieffen of November 29th, 1904, Holstein asks him to come and see him "perhaps tomorrow, Thursday, at the usual time, i.e. between five and seven. I have several things to tell you" (von der Lancken, *ibid.*, p. 59).

³¹ *The Holstein Papers 1887 to 1909*, ed. by Norman Rich and H. M. Fisher, vol. I (1955), contain, according to H. M. Fisher, nothing materially new about his Morocco policy.

³² *Crosse Politik*, XX (1), No. 6521.

means considerable damage to German economic interests.³³ But more important is a political consideration: in the discussions of the Great Powers on colonial questions, Germany must not allow herself simply to be pushed aside; she must safeguard her right to play a part for the sake of her prestige, her standing as a Great Power. Holstein thinks Morocco is a very suitable ground on which to make this claim. There Germany can come forward as guardian not only of international law and the independence of a free sovereign, but also of the economic interests of all European nations, by opposing the establishment of a French protectorate and a French monopoly of Moroccan trade. But for this policy it is absolutely necessary for Germany to forgo acquisitions in Morocco; instead she must champion the annexation of Tangier and its hinterland by Spain in the event of the Sultan's sovereignty one day becoming untenable. In this way Germany can hope for support from other Powers. Even England (who counts Spain among her proteges) will be glad if others look after her own (relatively strong) economic interests and her vassal. Article 9 of the Anglo-French agreement, promising support for France's Morocco policy, will probably remain platonic.

These are the basic principles of a political programme to which, in my opinion, Holstein adhered unswervingly right until the Algeiras conference of 1906; he was as undeterred by the efforts of Delcasse and Rouvier to remove German objections by the offer of colonial compensation (in bilateral negotiations) as he was by the unexpectedly tenacious support given to France by Britain. Holstein was not in the least interested in colonial acquisitions (just at that time—during the great Herero rising in South-West Africa—opinion in Germany was rather tired of colonies) but only in political claims. He wanted to show the world that "we don't sit quiet if someone treads on our toes." But was this, the preservation of outward prestige, really his ultimate goal? It is hard to believe, for obviously outward prestige would also have been preserved if in bilateral negotiations Germany had got substantial compensation from France, such as support over the Baghdad railway, or harbours on the Moroccan west coast, or frontier adjustments in Central Africa: and that was the kind of thing actually offered to her. But Holstein (and Billow) did not even allow

³³ That it could also lead to a substantial increase in French military strength seems only to have been considered afterwards. Cf. Rosen to Lowther, December 4th, 1905: *British Documents*, III, No. 190, p. 147.

such offers to develop and refused them out of hand. Why? Purely out of consideration for the Sultan of Morocco, whom Germany had promised to support? To be better able to play the part of selfless guardian of international trade interests?

The key to Holstein's whole Morocco policy seems to me to lie in one of his last official notes, dating from a time (February 22nd, 1906) when this policy had already as good as foundered. "The French approach to England," he says, "began immediately after Fashoda, when the French saw they could achieve nothing *against* England. In the same way, the French will only consider approaching Germany when they see that English friendship—which after the result of the last elections can hardly be anything but platonic—is not enough to obtain Germany's consent to the French seizure of Morocco, and that Germany wants to be loved for her own sake."³ This can only mean: France must be taught that a friendly connection with Germany is indispensable to her own interest, because England's friendship can never be more than "platonic," i.e. is worthless from the military point of view and unreliable or insufficient from the political.

The hope of achieving an alliance of the Continental Powers against England was from 1904 to 1906 the basic idea of German foreign policy. In spite of the Franco-Russian military alliance, Russia's indigence during the Japanese war made this hope appear not entirely futile, and it reached its culmination in July 1905 at the meeting of the emperors at Bjorko. The greatest obstacle was always the implacable enmity of the French. Should a political entente develop out of the Anglo-French colonial agreement of 1904, all hopes of a Continental alliance would wane. However paradoxical it may at first sound, Holstein's Morocco policy was intended as a means of forcing France into a friendly approach, and this by means of a double lever: political isolation at an international conference, accompanied by half-concealed military threats. This seems strange at first sight. But it belonged to the style of the Wilhelminian era and had been tried several times, even against England. It was what Holstein understood by *Realpolitik*.

If everything depended on bringing as many Powers as possible to the conference table to mobilise their interest in an "open door" for international trade in Morocco, the obvious step would have been to demand such a conference immediately (perhaps supported by a

demonstration in the Reichstag), not by shocking the world with one's own surprise actions in Morocco and promises of help to the Sultan, or by committing oneself to the defence of a decrepit Muslim state long in need of reform. But Biliow—almost certainly on Holstein's advice—not only urged upon the very reluctant Kaiser the *coup de theatre* of a State visit to Tangier, but even drafted a somewhat martial and threatening speech for him: "If today I were to give Your Majesty a firm promise of support, you would attack the French tomorrow. But I would rather, if possible, preserve the peace, even though I have a very strong army. Therefore I must reserve my decision in the event of it really coming to a war between Morocco and France; but I do not believe in this. France will try to see how far she can get with threats. But France knows her situation is a dangerous one if she attacks Morocco without first assuring herself of Germany's neutrality."³⁵

This was a somewhat undisguised provocation of France, and one may count it fortunate that Wilhelm II disregarded his Chancellor's proposal. Did, then, Biliow—and his counsellor, Holstein—want the war? In the same letter to the Sovereign he declares: "There can be no question of Your Majesty's risking a war with France over Morocco. On the other hand, it is more than doubtful if the present French civilian Government, which has more to fear from a victorious general than from any external enemy, would want to risk a war with Morocco as long as there is the slightest possibility that Germany might sooner or later intervene. For the present, therefore, we must leave our ultimate intentions in doubt."

Plainly this amounts to a policy of bluff. At first the bluff was successful. Delcasse, however, adopted a very confident attitude in the presence of his ministerial colleagues,³⁶ and foreign diplomatic circles were quick to see that in truth the Kaiser feared nothing more than war. But Rouvier, the prime minister, like most of his colleagues, was fully aware of the weakness of France at this moment, and also of the temptation this presented to the German military to "settle accounts" with her now.³⁷ Even the promise of the British Cabinet

³⁵*Grosse Politik*, XX (1), No. 6576, p. 278.

³⁶In the Cabinet Council of June 2nd he declared in answer to Rouvier's apprehensions of a war with Germany: "Don't believe all that, they're only bluffing" (*Grosse Politik*, XX (2), p. 407).

³⁷Cf. the report by the Ambassador, Bihourd, from Berlin, April 28th, 1905 (*Documents Dipl. Français*, 2 serie, VI, No. 369), which mentions the influence of a war party, admittedly a small one, in the officer corps, but regards Wilhelm II as a man of peace.

that in case of a conflict they would at once consult with the French Government about "joint measures," was not much consolation in face of a powerful German Army. Its effect in Paris was encouraging, but it did not prevent Rouvier dropping his Foreign Minister, Delcasse, in the hope of making an understanding with the Germans easier.

It was a triumph of German diplomacy, and the Kaiser—most imprudently—went so far as to stress it by elevating Count Billow to princely rank. Only now did the English become fully aware of the extraordinary weakness of their allies.³⁸ Very soon they recognised too, that the Billow-Holstein policy was not really concerned with Moroccan interests, but with loosening or breaking up the Anglo-French entente.³⁹ So there were promises of help in an anxious attempt to prevent any compromises being wrested from Rouvier which would diminish France's spoils in Morocco (for instance, by making her give up some ports). Thus, from the beginning, the Morocco dispute was regarded as a test of the Entente and was conducted with appropriate means.

Eyre Crowe (whom one might call the British Holstein) expressed in his famous memorandum of January 1st, 1907, the retrospective view that the period immediately after the fall of Delcasse was the most dangerous moment for the Entente. If at that moment German policy had been intelligent enough to build France golden bridges, i.e. to leave her Morocco in exchange for mere imaginary concessions, on the pattern later to be followed at Algeciras, or to arrange an agreement on other political questions, the Entente could hardly have survived. The French would have seen that England could offer no real security, whereas the Germans were amenable to reason and were not using their military superiority to bully France. Thus the French would have been left with a feeling of bitterness towards England, who refused so stubbornly to transform the Entente into a formal military alliance, and was not of much military value either.⁴⁰

³⁸Balfour to Edward VII, June 8th, 1905 (Sidney Lee, *Edward VII* (1927), II, p. 344). "Delcasse's dismissal . . . displayed a weakness on the part of France which indicated that she could not at present be counted on as an effective force in international politics."

³⁹Sir F. Bertie to Lansdowne, April 25th, 1905: "The general feeling in Paris is that the chief object which the German emperor has had in view . . . is to show to the French people that an understanding with England is of little value to them and that they had much better come to an agreement with Germany" (*British Documents on the Origins of the War*, III, p. 75). Later Grey spoke in a similar vein to Metternich (*Grosse Politik*, XXI (1), No. 6924),

⁴⁰*British Documents*, III, p. 400 f.

But whether this reflection after the event was correct, and whether the French could really have been induced to forgo the help repeatedly promised by England and instead throw themselves into the arms of Germany if only the latter showed herself thoroughly placable, is very doubtful. Holstein, at any rate, was of a different opinion. If (to reconstruct his train of thought) the French managed to get Morocco left to them for "Tunisification"—even with a number of concessions to Germany in the country itself or elsewhere—the Entente of 1904 would have achieved its aims and would have been cemented by this practical success for ever. For the success would have been solely due to the English, not to Germany. Therefore, at least initially, one had to snatch the booty from their hands and force the French to give in, i.e. to allow the Moroccan "reforms" to be organised internationally or else seek an entente with Germany instead of England. If they did the second, Germany would not hesitate to let them have Morocco in the near future. If they refused, they would have to resign themselves to an international conference deciding Morocco's fate. At this conference Holstein hoped at least to prevent the transfer into French hands of the powers of the executive, especially the police force. If no international agreement could be reached on this matter, there was still the expedient of torpedoing the conference by a German veto and thus confronting France with the choice of making war on the Sultan or preferring, after all, to seek a lasting general agreement with Germany. Holstein and Biliow were quite certain that in the end the French would not dare choose the first, because they could not be sure of reaching their goal without meeting German armed resistance. The torpedoing of the conference would never result in war but would prolong and accentuate international tension, which would ultimately be more difficult for France to bear than for Germany.

One can criticise this policy for being far too ingenious a game—a calculation with far too many unknowns, and therefore a gamble whose success was quite uncertain. On the German side it presupposed a high degree of dogged patience, prudence and diplomatic skill—all qualities entirely lacking in the Kaiser, on whose collaboration so much depended. So far as France was concerned, it underrated the touchiness of her national pride, which rebelled against the idea of becoming dependent on Germany. With regard to the English, it overlooked their determination never to give up the Entente at long last achieved

with the French, and their readiness to muster all their resources for the sake of the European balance as they understood it. Finally, it overlooked the fact that nobody in the world took the keeping of the "open door" in Morocco with such seriousness, or pretended seriousness, as the Germans.

All these were considerable weaknesses in the programme devised by Holstein. But of one thing he cannot be accused: that he deliberately steered towards war in an effort to break the net of hostile alliances which was tightening round Germany. Nowhere in his telegrams or memoranda is there any evidence for this. If Holstein had seriously wanted war, he would have seen to it that public opinion throughout the world, and especially in Germany, was aroused from the beginning—for example by manifestoes against the insufferable threats which French imperialist methods presented to all free nations, and the disregard of international law by the two Western Powers. An allegation on these lines was made in 1918 by Hammann, the Press Officer at the Foreign Ministry: Holstein (he said) had ordered the semi-official Press to start a "paper alarum" and a "semi-official sabre-rattling," which had offended the tradition of the Ministry, as well as German public opinion. But this charge is by no means corroborated in the great document collection of 1927. Here, far from complaining of a lack of "alarums" on the part of the semi-official Press, Holstein criticises its wrong tactics in always discussing Delcasse's errors, instead of calling energetically for a new settlement of the Morocco question by an international conference of the Treaty Powers, and in playing up Germany's interest at the expense of international interests.⁴¹ But anyone who urges international conferences at once makes it difficult for himself to solve international problems by the sword, by swift action instead of protracted talks.

This becomes only too obvious in the long and painstaking Franco-German discussions during the summer and autumn of 1905. They show how, even before the conference, Holstein tried to induce the French by a mixture of utmost coolness (not without threatening undertones) and confidential offers, temporarily to give up their Moroccan booty in expectation of getting it back from a friendly Germany later on. For this he employed first the Ambassador in Paris, Prince Radolin, and later the envoy Rosen, as special emissaries—

11 O. Hammann, *Zur Vorgeschichte des Wehkrrieges* (1918), p. 210 (2. Aufl. 1919, p. 136 £) ■
Similarly in: *Der iicne Kurs*, p. 60. Cf. *Glossus Politik*, XX (2), Wos. 6597 f. i 6606—9-

both without success; for the task which was set them soon proved impossible. It was later the verdict of Eyre Crowe that this time Holstein's diplomacy overreached itself. After the fall of Delcasse it was possible to get the French to agree to the summoning of the conference, but not to extract binding promises of real weight from them in advance.

In spring Holstein had been full of optimism about the course the conference would take. "England won't stir," he wrote on April 4th, "Spain doesn't count, Italy (who wanted to act as an intermediary) will be manageable, perhaps with a quiet hint that while we deal with France, Austria might deal with the *irredenta*"; if France remains obstinate about the idea of a conference, she puts herself in the wrong with the Treaty Powers, "giving England, Spain and Italy a perhaps welcome excuse to withdraw."⁴² Biliow had similar opinions: even Germany's most radical opponents in England would "see reason" when they realised that she was not seeking any special advantages in Morocco—especially if the American President, Roosevelt, were on her side.⁴³ Meanwhile very sobering reports from London had reached Berlin, and one gets the impression that by the late summer of 1905 Holstein, as well as Biliow, had already grown doubtful whether the plan to loosen the Entente by a strong-handed attitude over the Moroccan question was practicable. With the Japanese war coming to an end, the world situation was already turning to Germany's disadvantage again. The Kaiser's hope of founding a Russo-German alliance at Bjorko (July 1905) proved no more than a bubble which soon burst. If the Continental *bloc* was still to come to anything, it was as well to respect French susceptibilities.

The closer the conference approached, the more clearly it was seen in Berlin that Germany's chances of success with the minimum programme were now slender if France, as expected, proved tenacious. On November 2nd Count Metternich in London sent Biliow a memorandum, which set forth with splendid clear-sightedness the hopelessly bungled situation into which Germany had got herself over Morocco. At the most she might achieve some small, partial success. But this would do nothing to alter the antagonism which had been aroused between herself and the Western Powers. Metternich admitted that even full compliance by Germany would not help, since this would be regarded in France as due to English support

Crosse Politik, XX (2) No. 6601 (April 4th, 1905).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, No. 6599.

and would thus simply strengthen the Entente. But he uttered an urgent warning against seeking a military solution. What good would it do if Germany overthrew France, and England continued the war by sea? There was no way of getting at such an enemy; in the long run the British would wear down Germany with their naval blockade and force her to make peace with France. "There may be those among us," the memorandum concluded, "who think this is a suitable moment to let it come to a breach between ourselves and France; who say that after the defeat of France we should compensate ourselves in Europe for the loss of our overseas possessions to England. But I regard it a criminal frivolity to force the course of history, and a folly to want to shake the fruit off the tree before it is ripe."⁴⁴

This was—almost to the point of quotation—in the tradition of Bismarck's policy, and it is hard to believe that these warnings failed to make a strong impression on the Foreign Ministry. When Biilow discussed the position with his aides at the end of December, they came to the conclusion that there were three possible courses the conference might take. First, Germany might get her way, making this easier for the French by the offer of a merely provisional arrangement, perhaps for three years, with the vague expectation of improving their position later on. Secondly, Germany might after all enter into special negotiations outside the conference—a course Biilow did not want to reject completely if the French should come forward with "tangible offers." Thirdly, there was the quite intolerable possibility of a French diplomatic triumph, i.e. her obtaining a general mandate for the whole of Morocco, not only for the eastern areas adjoining Algeria. Rather than agree to such a solution, Germany would have to "risk a conflict." The French were to be informed of this at once through Prince Radolin. "It would be his task to disillusion the French completely of the idea that we were not serious in this matter and were only trying to bluff." The German Embassy in Paris was instructed in this sense, but with the following rider: Germany's aim was "a peaceful understanding in which both partners would receive their due, at least for the moment."⁴⁵

With this the Morocco conference had been stamped unmistakably as a struggle for prestige, and a direct threat of war—admittedly only in the extreme event of the French being completely obstinate—had

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 6881 (enclosure).

⁴⁵ *Ji Grosse Politik*, XXI (1), Nos. 6914, 6916 (December 25th and 29th).

been pronounced for the first time. When the Foreign Ministry meeting took place, Graf Schlieffen, with his dismissal as from December 31st already in his hands, was working on the great military testament for his successor. Holstein was not present at the meeting, but there can be no doubt that this was the moment when Biilow expounded his programme. So much can be deduced from all his later remarks. Was it, then, his intention to kindle the war after all? Obviously not, since the delegates to the conference were not to conduct their negotiations in a way which would lead to open conflict, but with the aim of reaching a peaceful understanding. The threat of war was only intended as the extreme political means of pressure. There could no longer be any question of breaking up the Western Entente by a strong-handed attitude, as had originally been hoped. That was long past. Now the best that could be hoped for was to prevent an open diplomatic defeat in the great world conference and so save Germany's imperilled prestige. Whether there would be a German threat of war at all depended, on one hand, on whether the French would oppose concessions of any kind, on the other, on whether German policy was still resolved at all costs to prevent a French triumph. Neither was the case.

As we know, French policy saw very skilfully that by giving up the general mandate and recognising the "open door" for trade, it could create a very favourable atmosphere for further claims and dissolve the whole complex of Moroccan problems into questions of detail. Taken by themselves, the practical importance of these was small; indeed it was almost ridiculous in proportion to the great diplomatic array trying to solve them. When the dispute of the Great Powers finally centred on the question whether, besides French and Spanish police officers, nationals of other countries should be brought into the Moroccan harbour police, Germany could no longer throw her sword on the conference table without appearing the deliberate disturber of world peace; as it was, the experience of complete diplomatic isolation, even from Italy, the third partner in the Triple Alliance, was bitter enough. Holstein and Biilow had thought that in an international conference the material interest of the various nations engaged in Moroccan trade would work out to Germany's advantage—a mistake which is as difficult to understand as to forgive! For as diplomats they should have known that in international affairs it is not the economic but the political, the *power* interest, which turns the scale.

But Holstein's expectations were disappointed from another quarter as well. Biilow's resolve to risk a "serious conflict" with France rather than accept her diplomatic triumph had always rested on a slender foundation. Just about that time, Wilhelm II took several occasions of letting it be unequivocally understood that under no circumstances was he prepared to make war on France for the sake of Morocco. In two long letters to Biilow on December 29th and 31st⁴⁶ he almost entreated the Chancellor to preserve him from this disaster. Indeed, in his nervous fright (one can hardly call it anything else) he went so far as to maintain that "against a combination of France and the English Navy we are completely helpless." The Army was not ready with its armament conversion, the Navy was quite inadequate, and at home the Socialists were preaching open rebellion. "First cow the Socialists, behead them and make them harmless—with a blood-bath, if necessary—and then make war abroad. But not before, and not *a tempo!*" To incur the odium of aggression for the sake of Morocco would only be doing England a favour. Of course, Algeciras must not become a German Fashoda. But a skilful policy "should manage to keep it from looking like one, or even coming anywhere near it."

As early as September Kaiser Wilhelm had shown his weariness with the Morocco business when he telegraphed to Biilow from Rominten: "Bring Rosen [the German negotiator in Paris] to his senses and put an end to the disgusting squabble in Paris. I am thoroughly tired of it."⁴⁷ When the "Supreme War-Lord" refused his permission for military action over Morocco, how could Biilow still dare to make threats with it? It is also worth noting that Schlieffen's successor, General von Moltke, made no attempt to fan the fire with the rumours of French rearmament which got about at the beginning of the conference. On the contrary, he issued a *dementi*. It was true that France was closing certain gaps in her armament, but this was no more than a reasonable precaution. "The French," he declared, "do not want war and have no thought of attacking. But they want to be armed against a German attack."⁴⁸

In this situation, Biilow's political attitude became visibly more and

⁴⁶ *Grosse Politik*, XX (2), No. 6887, and J. Reimann, *Fürst Bülows Denkwürdigkeiten und die deutsche Marokkopolitik* (1935), p. no f., where the famous "*Sylvesterbrief*" is reproduced in full, after its publication in the *Berliner Tageblatt* (October 14th, 1928). Cf. Biilow, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, II, p. 197 ff

⁴⁷ *Grosse Politik*, XIX (2), No. 6245 (November 27th, 1905).

⁴⁸ *Grosse Politik*, XXI (1), Nos. 6939, 6942.

more uncertain. He was obviously impressed by Metternich's report from London that the new Liberal Government and its Foreign Secretary, Grey, regarded the Morocco question as a test of strength for the Entente, and by his warning to seek a compromise rather than risk an open struggle for power.⁴⁹ He had it conveyed to Sir Edward Grey that Germany had no intention of breaking up the Entente and that the whole Morocco question was too unimportant to be turned into a question of German prestige.⁵⁰ He pointed out at some length to the Chief of the General Staff, Moltke, that although the Balfour Government had threatened to support France in the event of war, the Liberals "have been taught by the elections that the great majority of the English people do not want to pay any more war bills ; they had had enough of those for the Boer War." Furthermore Article 9 of the Anglo-French treaty of 1904 only committed the British to diplomatic, not to military, support of French aims in Morocco. It was perhaps "not impossible that crushing French defeats might put the English into a bellicose mood," but on this uncertain chance France would hardly risk war with Germany for the sake of Morocco; rather would she adopt a conciliatory attitude at the conference. However (he thought), it could also happen that the Algiers conference failed. What then? The international *status quo* of the Treaty of Madrid of 1882 would come into force again. If France should then try to subdue Morocco by force, she would run a great risk, because probably (it was hinted) "Morocco would not remain isolated in this war." In other words: no danger of war now, but at a later stage—though France would think twice before striking.⁵¹

How far Prince Bismarck believed in these optimistic statements himself is an open question. They can hardly have made an impression on Moltke. About this time he received the report, already quoted, of the military attaché in London, Count von der Schulenburg, which informed him minutely about the strength of the expeditionary force which the British were going to send to the Continent, and which probably led him to ask Graf Schlieffen for the supplement to his great

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 6923 f.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 6932. To hand out similar tranquillisers, Holstein also used a friend, the banker von Schwabach. Cf. P. von Schwabach, *Aus meinen Akten* (1927), particularly the accounts to Rothschild and Crowe of January-February 1906 (pp. 89, 90, 98, 101). Here it is denied that Bismarck had any intention of making war. That after this German threats no longer made any impression in Paris is not surprising.

⁵¹ *Grosse Politik*, XXI (i), Nos. 6932, 6943 (January 24th, 1906).

operational plan (see above, p. 70, footnote⁴). But it is remarkable that the Chancellor (or Holstein, as the originator?) should have been trying to urge on the Chief of the General Staff, and not the other way round!

What were Holstein's thoughts during these weeks? On January 15th he had obviously not yet given up hope of being able to convince Sir Edward Grey that it would be unfair of England and France to "coerce the other Treaty states into renouncing [their rights in Morocco] without suitable compensation"—and above all that the unleashing of a great war for the sake of Morocco would be as unrewarding for the British as for the Germans or French. Therefore, he hoped, they would be content to provide their partners in the Entente with diplomatic support.⁵² Metternich was told to inquire of Grey whether England would still give military support to the French if they began, after the failure of the conference, to take over Morocco by force. Grey at first declined to make a binding statement in advance on these questions. Later he confirmed that England would regard herself bound to her partner in the Entente in any circumstance, including the one mentioned by Metternich.⁵³ This did not deter Holstein from using various ways to warn the French against a failure of the conference and to point out the unfortunate consequences: a continuation of the military tension and perhaps even the fall of the Rouvier Government as a scapegoat for French disappointment. But he was quick to combine the warning with an immediate renewal of former offers: Germany would be prepared after a few years to discuss a revision of the Morocco settlement in a form more favourable to France.⁵⁴ Yet all these attempts to come to an agreement secretly and outside the conference resulted in failure, and the French attitude stiffened even more. In the end, German policy had to make up its mind whether it would really break up the conference over the tiresome police question or else climb down.

Only at this juncture does Biilow seem to have parted company from Holstein, and this under pressure of very definite directives from the Kaiser. A formal statement of differences between them does not appear in the documents, but we know that Holstein had his last meeting with the Chancellor at the end of February and no longer collaborated with him as from March 12th, the day that brought the

s- *Ibid.*, No. 6953 (note to Biilow).

53 *Ibid.*, No. 6959 (January 23rd, 1906); 7018 (February 19th, 1906).

61 *Ibid.*, No. 6994 (February 10th); 7034-6 (February 22nd); 7055 (March 4th).

change of front at Algeciras. The differences between the Chancellor and his collaborator were then only a matter of tactics, not of political strategy. The supposition that Holstein, in contrast to Bülow, tried vainly to start a preventive war is not supported by any evidence in the documents. Even Wilhelm II, to whom Bülow later represented the *Geheimrat* as the main culprit for the failure of the Morocco policy, reproached the latter only with having wanted the conference to fail and with having sent the appropriate instructions to Algeciras.⁶⁵

What is the origin of the contention that Holstein was steering towards a preventive war against France? The outcome of the Morocco crisis was generally felt to be a heavy defeat for German diplomacy; indeed, in the prehistory of the Great War it represents a cross-roads: with it began the consolidation of the Entente into a military pact, and with that came the end of Germany's political freedom of manoeuvre. Holstein was sent into the wilderness as a scapegoat; it was quite natural that he should try to justify himself and to shift some part of the responsibility on to others' shoulders. Had not his advice always been to see it through, i.e. to let the Algeciras conference fail rather than accept a French triumph? Had not Wilhelm II on several most imprudent occasions, even in the presence of foreigners, shown that he was absolutely opposed to making war in Morocco, thereby sabotaging all attempts of German diplomacy to reach better results by firm or even menacing behaviour?

It was rather in this sense that Holstein spoke to von der Lancken when in 1909 the latter visited him on Bülow's (indirect) instructions, to get his approval, on his death-bed, for the then pending Franco-German agreement on Morocco. Von der Lancken found him very ill and in great despondency over his late Morocco policy. He admitted having made great mistakes: at first he had thought an English *approvement* with the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance was quite impossible; then, when it happened, he had been convinced that "before the ring of the other Great Powers throttled us, we should try with all our energy, and with resolution not to shrink from the extreme, to break this ring open. Hence the Kaiser's Tangier journey! But I made a mistake in my estimate of the personalities who finally counted. I

⁶⁵ *British Documents*, III, p. 366 (Lascelles' report of August 16th, 1906). In *Grosse Politik*, XXI (2), p. 567, there is a minute by Wilhelm II of 1907. Here the accusation against Holstein reaches the grotesque; it cannot be taken seriously in this form; but again there is no mention of a direct demand for a preventive war.

should have seen quite clearly that Prince Biilow was hardly likely, His Majesty never, to decide on the extreme step." In 1904-3 the military situation had been more favourable to Germany than at any other time.⁵⁶

Are we now obliged, with Peter Rassow, to take these phrases ("resolution not to shrink from the extreme," "to decide on the extreme step") as meaning that in 1904-5 Holstein had decided on a preventive war? First it must be said that the phrasing itself is very doubtful. Von der Lancken wrote it down from memory twenty-two years later and said himself that he could not guarantee each individual phrase. At the time, in 1909, he obviously did not understand it as an intention to make war on Holstein's part. Not until "many years later" when he had read Rochs' pamphlet on Schlieffen with its story quoted earlier, and shown to be quite imaginary, that Schlieffen had recommended a preventive war to the Chancellor as early as the autumn of 1904, did von der Lancken feel justified in deducing that Holstein, under Schlieffen's influence, wanted to provoke an aggressive war against France. He then tried to support his deduction by pointing out that Holstein and Schlieffen often had talks together. For a critical study of history, all this has, of course, no value.⁵⁷

Even if the sick and dying Holstein really meant what von der Lancken later read into his words, such an account of his past would make nonsense in view of the clear evidence of his official memoranda of 1905-6. This is further confirmed by his private and strictly confidential remarks of the same period. On July 16th, 1905, he wrote to his cousin and friend, Ida Stulpnagel: "I think the Morocco question will turn out well, too. We don't want to bring off anything special. The object of our attitude was to show by deeds that 'they can't do without us,' and to bring down Delcasse. Since October, when we made it up again, Biilow has shown full confidence in me. During

⁵⁶ Von der Lancken, *Mein 30 Dienstjahre*, p. 86 f.

⁵⁷ Further responsible witnesses for Holstein's alleged warlike intentions do not exist. Rosen, *ibid.*, p. 101, refers to von der Lancken and offers no evidence of his own. Frh. von Trotha, *Friedrich von Holstein* (1931), offers little original material, and on the Morocco question refers to von der Lancken, Otto Hammann and Eckardstein. On p. 135 he produces a remark by his uncle, Max von Brandt, who had talked to Holstein (sometime during the Morocco crisis) and had worriedly said that Holstein "wanted the war." This is mere talk which signifies nothing. O. Hammann, *Bilder ms der letzten Kaiserzeit* (1922), p. 48, tells of a directive to the Press in December 1905 which mentioned the threat of war in the coming spring—in order to put pressure on France. This agrees quite well with the consultations in December 1905 mentioned in the text above, but is no evidence of Holstein's alleged intention of war. Nor is the passage in Monts, *Erinnerungen tmd Aufzeichnungen* (1932), p. 191 f. (quoted by Rassow, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 173, p. 306) of any significance.

these past eight months, when one difficult question has followed another, I have conferred only with him, without any quarrelling. Apart from Biilow, I have nobody with whom to exchange views; I give orders about what is to be done, or else do it myself. But this feeling of lonely responsibility gives me many a sleepless night."⁵⁸ Not a word about war, or about differences with Biilow! At the end of January 1906, however, he complains that "Biilow's weakness" has spoiled his pleasure in his work; at the end of December he had already put in a provisional request to be allowed to retire—slowly becoming weary, also, of his strange hybrid position, half-way between Counsellor and State Secretary, without the authority to make independent decisions. Again, in March 1906, he gives merely these personal motives and old age as reasons for his retirement. But now he complains about the Kaiser too: "He lacks persistence, and without that there is no success in politics. Also he lacks the nerve of his grandfather. That is the worst of it. Slowly it gets noticed abroad that H.M. retreats in the face of strong pressure. This is the danger for the future. People will try putting on the pressure more often. I have pointed it out. I cannot do more." What he meant is clarified by a letter of April 4th: "On the Morocco question I was of the opinion that we should stick firmly to our point of view in the sure expectation that the neutrals would come forward with proposals for a settlement. Russia needed a loan of a thousand million, Italy was carrying through a Bill conversion, England wanted to cut down her Boer war debt. In short, they all needed not just peace (peace was never threatened), but absolute tranquillity. They would have come forward with proposals for certain, as soon as they saw that the conference was in danger of failure. This view was shared by the Chancellor, the State Secretary and the State Under-Secretary. But the Kaiser suddenly took fright. . . when the newspapers reported that Delcasse had been summoned to the King of England. Our Most Gracious has a strong imagination and weak nerves. He wrote to Biilow that we should give in. I deplore this for the future's sake, because next time it happens other cabinets will remember that Germany retreated under pressure. The same technique will then be tried again. Here lies the real danger. The Morocco crisis itself was quite harmless. That I who for sixteen years have watched over Germany's security, safeguarding it to the best of my ability, should now be represented as a warmonger, is an irony of fate."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ H. Rogge, *ibid.*, p. 293 f.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 244 E, 246 f.

These statements are so unambiguous that it is unnecessary to quote from the various articles and letters which Holstein got into the Press in 1906 to defend himself against his slanderers and political enemies and to give his point of view about the outcome of the Morocco crisis.⁶⁰ I will merely quote one sentence from a letter he wrote (without intending it to be published) to a South German editor: "Nobody wants war nowadays, because every sensible politician knows that the masses would not follow blindly. *Vide* Russia." That a war for the sake of Morocco would be unpopular in the highest degree was doubtless as clear to Holstein as to Bülow and the Kaiser.

With this we have reached the end of our inquiry. Its result seems to me worth the trouble. About 1904-6 Germany experienced for the first and only time in the period before the Great War a lifting of the threat of a two-front war, and thus her military superiority over the French was absolutely without doubt. In spite of this, French policy tried to ignore her demand for equality in the competition for great colonial areas. For Germany—and this was sensed strongly abroad—the temptation was never far distant to take the opportunity of challenging her old rival to war and making an end of her claims to power by force. The German General Staff had long prepared operational plans for a war with France and was convinced that they had excellent prospects of success. Nevertheless it was wary of urging war, and even the most active personality in the Foreign Ministry, Baron Holstein, never thought of starting a preventive war. Moreover the Chancellor and the Kaiser were fundamentally against a solution by force. They were also conscious (and had often said so) that the mass of the German people would be violently opposed to such a war. They would never have dared summon the nation to such an enterprise, which would have been regarded as a mere Cabinet war.

Any connection between the Schlieffen Plan and a scheme to solve the Morocco question, or break up hostile alliances, by force of arms may therefore be discounted.

⁶⁰ *Schicksische Zeitung*, No. 297 of April 28th, 1906, in: Rogge, *ibid.*, p. 253 f. Letter to a South German editor in Spring, 1906, published in the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, March 1919, p. 420 ff. (full of strong criticism of Wilhelm II). Open letter to Maximilian Harden, August 5th, 1906, published in the *Zukunft* of June 18th, 1906. Letter to Graf Monts, April 22nd, 1906, in: Monts, *ibid.*, p. 358 ff. The most enduring success of all his enemies of that time was achieved by O. Hammann, who accused him of being a warmonger.

TEXTS

I. SCHLIEFFEN'S GREAT MEMORANDUM OF DECEMBER 1905

A. EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

1. The Drafts

*O*F the great memorandum of December 1905 Schlieffens papers contain the preliminary drafts, fragments, fair copies and transcripts enumerated below. Their relationship with each other is not easily recognisable, because in his constant re-writing Schlieffen often presents the ideas in the drafts in a different order, using old and new drafts simultaneously as his working copy without always keeping to the exact wording, etc. However, by carefully comparing the relevant corrections and insertions with the text of the subsequent fair copies (which in turn served as drafts themselves) it has been possible to construct a chronological order. The provisional order made by an archivist (in Washington?) by means of consecutive numbers (in pencil at the top of each page) is arbitrary and has furthermore disrupted the sequence of pages. Here I have enumerated the items chronologically.

I. Draft in the handwriting of Major von Hahuke, nineteen half-page columns (pages 119-38) interleaved with empty pages for corrections, two of them used for postscripts (in Hahnke's hand). Many corrections and insertions in Schlieffens handwriting in the empty left-hand columns. Begins: Chief of the Army General Staff. Berlin, December 31st, 1905. In a war against Germany, France will probably at first restrict herself to defence. Ends: . . . therefore a German attack on France does not permit one to respect the neutrality of Luxembourg and Belgium.

Since the text displays several gaps (re-starting out of context, sometimes in the middle of a sentence), parts of this draft must have been lost or have been used for other purposes. It is probably the earliest dictated draft. I therefore reproduce it in full as Appendix, 1.

II, Ha, lib. Two fair copies in Hahnke's hand. One of them (lid) comprising eighteen half-page columns (pp. 139-56) is not corrected; the other (II), of nineteen columns (pp. 192-210), has many corrections and insertions

in Schlieffen's hand. A third copy (*lib*), of twenty columns, not page-numbered, is in a copyist's hand, identical to *Ha*, and shows only corrections by the copyist. *Begins*: Berlin, December 1905. In a war against Germany, France will probably . . . *Ends*: . . . the remaining classes of reservists are to be used (*cf. Appendix, 1, p. 152 below*). Attached to *II* there is a fragment comprising four half-page columns. *Begins*: . . . not against the great fortresses, whose conquest requires a great siege apparatus. . . *Ends*: (*crossed out*) . . . would also have been desirable. In order to render the new deployment difficult. . .

21Draft in Schlieffen's own handwriting, undated, twenty-eight half-page columns (pp. 79-106), extensive crossings-out and corrections. *Begins*: War against [France] France allied to England. The French have turned their country into a fortress. From Dunkirk and Calais. . . *Ends*: . . . are deploying quicker than we, and anticipate the attack.

22Draft in Schlieffen's own hand, thirty half-page columns (pp. 49-78), undated, with many insertions and corrections. *Begins*: Offensive plan against France. The French have turned their country into a fortress. On the long frontier from Dunkirk and Calais. . . *Ends*: . . . The force will only fulfil its task, if it is trained to move and fight in woods and mountainous country.

I reproduce the first four paragraphs of this draft as Appendix, 2. They are a rephrasing of the opening sentences; in the final version these were left out, but are echoed in the rather strange new insertion on page 144.

23Draft in Schlieffen's own hand, thirty-five half-page columns (pp. 157-91), several insertions and corrections. *Begins*: War against France allied to England. Berlin, December 1905. In a war against Germany France will, especially as long as. . . *Ends*: . . . for here the decisive battle is to be expected.

24Copyist's hand, thirty-seven half-page columns (pp. 215-52), many corrections and additions in Schlieffen's hand. *Begins*: War against France allied to England. Berlin, December 1905. *The opening*: In the event of a war against Germany. . . is subsequently combined with the second opening (*see above, IV = Appendix, 2*). Corrected in Schlieffen's hand, it *begins*: The French have turned their country into a fortress. . . . Anyone who has built such a fortress will not give it up at once; he will hold it. Therefore it must be assumed that France, in a war against Germany, . . . etc. *Ends*: . . . for here the decisive battle is to be expected.

VII. *Fragment in Schlieffens own hand, twelve half-page columns (pp. 103-14). Begins: . . . six army corps, followed by half a Reserve corps, will be sent against the sector of the Meuse between Namur and Mezieres. Ends: . . . with the help of this superiority and the skill of the subordinate commanders, victory will be ours.*

This fragment cannot be placed with certainty in proper order among the other items. I think it is older than V and VI, but it certainly does not belong to item III (page-numbering misleading!).

Items VIII and IX have no material interest as they contain nothing new.

VIII. *Hahnke's handwriting, eight half-page columns (pp. 253-60) without heading, a number of corrections in Hahnke's hand. Begins: In a war against Germany, France will probably . . . Ends: . . . not too far away to engage him in battle under unfavourable circumstances.*

IX. *Draft starting in Schlieffen's own hand, after column 2 in the copyist's hand, ten columns (pp. 261-70); corrections partly by Schlieffen, partly by the copyist. Begins: Berlin, December 1905. In a war against Germany, France will probably at first restrict herself to defence. Ends: . . . the remaining classes of reservists are to be used.*

*According to Professor Wolfgang Foerster, who informed me by letter (basing his information on a verbal statement made by von Hahnke), these preliminary drafts were probably made in December 1905 and January 1906. Schlieffen finished the memorandum at the end of January 1906, and in February a copy was handed by von Hahnke to General von Moltke. The date "December 31st, 1905" has no significance apart from the fact that on that day Graf Schlieffen's term of office ended. The facsimile in W. Groener's book: *Das Testament des Grafen Schlieffen (1927) p. 8 et sqq.*, has been made upfront three different items: the heading from V, the text from the closing passages of IV, and the signature from fair copy "B" which we shall discuss below.*

2. The Final Version

Of the final version of the great memorandum Schlieffen's papers contain two identical typewritten copies and one fair copy in a copyist's hand, signed by Schlieffen, of twenty-four folio pages (not columns!). The latter (which I will call "B") lies in a special cardboard folder with the following inscription by von Hahnke: "France 1905. Schlieffen's original draft. Compared with the original, W.H." Obviously von Hahnke regarded this as the final and definitive "draft," while calling another fair copy, which was

handed to Moltke (and which seems no longer to exist), the "original." Manuscript B shows: (1) many small corrections or insertions, which von Hahnke seems to have made on the basis of the "original"; (2) a change of handwriting in the main text, which shows clearly that after page 14 three pages, and after page 22 four pages, have been inserted with a changed text—a final change which is important in that it represents a new beginning in the middle of the text (see below, page 144), taking up, in a different form, the basic idea expressed in the opening.

Of the two identical typewritten copies, the first (called "A" in the text below) has a cover with the heading "Colonel-General Graf Schlieffen. Memorandum December 1905." Handwritten note: W. v. Hahnke, with rubber-stamped address: Potsdam, Gr. Weinmeisterstr. 2.

The second is a carbon copy, but typed on a different machine from the preceding copy. The first contains in its left margin, in typescript, all the remarks which Moltke felt it necessary to make on the memorandum.

The second shows only the first of Moltke's remarks in this form; all the others are in von Hahnke's hand. Both of them thus show that von Hahnke afterwards copied out the memorandum handed to Moltke, with all the latter's marginal notes. Since they are therefore immediate copies of the "original," i.e. the very last version, I based the text below on "A." Text "B" has been consulted all the way through for comparison. Passages which have been added as corrections to the original version of text "B" I have set in square brackets []; passages which are struck out of "B" have been added as footnotes, except where they are merely stylistic changes without material significance.

The two typewritten copies mentioned both carry the memorandum of 1905 on twenty pages, then on pages 21-5 Schlieffen's additional memorandum of February 1906 (printed below as II) and on pages 26-9 Moltke's general comments on Schlieffen's memorandum (printed below as III).

B. TEXT OF THE MEMORANDUM

War against France

Berlin, December 1905¹

In a war against Germany, France will probably at first restrict herself to defence, particularly as long as she cannot count on effective Russian

¹ The following is to be found in "B" before the text, in "A" in the margin: Germany: 971 battalions, 504 squadrons, 801 batteries without Landwehr, Landsturm and fortress garrisons (crossed out: new formations); France: 995 battalions, 444 squadrons, 705 batteries without territorial troops and fortress garrisons (crossed out: Landwehr and fortress garrisons). Note in Hahnke's writing: "in the fair copy below the text under f."

support.* With this in view she has long prepared a position which is for the greater part permanent, of which the great fortresses of Belfort, Epinal, Toul and Verdun are the main strongpoints. This position can be adequately occupied by the large French army and presents great difficulties to the attacker.

The attack will not be directed on the great fortresses, whose conquest requires a great siege apparatus, much time and large forces, especially as encirclement is impossible and the siege can only be conducted from one side. The attacker will prefer to advance on the intervening gaps. Two of them (Belfort-Epinal and Toul-Verdun) are filled with barrier forts, but these are of no considerable importance. It matters more that the gaps are already strong natural positions in which sector lies behind sector, and which, by the great fortresses on their wings, impede their envelopment by the enemy, while threatening him with the same fate himself. The greatest promise of success is offered by an attack on the right wing of the Moselle forts (Fort Ballon de Servance). But we are not sufficiently prepared to overcome the difficult terrain here. Even when that has been attended to, one will hardly wish to open a campaign with a siege of "Ballon de Servance." In a later period of the war, however, the reduction of this fort may be of importance.

Another promise of success is offered by an attack on Nancy, which is protected by field-works and is open to easy envelopment and bombardment. But after the town and the heights beyond are taken (Forêt de Hayc) we are faced with the fortifications of Toul. Almost the only advantage of an attack on Nancy is that in order to save the capital of Lorraine the French might perhaps be induced to come out of their fortresses and accept open battle.** But they would then have their defence lines so close in their rear that a defeat would not bring them great damage, nor the victor great success. It would be a repulsed

** Marginal note by General von Moltke:*

France's offensive or defensive attitude will essentially depend on the *cams belli*. If Germany causes the war, France will probably be on the defensive. If, however, the war is desired and caused by France, she is most likely to conduct it offensively. If France wants to re-conquer the lost provinces, she has to invade them, i.e. take the offensive. I do not consider it altogether certain that France will remain on the defensive under all circumstances. However, the frontier fortresses built soon after the war of '70-'71 stress the defensive idea. But this does not accord with the offensive spirit ever inherent in the nation, nor with the doctrines and views now prevalent in the French Army.

*** Marginal note by General von Moltke:*

I think it certain the French would not abandon Nancy to a bombardment without a battle. The army command would never dare to, in view of public opinion.

sortie from a fortress, involving besieger and defender in about the same number of casualties and leaving the situation of both unchanged.

Therefore a frontal attack on the position Belfort-Verdun offers little promise of success. An envelopment from the south would have to be preceded by a victorious campaign against Switzerland and by the capture of the Jura forts—time-consuming enterprises during which the French would not remain idle.*

Against a northern envelopment the French intend to occupy the Meuse between Verdun and Mezieres, but the real resistance, it is said, is not to be offered here but behind the Aisne, roughly between St. Menchould and Rethel. An intermediate position beyond the Aire seems also to be under consideration. If the German envelopment reaches even further, it will run into a strong mountain position whose strongpoints are the fortresses of Rhcims, Laon and La Fere.

The Germans² are therefore confronted with the folio whig:

25 The position Belfort, Epinal, Toul, Verdun with a continuation along the Meuse at Mezieres. Screening troops are pushed out to the Vosges, the Meurthe, Nancy and the Cotes Lorraines between Toul and Verdun.

26 The intermediate position on the Aire.

27 The position on the Aisne.

28 The position Rheims-La Fere.

One cannot have great confidence in an attack on all these strong positions. More promising than the frontal attack with an envelopment by the left wing seems to be an attack from the north-west, directed on the flanks at Mezieres, Rethel, La Fere, and across the Oise on the rear of the position.

To make this possible, the Franco-Belgian frontier left of the Meuse must be taken, together with the fortified towns of Mezieres, Hirson and Maubeuge, three small barrier forts, Lille and Dunkirk; and to reach thus far the neutrality of Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands must be violated.

The violation of Luxembourg neutrality will have no important consequences other than protests. The Netherlands regard England,

* *Marginal note by General von Moltke:*

They would only be feasible, of course, if there were a simultaneous attack in front.

² *In the margin:* Map 1: German deployment and French positions.

allied to France, no less as an enemy than does Germany. It will be possible to come to an agreement with them.*

[Belgium wdl probably offer resistance.] In face of the German advance north of the Meuse, her army, according to plan, will retreat to Antwerp and must be contained there;³ this might be effected in the north by means of a blockade of the Scheldt which would cut communications with England and the sea.** For Liege and Namur,⁴ which are intended to have only a weak garrison, observation will suffice. It will be possible to take the citadel of Huy, or to neutralise it.

Making a covered advance against Antwerp, Liege and Namur, the Germans will find a fortified frontier, but not a frontier as thoroughly and extensively fortified as that opposite Germany.*** If the French wish to defend it, they will be obliged to move corps and armies from the original front and replace them by reserves from the rear, for instance by the corps on the Alpine frontier. But it is to be hoped that they will not be fully successful in this. Therefore they may perhaps give up the attempt to man such an over-extended line and instead take the offensive against the threatening invasion with all the troops they can scrape together. Whether they attack or defend, it is not unlikely that battle will be joined near the frontier Mezieres-Dunkirk; and the Germans' task is to muster the greatest possible strength for this battle. Even if it should not take place and the French remain behind the Aisne, a strong German right wing will still be of the greatest value for the operations to come.

If one wishes to make an attack from the rear on the left flanks of the French positions at Mezieres, Rethel, La Fere and beyond, it seems expedient to advance exclusively on the left of the Meuse through Belgium, to wheel left beyond Namur and then to deploy for the attack. But one would lack roads for a march on such a narrow front,

* *Marginal note by General von Moltke:*

If our diplomacy manages this, it will be a great advantage. We need the Dutch railways. The value of Holland as an ally would be incalculable.

³ *In the margin:* three divisions.

** *Marginal note by General von Moltke:*

The investment of Antwerp will have to be followed by a formal siege as quickly as possible.

⁴ *In the margin:* three army corps.

*** *Marginal note by General von Moltke:*

Liege and Namur are of no importance in themselves. They may be weakly garrisoned, but they are strong places. They block the Meuse railway, whose use during the war cannot therefore be counted upon. It is of the greatest importance to take at least Liege at an early stage, in order to have the railway in one's hands.

and even more so railways with which to bring up one's forces. The railway system obliges the German army to deploy mainly on the line Metz-Wesel. Here twenty-three army corps, twelve and a half Reserve corps and eight cavalry divisions are to be assembled, in order shortly afterwards to wheel left against the line Verdun-Dunkirk. During this, the Reserve corps of the northern wing will cover the right flank, particularly against Antwerp, and the Reserve corps of the southern wing the left flank, against an enemy advance left of the Moselle from the line Toul-Verdun. [Accordingly the attack will not be directed exclusively on the flanks, but also on the left part of the front.]

Three and a half army corps, one and a half Reserve corps and three cavalry divisions remain left of the Moselle. To begin with they will attack Nancy, in order to attract as many enemy as possible on themselves and away from the reinforcement of the northern front; later they will co-operate in covering the left flank, or in reinforcing the right.

The strongpoint for covering the left flank will be Metz. Not the Metz of today, nor the enlarged Metz envisaged in the latest projects, but a Metz fortified largely by field-works. Its size will be determined in general by the courses of the Moselle, Saar and Nied; it will be given a strong garrison and⁵ Landwehr troops, as well as numerous pieces of heavy artillery, and will be enabled to draw upon itself a considerable part of the enemy's forces.

If possible, the German Army will win its battle by an envelopment with the right wing.⁶ This will therefore be made as strong as possible. For this purpose eight army corps and five cavalry divisions will cross the Meuse by five⁷ routes below Liege and advance in the direction of Brussels-Namur; a ninth army corps (XVIIIth) will join them after crossing the Meuse above Liege. The last must also neutralise the citadel of Huy, within whose range it is obliged to cross the Meuse.

The nine army corps will be followed by seven Reserve corps, whose main part is intended for the investment of Antwerp while the remainder initially give further cover to the right flank.

Apart from this, there is a further possible reinforcement in the form of two of the army corps remaining on the left bank of the Moselle. They can be brought up by railway (German and Belgian) as soon as the lines are cleared and put into service. These could bring the decision.

Six army corps and one cavalry division, followed by one Reserve division, will be marched against the Meuse sector Mezieres-Namur.

⁵ B: of

⁶ *In the margin:* Map 2. Advance to the French frontier.

⁷ B: four

When they have crossed the river, between fifteen and seventeen army corps will have linked up left of the Meuse.

Eight army corps and two cavalry divisions will advance on the Meuse front Mezieres-Verdun. Five Reserve corps [leaning on Metz] will undertake the cover [of the left flank].⁸

Ten Landwehr brigades will follow them north of the Meuse, six south; six will be in⁹ the war garrison of¹⁰ Metz, three and a half will be on the Upper Rhine and one in Low'er Alsace.

It can be assumed that the German deployment takes place undisturbed. At the most it might become necessary to de-train the Reserve corps of the far left wing farther back instead of, as hitherto planned, on or beyond the Saar above Saarbrücken. It will also be possible to start the advance of the whole army left of the Moselle according to plan. But whether the French army [left of the Meuse, or right of it, or on both banks] will come to meet us or whether it will await our attack—and if so, where—is quite uncertain. But in any case it is important that north of the Meuse the defile between Brussels and Namur is passed *before* a clash with the enemy, so that beyond it the deployment of the nine army corps can develop without interruption. It is therefore essential to accelerate the advance of the German right wing as much as possible. Since there must be a left wheel, the advance of the rest of the army must slow down progressively towards the left.

The German armies advancing right of the Meuse must daily be prepared for a clash with the enemy still on this side of the river. At all times it must be possible to form a front at least strong enough to fight off the enemy, even if he is superior. This will be rendered more difficult by the fortresses of Longwy and Montmedy, which must be taken or at least neutralised; by the wooded mountains which run across the country south of the Semois, and by the extensive woodlands north of this river. The army commanders must be constantly on the alert and distribute the marching routes appropriately. This will be made easier by the fact that the daily marching distances need only be short. The force will only fulfil its task, if it is trained to move and fight in woods and mountainous country.

Having broken through the French fortress belt left of the Meuse, whether after a victorious battle on Belgian territory, or a successful attack on the fortified position, or without meeting serious resistance, the Germans will turn, according to plan, against the left flanks of the

⁸ B: between the Meuse and Moselle.

⁹ B: in addition to

¹⁰ B: in

northern France without a stiff fight. Unless, therefore, they save their honour by a counter-offensive, they will probably prefer to form a defensive flank behind the Oise between La Fere and Paris rather than surrender a great, rich territory, their fine fortresses, and the northern front of Paris. It can hardly be said that it is impossible to take up a position behind the Oise. Since the main position Belfort-Verdun need only remain weakly occupied, the available forces will be enough to defend the Aisne and the Oise. The position behind the Oise may not be very strong in front, but on the left it rests on the colossal fortress of Paris. Even if it is mastered in front, even if the defender retreats behind the Marne or Seine, the victor must still submit to the necessity of investing Paris, first on the northern front and then on other fronts, and is obliged with considerably weakened forces to continue the attack against a more numerous enemy. To dislodge the latter from his new position, he will by-pass the left flank resting on Paris and will thus again have to use strong forces for the investment of the western and southern front of the gigantic fortress.

One thing is clear. Unless the French do us the favour of attacking, we shall be obliged to advance against the Aisne, the Rheims-La Fere position and the Oise, and we shall be forced, no matter whether our enemies hold the Aisne-Oise position or retreat behind the Marne or the Seine, etc., to follow them with part of our army, and with another part to envelop Paris on the south and invest the fortress. We shall therefore be well advised to prepare in good time for a crossing of the Seine below its junction with the Oise and for the investment of Paris, initially on the western and southern front. Make these preparations how we may, we shall reach the conclusion that we are too weak¹⁸ to continue operations in this direction.] We shall find the experience of all earlier conquerors confirmed, that a war of aggression calls for much strength and also consumes much, that this strength dwindles constantly as the defender's increases, and all this particularly so in a country which bristles with fortresses.

The Active corps must be kept intact for the battle and not used for duties in the lines of communication area, siege-work, or the investing of fortresses.

When the Germans reach the Oise, their lines of communication area¹⁹ will extend on the right to the coast and to the Seine below

¹⁸ B: the German army is too weak *After the bracket the first copyist's hand recommences on afresh page (number 18).*

¹⁹ *In the margin: Map 4 (lines of communication area).*

Paris. In front it will be bounded by the Oise and the Aisne as far as the Meuse below Verdun. The course of its boundary from there to the Rhine depends on what progress the French may have made on the right of the Moselle. The lines of communication area will comprise Luxembourg, Belgium, part of the Netherlands and Northern France. In this wide area numerous fortresses must be besieged, invested or kept under observation. Left of the Moselle, the available seven and a half Reserve corps and sixteen Landwehr brigades will be used for this purpose, except for [at the most] two and a half Reserve corps and two Landwehr brigades which are urgently needed [to reinforce the front and]²⁰ cover the flank and the rear of the main army. (Under no circumstances is it possible to leave an army at Dunkirk, Calais, Boulogne, etc., as cover against an English landing. Should the English land and advance, the Germans will halt, defend themselves if necessary, detach an adequate number of corps, defeat the English and continue the operation against the French.)²¹ It is calculated:

For the investment of Antwerp five Reserve corps (perhaps not enough)

For the observation of

Liège	2 Landwehr brigades.
Namur	2 Landwehr brigades.
Maubeuge	2 Landwehr brigades.
Lille	3 Landwehr brigades.
Dunkirk	3 Landwehr brigades.
Mézières	
Givet	j- 1 Landwehr brigade.
Hirson	
Longwy	
Montmédy	i Landwehr brigade.

But the railways necessary to supply the army must also be guarded; the great cities and the populous industrial provinces of Belgium and north-western France must be occupied. The whole area must offer the army a secure base. For this the Landsturm must be used. Should there be legal obstacles, the law must be changed immediately on the commencement of mobilisation.

Still greater forces must be raised. We have as many Reserve battalions

²⁰ B: to

²¹ The passage in brackets was added by Schlieffen as a footnote.

as infantry regiments. From these and the available reservists, and if need be from the Landwehr as well, fourth battalions must be formed as in 1866; and from these and Ersatz batteries, again as in 1866, divisions and army corps must be formed. Eight army corps can be created in this way. We shall not wait until the need becomes painfully obvious, until operations are forced to a standstill, before undertaking these re-formations, but do it immediately after the mobilisation of the other troops.

Therefore we must make the Landsturm mobile so that it may occupy the whole lines of communication area from Belfort to Maas-tricht etc., [we must pull out the Landwehr remaining in the fortresses,] and in addition to this we must form at least eight army corps. That is the very least we are bound to do. We have invented conscription and the *Volk in Waffen* and proved to other nations the necessity of introducing these institutions. But having brought our sworn enemies to the point of increasing their armies out of all measure, we have relaxed our own efforts. We continue to boast of the density of our population, of the great manpower at our disposal; but these masses are not trained or rmed to the full number of able-bodied men they could yield. [The fact that France with a population of 39²² million provides 995 battalions for the field army, while Germany with 56 million produces only 971, speaks for itself]

The eight army corps are most needed on or behind the right wing. How many can be transported there depends on the capacity of the railways. Those which cannot be brought up on the left of the Meuse and Sambre through Belgium and Northern France must be brought south of Liege-Namur to the Meuse between Verdun and Mezieres. If this is not entirely possible either, the rest can be used as required at Metz and right of the Moselle.

One must be able to count on there being available for the advance on the position Aisne-Oise-Paris²³ etc.

Army corps	..	..	..	25
Reserve corps	..	..	..	i\
Newly formed corps	..	..	..	6

331 corps

Of these, more than one-third are needed for the envelopment of Paris:

22 B: 34

23 B: For the attack on the position Verdun-La Fere-Paris

seven army corps for the envelopment proper, and six new corps for the investing of Paris on the [western and] southern front. How the advance and the attack on the position are planned is shown on *Map 3**

[If the enemy stands his ground, the attack will take place]²⁵ on the whole line, but particularly on La Fere, which is invested from two sides; after a success it will be continued against Laon and Rheims, which is open towards the West.²⁶ [All along the line the corps will]²⁷ try, as in siege-warfare, to come to grips with the enemy from position to position, day and night, advancing, digging in, advancing [again,²⁸ digging in again, etc., using every means of modern science to dislodge the enemy behind his cover. The attack must never be allowed to come to a standstill as happened in the war in the Far East.

France must be regarded as a great fortress. Of the outer *enceinte* the sector Belfort-Verdun is almost impregnable, but the sector Mezieres-Maubeuge-Lille-Dunkirk is only fortified in parts and at the moment almost unoccupied. Here we must try to break into the fortress. When we have succeeded, a second *enceinte*, or at least part of it, will become apparent, i.e. that adjoining Verdun: the position behind the Aisne to Rheims and La Fere. This section of *enceinte* can be outflanked from the south,* however. The architect of the fortress counted on a German

²⁴ *In the margin: Map 3.*

²⁵ B: It will take place

²⁶ B: Rheims, farther against the Aisne, the Oise, and by the right enveloping
(made illegible).

²⁷ B: The advanced corps will

²⁸ *With the square bracket a new insertion begins in "B," consisting of four unnumbered pages in the second copyist's hand. A page of the text originally following is crossed out. It followed the above text to the line dividing the sections (a final sentence is rendered illegible) and then continued as follows:* The operations will not necessarily take the course outlined here. The French are capable of repeated counter-offensives. By so doing they will ease the Germans' task. The latter can then make use of the principle "strategic offensive—tactical defensive," particularly at those points where they were obliged to give their fronts great width in order to continue the offensive the more vigorously elsewhere, especially on their right wing.

It is also possible that instead of clinging to their positions, the French will retreat to the south in good time. But it is not unlikely that the positions on the Franco-Belgian frontier, before the Aisne, on the Oise, perhaps even on the Somme, will play a certain part and mark the subsequent phases of the campaign.

* *Marginal note by General von Moltke:*

north. (This mistake had already been corrected by Schlieffen in "B," but the correction must have been overlooked by the copyist.)

attack from the south of the Meuse-Sambre, but not from north of this river line. Now it will probably be too late to make good this deficiency by extending the fortified line Rheims-La Fere via Peronne along the Somme. The defender can counter the threatened outflanking by an offensive round the left wing of the position at La Fere. It is to be hoped that this counter-attack, which may be accompanied by an advance from the whole front Verdun-La Fere, will fail. The defeated defender can then try to hold the Oise between La Fere and Paris. The defensibility of this river line is open to doubt. If the doubt is well founded, or the French refrain from defending the Oise and allow the Germans to cross the river in strength, the second *enclave* Verdun-La Fere can no longer be held. La Fere, Laon and Rheims, which is open to the west, the whole hill position designed against an attack from the north-east, will be taken, and the Aisne position will have to be evacuated. With this, the Meuse forts between Verdun and Toul, which can offer only insignificant resistance to an attack from the west, will be exposed. Verdun and Toul will become isolated fortresses. The whole French fortress system directed against Germany will threaten to collapse. It is therefore not impossible that in spite of all the shortcomings of the position, the French may try to hold the Oise, and that they may be able to offer successful resistance. In this event we must march round the south of Paris. The same is true if the French give up the Oise and Aisne and retreat behind the Marne, Seine, etc. If they are allowed to go on in that direction, the war will be endless. By attacks on their left flank we must try at all costs to drive the French eastward against their Moselle fortresses, against the Jura and Switzerland. The French army must be annihilated.]²⁹

It is essential [to the progress of the whole of the operations] to form a strong right wing, to win the battles³⁰ with its help, to pursue the enemy relentlessly with this strong wing, forcing him to retreat again and again.³¹

If the right wing is to be made very strong, this can only be at the expense of the left, on which therefore it will probably fall to fight against superior forces.

If success is to be achieved, the right wing must make very great

²⁹ *Recommencement of the original text (first copyist's hand) in "B."*

³⁰ B: a battle

³¹ B: to force him against his own fortresses or against the Jura and to encircle him. The enemy must not be allowed to slip away to the south to conduct an endless war there. He must be annihilated.

exertions. But the roads to be used are on the whole very good. Quarters, too, should be satisfactory in many localities, unless the right wing corps are forced to march in such close order that even the densest population is not enough [to provide quarters].

On the other hand there can hardly be a shortage of provisions. The rich lands of Belgium and northern France can furnish much, and if they lack anything they will produce it—under suitable pressure—from outside.

The increased strain on Belgium's resources will perhaps decide her to refrain from all hostilities, hand over her fortresses and secure in exchange all the advantages of a disinterested third party in a fight between two adversaries.

On the outbreak of war, three army corps, one Reserve corps and three cavalry divisions right of the Moselle will attack Nancy. Whether this attack succeeds, depends essentially on (whether) the French confine themselves to defence here, or whether, true to their principle, they advance for a counter-attack. If they take the latter course, the main object of the attack on Nancy, namely to tie down as great a force as possible on the French eastern front, will be achieved. The more troops the French employ for the counter-attack, the better for the Germans. But the latter must not allow themselves to be engaged in prolonged actions, but must realise that their task is to draw as many enemy troops as possible after them and to hold them down with the help of the enlarged Metz. The army cut off on the right of the Moselle can hardly be in any danger; on the other hand it would be damaging to the [German] main army if the army right of the Moselle possessed numerical superiority. The tendency must be to tie down the maximum number of French with a minimum of German forces.

If the French do not counter-attack, two army corps must be despatched to Belgium as soon as possible for the outermost wing of the German army. Everything depends on being strong on this wing. Only when twenty-five army corps have been made available left of the Moselle for this battle, for which one cannot be too strong, can one await the result with a calm conscience.

The small forces which remain right of the Moselle, i.e.

1 army corps

1 Reserve corps

30th Reserve division (Strasbourg)

possibly 2 new corps

Landwehr brigades on the Upper Rhine and from Metz, if this is
 not attacked
 59th Landwehr brigade (Lower Alsace)
 6 Jäger battalions in the Vosges

must as far as possible be reinforced. The fortress garrisons still offer material for new formations. Also the South German Landsturm can be used to cover the country left of the Rhine, to mask Belfort, etc. A new army must be formed with the task of advancing on the Moselle between Belfort and Nancy, while the five Reserve corps of the left wing and two Landwehr brigades invest Verdun and attack the Cotes Lorraines.

When in the course of deployment the French learn that the Germans are assembling on the Lower Rhine and on the Dutch and Belgian frontiers, they will have no doubt as to the enemy's intention of marching on Paris; they will be wary of advancing with either their entire forces or their main forces between Strasbourg and Metz, and particularly of invading Germany across the Upper Rhine. That would be a case of the garrison leaving the fortress just when the siege was about to begin. Should they do one or the other nevertheless, [it can only be welcome to the Germans. Their task will be made easier. The best thing would be for the French to choose the route through Switzerland to invade southern Germany. This would be a means of acquiring a much-needed ally who would draw part of the enemy force upon himself]

It³² will be advisable for the Germans [in all these cases] to change their operational plans as little as possible. But the Lower Moselle between Trier and Coblenz must be covered, and the sector between the Moselle and the Meuse must be blocked level with Diedenhofen. The German army will try to reach the general line Coblenz-La Fere with reserves on the right wing. The right bank of the Rhine from Coblenz upwards will be occupied from the rear. The attack will be made with the right wing.³³

[If the French cross the Upper Rhine, resistance will be offered in the Black Forest. The troops will be brought up from the rear and assembled on the Main and Iller.]

If the Germans persevere in their operations they can be sure that the French will hastily turn back, and this not north, but south of

³² B: it

³³ *In the margin: Maps 5 and 5a*

Metz, in the direction whence the greatest danger threatens. The Germans must therefore be as strong as possible on their right wing, because here the decisive battle is to be expected.³⁴

Graf Schlieffen

APPENDIX

EXTRACTS FROM THE PRELIMINARY DRAFTS OF THE DECEMBER MEMORANDUM OF 1905

1. Draft I. (Apparently the earliest draft)

Chief of the General Staff of the Army, Berlin

December 31st, 1905.

In a war against Germany, France will probably at first restrict herself to defence. With this in view she has prepared a position which is for the most part permanent, of which the fortresses Bel fort, Epinal, Toul and Verdun form the main pillars. Northwards beyond Verdun the heights of the left bank of the Loison form the natural extension as far as Montmedy.

The flanks of this extended position rest on the neutral territories of Switzerland and Belgium. It can be adequately manned by the large French army and presents great difficulties to an attack in front.

Should the Germans nevertheless attack along this whole line, they run the danger of being enveloped on their right flank through southern Belgium and Luxembourg. Under these circumstances it may appear more expedient for the Germans to violate Luxembourg and Belgian neutrality themselves and try to envelop the defender's left flank.

But the French have certainly prepared for this eventuality. It can hardly be doubted that they will extend their front line leftwards to Mezieres. Since the Meuse below Mezieres is very difficult to cross, the success of the envelopment becomes very doubtful.

If all the difficulties should nevertheless be overcome, the German enveloping-wing would still get into a serious position. It would become apparent that in spite of the envelopment the defender had no need to give up the front Belfort-Verdun, since he would be covered there by his fortifications. Thus the German enveloping army would be altogether separated from the main army and in its isolation could be defeated by superior enemy forces. A frontal attack combined with

³⁴ *In the margin:* Map 6. Overall map of the operations.

an envelopment is therefore as little to be recommended as a simple frontal attack.

Only one course remains: to outflank the position completely. If this outflanking is restricted to the area south of the line Liege-Namur-Maubeuge, it will probably be found that the lines Verdun-Mezieres and Namur-Liege are both occupied by the French and Belgians. It is quite possible that the line Mezieres-Namur could be blocked as well, considering the difficult terrain of the Meuse valley between Mezieres and Givet.

One would thus be obliged to advance concentrated into a pocket and lay oneself open to a most effective envelopment by the enemy. One must try to find more room for the outflanking, i.e. one must not attack the front Bel fort-Verdun but the front Verdun-Lille-Dunkirk.

This front, too, is covered by fortifications, but not throughout its length as is the line facing Germany.

In this more extensive outflanking the right flank is again threatened—by Antwerp; and the advance is confined by Liege-Namur. Furthermore, it is necessary to violate the neutrality not only of Belgium but also of the Netherlands. But as long as no other expedient can be found, one has to make the best of these difficulties.

Above all, this requires the investment of Antwerp, to which the Belgian army will in all probability retreat; from the north it should be completed if possible by blocking the Scheldt. For Liege and Namur, which are intended to have only a weak garrison, observation will suffice. It will probably be possible to take the citadel of Huy.

On these assumptions the deployment of the main German forces has been envisaged on the line Metz-Geldres.

Here twenty-three and a half army corps and twelve and a half Reserve corps will be assembled with the intention of wheeling left and advancing against the line Verdun-Lille.

During this operation the Reserve corps of the northern wing will cover the right flank, particularly against Antwerp, and the Reserve corps of the southern wing the left flank against an enemy advance left of the Moselle from the line Toul-Verdun.

The enemy can at first turn against the front of this attack.* In this event one may hope that he will not succeed in so far extending and strengthening his left wing that, in the face of all the fortresses, its

* Original phrasing: "The enemy can turn—offensively or defensively—either against the front or against the left flank of the outflanking movement."

envelopment becomes impossible. This is on the assumption that the Germans make their right wing sufficiently strong.

To this end, eight army corps on the right wing are to cross the Meuse below Liège by four routes and advance in the direction of Brussels-Namur. A ninth army corps (XVIIIth) will join them after crossing the Meuse above Liège. It must also neutralise the citadel of Huy within whose range it is obliged to cross the Meuse. The nine army corps will be followed by Reserve corps, whose main part is intended for the investment of Antwerp and the rest for providing further cover for the right flank. There remains in reserve a further reinforcement in the form of the three army corps (XVth, XIVth, XXIst) which have stayed on the right of the Moselle and which can be brought up by railway (including Belgian railways). Six corps (Guards, Guards Reserve, XVIIth, VIIIth, Vth) will be sent against the Meuse sector Namur-Mézières. When they have crossed the river, between fifteen and eighteen army corps will have joined forces north or west of Mezieres. Eight army corps will attack the Meuse line Verdun-Mézières (*crossed out*: "and will be covered on the left flank by five Reserve corps and one infantry division").

The intention is, if possible, to force the enemy's left wing southward and thus away from Paris, but at the same time also to outflank the rear position Rheims-La Fère with the right wing.

Of course, the enemy is not obliged to defend the Meuse sector Mézières-Verdun. He can also advance to attack the Germans or move the defence farther to the rear, for instance behind the Aisne to the general line Verdun-La Fère. In any case, the intention must be to envelop his left flank with a strong right wing. Should the enemy try to prevent this by extending his left wing, he will so weaken his front line that a break-through at some point may well become possible.

In order to hold down as many enemy as possible on the original front, the five Reserve corps intended to cover the left flank must advance as far as they can on the left of the Moselle against Verdun-Nancy. Three army corps (XVth, XIVth, XXIst) and three Reserve divisions (26th, 28th and 30th) have been left on the right of the Moselle, and initially they can still be reinforced by the left wing corps of the main army (XVIth) and the 43rd infantry division. As soon as possible they will advance against the line Pont à Mousson-Lunéville and against the Meurthe up to the area beyond St. Die and the Col de Ste. Marie and the Col du Bonhomme.

Their immediate function is firstly to hold the enemy as far as possible behind the Moselle, so that he cannot move too many forces to his left wing (*crossed out*: and secondly to hold up an offensive across the Moselle).

Between the Vosges and Neubreisach the army corps will be covered by Landwehr brigades. In case the enemy does not advance across the Moselle, freedom is reserved to move these troops still farther, or to march the XVIth army corps to the left wing of the army and transfer the three other army corps to the far right wing.

An enemy advance across the Moselle between Nancy and Epinal or from Belfort will quickly be detected by the armies right of the Moselle; but instead of letting it come to a decisive battle there, they will slowly retreat before the attacker. To overcome the invaders part of the main army will have to turn about and cross to the right of the Moselle. How large a part, will depend on the timing and strength of the attack. If after completing deployment the enemy should advance in strength on the right of the Moselle, showing signs of a planned offensive, much the greater part of the army, perhaps still in the process of deployment, will turn to meet him. If the enemy does not advance until the spearheads of the German right wing have reached the French frontier through Belgium, we shall continue the movement already set in motion, disregarding the detachment by which the enemy has weakened himself on our front. The treatment of possibilities between these two extremes needs reflection.

Whatever happens, we need a fortress of Metz, not a Metz in its present state, nor of the size now planned, but a great modern fortress whose general boundaries are determined by the courses of the Moselle, the Saar and the Nied. No engineer can be asked to protect this enormous perimeter with armoured forts. Works like those on the Sha-ho and on the neglected front of Port Arthur during the war will be sufficient. To carry out these works we need: a plan, troops (eleven Landwehr brigades are available in addition to the garrison) and mobile heavy artillery. This enlarged Metz will provide cover for the left flank during the advance westward.

Along the whole front the army will be followed by Landwehr brigades, intended to help with the investing of fortresses or covering of lines of communication. The latter are to be regarded as particularly including the railways through Belgium.

Furthermore it is absolutely necessary to create a reserve from newly

formed units, for which in the first instance the trained parts of the Ersatz battalions and the remaining classes of reservists are to be used.

(Here follows an apparent gap. The text recommences with an insertion in Schlieffens handwriting):

... of the German army deployed on the Dutch, Belgian and Burgundian frontiers and later advancing on the line Brussels-Verdun. On one hand, the enemy advancing right of the Moselle will be drawn in a northern or north-eastern direction by the corps and divisions thrown out against Nancy and the Meurthe; on the other, he will also be forced to wheel left against Metz. A subsidiary operation or a demonstration will therefore collapse of its own accord and scarcely leave forces to spare for the difficult crossing of the Moselle at and below Trier. Against any larger French operation right of the Moselle, Metz provides the German army with time to turn left with one or more armies towards the Moselle and counter-attack south of the fortress, or through it, or by going round it in the north. Finally, if the Germans confine their operations to one bank of the Moselle, it provides effective rear cover against an enemy following up on the left bank. In other words, it makes possible or facilitates an operation on interior lines against two bodies of enemy advancing on both banks of the Moselle.

(This is the end of the insertion. On the next page the text continues in Schlieffens handwriting without material connection):

On her whole eastern front France has fortified herself from sea to sea. In war-time, in addition to the fortifications mentioned, there will be the river-lines fortified with field works. An aggressive war against this country means, if not a siege, at least a forced entry between fortifications.

Disregarding the French Alpine frontier, which Italy considers impregnable, and the French fortifications opposite Switzerland, which are difficult for us to reach, Germany must consider the line Belfort, Epinal, Toul, Nancy, Verdun, the Meuse, Mezieres, Hirson, Maubeuge, Lille, Dunkirk; farther back the lines Besancon, Dijon, Langres, Neufchateau, Toul, and Verdun, the Aisne, Rheims, Laon, La Fere; and finally Paris. At first the French army will front generally towards Germany. Previously its deployment behind the line Belfort-Verdun-Montmedy was conceivable. Now one must visualise an extension of the left wing to Mezieres. An attack must therefore be directed first against the front Belfort-Mezieres. If we respect the

neutrality of Luxembourg and Belgium in making this attack, France will not show the same consideration but will immediately attack our right flank. Therefore a German attack on France does not permit one to respect the neutrality of Luxembourg and Belgium.

2. The beginning of Draft IV, in Schlieffen's handwriting

The French have turned their country into a fortress. On the long frontier from Dunkirk and Calais on the Channel to Nice on the Mediterranean a more or less dense line of fortifications has been erected. Even the passes over the Pyrenees are blocked. The remaining frontiers are secured by the sea. Anyone who has built himself such a fortress will intend to hold it. Therefore in a war against Germany, France will at first confine herself to defence, particularly so long as she cannot count on effective support from Russia. She will quieten her conscience, which demands a bold offensive, by the thought of answering an unsuccessful German attack with a counter-attack.

Of the long perimeter of the fortress, Germany can disregard the coasts, the Pyrenean frontier, the Alpine frontier (which the Italians, who are immediately concerned, pronounce impregnable) and the Franco-Swiss frontier, which could only be reached after a victorious campaign against Switzerland. At the moment we are concerned solely with the Franco-German frontier, the line Belfort-Montmedy.

The vast, greatly reinforced fortresses of Belfort, Epinal, Toul and Verdun are the mainstay of the defence of this frontier. The gap between the first two is filled by the Moselle forts; that between the last two by the Meuse forts. The Moselle sector between Epinal and Toul and the left bank of the Loison between Verdun and Montmedy are given over to field-works. A salient from this line is formed by the fortifications of Nancy, partly field-works, partly permanent.

The flanks of this extended position rest on the neutral territories of Switzerland and Belgium. It can be adequately occupied by the large French army and presents great difficulties to an attacker.

3. From Draft II

But it is also possible that there will be an attempted French offensive directed on Metz and Saarburg i. L., against the left flank of the German army. Yet not all the French armies can be drawn away for

this purpose from the threatened front Toul-Mezieres. Such an offensive will be restricted to the French right wing. To begin with it is confronted by the three army corps (XIVth, XVth, XXIst) and three Reserve divisions, and perhaps also by the XVIth army corps and the 43rd infantry division, which will all slowly withdraw before the greater force in a northern or north-eastern direction. A part of the enemy will follow them. Another part must turn towards Metz, whose garrison will be reinforced by the greatest possible number of Landwehr brigades, and whose eastern front will be extended by field-works along the Nied. The enemy must therefore take on two fronts: one against the enlarged Metz, the other against the retreating corps and Reserve divisions.

He will be forced to take on a third front, if Ersatz brigades advance from the Rhine below Strasbourg along the line Saverne-Bitsch and possibly even farther north (*crossed out*: and at least show action).

If, in spite of all these difficulties, the enemy succeeds in gaining the right bank of the Moselle, the eight German army corps of the left wing will not be too far away to engage him in battle under circumstances unfavourable to him.

The offensive of the main army, however, must be carried out along the general lines on which it has started, particularly if the enemy weakens his front by subsidiary operations.

If the French do not restrict themselves to defence, as we said in the beginning, but instead take the offensive from the start, advancing partly between Metz and Saarburg i. L., and partly between the Moselle and the Meuse, the Germans will first turn against the French left wing with the strongest possible forces, merely keeping the right wing occupied so that when the left has been defeated they can cross the Moselle, attack the French right wing and throw it against the Rhine. Such a French offensive would be most welcome to the Germans.

Assuming its deployment as at present, an offensive with the whole French army advancing between Metz and Strasbourg or an offensive across the Upper Rhine is hardly possible. But should they be made nevertheless, the Germans would wheel left, making use of the railways, and presumably gain battle under very favourable circumstances.

How German operations should be conducted in detail against these French offensives has been shown in operational studies, war-games and staff-rides.

4. From Draft III

An envelopment must be extended beyond Mezieres to south of Liege-Namur. But the deeply cleft Meuse valley between Namur and Givet can only be crossed at a few, easily blocked points. We must expect to find the Belgian army in a strong position between Namur and Liege. After the German violation of her neutrality Belgium will be on the side of our enemies. It will not be beyond the power of the French to man the short Meuse sector Givet-Namur and to extend their line beyond Mezieres to Namur. True, the 260 kilometres of the original position Belfort-Montmedy will be increased to about 360 kilometres, but artifice has already done much, and would do still more, to improve the natural strength of the position. The extension is thus without hazard and the Germans, despite all their attempts at envelopment, face the prospect of marching into the cul-de-sac Mezieres-Namur-Liege or of being enveloped from Givet-Namur-Liege, possibly with English assistance. But if the French want to extend in this fashion beyond Mezieres, they will not wait for the effect of the German envelopment beyond the Meuse but plan, it seems, to take up position behind the Aisne and up to La Fere. After completing the envelopment south of the Meuse and Sambre the Germans will find themselves facing the front Belfort-Verdun-La Fere. With this they will probably have reached the end of their strength. Nothing more can be achieved by an envelopment. The French position must be outflanked completely, i.e. we must advance not against Belfort-Verdun, but against Verdun-Lille-Dunkirk.

This part of the front also is fortified, but not as thoroughly and extensively as the part opposite Germany, and from Mezieres onwards it is not occupied at all at present, or at least only weakly. Of course, the French can move corps and armies from the main front to the endangered subsidiary front and replace them by reserves, for example the corps on the Alpine frontier. But it is to be hoped that they will not fully succeed in this, and that a good part of the forces originally deployed in the line Belfort-Verdun can be held there, and that the troops newly moved up will not be numerous enough to occupy the new front. The sector Mezieres-Maubeuge is ill-suited to defence, but the gap Maubeuge-Lille is covered by water-lines or weak fortifications. North of Lille a narrow but unprotected stretch of country invites invasion. Here one may hope that the break-through will succeed, provided it is made in strength.

5. From Draft IV

Considering the strength of the French position and the size of the French army, it would not be too great a task for them nor too exaggerated a demand on their forces if they were expected to man the whole position Belfort-Verdun-Mezieres together with the few Meuse crossings between Mezieres and Givet, and still have forces left over to advance with Belgian, and perhaps English support, from Givet-Namur-Liege to attack the Germans on the march. In any case, with the help of the Belgians and their fortresses alone, they can adequately block the whole Meuse sector Mezieres, Givet, Namur, Liege and force the Germans to march into a cul-de-sac.

6. From Draft IV

The nine army corps are to be followed by seven Reserve corps, whose main part is intended for the investment of Antwerp, and the rest to give further cover to the right flank.

Apart from these, there remains an available reinforcement of two (*crossed out*: 2-3, *then* 1) of the new army corps still on the right bank of the Moselle (XVth, XIVth, XXIst), which can be brought up by railway (including the Belgian railways).*

On the whole front the army will be followed up by Landwehr brigades intended to co-operate in investing fortresses or covering the lines of communication. Among the latter, particular attention must be paid to the railways through Belgium.

The Belgian railways west of the Meuse will have to be the principal lines of communication for the German army. Reliance should not be placed on the railway in the Meuse valley, which is blocked by the two fortresses of Givet and Mezieres and can be obstructed by the demolition of its many tunnels. East of the Meuse a number of rather inefficient but adequate Belgian railways run near the river, but not across it. The main line via Montmedy will probably be rendered useless by the demolition of the tunnel there. It is estimated that the construction of a by-pass railway will take six weeks. Until it is ready, the only connection between the Belgian and French systems in this area is by the inefficient narrow-gauge railway between Bouillon and Sedan. A railway from Thiaucourt to St. Mihiel, to be constructed

* *Note by Schlieffen*: The railways cannot carry more than two army corps.

after the reduction of the Meuse forts, would open up a connection between Metz and Paris. Between Saales and St. Die a mountain railway could be built with some difficulty. But it would only connect Germany with France right of the Moselle. There Frouard, Pont St. Vincent and Epinal form a barrier which cannot immediately be overcome. Lines of communication must therefore be sought mainly through Belgium north of the Meuse.

After breaking through the line Mezieres-Maubeuge-Dunkirk the aim must be to push the enemy's left wing southwards and thus away from Paris, at the same time using the right wing to envelop the rear position Rheims-La Fere and causing the fall of the fortresses of La Fere, Laon and Rheims, which are not very strong on their western fronts.

In the further course of operations the enemy is to be driven back against his own fortresses on his eastern frontier, against Switzerland and the Rhine. To do this the Germans must always form a strong reserve on their right wing. For while remaining on the defensive, the enemy will not restrict himself to one position but when forced to retreat, will constantly take up new ones. It seems certain that he will offer resistance behind the Aisne, along the general line Verdun-La Fere. The aim must always be to envelop the enemy's left flank with a strong right wing and to cover one's own right flank which becomes more and more vulnerable the farther the advance proceeds. Should the enemy try to prevent the envelopment by extending his left wing, he will so weaken his front line that a break-through at some point may well become possible.

7. From Draft VI

(Marginal insertion in Schlieffens hand)

The three positions Verdun-Dunkirk, Verdun-La Fere-Abbeville and Verdun-La Fere-Paris have approximately the same length. With the addition of the line Belfort-Verdun, each is about 500 kilometres long. This gives an average of two field army infantrymen per metre. Deducting the above mentioned fortifications with their special garrisons, and including Territorial troops, an average of four men per metre may be reckoned upon. If the German right wing has been made strong, **it** may be hoped that the position Verdun-Dunkirk can be penetrated. It may further be hoped that the French will not succeed in occupying the full length of the line La Fere-Abbeville, and that

the Germans will gain the left bank of the Somme. But after that one must still count on a battle for the line Verdun-La Fere-Paris. The position behind the Oise below La Fere is not very strong, but nevertheless the question is whether it can be taken in front or whether it must be by-passed by marching south round Paris.

When we reach this question, the thought will immediately present itself, if it has not done so already, that we are too weak for the enterprise we have undertaken.

(The main text is crossed out from this insertion onwards. It can be found in Draft V and reads):

But for this envelopment (i.e. of Paris) and the simultaneous attack on the Oise and Aisne position up to Verdun the German army is not strong enough. It must secure a narrower front and for this purpose must move so far right during the advance that it reaches approximately the line Mezieres-La Fere-Paris with an army to spare for the envelopment. Then the fortress lines La Fere, Rheims and the river-line of the Aisne from Amagne upwards will be attacked in flank. Only after crossing the Oise and thus breaking through the second fortified line does the attacker enter the great fortress which is France. It then remains to fight the garrison within the fortress. The task is to force it against its own fortifications in the east, against Switzerland and against the Rhine. This would be complicated if the enemy succeeded in escaping southward across the Aisne. Then the war could well drag on endlessly. Fortunately fortifications will keep the French in the north.

Before the Germans reach the Somme or the Oise they will have realised that they are too weak for the enterprise they have undertaken.

(The following is not crossed out.)

We shall find the experience of all earlier conquerors confirmed, that a war of aggression calls for much strength and also consumes much. *(The following added in Schlieffens own handwriting)* that this strength dwindles constantly while the defender's increases.

8. From Fragment VII

When the German right wing has succeeded in breaking through the line Mezieres-Dunkirk and has thereby caused the enemy to evacuate the line Verdun-Mezieres, the French must be assumed to be weak in the line Belfort-Verdun and strong behind the Aisne between Verdun and La Fere. It will be the German aim to outflank or envelop them

on the right. To evade this operation, the French can try to extend their left wing, either beyond Peronne along the Somme to Abbeville, or along the Oise to Paris. The front lines thus created look very long, but apart from the front Belfort-Verdun, which will continue to be weakly occupied, they are no longer than the original front Belfort-Montmedy and can be occupied in roughly the same strength as the latter, if, as may be assumed, second-line troops are brought in from every side to fill the gaps and to satisfy the increased demand. But the positions to be occupied by the French army will be much weaker than their previous positions, which were prepared in peacetime. Nevertheless, the attack will not be without difficulties, and the attackers cannot expect to achieve the same length of line as the defenders, particularly if they wish to retain the strong reserve needed on the right wing. The twenty-three to twenty-five army corps must leave it to other troops to occupy the Meuse between Verdun and Mezieres, and later the Aisne up to Rethel; they must pull their left wing into the area of Mezieres and further narrow the front as they advance.

Before the Germans reach the Somme or the Oise they will have realised, like other conquerors before them, that they are too weak for the whole enterprise. . . .

. . . Four points in particular require to be reinforced by the(se) new formations: the most northern part of France, where special measures may be needed against an English landing; the Meuse below Verdun, for co-operation in the attack on the Aisne position; between Metz and Verdun for the attack on the Meuse forts; and on the Meurthe and in Upper Alsace for the attack on the Moselle fortresses and on the fort Ballon de Servance. The attacks on the Meuse forts and the Moselle position stand a better chance of success at a later period than they do at the beginning of the war, because the greater part of the enemy's forces will then have been drawn to the other front. If the Meuse and the Moselle can be crossed successfully, it will be possible to attack the enemy from a semicircular position. The right wing of the German main army must attempt to envelop Paris on the south if necessary.

9. From Draft VI

The planning of the advance and the attack on the position is shown on the attached map. It will take place on the whole line, particularly on La Fère, which is invested on two sides; after meeting with

success here, it will be continued against Laon and—by means of a bombardment—against Rheims, which is open towards the west; then against the Oise and, with the right enveloping army from the south, against the Marne.

This attack is to be supported by the troops remaining right of the Moselle, namely: one army corps (XIVth or XVth or XXIst); a new corps consisting of the 43rd Infantry Division and one Active brigade each from the Vth and VIth Reserve Corps (to be replaced by new formations); the VIth Reserve Corps; the 30th Reserve Division; two new corps; Landwehr brigades from the Upper Rhine and from Metz if the latter is not attacked; the 39th Landwehr Brigade; Landsturm from Southern Germany; the 6th Jäger Battalion—so far as all the above are not completely occupied by defence against French forces. If this is not the case, the army right of the Moselle is expected to take Nancy, advance against the Moselle position, which will not be strongly occupied, and if possible, with cover against Toul, Epinal, the Moselle forts and Belfort, attack Ballon de Servance, continuing in case of a success in the direction of Châlons s. M.

The operations will not necessarily take the course outlined here. The French may make repeated counter-offensives. By so doing they will ease the Germans' task. The latter can then employ the principle "strategic offensive—tactical defensive," particularly in those places where they have been obliged to give their fronts great width in order to continue the offensive all the more vigorously elsewhere, especially on their strong right wing. It is also possible that instead of clinging to their positions, they will retreat in good time to the south. This would not be easy, however. To abandon their fortresses, their positions, their capital, without having fought to the utmost, would be almost unthinkable for such a proud nation. In all probability the Franco-Belgian frontier positions, the Aisne position up to La Fere, the Oise, perhaps even the Somme, will play an important role and designate the successive phases of the campaign.

II. SCHLIEFFEN'S ADDITIONAL MEMORANDUM OF FEBRUARY 1906

AS a supplement to his deployment plan of December 1905, Schlieffen ~~XX~~ composed a further memorandum in February 1906, i.e. after his retirement, in which he discussed the measures to be taken if the English intervened in a Franco-German war with 100,000 men or more. It is to be assumed that this memorandum, too, was handed on to his successor Molthe. The numbering of the attached maps shows that the author regarded it as an immediate continuation of the December memorandum.

The text before me is in the form of (1) a draft ("E") in Schlieffen's own handwriting (eight columns), and (2) the typewritten fair copy (five columns) mentioned above (p. 134). The latter differs repeatedly from "E." I reproduce the text of the fair copy and add the deviations from it in footnotes. Corrections of style without any material significance are ignored. Words or sentences missing in "E" are enclosed in square brackets [].

If in a Franco-German war the English plan to land a force of 100,000 men or more in Antwerp, they can hardly do so in the first days of mobilisation. No matter how well they prepare the assembly of their three army corps, their army organisation and defence system present so many difficulties that their sudden appearance within the great Belgian fortress is almost inconceivable. But even if they should land at a relatively early stage and issue from the fortress against the Germans, they would find the enemy in occupation of the few roads which lead from Antwerp across the peat bogs of northern Belgium and the southern Netherlands to the northern and eastern front. If they choose the southern front between the Nethe and Dyle as the starting-point of their attacks, they will come up against the eight German army corps which have crossed the Meuse below Liege.

As the German advance proceeds, one fortress front after another will be sealed off.¹ Any attempt by the Anglo-Belgians to repel the

¹ In the margin: Map 7.

investing corps will be frustrated by the support the latter receive from the advancing German army. Until the left wing-corps has completed the investment left of the Scheldt, a number of German army corps will remain available to intervene in any battle.²

Most of the country facing the Anglo-Belgian forces is not suitable for sallies. They must work their way out of defiles in order to deploy. The sectors of the fortress zone which favour a sally will be reduced in number if the Belgians carry out their inundation schemes.

If the English plan to advance to the attack from Antwerp, they will be obliged to engage in battles as hopeless as the many sallies made by the French before Metz and Paris.³ It is necessary, however,⁴ that [during the advance on the fortress] the corps intended for the investment should reinforce their position daily [and always be prepared for an attack], getting as close as possible to the enemy's field-works and improving the strength of their positions until they become impregnable.⁵ The right and left wings will attempt to get as close as possible to the Scheldt and seal off the [last] seaward escape route of the fortress with batteries and sea-mines.

There is a not unfounded prospect that if the English go to Antwerp, they will be shut up there, together with the Belgians. They will be securely billeted in the fortress, much better⁶ than on their island, where they are a serious⁷ threat and a standing menace to the Germans.

The investment of Antwerp will be more than a little impeded by the small fortress of Termonde. However, this is neither strong nor in good repair and can be neutralised, at least so far as artillery is concerned, with the help of the heavy artillery of the next corps. After that it will be possible to complete the investment of Antwerp between Termonde and Rupelmonde.

The battle for Antwerp will be rendered more difficult, however, if the French succeed in reaching the line Namur-Antwerp before us and with the English and Belgians prevent us from advancing farther along the left bank of the Meuse.⁸ An envelopment with the

² *In the margin:* cf. Map 7.

³ *The passage from "It is . . ." to the end of the paragraph appears in only after the next paragraph ("... to the Germans.")*

⁴ E: It is self-evident

⁵ E: fieldworks and then improving their positions till they become impregnable.

⁶ E: They will be much better accommodated there

⁷ E: constant

⁸ E: and, together with the English and Belgians prevent us from emerging from this defile.

right wing will then become impossible. The plan must be changed. [Even combined, our enemies can be prevented from advancing north of Namur-Liege. If they want to throw us back, they must also advance right of the Meuse, and in so doing they cannot help exposing their right flank to a German attack.]⁹

If the French come up at a later stage, the Germans will be faced with the prospect of a battle in two directions, i.e. with one front facing Antwerp and the other facing Hirson-Maubeuge-Lille.¹⁰

According to their reiterated intentions, the French are going to advance *en masse* and in depth; The dictum of the late Field Marshal will then be borne out that the narrow front is in danger of being enveloped while the broad front [provided precautions are taken against an enemy break-through]¹¹ offers great promise of success.

The English are also credited with the intention of landing at Esbjerg and not at Antwerp. Sometimes the supposed plan is to appear at a very early stage on the Jutland coast, sometimes it is to delay with the enterprise until the German and French forces are already engaged in battle. Advantage is to be taken of Germany's completely denuded state for a march on Berlin, possibly with the assistance of some French corps.

In the first case, the Germans would not be able to complete their deployment if an English army were to appear in the north while it was still in progress. The corps still in the rear would have to be halted and sent to annihilate the new enemy by their great superiority. The French would have no choice but to come to their ally's aid [i.e. give up their fortresses and positions and take the offensive. With this, we should be faced with all the advantages of which we have convinced ourselves on various occasions in the event of a war left of the Rhine.]¹²

But should the English wait [with the intended landing] until a favourable moment, they will [hardly find one before the first battle].¹³ If the battle goes in favour of the Germans, the English are likely to abandon their enterprise as hopeless. The battle is therefore of the

⁹ An attempt must then be made with a strongly echeloned left wing to envelop the enemy on the left and force him against the sea. Admittedly there is then a very serious threat to the German left wing. But a break-through between Maubeuge and Namur may well become possible.

¹⁰ *In the margin*: Map 8.

¹¹ E: though vulnerable to a break-through, also

¹² E: From this the same kind of war would develop in the West which has been discussed repeatedly in war games and on staff rides—a war in which the Germans have the advantage of the situation.

¹³ E: certainly wait to know the outcome of the first battle.

utmost importance, and it would be a serious mistake if, in expectation of the English, we were to leave behind in some [distant theatre of the future, an army, a corps, or even a division, which might bring the decision against the French.

If the English nevertheless land after we have completed our deployment, be it before or after a battle, we must]¹⁴ collect all the forces still in the country—and they will still be far from negligible—and crush the English invaders.

[The forces remaining behind must be organised, however.]

Graf Schlieffen

¹⁴ E: potential theatre anything which might bring the decision in a battle against the French. If the battle in the West goes against us, the English will probably carry out the intended landing, and we must then

III. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE SCHLIEFFEN

PLAN BY H. VON MOLTKE

(apparently dated i q i i)

THE Schlieffen papers contain a typewritten copy of the following minute, which supplements Moltkes marginal notes to the Schlieffen Plan of 1905 given under "I." The only clue to the date is the note at the end, which points to a conspicuously late one. Could it be the date of the copy?

Comments on the memorandum by General von Moltke:

It may be safely assumed that the next war will be a war on two fronts. Of our enemies, France is the most dangerous and can prepare the most quickly. Accounts must be settled with her very soon after deployment. Should the defeat of the French be achieved quickly and decisively, it will also be possible to make forces available against Russia. I agree with the basic idea of opening the war with a strong offensive against France while initially remaining on the defensive with weak forces against Russia. If a quick decision is sought against France, the attack should not be directed exclusively against the strongly fortified eastern front of that country. If, as may be expected, the French army remains on the defensive behind that front, there is no chance of quickly breaking through; and even a break-through would expose the German army, or those sections which have made it, to flank attack from two sides. If one wants to meet the enemy in the open, the fortified frontier-line must be outflanked. This is only possible by means of an advance through Switzerland or Belgium. The first would encounter great difficulties and, because of the defence of the mountain roads, would take a long time. On the other hand a successful outflanking of the French fortifications would have the advantage of forcing the French army towards the north. An advance through Belgium would force the French back into their interior.

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Nevertheless it should be preferred, because there one can count on quicker progress. We can count on the somewhat inefficient Belgian forces being quickly scattered, unless the Belgian army should withdraw without a battle to Antwerp, which would then have to be sealed off.

It is important, of course, that for an advance through Belgium the right wing should be made as strong as possible. But I cannot agree that the envelopment demands the violation of Dutch neutrality in addition to Belgian. A hostile Holland at our back could have disastrous consequences for the advance of the German army to the west, particularly if England should use the violation of Belgian neutrality as a pretext for entering the war against us. A neutral Holland secures our rear, because if England declares war on us for violating Belgian neutrality she cannot herself violate Dutch neutrality. She cannot break the very law for whose sake she goes to war.

Furthermore it will be very important to have in Holland a country whose neutrality allows us to have imports and supplies. She must be the windpipe that enables us to breathe.

However awkward it may be, the advance through Belgium must therefore take place without the violation of Dutch territory. This will hardly be possible unless Liege is in our hands. The fortress must therefore be taken at once. I think it possible to take it by a *coup de main*. Its salient forts are so unfavourably sited that they do not overlook the intervening country and cannot dominate it. I have had a reconnaissance made of all roads running through them into the centre of the town, *which has no ramparts*. An advance with several columns is possible without their being observed from the forts. Once our troops have entered the town I believe that the forts will not bombard it but will probably capitulate. Everything depends on meticulous preparation and surprise. The enterprise is only possible if the attack is made at once, before the areas between the forts are fortified. It must therefore be undertaken by standing troops immediately war is declared. The capture of a modern fortress by a *coup de main* would be something unprecedented in military history. But it can succeed and must be attempted, for the possession of Liege is the *sine qua non* of our advance. It is a bold venture whose accomplishment promises a great success. In any case the heaviest artillery must be at hand, so that in case of failure we can take the fortress by storm. I believe the absence of an inner rampart will deliver the fortress into our hands.

III. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN

On the success of the *coup de main* depends our chance of making the advance through Belgium without infringing Dutch territory. The deployment and disposition of the army must be made accordingly.

(Troops for the *coup de main*, heavy artillery, preparations for mobilisation.)

B [Berlin?] 1911

(signed) v. M.

IV. SCHLIEFFEN'S MEMORANDUM OF
DECEMBER 28th, 1912 ON A WAR WITH FRANCE
AND RUSSIA

f) This memorandum the Schlieffen papers contain:

I / (1) A typewritten copy of twelve pages, each of thirty-six lines.

This has a title page with the following:

28 Secret. Memorandum of the late Field Marshal Graf Schlieffen. Final draft of December 28th, 1912.

In the top right-hand corner, an attestation: "W. v. Hahnke, Potsdam, Gr. Weinmeisterstr. 2." (The signature in Hahnke's own writing) This copy must have been made, like that of the memorandum of 1905, from the fair copy handed to Moltke, since a marginal remark of Moltke's has been copied as well.

29 A copy identical with (1), produced on a different typewriter. Here, too, Moltke's marginal note has been copied.

30 A draft in Schlieffen's own hand ("L"), a little over seventeen columns written on the right half of the page; many corrections, additions and rectifications, often entered on the left side; some of the columns crossed out. At the top a note in Hahnke's hand: "Graf Schlieffen's memorandum of December 1912. The following sheets contain various treatments. From these drafts the Field Marshal dictated to me pages 1 to 31 of the fair copy (pp. 1 to 25 in the draft)."

This pagination does not correspond with any of the manuscripts I have seen. On the whereabouts of the 'fair copy' the following note in Hahnke's hand, found on another sheet, gives this information: "Memorandum by Field Marshal Graf Schlieffen. Final draft of December 28th, 1912. The fair copy with the original maps was handed by me personally to His Excellency the Chief of the General Staff of the Army on February 8th, 1913. W. v. Hahnke."

(4) A fragmentary draft in Schlieffen's hand, nine half-page columns widely spaced, identical with the last nine paragraphs of the final version ((1), above). A note in von Hahnke's hand: "These three sheets are the last thing the Field Marshal wrote, following the visit of General of the

Cavalry von Hausmann on Saturday night, December 28th, 1912." It must be explained that the "treatments" ("E") from which Schlieffen dictated the memorandum to his son-in-law go only as far as the passage on p. 174, below, where the organisation of fifty-one divisions of a new kind is discussed. Probably the dictation which Hahnke mentions ((3) above) broke off shortly after this point (p. ij\$, par. 1, below) and was completed by him in the "fair copy" with this fragment as endpiece.

I reproduce the text according to the copy (i) but show material deviations from "E" (see under (3), above) by placing passages missing in "E" in square brackets []; different formulations or passages later struck out of "E" are shown in footnotes or in the appendix.

The Triple Alliance developed out of an alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary. Both Powers felt threatened by Russia: [Austria due to serious political differences which could easily have led to a war, Germany because of personal irritations which might nevertheless soon have given way to traditional friendship again, had they not been aggravated by the signing of a treaty with Russia's enemy.]¹ The alliance was conceived defensively, but in case of war was to be carried into effect offensively.²

At that time the Russian army was distributed throughout the vast expanse of the empire, and the Russian railway system was altogether inadequate. Therefore in the first stages of a war it would only have been possible to assemble a part of the army in Poland right of the Vistula. Against this part the allies intended to advance from north and south in order to crush the enemy in the middle of the country.

While the two allies were still enjoying this pleasant prospect,

¹ Instead of the passage in brackets, in read: to meet the danger, one Power secured the other's help.

² E: In fact, between this Power and Austria there existed political differences which could lead to a war. On the other hand, there were between Russia and Germany no points of controversy, but only personal irritations which would soon have given way to traditional friendship, had they not been intensified by the signing of a treaty with Russia's enemy. Since according to all available information and reasonable assumptions, the distribution of troops throughout the vast Russian empire and the still very incomplete railway system of that time dictated the assembly of the Russian army on the right of the Vistula, the allies decided that the . . . at least in the initial period of a war only part of the Russian army was to be expected right of the Vistula in Poland. Against this, the . . . wanted . . .

rumours got about that Russia was pulling her corps stationed in the East westwards and preparing to assemble an army on the Niemen, on the Germans' left flank, and on the eastern frontier of Galicia, the Austrian/ right flank.³ Austria intended to clear her flank first and postpone the offensive into Poland until this was done. Unless Germany were prepared to invade Poland alone, she had no choice but to follow her ally's example. Thus two quite separate prospective theatres of war were created: one in Eastern Galicia, the other in East Prussia, each with its adjoining Russian provinces.

Austria, with only the smaller part of the Russian army against her, had a relatively easy task. She would always have forces to spare for the pursuit of her aims in the Balkan peninsula. Germany faced not only the greater part of the Russian army but also, as became soon apparent, the French army.

This disproportion might have been rectified by Italy, which had joined the Alliance. Indeed, in the hope of regaining Nice and Savoy, the latter was intending to cross the Alps and to invade central and southern France, thereby relieving Germany of a great part of the French army. The plan had to be abandoned when France fortified all the Alpine passes. But in order to take part in the expected Franco-German war, Italy was to bring some corps over the Austrian and south German railways to the Upper Rhine, where she would unite with Germany in a common campaign. This plan also was eventually abandoned, because it was thought dangerous to send a large part of the army abroad when the French could cross the Alps and invade the Po valley.

So Italy left the Triple Alliance, at least as a working member. Austria kept far away in a separate theatre. [Germany meanwhile faced the greater part of the Russian, and the whole of the French army, without any support.]⁴

If both her enemies were to advance from east and west, Germany would certainly find herself in a serious situation.⁵ But neither dared take the decisive step. Each feared the other would let her down or come too late, and that she alone would be saddled with the whole German army. Secure behind fortresses, rivers, mountains and swamps, both were lying in wait for their unprotected weaker adversary who was entirely on his own.

³ Here follow several drafts in "E" whose essence I reproduce in Appendix, 1, below.

⁴ Parallel phrasing see Appendix, 2, below.

⁵ See Appendix, 3, below (amplification).

So it was not the Triple Alliance, but solely the German army which held Russia and France in check, preventing the former from giving Austria, and the latter Italy, a taste of her superiority. Peace was kept in Europe. It mattered little that Italy, prevented by the French Alpine fortifications from attacking France, tried to vent her expansionist desires on Austria. When the Austrians, too, fortified their Alpine passes, the Italians were forced to give up their lust for conquest here as well.

The power and prestige of the German army proved their worth in 1905 and 1909. Neither France nor Russia was willing to take up arms once Germany left no doubt about her determination to fight back. This favourable state of affairs underwent a change in 1911. German resolution was paralysed by England's threat to come to the assistance of France with 100,000 men.⁶ In 1911 England would have yielded before Germany's manifest intention of using the army if necessary, as France had done in 1905 and Russia in 1909. But on this occasion it was Germany who yielded, and so the spell was broken which had so far made her army seem invincible. Nor could the lost prestige be restored by the army reform of 1912, which brought little more than changes in organisation—none in power. This time it was not Germany's promise to stand by her Austrian allies which secured peace, but only England's wish, for *economic* reasons, to avoid a world war.

It is to be hoped that England's will may nol for ever be decisive, and that Germany will one day regain the position of power necessary to her economic prosperity. Without a war this will scarcely be possible. How it will come about remains to be seen. How it is to be conducted must be left to Germany. She has done her duty as a member of the Triple Alliance by making an enemy of Russia, from whom she was not divided by any conflicting interests—and off whom she could have won nothing worth while—and by drawing upon herself the greater part of the Russian army. As a result she stands between two powerful enemies.

In a similar situation in 1866 Moltke did not leave an army on the Rhine against France, send a second against South Germany, and allow

⁶ *continues (partly crossed out)*: It was not yet a question of peace or war, but it v. as necessary to show one's resolve to stand fast in face of a threat which later proved empty. But since Germany showed that under the changed circumstances she herself had no complete confidence in an army [to] which Europe, above all, had up to now owed its security . . .

a third weak army to be beaten by Austria. And in 1870 he did not leave behind an observation army against Austria, but secured superiority over France with all the forces he could muster.

If anything could have induced France to make war in 1886, and Austria in 1870, it would have been a small army on the Rhine or in Upper Silesia, and the prospect of a cheap victory.

Experience shows that the absence of any enemy leads to procrastination, a delay to see how one's allies are faring, and then a declaration of peace as soon as they meet with an accident.* But should the enemy whom one has disregarded invade one's naked country, Frederick the Great was ultimately of the opinion that it was better to sacrifice a province "than split up the army with which one seeks, and must achieve, victory!"

The *whole* of Germany must throw itself on *one* enemy—the strongest, most powerful, most dangerous enemy: and that can only be the Anglo-French!

Austria need not worry: the Russian army intended against Germany will not invade Galicia before the die is cast in the West. And Austria's fate will be decided not on the Bug but on the Seine!

Against Germany, the French intend to hold a position extending from the frontier at Belfort along the Upper Moselle as far as Toul, from there following the course of the Meuse to Verdun and leaning on neutral Belgian territory as far as the neighbourhood of Montmedy. In front of this position they will further occupy the passes across the Vosges, the fortified city of Nancy, Manonvillers, the heights right of the Meuse between Toul and Verdun, and also Longwy. Should the Germans succeed in breaking through the left wing of this position, they will still find the enemy behind the Meuse between

** Marginal note by General von Moltke:*

This would be true in the event of France and Germany coming into military conflict, but not if the Triple Alliance were involved in a war through a conflict between Austria and Russia. In that case Russia would have to mobilise her whole army and at once face Germany as an enemy also. A different situation from 1870, when Austria temporised and was prevented from intervening by the German victories, and from 1866, when the same applied to France. As things are now, the situation cannot arise in which France or Russia looks on as an unconcerned spectator to begin with; but both will mobilise simultaneously and open hostilities against Germany. There can be no question under present-day political circumstances and treaties of Russia's hesitating to invade Prussia if no defence forces are left there.

(signed) v. M.

This marginal note is copied on a separate typewritten sheet, the signature being added in Moltke's own hand.

Verdun and Mézières. Below the latter the river is not easily accessible. The first important crossing, farther north, is blocked by the fortress of Givet. The Germans cannot therefore count on crossing the Meuse without serious fighting so long as it runs through French territory. Beyond Givet the river enters Belgium. This country is regarded as neutral, but in fact it is not. More than thirty years ago it made Liège and Namur into strong fortresses to prevent Germany from invading its territory, but towards France it has left its frontiers open. The French will therefore be free to send as many reinforcements as they wish into the position which the Belgians apparently intend to occupy between these two fortresses. The English may also be present. In 1911 they threatened to land with 180,000 men in Antwerp. On its landward side the latter is heavily fortified. It is unlikely that the Dutch will bring their Scheldt batteries into action against the English, upon whose goodwill they depend for their colonies. Therefore via Antwerp, or if need be Dunkirk, the English can join up with the Belgians and French in the position Liège-Namur. From there the three, or two, of them will be able not only to prevent the Germans crossing the Meuse between Givet and Liège, but also most effectively to flank a German attack on the French position Belfort-Mézières.

Unless, therefore, the Germans are prepared to suffer a serious defeat, they are obliged to attack the offensive flank which the Belgians have added to the French position. This can be done if at an early stage a German army crosses the Meuse below Liège, wheels left and invades Belgium and France left of the Meuse and Sambre,⁷ while a second army supports the attack between Givet and [Namur on]⁸ the right of those rivers, a third advances on the sector Mézières-Verdun, and a fourth advances on the front Verdun-Belfort.

An attack on so large a scale requires a large army. The German corps, with a column-of-march length of twenty-nine kilometres excluding train, have become very cumbrous. If only their infantry strength were not in unfavourable proportion to the artillery, they could be divided and each half be treated as a new corps. But as the Reserve divisions are allotted too little artillery in proportion to infantry, a more favourable arrangement of the army might be achieved by a combination of army corps and Reserve divisions. The twenty-four battalions and 144 guns (excluding heavy artillery) of a

⁷ Parallel phrasing in see Appendix, 4, below.

⁸ Namur on is accidentally left out in the fair copy.

corps and the twelve battalions and thirty-six guns of a Reserve division yield

1

36 battalions
180 guns

of which the first could if necessary be increased to forty by Jäger battalions, surplus infantry brigades and regiments, and Reserve battalions. Half of that would bring each division up to

20 battalions

(four brigades of five battalions each) and

90 guns

i.e. to a strength almost equal to that of the corps in 1870, but far surpassing them in fire-power, not counting machine-guns and heavy artillery.

This mixture of Active and Reserve troops might be viewed with doubt. But it already exists: 11 Reserve corps are to be employed with twenty-five army corps in the first line, generally with the same tasks but unequal means. In future, instead of these thirty-six corps, one could put into the field fifty-one divisions of equal composition and strength (the Guards counting as three).

In each division twelve Active battalions would be used for actual combat, support being provided by a second line of eight Reserve battalions.

With the fifty-one divisions corresponding to the original corps the whole line Belfort-Nijmegen can be attacked.

Formerly, when the French were inclined purely towards the defensive, it was possible to restrict the attack to a part of the whole line. But now that they are imbued with the offensive spirit, we must assume that the part not attacked will advance offensively. To counter this it would be necessary to hold strong reserves. But it is simpler to gain the initiative by using them in the attack from the very beginning.

The Netherlands are prepared for an outflanking of the position Namur-Liege. They intend to defend the Meuse line, at least at Maastricht. Along the whole section from Liege to the Waal⁹ there are only three road and three railway bridges; there are, however, numerous crossing-points, for whose defence the Dutch army will

⁸ Schlieffen writes repeatedly the Waag, but obviously means the Waal.

hardly have enough troops. Given, careful preparation (beforehand, in peacetime!) it will be possible to secure a first crossing point, and thus the whole number, and so to cross the Meuse with as many columns.

With the further advance it will at first be necessary to have cover against the Netherlands and a landing on Dutch territory. The simplest method is for a division to push north of the Waal to the fortified water line Naarden-Utrecht-Gorinchem, while a second division advances south of the Waal to the Meuse and Scheldt flats at Geertruidenberg as far as the crossing into Beierland. For the investing of Antwerp two divisions will be necessary, for Liege and Namur, on the left bank of the Meuse, one. Beyond the strategic defile Antwerp-Namur the left wing of the army will follow the left bank of the Sambre towards St. Quentin, while the right, to make room for the deployment, follows the direction Ghent-St. Omer to Abbeville. A corps following the right wing will provide cover against Dunkirk, Gravelines, Calais and Boulogne and a possible landing there. Since Lille and Maubeuge must also be invested, eight to nine divisions on the right wing of the army will have to be used before fortresses, etc.

To minimise this loss it will be advisable to confront the Belgian Government with the choice of a bombardment of its fortified towns, particularly Liege, as well as a considerable levy—or of handing over all fortresses, railways and troops. But to turn the threatened bombardment into reality if necessary, the heavy artillery must be suitably equipped. The latter will also prove necessary in the further course of the campaign. To begin with, the great industrial town of Lille offers an excellent target for bombardment.

For the investing of fortresses which have not capitulated, for the occupation of conquered territory, and for securing lines of communication, the army will be followed as soon as possible by the Landwehr, the Ersatz troops, and, since these alone will not be sufficient, the mobilised Landsturm.

Level with the first army, a second army of eight divisions will advance south of the Meuse, using one division to invest Liege and Namur on the south. It will cross the Meuse between Namur and Mezieres, the right wing following the right bank of the Sambre, leaving a division before Maubeuge and taking the direction of St. Quentin, while the left wing takes the direction of Rethel.

The third army will advance with five corps through southern

Belgium and Luxembourg against the Meuse between Mezieres and Verdun.

The fourth army, with six corps, will attack the front Verdun-Belfort, resting its left wing against the area of Porrentruy in neutral Switzerland. So far as Belfort and Epinal are concerned, this attack cannot do more than seal them on the east side. Against the forts of the Upper Moselle, the gap between Epinal and Toul, and the hill position between the latter fortress and Verdun, siege tactics will have to be used. The fortifications round Nancy can be reduced by the bombardment—threatened or actual—of the town. If this succeeds, the Germans will come into possession of the high plateau opposite Toul, which is washed by the Meurthe and the Moselle. A breakthrough in the strongly held position Belfort-Verdun, however, can only be hoped for when the third army has crossed the Meuse, and this in turn can only succeed when the second and first armies have crossed the French frontier.

A successful march through Belgium on both sides of the Meuse is therefore the prerequisite of a victory. It will succeed beyond doubt, if it is only the Belgian army which tries to obstruct it. But it will be very difficult if the English army, and perhaps even part of the French, is present. The area between Namur and Antwerp is so confined that it can easily be blocked by the English and Belgian corps, supported if necessary by a few French corps. In this case, the advance of the second army on the right of the Sambre must create a breathing space. If they, too, find the Meuse blocked between Namur and Mezieres, help can come only from an attack on the whole front, with a break-through at some point after large-scale heavy artillery preparation.

But in general we must put our trust in an overwhelming right wing, which will progressively bring the whole line forward. When the latter reaches the approximate level Abbeville, St. Quentin, Rethel-Verdun, the French will slowly evacuate the position Verdun-Toul, Toul-Epinal, etc. Their general retreat will first be towards the position Rheims-La Fere, then towards Paris. The first, second and third German armies, joined by the released corps with strong cavalry on their wings, will follow in a wide arc with the intention of completely encircling the greatest possible part of the enemy army.

For the occupation of the conquered territory and the covering of the lines of communication, the Landwehr and Ersatz troops will not be sufficient. The Landsturm must be mobilised.

APPENDIX TO THE MEMORANDUM OF 1912

Extracts from the parallel version of Draft "E"

1. *(See footnote 3, above.)*

31Before the allies began the attack on the Poles, they had to dispose of the new army appearing on their right flank. If they turned against that army, they had to be prepared for an attack from Poland in the flank and the rear. The difficult task of making an offensive in two directions could only be achieved with considerable forces. Austria could raise these, since she had her whole army behind her and only the smaller part of the Russian army in front, but not so Germany . . .

32Simultaneously with the making of the offensive into Poland, the allies had to turn eastward against the enemy threatening their flank. This double task could only be achieved with considerable forces . . .

2. *(See footnote 4, above.)*

Austria stood aside. She was strong enough to defend herself against the smaller part of the Russian army, which was far from the eastern frontier of Galicia, and at the same time to conquer Serbia and pursue other aims in the Balkan peninsula. Germany meanwhile faced much the greater part of the army mobilised by Russia, and the whole French army, without any support. The latter (France) was her sworn enemy. But with the former she was connected by traditional friendship and had no points of difference to cause a separation; she had only turned her into an enemy for the sake of Austria. If these . . .

3. *(See footnote 5, above.)*

(The following is partly crossed out in "E".)

The German army was roughly equal to the latter (the French army); the Russian army facing Germany represented a surplus which the two Entente Powers thought would guarantee them victory. However, they made no use of this advantage, each feeling that by hers ell: she was unequal to the German army in both numbers and quality, and lacking faith in the other's wholehearted co-operation. Each feared being left in the lurch and delivered into the grasp of the more powerful

enemy. It was not only the Triple Alliance which preserved European peace through these three decades, but the German army and the fear and trembling it instilled into Germany's enemies.

4. (*See footnote 7, above.*)

. . . while another army first marches up the right bank of the Meuse, crosses the river between Givet and Namur, and then, marching on the right bank of the Sambre, accompanies the first army on the left. The river is somewhat wide and the whole sector from Liege to Ravenstein (?) contains only three road bridges and two railway bridges. Some of these may be destroyed or occupied. But to prevent every crossing in such a long sector is something for which the Dutch army can hardly be prepared; one must be ready to build quite a number of bridges, however. For the advance must be made with as many columns as possible, in order to be covered on the north and on both flanks and yet be able to invade France with a considerable army. Thus the Germans will be obliged to attack the whole long line from Belfort to the Meuse bend south of Nijmegen. Previously, as long as we knew the French were strict adherents to the defensive idea, we could exclude the southern part of this long line from the Verdun area onwards. Now that the enemy is lusting for the offensive, we must expect an attack by the forces in those sectors of the position not attacked. To meet such an attack it will be necessary to keep strong reserves ready for action, perhaps in Metz. But the number of troops required for this would not be any smaller than that required for an attack at the outset. Even if we follow the principle of using few troops where a success can hardly be expected, on such an extended line we shall still need greater forces than we have so far estimated. They can perhaps be found by a slightly changed organisation. (*The continuation shows no material differences from the final version.*)

V, NOTES BY MAJOR W. VON HAHNKE ON GRAF
SCHLIEFFEN'S MEMORANDUM OF
DECEMBER 28th, 1912

J1HE following "notes" in thirteen pages of Hahnkes handwriting are found inserted after the title page of the typescript copy (1) of Schlieffens memorandum of 1912. The maps referred to at the end are among Schlieffens papers.

Notes on the attached memorandum:

33His Excellency Field Marshal Graf Schlieffen intended the attached memorandum as a supplement to the memorandum composed on his retirement in January 1906. From then on, the suggested operation occupied the Field Marshal continuously. His military-scientific studies in the operational field and his constant study of European politics, as far as this was possible from the Press, confirmed the Field Marshal in the views here expressed.

34After completing the final essay on Cannae in October 1912 the Field Marshal repeatedly worked on drafting the contents of pages 1 to 31 of the memorandum. This final version the Field Marshal dictated to me on December 26th and 27th, 1912, having repeatedly, and for the last time on December 24th and 25th, explained to me his plans and views.

35The Field Marshal also discussed the points he raises over a map with His Excellency General of the Cavalry von Hausmann in two conversations of several hours, the last being on December 28th, 1912. Apart from General von Hausmann and myself, only Flugeladjutant Lieutenant-Colonel von Dommès has knowledge of the views set forth.

4. After the last conversation with General von Hausmann the Field Marshal wrote on the same evening, December 28th, pages 31 to

the end, beginning "With the further advance . . ."* It was the last thing he ever put on paper. On the following morning, December 29th, the Field Marshal fell sick.

36 Instead of "Waag" the Field Marshal probably means the "Waal." Where he uses "corps" on the last pages he had in mind a formation of two divisions, on the model suggested by him.

37 The Field Marshal said furthermore that the investing and covering troops must be reinforced by reserves and as far as possible released for the front line. These masking and covering forces absorb hundreds of thousands of men. Thanks to scientific advances and the development of new methods of demolition the enemy population will create unheard-of difficulties for us; therefore the conquered territory must be completely inundated with our troops. Wave must follow wave in the invasion. After the first line must come the Reserves, then the Ersatz troops, then the Ersatz Reserve, finally, if necessary, the mobilised Landsturm, so that in fact the whole German population able to bear arms will take part in the operations against France.

38 Of marching-distances and fronts the Field Marshal said again and again that the modern corps, with its fighting troops spread over a column-of-march of twenty-nine kilometres, cannot come fully into the attack in one day. The rear contingents must be waited for. This waiting diminishes the fury of attack. The length of the column must be reduced. Compare the *Vierteljahreshefte*, 1913, No. 1, page 4, lines 14 to 19.² In civilised countries like France and Belgium main roads can be found at intervals of about a mile.

The fire-power of the modern army corps with its large number of machine-guns and its heavy artillery is so enormous that the regulations still in force for the tactical deployment of infantry need to be changed. Otherwise, as was still the case in 1870-1, an unnecessary mass will be formed behind the firing-line. With their present-day fighting-strength, augmented by machine-guns and heavy artillery, twenty battalions and ninety field guns can quite safely take over the operational area of twenty-four battalions

¹ See above, p. 175.

² *Vierteljahreshefte für Truppenführung und Heereskunde*. Cf. Schlieffen, *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, p. 222 (Cannae Essays).

and 144 field guns, even allowing for suitable disposition in depth.

39The Field Marshal was always saying that when in operational studies and war games during his term of office Reserve divisions, and eventually Reserve corps and Ersatz troops were used almost in the role of Active formations, this was a makeshift because further Active army corps had not been sanctioned. By using the Reserve corps with their unfavourable artillery strength he sought to induce his colleagues to make extraordinary exertions when something extraordinary was to be achieved, and to induce them to find ways and means of restoring the Reserves to their original role: not in the first line alongside Active troops but in the second line, as support and follow-up forces. The Field Marshal felt that his suggested division or corps, however one chooses to call it, of twelve Active and eight Reserve battalions would simplify mobilisation. The Field Marshal thought each such division should in general be followed by Ersatz troops, Landwehr, well trained and organised Ersatz Reserves, and Landsturm of the same territorial district, because in his opinion, the whole of the enemy's country behind the fighting forces would remain in rebellion and a state of war.

40On various occasions the Field Marshal said that for the inevitable People's War, besides the full use of general conscription and the training of the Ersatz Reserve, military service should also be prolonged, as was the case in 1870-1.

41I have summarised the employment of the fifty-one divisions as intended by the Field Marshal in enclosure (1).

42The blue marching routes on the enclosed road map were drawn in by the Field Marshal himself at the beginning of December 1912. Because of the good road network the Field Marshal has broken up part of the northern group into brigade columns. The fortress map West (1 : 1,000,000) I marked up myself according to the Field Marshal's instructions, after his death. The Field Marshal intended to attach such a general map to his finished memorandum.

Wilhelm von Hahnke

Major and Battalion Commander

1st Foot Guards

Summary of the employment of 51 divisions.

2 divisions against Holland.

2 divisions against Antwerp.

43 divisions against Liege-Namur, left of the Meuse.

44 divisions against Dunkirk-Gravelines, Calais, Boulogne and for observation of the coast.

2 divisions against Lille and Maubeuge.

9

12 divisions as *First Army* for the offensive left of the Meuse and Sambre, direction Abbeville-St. Quentin.

8 divisions as *Second Army* south of the Meuse, of which

1 division against Liege-Namur,

n against Maubeuge.

10 divisions as *Third Army* against Mezieres-Verdun.

12 divisions as *Fourth Army* against Verdun-Belfort.

VI. SCHLIEFFEN'S OPERATIONAL PLAN FOR "RED"
(FRANCE) OF 1911¹

Foolscap envelope inscribed:

Graf Schlieffen's operational plan for France against Germany
(*von Hahnkes handwriting*)

Enclosed, a slip of paper in von Hahnkes writing:

Background: The great ride of 1911 was about to be held. General Windheim was to command "Red." He gave me his deployment and operations scheme, asking me to show it to Graf Schlieffen because he wanted to hear H.E.'s opinion. Windheim was the only man of sense—and that includes Moltke jun., Ludendorff, Stein and Company—who turned to the master. The rest, including Moltke and Ludendorff, were foolish enough never to ask Schlieffen's opinion any longer. Final result: the lost war.—*Item*, Schlieffen did not approve of Windheim's plan but put his thoughts to paper, supplementing them verbally to me, as I have indicated in the postscript.

v. Ha., 114.23

Schlieffen's own writing, six half-page columns with an insertion in the left-hand column. Postscript in Hahnkes writing, four pages.

The strength of the German army leads one to assume that in the attack it will occupy the whole length of the frontier from Belfort to Luxembourg. Here it encounters fortified lines or positions which by their natural strength would hold it up for some time. It is not unlikely therefore that it will extend farther to the right and cross Luxembourg and Belgian territory. France has sufficient forces not only to safeguard herself against such an outflanking or envelopment, but to counter it with an even more extended outflanking. The front of her whole border position is so strong that it can be secured with few troops. By far the largest part of the army is available for flanking movements. Therefore there can be no doubt that France will make sure of Belgium

¹ Cf. account in: Foerster, *Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg* (1925) > pp. 77-9-

in good time. She will announce to the Belgian Government that she intends to make a *penetration pacifique* guaranteeing the independence of the country, but demanding in return that the Belgian army, the Belgian fortresses and the Belgian railways be put at her disposal. Belgium has secured herself by fortresses against Germany, but in no way against France. To the neighbour who wants to penetrate it peaceably, the country lies open. Confronted with the choice of joining France to help her to victory and thus getting off lightly, or a desperate struggle ending in subjugation by one or other of the belligerents, she will not hesitate for long. If Belgium chooses to maintain her neutrality, the French army will invade her and impose, for a start, a war levy of some thousand millions. Belgian neutrality has been guaranteed by the Great Powers. But will Russia, the ally of France, or England, the latter's partner in the Entente, or remoter still, Austria, intervene? The deployment of the French army would then take place along the line Belfort-Liège. The situation could be further improved if, before the declaration of war, on the first word of mobilisation, a detachment from Belfort were to occupy Huningen and seize the bridge over the Rhine there. Other, stronger, detachments from Belfort and the Vosges would meanwhile take by surprise (*sic* !) the garrison of Mulhouse, gain possession of the bridge opposite Mullheim, then march downstream and penetrate as far as Strasbourg, seal off the fortress on the south, shoot Neu-Breisach to pieces, seize all the crossings on the difficult Upper Rhine and occupy both banks. Since 1870 such bold ventures in advance of complete mobilisation have had a bad name. But at the time they were fully effective and only failed to lead to a real success because plans for the transport of peace-strength units, their increase to war-strength, and mobilisation in general, were all insufficiently prepared.

The French army will then consist of a right wing between south of Strasbourg and Nancy, a centre between Nancy and Verdun, and a left wing on the line Verdun-Liège. The right flank will be covered by the garrisons posted on the Upper Rhine, for which the fortress garrisons of Belfort and Epinal can be drawn upon. For covering the left flank, the Dutch army will be used as well; under a guarantee of independence to the country, it will be asked first to occupy the Meuse from Liège downstream, and then to follow the left wing of the army, acting as left echelon for the protection of the Rhine. The two wings (on a 250-kilometre front) are intended to consist, in the main, of

twenty-four Active corps (four of them Belgian). Further requirements will be met by Reserve corps. The centre will consist solely of Reserve corps, apart from the fortress garrisons of Toul and Verdun. Second and third line troops (Territorials) will follow, especially on the wings to give flank cover.

When deployment is completed, and partly while it is still in progress, the left wing will wheel right and advance against the line Sierck-Coblenz, while the right wing, investing Strasbourg on the way, rests its right flank on the Rhine and on the left takes the direction of Saarbrücken. Linking up with both wings, the centre will advance against the western and southern front of Metz and later wheel against the eastern front. Massed cavalry, supported by infantry, will cross to the right bank of the Rhine, try to wrest the river crossings from the enemy for the use of their own army and to threaten the flanks and rear of the enemy or to attack them, while the two wings continue their concentric march. The further this march proceeds, the more troops can be thrown across the Rhine for the general attack.

Von Hahnkes postscript:

Postscript. *Note in red pencil, in Hahnkes writing:* "General von Windheim, returned 31.10."

Just as I was about to expedite this letter, my father-in-law came to see me and graciously gave me the following explanations which I cannot fail to communicate to Your Excellency, respectfully and in confidence.

The French will find the strategic defensive most expedient. But like any defensive, it must be inspired by an offensive spirit. What matters is not to hold the Germans off, but to defeat and annihilate them. Public opinion—*rerum novarum cupidus*—will not tolerate a delay until the Russians are ready for joint action. Therefore the offensive, not under pressure, but on one's own initiative—at least prepare for it, on *both* wings.

It looks as if the German intention is to attack the front of barrier forts and attempt a "break-through." The Directing Staff may decide what they like in the game, but the fact is that in war this break-through will fail, as has every other "break-through" in military history.

The forts may be of little value. Certainly. But the defence line is not the line of low-lying, partly inefficient forts: the defence of the

line Verdun-Toul lies on the higher, eastern bank of the Meuse (*crossed out*: and Moselle). In the view of Graf Schlieffen the only function of the forts is to secure a safe crossing of the Meuse for the French defence in case of a retreat. This eastern defence line need only be very weakly occupied.

In a war under the conditions given, Belgian neutrality *must* be broken by one side or the other. Whoever gets there first, occupies Brussels and imposes a war-levy of some thousand millions, has the upper hand. I dared to submit to Your Excellency that the Belgians would be more favourably inclined towards the German Confederation. Graf Schlieffen said today that a few years ago, with the unlimited domination of the Clerus, this would certainly have been the case. Today the Clerus is still in nominal control, but the Radical-Socialist movement commands a majority with the people and will certainly prevail in a war. This movement tends towards France.² The Belgian fortresses, too, are designed in accord with this popular voice—against Germany, not against France.

French public opinion would welcome an invasion of Upper Alsace. In Mulhouse the Republic is to be declared immediately for the whole of Alsace-Lorraine. The newly granted constitution need not be changed. It is already directed against Prussia-Germany. Therefore it is suggested, on the basis of the deployment ordered by Your Excellency:

1st and 2nd Armies to advance *left* of the Rhine from south to north against the line Strasbourg-Nancy; Metz to be encircled from the south. The Rhine to be sealed off (for this, six to seven Reserve divisions from the main reserve Belfort and Epinal); 3rd, 4th, 5th Armies to be grouped for the advance through Belgium; Metz to be gradually invested from the west and north.

6th Army as Supreme Army Command reserve to area Verdun.

Invasion of Upper Alsace as soon as possible, but not with insufficient forces (two armies!). The advance through Belgium could wait if necessary, but the grouping of the armies on the basis of the road network should be prepared early. Territorial divisions to be used for occupying the line of barrier forts and for the encirclement of Metz.

Your most obedient servant,

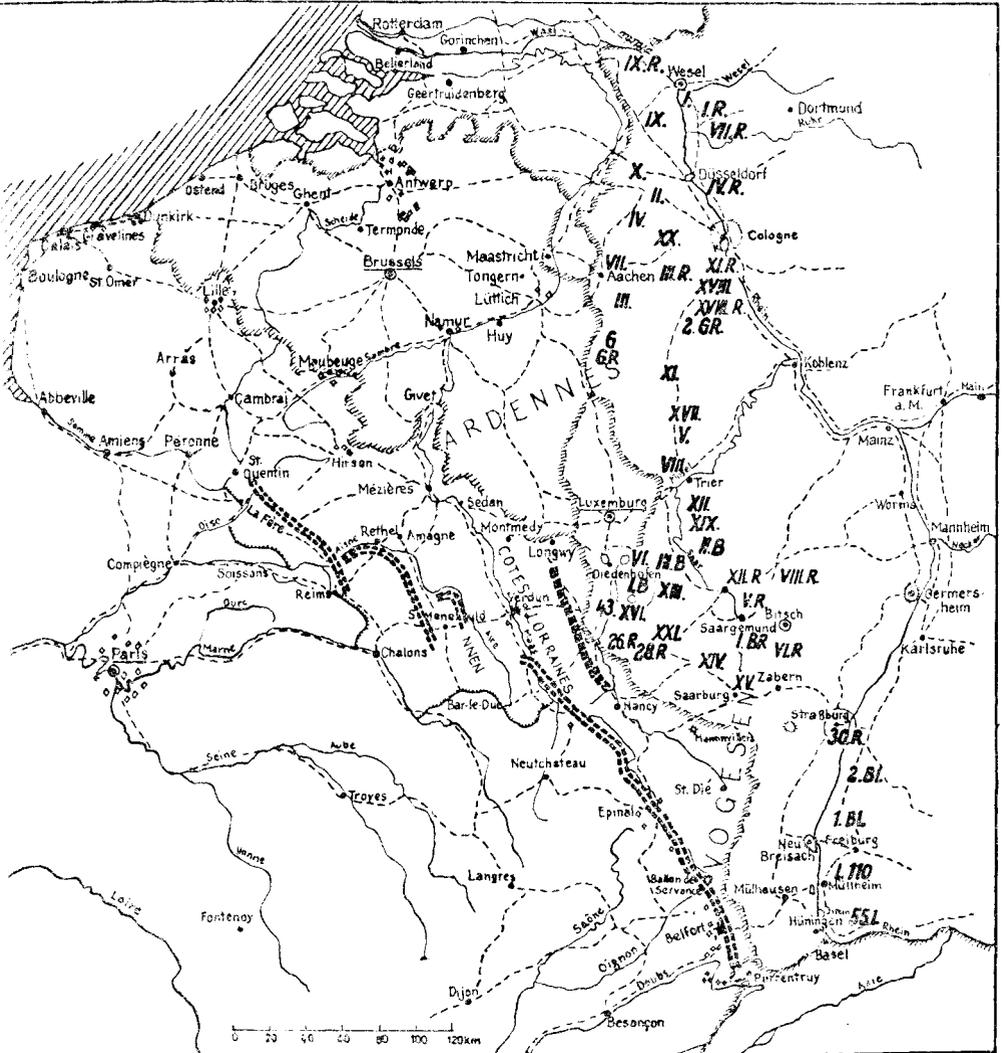
v. Hahnke.

² Cf. p. 87, above, footnote ¹⁶.

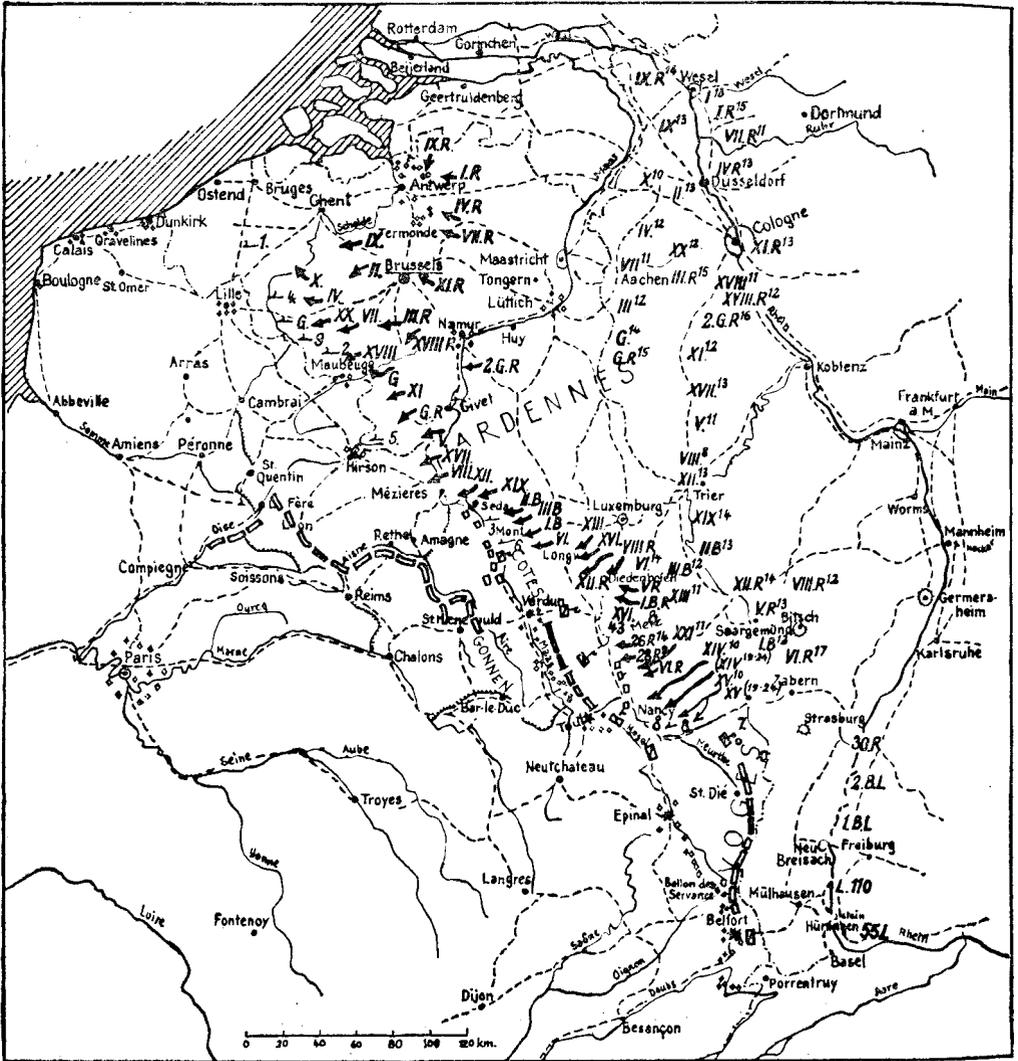
MAPS

Schlieffen supplemented his plans with a number of maps, and he referred to these in marginal notes. They consisted of large-scale coloured general staff sheets, on which he had Major von Hahnke draw in the positions and routes of advance.

Those reproduced here are merely a selection, and are, of course, much reduced in size. The basic map has been re-drawn, and Hahnke's markings have been transferred. The numbering and explanatory titles are Hahnke's.



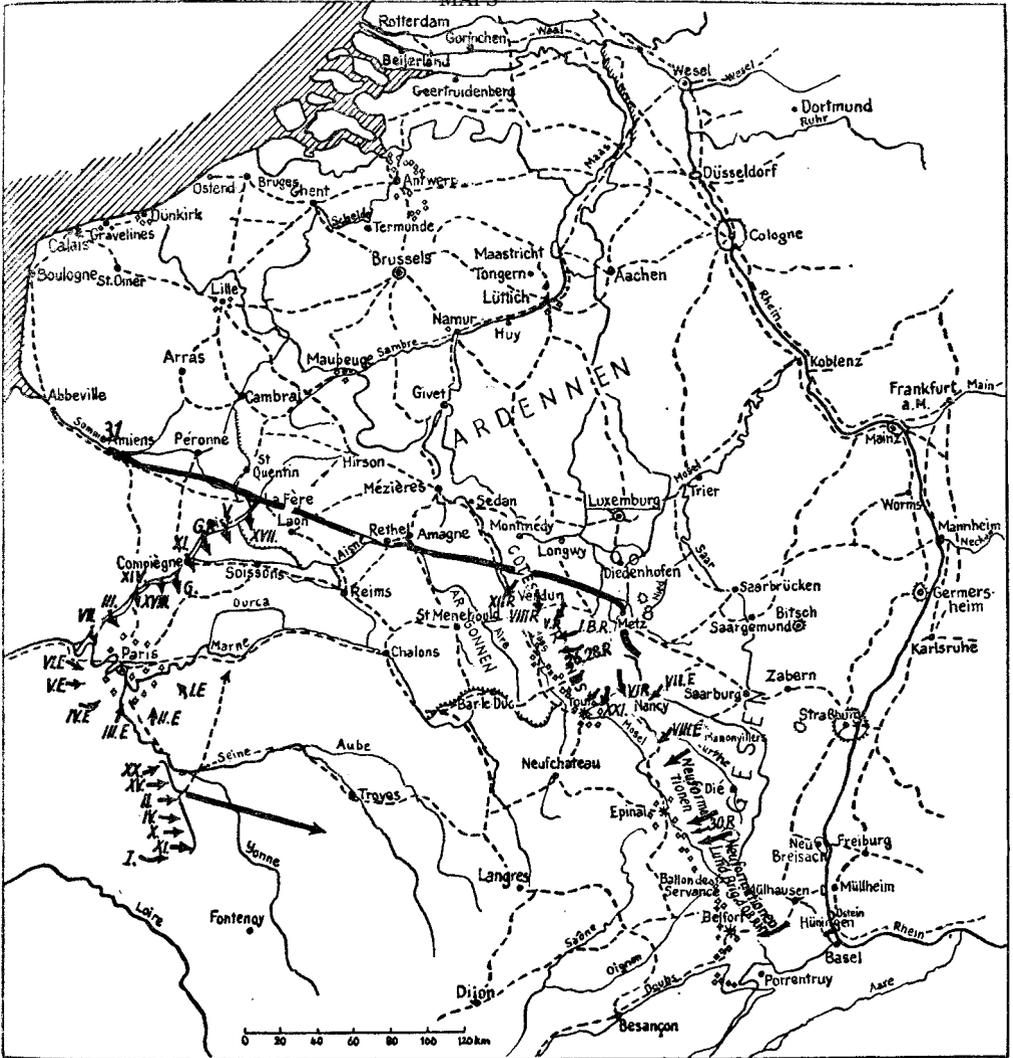
(i) Map 1
German deployment and French positions



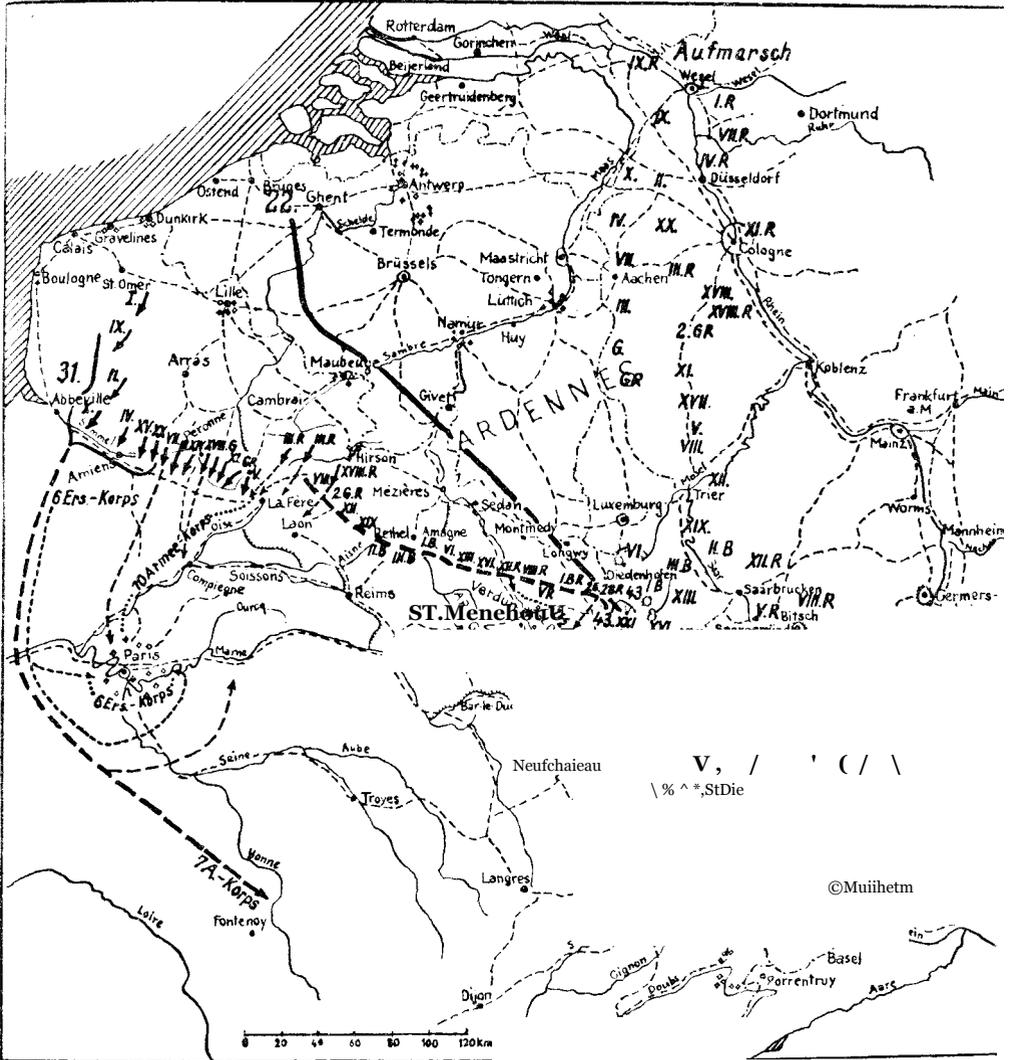
(2) Map 2

Advance to the French frontier (22nd day)

MAPS

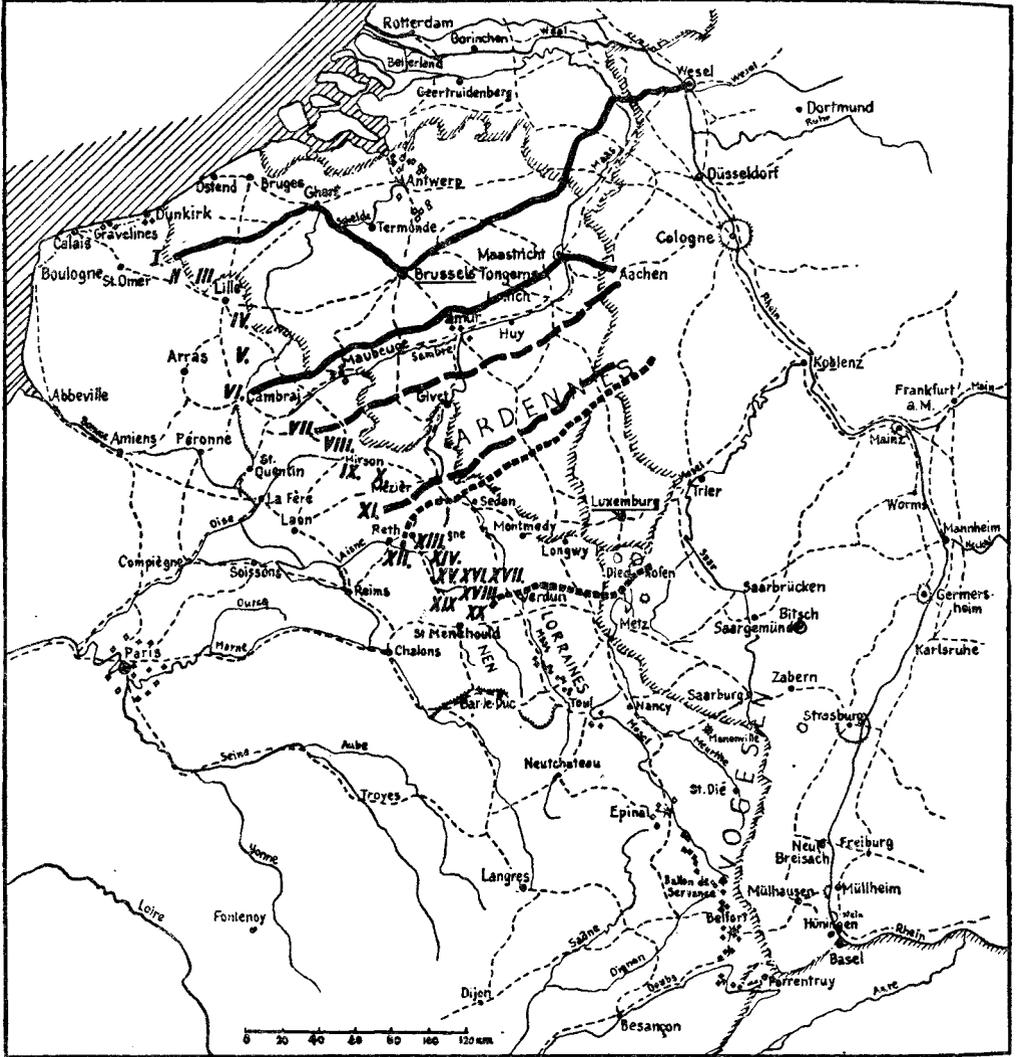


(3) Map 3
Further advance (31st day)



(5) Map 6

Overall map of operations



(6) Last operational study, 1912

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