



THE MILITIA
Style Guide No. 3

Prussian Landwehr

THE HISTORY



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A very brief history of Prussia



Germany didn't exist as one big country until the nineteenth century. Instead there was a huge patchwork of small German states, one of which was Brandenburg.

In the early seventeenth century Brandenburg's rulers, the Hohenzollerns, inherited the Duchy of Prussia and created the state of Brandenburg-Prussia. It was a bit of an unwieldy state though - Brandenburg was in the west (with Berlin as its capital), but the Duchy of Prussia was over 400 miles to the north east ... on the other side of Poland.

The Hohenzollerns spent the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries trying to join up the two ends of Brandenburg-Prussia, and through a series of marriages, inheritances and wars, they eventually controlled a large part of northern Europe. Along the way the Hohenzollerns had declared themselves Kings and Brandenburg-Prussia became the Kingdom of Prussia.



A big, well trained army was very important in expanding the new kingdom. The army was also needed to keep hold of the territories that had been gained, because unlike other large states Prussia did not have easily defended natural borders (France for example is surrounded by mountains and sea).

Prussia became a big military power in the early eighteenth century, under "the soldier king" Frederick-William I. The king was obsessed with his army, and grew it into one of the biggest, best trained and best equipped in Europe. He introduced new ways of fighting, with a focus on strict discipline and precision drill. He introduced national service much earlier than other countries. He even managed to convince the aristocracy that the army was the most honourable way of life for their sons.

Frederick William's son, Frederick the Great, was a brilliant military commander. In the middle of the century he used the excellent army built by his father to expand Prussia's boundaries still further and establish Prussia as a proper European power.

Prussia saw less military action towards the end of the century and the once great army went a bit rusty.



Top Left: The Black Eagle of Prussia

Above: One of Frederick-William I's obsessions was his giant grenadiers, the Potsdam Giants

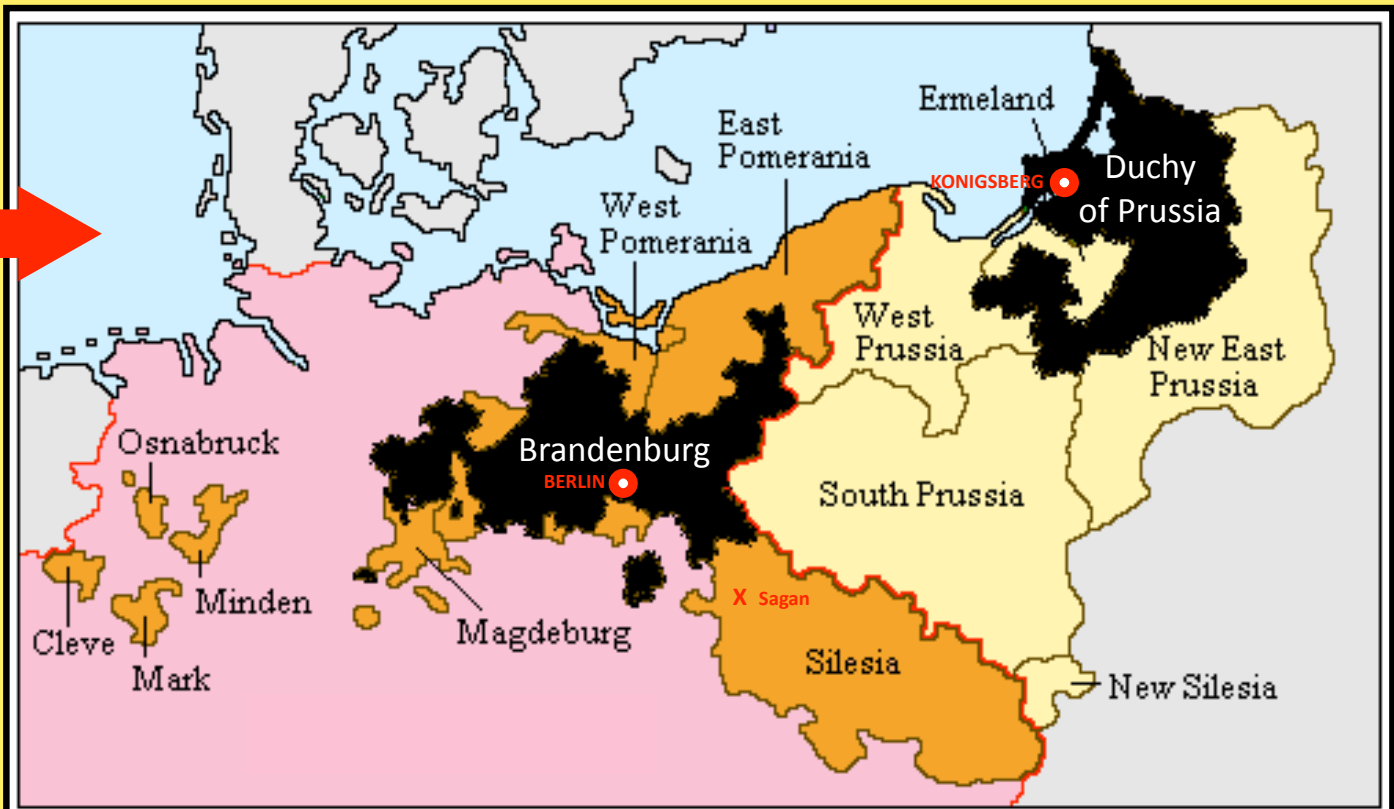
Bottom Left: Frederick the Great

Where was Prussia?

Map of Europe 2011



Map of Prussia 1795



Prussia was a jigsaw of smaller states that had each been absorbed by Brandenburg through a mixture of marriage, inheritance, diplomacy and invasion.

Prussia covered large parts of modern Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic.

After the wars Prussia became more powerful and was dominant in establishing a unified Germany.

Prussia ceased to exist in any formal way after World War II.

	Brandenburg-Prussia early 17 th Century	} Prussia 1795
	Territory acquired 1600 - 1772	
	Territory acquired from Poland 1772 - 1795	

The Napoleonic Wars



The French Revolution of 1789 triggered a series of conflicts that would rage across Europe and around the world for the next twenty five years.

Hostilities opened with the French Revolutionary Wars which saw the powers of Europe come together to put the upstart republic back in its box. The French army modernised rapidly during this period and proved very difficult to beat. By the late 1790s however things had begun to crumble and the French government was losing its grip both at home and in the field.

The very ambitious and very popular French General, Napoleon Bonaparte, took this opportunity to seize power from the Paris politicians.



The Treaty of Amiens in 1802 brought the first phase of the conflict to an uneasy end. The peace ended a year later when the Napoleonic Wars kicked off. For the next decade Napoleon swept all before him and expanded French influence across vast swathes of Europe.

The great European powers continued to resist the French, but progress was slow and the cracks only really started to appear when Napoleon overstretched himself in the Russian campaign of 1812.

The allies saw their chance and proceeded to push the Emperor back in to France. By 1814 it was all over ...

... at least it was supposed to be. Napoleon escaped from exile on the Mediterranean island of Elba, returned to France and raised his army once more.

The subsequent campaign culminated in the Battle of Waterloo, where Napoleon was finally defeated. He was sent into exile on St Helena, far out in the Atlantic, where he died in 1821.



Top Left: "Liberty Leading the People"
Bottom Left: Napoleon Bonaparte
Top Right: Napoleon's Old Guard
Above: The Duke of Wellington

Prussia in the Napoleonic Wars = 1

The Napoleonic Wars were a bit of a roller-coaster ride for Prussia.

Prussia had acquired large parts of Poland during the French Revolutionary Wars, expanding Prussian territory by a third and increasing the population from six to nine million. But the country's patchwork nature meant that its complex bureaucracy struggled to cope with this huge expansion. The treasury was close to bankruptcy and couldn't afford a war, even if King Frederick-William II had wanted one (which he didn't, it wasn't really his cup of tea), so in 1795 Prussia became neutral.

The state of the army had declined considerably and it had fallen behind the other European powers.

Officers were only recruited from the landed aristocracy. There was no pension available for aging officers and their estates often failed to generate enough money to support them. The aristocracy were banned from non-military professions, and forbidden to sell their land. As a consequence, many senior officers relied heavily on their military income and stayed in post well into old age. In 1806 the average age of senior Prussian commanders was 58½, twenty years older than their French counterparts.

As in many armies of the day, senior officers were personally responsible for unit expenses – so clothing, equipment and training were targets for penny-pinching and profiteering.

Held back by outdated practices such as these the army had become a shadow of Frederick the Great's magnificent military machine.

The situation did not improve when Frederick-William III and his queen, Louise, came to the throne in 1797. For the next nine years Prussian foreign policy was dithering and non-committal in the face of increasing challenges to the country's neutrality.



Above: Prussian infantry before 1806

Prussia in the Napoleonic Wars = 2



Above: King Frederick-William III

Queen Louise was very popular with the Prussian people. She was, however, much more fiery than her husband and frequently urged him to join the coalition against France.

In 1805 she persuaded the king to sign a secret treaty with Austria and Russia against the French. Before the Prussian army had even mustered though, Napoleon had caught up with the Austro-Russian force and given it a proper kicking at Austerlitz.

Napoleon discovered the details of the secret Austro-Russo-Prussian treaty and demanded that Prussia sign a most disadvantageous peace treaty. Louise persuaded the king to reject the treaty, which provoked Napoleon to demand even harsher terms. This time Frederick-William signed – but in an incredibly ill-advised move, possibly at Louise’s insistence, the king changed his mind and ordered Napoleon to withdraw his troops. That was silly. With the Austrians and Russians all but out of the war, Prussia stood alone and exposed, against the unstoppable might of Imperial France – who properly clobbered the Prussian army at the twin battles of Jena and Auerstadt.

The whole sorry chapter ended in the humiliating Treaty of Tilsit which saw Prussia reduced to half its former size, required to pay crippling fines and occupied by French troops. Under the terms of the treaty, Prussia’s army was limited to 42,000 men.

One of the few figures to emerge with any credit was General von Blücher, to whom we shall return in due course.



Above: Queen Louise ... mmm history honey!

Prussia in the Napoleonic Wars = 3



The crushing defeat of the 1806 campaign and the devastating peace terms seemed to focus Frederick-William's mind and he immediately set about overhauling Prussia's military.

The need for modernisation had been recognised for some time, but vested interest and conservatism had always frustrated progress. After Tilsit though, the problem couldn't be ignored and the king ordered a radical rebuild of the entire system.

Three quarters of the senior commanders were removed; promotion would now be by merit; soldiers of all ranks were given equal rights; corporal punishment was abolished; a modern command structure was developed; weapons and training were improved; up to date tactics were adopted (including a greater use of skirmishers); even uniforms didn't escape and became far more practical under the reforms (by Napoleonic standards at least!). The deep changes in the army and society were designed to bring the military and nation closer together and to rebuild the national identity.

A key development was the introduction of universal military service. Men were called up into the regular army or into territorial militia units. Each regiment was allotted an area known as a *Kanton* from which to recruit, a process which produced regiments with strong local ties. Another feature of military service was the *Krümper*, a method of getting a lot of men through basic training whilst staying within the limit imposed by Napoleon. The *Krümper* meant that a reserve of trained civilians was quietly building up under the noses of the French – which would make it possible to expand the army quickly should an opportunity to restore Prussian fortunes present itself.

In 1812 Napoleon assembled a Grand Armée of half a million men and attacked Russia. The Emperor's Russian adventure went very badly wrong – of the half a million who went in, only 27,000 made it back out in one piece. This was the opportunity Prussia had been waiting for. After a bit of dithering from the king, Prussia joined the alliance against France and began expanding the vastly improved army.

Napoleon somehow managed to raise another army and in 1813 set about defeating the latest alliance against him. This prompted a surge of Prussian patriotism and it was at this point that the *Landwehr* was officially established.



Above: Gneisenau (L) & Scharnhorst (R) – the architects of Prussia's military reforms

Top Left: Prussian infantry after the reforms
Left: Napoleon's retreat from Moscow.

Prussia in the Napoleonic Wars = 4

The Wars of Liberation (*Befreiungskriege*) that followed culminated in the massive Battle of the Nations (Leipzig 1813) where all the allied powers came together to defeat Napoleon (Britain was represented by a single rocket troop), before chasing him back into France, where he abdicated in 1814.

By the spring of 1815 Bonaparte had escaped exile, returned to France, raised an army from nothing, retaken the throne and ousted the king. This really wasn't cricket, so the allies, who were still carving up post-Napoleonic Europe at the Congress of Vienna, mobilised their forces once again.

By June 1815 the Anglo-Allied army under the Duke of Wellington, and the Prussian army under Feldmarschall von Blücher, were in Belgium threatening northern France.

Napoleon led his army into a gap between the two armies, where he planned to defeat them one at a time. The Anglo-Allied army managed to hold him at Quatre-Bras. The Prussians were badly beaten at Ligny and lost a lot of men, but managed to escape relatively intact.



Above: *The Battle of Leipzig, 1813*

Below: *The Prussians storm Plancenoit, 18th June 1815*



In avoiding a full scale defeat at Ligny, Blücher was forced to move even further away from Wellington. This gave Bonaparte a second chance to defeat the allies one at a time – starting with Wellington's army who had occupied a ridge near the village of Waterloo.

Napoleon threw everything he had at the men on the ridge. But Wellington wasn't budging, because he knew (hoped) that Blücher was coming. The Prussians finally arrived in the early evening and smashed into Bonaparte's right flank at Plancenoit, having marched sixty miles in forty eight hours.

Outnumbered and engaged on two sides the French began to waver. When the Imperial Guard broke it was all over and they went into full retreat. Wellington ordered a general advance, bringing his men down off the ridge to join the Prussians and drive the French back to Paris once more. The Napoleonic Wars were finally over.

Despite being very nearly destroyed, Prussia had come through the conflict stronger than ever and all set to be a major power in the coming century.

Blücher



Prussian Hussar of the Seven Years War

Feldmarschall Gebhard von Blücher was a rum old cove.

He was born in 1742 in a small German Duchy up on the Baltic coast – he wasn't actually born a Prussian. As a teenager he was sent north to live with relatives on the Swedish island of Rügen. He was supposed to be learning to be a farmer – but found the Swedish troops based on the island far more exciting. It wasn't long before Blücher had enlisted in the hussars and gone off to fight the Seven Years War ... against Prussia.

He was taken prisoner in an ambush in 1760. The Prussian hussar colonel who captured him turned out to be a distant relative and quickly persuaded Blücher to switch sides.

Blücher had a long and variable military career, during which he had picked up all the bad habits, swagger and enthusiasm one would expect of a dashing hussar officer.

At the outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars, he was already fifty. He was well into his sixties by the time he commanded the rear guard at Jena in 1806 as the rest of the Prussian army collapsed and ran.

Unlike many of the old generals, Blücher was right behind the reforms that followed. His despair at Prussia's humiliation was deep and his health suffered during this period, giving rise to the famous tales of delusions and bizarre behaviour (such as his belief that he was pregnant with an elephant).

He was a heavy smoker, habitual gambler and probable alcoholic – but he was also, an inspirational leader, personally brave (often to the point of recklessness), bold on the field, and loved by his men.

When the time came to drive the French out of Prussia, he couldn't be ignored (Scharnhorst is supposed to have said "I don't care if he has 100 elephants in him, Blücher must lead!"). He was given command of the Prussian and Russian army in the Wars of Liberation, where he earned the nickname "Marshal Vorwärts!".

By the time of Waterloo he was pretty ancient, even by modern standards, but still led from the front – even being trapped under his dead horse at Ligny didn't keep him down for long.

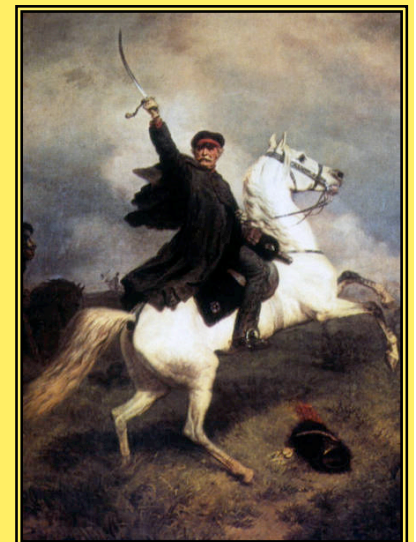
Blücher is not regarded as a tactical genius like Wellington or Bonaparte*, but he more than made up for this with his fighting spirit, his hatred of the French and as a great leader of men.

"Papa Blücher" died at his Silesian estate in 1819, aged 76.

* Although, of all the allied commanders, he has the best record against Napoleon: 4 losses, 2 wins, 2 assists.



Papa Blücher



Marshal Vorwärts!

Prussian Landwehr

Prussia's military leaders realised very quickly that Napoleon's defeat in Russia was the opportunity they had been waiting for and quickly began mobilising a "nation in arms".

The king had taken a little more convincing, but, after the traditional period of dithering, had finally declared war on France in March 1813. The regular army was expanded quickly with the call up of the men trained under the Krümpfer.

In addition to the regular army, Prussia also raised a national militia – the *Landwehr*.

Landwehr literally means "land-defence" – although "home guard" has been suggested as a better translation, but the intention that they only serve in their home province was soon forgotten!

The Landwehr made up a significant proportion of the Prussian army, around 40%. It was recruited on a regional basis and units were often made up of men from the same area.

Men between the ages of 17 and 40 were recruited, although this rule was often stretched to maximise strengths. Men over 40 were supposed to join the Landsturm - units of civilians armed with whatever they could find and ordered to protect villages and towns threatened by the French.

Kit was in short supply and the regular regiments had first dibs on the good stuff. Consequently what uniform there was was often of poor quality. The Landwehr uniform consisted of a blue coat and a blue cloth cap with a leather peak. The collar of the coat and the band of the hat were in the provincial colour. The colour of the coat's shoulder strap denoted the battalion. Weapons were hard to come by initially, but early victories over the French and aid from allies provided muskets and other kit.

Performance in battle was variable, but generally pretty solid for hastily trained and poorly equipped militiamen. Some of the regions had quite liked being under French occupation though, so were less inclined to fight for the Fatherland and often deserted – but the many who were driven by Prussian patriotism proved themselves time and again, despite huge losses.



Top: Landwehr recruits go to war.

Bottom: Landwehr charge at Dennewitz, 1813

Books & Stuff

This is just a tiny sample of what's out there – you need never want for gift ideas again (there are about a million titles by Osprey alone)! We think we've exhausted pretty well all the English language books on the Landwehr – but if you come across any more please let us know. Enjoy ...

Prussia

Iron Kingdom, The Rise & Downfall of Prussia – C Clark
 Prussian Landwehr & Landsturm 1813-1815 – P. Hofschröer
 Osprey – Men At Arms 149 – Prussian Light Infantry 1792-1815
 Osprey – Men At Arms 152 – Prussian Line Infantry 1792-1815
 Osprey – Men At Arms 172 – Prussian Cavalry (2) 1807-1815
 Osprey – Men At Arms 192 – Prussian Reserve, Militia & Irregular Troops 1806-1815
 Osprey – Warrior 62 – Prussian Regular Infantryman 1808-1815
 Osprey – Men At Arms 9 – Blücher's Army
 The Prussian Army to 1815 – D. Smith
 The Prussian Army 1808-1815 – D. Nash
 Fighting for the Fatherland – D. Stone

Napoleonic History

Warfare in the Age of Bonaparte – M. Glover
 The Napoleonic Source Book – P. Haythornthwaite
 The Wars of Napoleon – C. Esdaile
 Rites of Peace – A. Zamoyski
 The First Total War – D. Bell
 Guineas & Gunpowder: British foreign aid ... etc – J. Sherwig
 Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon – R. Muir

Battles

Osprey – Campaign 25 – Leipzig 1813
 The Eagle's Last Triumph – A. Uffindell
 Waterloo – H. Lachouque
 The Waterloo Companion – M. Adkin

Uniforms & Equipment

Soldiers' Accoutrements of the British Army – P. Turner
 Uniforms of Waterloo – P. Haythornthwaite
 The Armies at Waterloo – U. Pericoli
 Uniforms of the Napoleonic Wars – D. Smith

Soldiers, Armies, Tactics, Drill

Wellington's Army – HCB Rogers
 Napoleon's Army – HCB Rogers
 Osprey – Elite 164 – British Napoleonic Infantry Tactics 1792-1815
 Osprey – Elite 159 – French Napoleonic Infantry Tactics 1792-1815
 Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon – R. Muir
 Military Field Pocket Book 1811 – General Scharnhorst
 Prussian Army Drill Regulations 1812

People, Memoirs, Units

Rifles – M. Urban
 The Man Who Broke Napoleon's Codes – M. Urban
 The Memoirs of Baron von Müffling – Baron Carl von Müffling
 Wellington – R. Holmes
 Waterloo Commanders – A. Uffindell
 The Recollections of Rifleman Harris – C. Hibbert (ed)
 William Pitt the Younger – W. Hague

Internet

There is loads on the internet – some of it very good, some of it pants.

The URLs below should take you to the websites of some of our German counterparts who re-enact the Wars of Liberation and the Waterloo campaign on the continent ...

www.kurmaerkische-landwehr.de
www.5-preussische-brigade.de