History informs the military profession and is a central, foundational element in professional military education. History is also employed to validate, provide context to, and thereby legitimate concepts like doctrine. Unfortunately, it is not always done properly, or with much regard to, or understanding of the evidence or to historians’ analyses. This is glaringly so in the case of Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces, and now-withdrawn Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, Mission Command, and their unfounded claim for mission command’s historical roots in Auftragstaktik, more properly termed Führen mit Auftrag. ADP 6-0, which superseded ADRP 6-0 in 2019, states that “Mission command traces its roots back to the German concept of Auftragstaktik (literally, mission-type tactics),” while ADRP 6-0 similarly claims that “mission command …, the Army’s preferred style for exercising command since the 1980s …, traces its roots back to the German concept of Auftragstaktik, which translates roughly to mission-type tactics.”

ADP 6-0 acknowledges that “aspects of [what is today termed] mission command, including commander’s intent, disciplined initiative, mission orders, and mutual trust, have long been part of U.S. Army culture” as far back as 1864, and that American “commanders have employed elements of [what is today deemed] mission command since the 18th century.” Having acknowledged this, the Center for Army Doctrine Development’s assertion for mission command’s Prussian or German lineage for longstanding American practices is curious. It ignores the historical record and overlooks the American experience. While there may be similarities between mission command and Führen mit Auftrag, to claim that the latter led to the former is to ignore the massive weight of evidence from Prussian, German, and American histories, and importantly, their historical origins.

“Auftragstaktik,” notes ADP 6-0, “was a result of Prussian military reforms following the defeat of the Prussian army by Napoleon at the Battle of Jena in 1809 [sic],” and then traces it through the “Franco-Russian [sic] War of 1870,” finally culminating in the “1888 German Drill Regulations.” Rightfully, ADP 6-0 gives due credit to reformers like Gerhard von Scharnhorst and August von Gneisenau for their part in the reconstruction and regeneration of the Royal Prussian Army (Königlich Preußische Armee). Putting aside the fact that the battles of Jena and Auerstädt took place on 14 October 1806, not 1809, and that France went to war with Prussia, not Russia in 1870, this assertion regarding the Prussian origins of mission command is rife with problems. Chief among them is it ignores the evidence. Moreover, the mythical Prusso-German antecedents gloss over the vast historical, social, political, and cultural gulfs that separated and helped define the Prusso-German and American
military experiences and the fact that American military leaders have, for over two centuries, exercised what is today termed mission command. Taking this to heart, there ought to be a greater wariness in embracing uncritically Auftragstaktik.

Historian and now-retired U.S. Army officer Antulio J. Echevarria II argues that the “US Army’s rather free and enthusiastic use of the term Auftragstaktik in the 1980s has become something of an embarrassment.” It remains so. Echevarria traces it to Trevor N. Dupuy’s *Genius for War: The German Army and the General Staff, 1807-1945*, “An oft-cited source of this confusion.” Furthermore, he has written that “Auftragstaktik has been greatly abused in military publications in recent years.” Its original understanding was as something of a free-form approach to directing troops on the battlefield, as opposed to Normaltaktik, which called for a “few standardized formations.”

Hence Auftragstaktik originally referred more to the liberal use of skirmishers and firepower in infantry tactics over formal, heavy infantry columns or lines than anything else. Nonetheless, modern interest in the Auftragstaktik (and seemingly all things Wehrmacht [armed forces]) began with British and American efforts at crafting doctrine and tactics to counter the threat emanating from the Group of Soviet Occupation Forces in Germany, later the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany (German Democratic Republic), during the extended Anglo-American occupation of the Federal Republic of Germany during the Cold War (1945–1991). Echevarria is not alone in his critique, nor is he the first in calling out the U.S. Army’s infatuation with Germany’s supposed military prowess. Historian Roger A. Beaumont critiqued the Army’s uncritical
infatuation with the Wehrmacht and asks the question, “If they were so good, why did they lose? Were the odds just too great? If they were so smart, after losing once, why did they try again?”

Robert M. Citino, a preeminent historian of the Wehrmacht, makes the point abundantly clear when he writes that merely invoking “Auftragstaktik is completely mythological. The Germans hardly ever used the term when discussing issues of command. Rather they spoke of ‘the independence of subordinate commanders,’ which is a very different thing.” Citino states emphatically that in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth, “Operational-level German commanders (corps and above) saw themselves, and were recognized by the General Staff, as absolutely independent in spirit and behavior; they were free agents while on campaign,” and that “it is almost impossible to find an occasion when a ‘mission’ as defined by the supreme command took precedence over the wishes of a battlefield commander.” All of this is a far cry from the disciplined initiative American subordinates are, and have been, expected to exercise within the commander’s intent. It is long past time for U.S. Army doctrine writers and military professionals to jettison their Prusso-German infatuation.

Cold War Blinders

Anglo-American officers reasoned that the German army (Deutsches Heer) had often succeeded beyond expectations against the much larger Red Army in World War II. Since they anticipated fighting outnumbered the same enemy in World War III, they believed that had much to learn by adopting German practices, a narrative shaped by German generals. At the tactical level of war, the German army had won some stunning victories against larger forces, and that enthralled Anglo-American officers. Tactical virtuosity aside, that army was sorely bereft of any capable or serious strategic thought or action in either of its wars, but that was beside the point.
Anglo-American admiration dovetailed with the much larger and more extensive project of rehabilitating Germany and its armed forces, and the German generals were only too eager to whitewash their crimes and tell their captors what they wanted to hear. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer led the political effort to rearm the forces of the Federal Republic of Germany. Central to his efforts was cleansing the name of the Wehrmacht and assigning all crimes to the SS (Schutzstaffel) and its ilk. Furthermore, Adenauer was also after the votes of veterans, and what better way to garner their support than by purifying their units’ records. Assisting Adenauer was Franz Halder, former chief of staff of the German army’s High Command (1938–1942). Halder led the cleansing while working for the U.S. Army Historical Division, today the Center of Military History as a consultant. With NATO a recent creation and the defense of Western Europe paramount in American eyes, the United States silently acquiesced. An essential pillar of the clean Wehrmacht was assigning all responsibility for the murder of Jews, intellectuals, communists, gays, and countless others to the SS, the armed SS (Waffen-SS), concentration camp guards (SS-Totenkopfverbände), and the extermination or deployment groups (Einsatzgruppen), when in fact, the Wehrmacht leadership and countless numbers of its subordinate officers, noncommissioned officers, and enlisted men eagerly participated in these crimes against humanity. Organized murder and the enslavement or extermination of undesirables were central tenets of the Nazi strategy of territorial expansion. Hence, the myth of the clean Wehrmacht is a lie. With Adenauer and Halder having led the whitewashing of the Wehrmacht, an open American embrace followed.

Starry ..., like DePuy, was impressed with the German army’s tactical prowess in World War II, never mind its strategic ineptitude and criminal conduct.

The most overt admiration of the Wehrmacht came during one of the U.S. Army’s most difficult periods, its emergence from the Vietnam War and focus on the defense of Western Europe. Gens. William E. DePuy and Donn A. Starry, who were instrumental in the Army’s revitalization following the Vietnam War, played leading roles. DePuy was a veteran of the war against Nazi Germany and had served in the postwar Federal Republic of Germany. Importantly, he was also the first commander of Training and Doctrine Command from 1973 to 1977, and drove the creation of FM 100-5, Operations. His biographer, Henry G. Gole, writes that DePuy “admired German [tactical] elasticity in 1944 and 1945 and later rediscovered it in his reading of German military history.” DePuy especially admired the “skill of the Wehrmacht, particularly on the Eastern Front against the vastly numerically superior Russian Army in World War II.” In his mind, German techniques “demonstrated an elasticity in the German way of war that he felt was ‘never understood, mastered or accepted by the U.S. Army.’” In Gole’s telling, DePuy’s “frequent praise of both the old and new German Armies” verges on idolatry, and in doing so, he dismissed American soldiers’ capabilities. According to Gole, DePuy believed that only one-tenth of the soldiers he led in World War II had stuff of soldiers. In his quest to revamp the Army’s doctrine and prepare the force for combat against the Soviets, DePuy took inspiration from his former enemies.

Starry, who followed DePuy as Training and Doctrine Command commander from 1977 to 1981,

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drove the creation of a new doctrine as he too took inspiration from the German army. In the development of AirLand Battle, Starry went to great lengths to ensure that U.S. Army doctrine was consonant with Deutsches Heer doctrine, HDv 100/100. Although Starry had not served in World War II, he, like DePuy, was impressed with the German army’s tactical prowess in World War II, never mind its strategic ineptitude and criminal conduct, but also the postwar Deutsches Heer’s emphasis on trust and subordinates’ initiative within the scope of their commanders’ intents. In the search for allied doctrinal consonance and profound doctrinal change in the U.S. Army, DePuy and Starry seem to have planted the seeds for the false historical narrative that eventually accorded primacy of place to Auftragstaktik in the creation of mission command. The embrace of German practices thus shunted aside long-held American practices that antedated the creation of the U.S. Army and left unexamined the fuller history underpinning the much-admired Auftragstaktik.

The Historical Basis and Development of Auftragstaktik

The tradition of German commanders’ autonomy on the battlefield did not develop overnight. It was not immediate, nor readily apparent, but evolve it did, slowly, and from the world of the early-modern Hohenzollern state, wherein the seventeenth and early eighteenth-century rulers of Brandenburg sought to stabilize, defend, and expand Brandenburg-Prussia, largely a flat, sandy, and agriculturally worthless land in northern Germany. Not fully geographically contiguous, defending the dominion was no small challenge, hence the need to create an effective and powerful army.

Over the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Prussia’s rulers turned to the nobility, the Junkers, to both officer the army and staff the Hohenzollern bureaucracy. A symbiotic relationship between the prince and his officer corps developed. Each relied upon the other to prosper. A process initiated by the “Great Elector” (Der Große Kurfürst), Frederick William
(r. 1640–1688) during the Thirty Years’ War, created the social, political, and economic seedbed out of which commanders’ autonomy grew. The Great Elector used the army to suppress provincial autonomy in outlying lands, particularly to the west, and to tax those provinces. In doing so, he established the basis for Prussian absolutism and the foundation for Prussia’s service nobility, which became the bulwark of the ruler and his state.27

Both monarch and Junker needed the other to exist, and consequently, for the Prussian state to exist. It was personal relationship, a social contract predicated upon distinct, even inviolable, rights, privileges, and customs unique to the social order into which they were born—one a Junker, always a Junker. The monarch’s absolute reliance upon Junker officers and bureaucrats endowed those nobles with enviable degrees of autonomy and independence, even as they relied upon the ruler for their positions within the army and the state’s bureaucracy.28 “We should keep in mind the true nature of its [Auftragstaktik] social background,” Citino reminds us.29 Their symbiotic relationship was the “basis of the Prussian state. Toward those of the lower orders under his control, whether [serfs or peasants toiling] on the land or [soldiers toiling] in the army, a Prussian Junker had not just privilege, but absolute sovereignty.”30 As the Prussian and later German army increased in size, members of the bourgeoisie gained entrance into the officer corps, and in doing so were educated and socialized according to its Junker norms. None of this is to say Prussian commanders exercised the operational autonomy of late-nineteenth century or World War II corps or army commanders; rather, the early relationship between the ruler and the Junkers was the basis for that establishment and growth of that autonomy.

By the mid-nineteenth century, for a prince of the house of Hohenzollern, or even his senior uniformed representative, the chief of the Prussian and later German General Staff (Chef des Großen Generalstabs), “to
insist on close supervision of a subordinate commander’s plan of action would have been a grievous infraction. In other words, Auftragstaktik grew directly out of [nineteenth-century] Prussian culture.31 It was a mutually exploitative and beneficial relationship and tradition between the ruler and his officer corps that morphed, ebbed, and flowed until 1945.32 Even before the creation of the Second Reich and the Imperial German Army commands’ lines of advance and then along their axes of attack and engaged in foolhardy battles that cost the lives of thousands of German soldiers.36 Steinmetz is evidence that for every successful application of a commander’s autonomy, there was the attendant risk of foolishness and disaster, but as a Junker, Steinmetz and those of his ilk need not brook any interference from senior officers. This was true even when some thirty percent

(Kaiserlich Deutsches Heer) in 1871, historian Geoffrey Wawro argues that “Auftragstaktik—‘mission tactics’—permitted orderly decentralization,’ and that this philosophy permeated the ranks of the Prussian army.33 ADP 6-0, however, mistakenly credits Field Marshal Count Helmuth von Moltke the Elder (1800–1891) for first promulgating Auftragstaktik in the 1888 infantry exercise regulations, which distilled and reinforced his earlier and more expansive injunctions in the “1869 Instructions for Large Unit Commanders.”

Auftragstaktik, in its original nineteenth-century usage, “amounted to something of a free-form approach to directing troops on the battlefield,” as opposed to Normaltaktik, which called for a “few standardized formations,” and “accords well with the principle of maneuver recognized in most of today’s armies.”34 It was a tactical philosophy that drew from Prussia’s unique history, circumstances, and military theorists. Auftragstaktik developed against the backdrop of theoretical tactical innovations proposed in the aftermath of the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763), enacted during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars (1791–1815), and further refined in later conflicts.

The Prusso-German command tradition often worked brilliantly, and just as often failed spectacularly, and soldiers paid the price.

The American Experience

Unlike Prussia, the United States had no serious threats to its security following independence. Even before the completion of continental expansion in 1854, the Early Republic had little to fear from other countries. Following the end of the War of 1812, the United States and Great Britain had come to a modus vivendi. Mexico, independent since 1821, was in a near-continuous state of turmoil as empire replaced empire, republic replaced empire, and a series of generals overthrew one another. Except for the brief war against
Mexico (1846–1848), the U.S. Army was an imperial constabulary and nation-building force rather than a proper army designed, trained, and prepared for war against an enemy force. Its policing and nation-building mission scattered it in penny packets across the frontier and in coastal fortifications. Its officers were surveyors, engineers, policemen, diplomats, and more. Distant from the centers of power, they were accustomed to acting with little direction, and even greater freedom, a far cry from the Prussian experience.

The guiding lights for the nineteenth-century U.S. Army were the imperial French armies of Napoleon I and his nephew Napoleon III. Dennis Hart Mahan, a long-serving professor at the U.S. Military Academy and noted Francophile, declared, “The systems of tactics in use in our service are those of the French.” Although his works seemed in some cases to reduce warfare to a series of geometrical propositions, Mahan understood that chance and contingency worked to defeat the most carefully laid plans. He believed that campaign plans had to be “limited as to comprise only the leading strategical dispositions, thus presenting only the outline features, within which the meshwork of the minor operations is to be confined; thus leaving ample latitude for all movement of detail and their execution.” Moreover, Mahan argued that the commanding general had to have “carte blanche for carrying out the details of the campaign, the plan of which may have been decided upon by a council” well in advance. Even this most admiring of Francophile theoreticians argued for the disciplined initiative of the commander. Yet, like so many admirers of the Corsican, Mahan equated tactical victories with strategic insight and ability.

Napoleon Bonaparte’s marshalate system was probably the first true example of so-called Auftragstaktik exercised in the strategic realm. Broad mission orders, expansive command latitude, and minimal guidance to his marshals allowed Bonaparte to consistently wage and lose wars from Spain to Russia, each one a sparkling failure. Like the later German generals of 1914–1918 and 1939–1945, Bonaparte’s marshals, with few exceptions, were mere tacticians. They might defeat their enemies, but they failed to suppress them for long, and in the end, France’s enemies learned, turned, rose, and defeated Napoleon and his marshals. Stunning battlefield victories do not a successful strategy make.

Nevertheless, and well before Mahan, U.S. commanders had nearly always acted in accordance with the broader orders of their superiors. As was the case in the Prussian tradition, some commanders were better and more successful than others. This notwithstanding, trust, but also physical distance and the nature of communications, precluded anything but the broadest of guidance and the expectation that commanders acting away from headquarters would do the right thing. Certainly, during the American Civil War, the U.S. Army learned how to wage war, however imperfectly, on a continental scale that surpassed the entirety of France in 1871. As the size of the U.S. Army grew, it increasingly operated along extensive rail, riverine, and coastal lines, and communicated at a distance by telegraph. By 1864, with the appointment of Ulysses S. Grant as general-in-chief, trusted field army commanders like Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman demonstrated the Army’s mastery of what is today called mission command. Sherman’s campaigns for Atlanta, Savannah, and the Carolinas were perhaps the greatest examples what of what is deemed mission command. There was no need to emulate Prussia, and Americans did not.

For the post-Civil War U.S. Army, Lt. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan did not believe there was much to learn from Prussia’s army. Sheridan, who had observed Prussian forces during the Franco-Prussian War, wrote that the “methods pursued on the march were the same as we would employ,” save the ability to find quarters easily. France, more densely populated than the American South, provided (however reluctantly) fixed quarters in homes, barns, and public buildings for soldiers. The general who had campaigned across far more extensive territory than any Prussian army in the war of 1870–1871 found “campaigning in France … an easy matter, very unlike anything we had during the war of the rebellion.” He could “but leave to conjecture how the Germans would have got along on bottomless roads—often none at all—through the swamps and quicksands of northern Virginia, from the Wilderness to Petersburg, and from Chattanooga to Atlanta and the sea.”

Although Sheridan admired the “perfect [Prussian] military system,” he noted it had been “devised by almost autocratic power,” and in this he detected but one element in the nature and culture of Prussian command. In Sheridan’s final reflection, he “saw no new military principles developed, whether of strategy
or grand tactics, the movements of the different armies and corps being dictated and governed by the same general laws that have so long obtained, simplicity of combination and manoeuvre, and the concentration of a numerically superior force at the vital point."

Sheridan observed that “the earlier advantages gained by the Germans may be ascribed to the strikingly prompt mobilization of their armies, one of the most noticeable features of their perfect military system.”

Still, as Sheridan noted, the Prussians’ “later successes were greatly aided by the blunders of the French, whose stupendous errors materially shortened the war, though even if prolonged it could, in my opinion, have had ultimately no other termination.”

Historian David J. Fitzpatrick has deemed Sheridan’s view, like that of a handful of other Civil War generals, “American chauvinism.” Most American officers admired Prussian military education, the general staff system, and more, and herein is the distinction. Col. Emory Upton, perhaps the most consequential American military thinker and reformer of the late nineteenth century, proposed a thorough-going reform of the Army. He did not, however, seek to emulate the nature of command, for there was no need. In his posthumously published *Military Policy of the United States*, Upton observed the “want of post-graduate schools to educate our officers in strategy and the higher principles of the art of war.”

Writing to Lt. Col. James H. Wilson in 1870, Upton, like Sheridan, tartly declared “the stupidity of the French generals has no parallel in History.” Five years later, Upton attributed Prussia’s success to “French incompetence,” even as he challenged the “efficacy of the entire Prussian tactical system.” Thus, Upton’s views were in line with Sheridan’s. Prussia’s general staff, its system of professional education, the army’s organization, and other structural elements offered much to be admired and emulated, but it offered little in the way of tactics, the art of war, or command for experienced officers like Sheridan and Upton. As historian Brian
McAllister Linn stresses, “Upton wanted to replicate another nation’s military structure, but without transposing the underlying philosophy of war that had created these forces and guided them to victory.” In reviewing “The Prussian Company Column,” Upton offered a profound criticism of those given to uncritical appreciation and mimicry when he advised that “prudence would therefore suggest that we pause in our admiration of a system which has been insufficiently tried, and refuse, till further developments take place, to abandon a company organization, which, notwithstanding all changes in arms, has met every requirement for more than thirty centuries.” Upton was not alone in critical analyses of Prussia’s stunning victories. In a series of lectures on the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 at the Infantry and Cavalry School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Lt. Col. Arthur L. Wagner, a leading theorist of the late nineteenth-century Army and admirer of the Prussian army, emphasized its preparation and technological advancements in the victory over Austria. Wagner then criticized the Austrian commander at Königgrätz of having wanted “nothing more than … blind obedience” from his corps commanders, and for having communicated poorly with them. He praised the high quality of the Prussian general staff, but generously claimed that the senior generals, one and all, deferred to the “wisdom” of Moltke. Like Upton before him, nowhere did Wagner draw upon Prussian regulations or their philosophy of command. Impressive as Prussian staff work was, its command philosophy was unremarkable to this admirer.

**An American Doctrine of Command**

In 1891, the U.S. Army broke with its nineteenth-century past when it adopted the *Infantry Drill Regulations*. It made the infantry squad led by a corporal the “basis of extended order.” It emphasized individual soldiers’ discretion in using and exploiting the terrain and stated that the “captain determines upon the direction and character of the attack” of his company and relied upon the company commander’s judgment and discretion when acting alone. In a like vein, the battalion commander, a major, “regulates the progress of the action …, leaving the execution of the details to his subordinates, he exercises a general control, and endeavors constantly to increase the energy of the action.” Trust, individual skill and judgment, flexibility, and an adherence to the broader concept of the operation were central. The battalion commander “should leave to each [company] commander the discretion necessary to enable him to profit by all circumstances.” The same spirit informed ever higher levels of command, from regiment to brigade to division. This was an American philosophy of command and leadership written by and for American soldiers. Moreover, as Echevarria notes, many American commanders were skeptical of German practice, although historian Perry D. Jamieson noted that a reviewer in the *Army and Navy Register* “deduced that the Leavenworth panel had … [drawn] on French, and, to a lesser extent, Belgian and German, sources.”

In 1905, the U.S. War Department issued the *Field Service Regulations* (FSR), the first American publication rightfully deemed doctrine. It was much more than drill. The FSR amplified or expanded upon well-established practices in the U.S. Army, such as the all-important mutual trust and “complete confidence” between the commanding general and his chief of staff. Moreover, declared the FSR, the chief of staff needed to enjoy a “considerable degree of independence in the performance of his ordinary duties.” Yet, Article II, “Orders. General Principles,” is chock full of nearly verbatim plagiarism from “Communications Between Staffs and Troops. The Issuance of Orders. General Principles,” *The Order of Field Service of the German Army*, an 1893 translation of the 1887
Felddienst-Ordnung, the German field service regulations as modified through 1892.\textsuperscript{70}

Orders, according to the \textit{FSR}, had to be brief, clear, and precise, but they “should not trespass on the province of a subordinate.”\textsuperscript{71} They “should contain everything which is beyond the independent authority of the subordinate, but nothing more.”\textsuperscript{72} In the translation, it reads “the order must be short, clear, definite, and suitable to the receiver’s range of vision.”\textsuperscript{73} The new regulations recognized the dynamic nature of battle when it stated that “orders should not attempt to arrange matters too far in advance.”\textsuperscript{74} Reinforcing that point, the \textit{FSR} noted that “frequent changes weary the men, shake their confidence in their commander, and tend to make subordinates uncertain in their action.”\textsuperscript{75} Furthermore, the \textit{FSR} recommended that orders include “intentions of the commanding officer.” Because of the fluid nature of combat, not every circumstance could be anticipated. Moreover, the \textit{FSR} enjoined commanders to “lay stress upon the object to be attained, and leave open the means to be employed.”\textsuperscript{76} The \textit{FSR} had codified the Army’s long-standing practices of trust, initiative, experience, and commander’s intent.

On the surface, the \textit{FSR} suggests the truth underpinning ADP 6-0 and mission command’s Prusso-German origins. Yet, going beyond the \textit{FSR}’s plagiarism and examining the historical development and practices underpinning Prusso-German and American command and leadership traditions reveals a different story. Grafting the bud of Auftragstaktik upon the root stock of American military history and well-established practice does not a Prusso-German practice create.

**Conclusion**

In his 1875 critique of the Prussian army’s tactics, Upton writes, “History teaches, that after every great modern war, which has surprised the world by brilliant results, the organization and tactics of the victor have been the subjects of admiration and imitation, to a degree often bordering on servility.”\textsuperscript{77} The irony of Upton’s observation is that in the twentieth century, the U.S. Army departed from its past practice of emulating foreign victors and embraced, defended, and whitewashed the consistent losers of two world wars. Consider instead the degree to which FM 100-5, \textit{Operations}, and the doctrine of AirLand Battle and concept of operational art resemble the work of Soviet theoreticians like Georgii Samoilovich Isserson, Aleksander A. Svechin, and V. K. Triandafillov. In those cases, U.S. Army doctrine embraced the victors, though it did not directly recognize them as such since the Soviets were the new potential enemy.\textsuperscript{78}

While there is no historical basis to assert that Auftragstaktik is a root for mission command, this is not to say that the baby should be thrown out with the bathwater. Rather than claiming this fictional...
ancestor, doctrine writers would better serve the Army by acknowledging that while there are some similarities between Auftragstaktik (Führen mit Auftrag) and mission command, that is where the relationship begins and ends. The U.S. Army was practicing what it today calls mission command long before it discovered German practices, and ADP 6-0 acknowledges this, even as it returns to its imaginary German origins.79

It is long past time to shed the infatuation with the German military experience and fatuous lineage of mission command. Historians have more than amply demonstrated for over two decades that similarities aside, there is no exclusive or even specific Prussian-German foundation in what is today termed mission command. Confusion about complex historical concepts such as the origins of mission command and Auftragstaktik reveals why doctrine writers and military professionals should consult professional historians and their works, those whose analyses and conclusions are grounded in primary sources, archival research, and historiography when they seek to understand and draw from the past and to understand the past as it exists in the present and informs it. There is much to be studied, learned, and even adopted in some fashion from the practices of other armies, just as there is much to realize that mission command is far more American, and far less German than doctrine pretends. This is not to say that there is nothing of value in German, or other armies’ practices. Rather, deeper understanding, greater historical literacy, and more precision in thought and language are needed, and a recognition that longstanding American practices do not require other armies’ validation. A conjured past is worse than no past at all.

The genesis of this article lies in discussions with G. Stephen Lauer (1952–2020), formerly associate professor of theory, School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Word count limitations allow only the most cursory review of a subject in need of more extensive scholarly attention. Many thanks to Eric Michael Burke, Anthony E. Carlson, Antulio J. Echevarria II, David J. Fitzpatrick, Col. Michael G. Kopp (German army), Brian McAllister Linn, Amanda M. Nagel, Lt. Col. Marc-André Walther (German army), Donald P. Wright, and the U.S. Army Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate for their criticisms and suggestions for revisions.

Notes

2. ADP 6-0, Mission Command, vii.
4. ADP 6-0, Mission Command, vii.
5. Ibid.


10. Ibid., 33.


16. Ibid., 4, 56–61; for the narrative crafted by the German generals, see the post-World War II “German Report Series,” written by former generals of the Nazi army and published by the Historical Division, European Command. The series is available at “Former DA Pamphlets,” U.S. Army Center of Military History Publications Catalog, 10 December 2021, https://history.army.mil/catalog/browse/pubnum.html; see also Records of the Foreign Military Studies (FMS) Program and Related Records, 1941–67 (RG 549.3), Records of United States Army, Europe, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. The literature exposing the myth of the clean Wehrmacht is too extensive to note.


21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 49.

23. Ibid., 49, 112.


26. Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civil (London: Andrew Crooke, 1651), 98. Depending on the period and geographic and political context, the ruler of Prussia was variously styled duke, elector, king in Prussia, or king of Prussia. It was only after the dramatic maneuvering and fighting across Germany and portions of the Habsburg realms, and surviving the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763), that Frederick II, “the Great,” and his successors were acknowledged solely as kings of Prussia; see Peter H. Wilson, The Thirty Years War: Europe’s Tragedy (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 463, 717. Wilson is also the most recent and authoritative history of the war; see also Peter H. Wilson, German Armies: War and German Society, 1648–1806 (London: UCL Press, 1998).

27. Tim Blanning, Frederick the Great: King of Prussia (New York: Random House, 2016), 6–17, 22–26; William W. Hagen, Ordinary Prussians: Brandenburg Junkers and Villagers, 1500–1840 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 69, 70; Derek McKay, The Great Elector: Frederick William of Brandenburg-Prussia (London: Routledge, 2001), details the “Great Elector’s” forging of the Prussian state, especially pages 49–72, 108–96; Otto Buesch, Military System and Social Life in Old Regime Prussia, 1713–1807: The Beginnings of the Social Militarization of Prusso-German Society (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997), carries on the analysis of the militarized Prussian state from the reign of the “Soldier King,” Frederick William I (1713–1740); his son “Der Alte Fritz,” Frederick II (r. 1740–1786); and concludes with the 1806 disasters at Jena-Auerstedt during the reign of Frederick William III (r. 1797–1840); Wilson, German Armies, 244. For the larger process of European state formation, and how war made the state, and the state made war, see Charles Tilly, Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992 (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990).


30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 32.


33. Eric Dorn Brose, The Kaiser’s Army: The Politics of Military Technology in Germany during the Machine Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 20, 61, 90, 124, 150, 153–54,