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Introduction

By the end of the fifteenth century, the states of the Swiss Confederation had enjoyed almost complete autonomy from the neighboring feudal powers for generations. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the states of the Swiss Confederation were beset by external threats to their security, independence, and existence. The largest single menace to Swiss independence was the Habsburg family who often controlled their lands according to monarchal authority and a social structure which kept their subject peoples as unfree serfs.

This Swiss self-rule aided an unusual development in social and political history. In many instances, democracies directed by free men from the lower classes ruled these states. These common people enjoyed many personal freedoms such as social mobility, the right to own property, and the right to bear arms which were very unusual and highly coveted in the Middle Ages. To a large extent, the Swiss (also known as *Eidgenossen* or confederates) owed the creation and maintenance of their democracies and freedoms to their military competence, which met all external threats.

In these two centuries, the Swiss developed a military system that became among the most respected in Europe. In the fourteenth

century through the middle of the fifteenth century, the confederates developed from mountain ambushers, as was the case at the Battle of Morgarten in 1315,[1] to a fine infantry proficient in nearly every tactical operation of the age as demonstrated by many military actions in the Burgundian War from 1474 to 1477. The Swiss proved to be among the first genuine tactical infantries in Europe capable of offensive and defensive maneuvers, strategically retreating, keeping unit cohesiveness in difficult situations, and in dealing most effectively with heavy feudal cavalry.[2] The increased effectiveness of infantries spelled the doom of the heavy feudal cavalry on the battlefields of Europe, and the impact of the first genuine tactical infantry would change the nature of warfare. Heavily armored knights eventually disappeared to be replaced by more lightly armored cavalries that relied largely on mobility for their effectiveness, and infantries were well on the road to the development leading to the modern age.

After the brilliant victory at the Battle of Murten 1476, the powers of Europe developed a great interest in the confederates.[3] When the French took a contingent of Swiss mercenaries into Italy in 1495, the armies of Europe got a closer look at the confederates, and many other states subsequently began to copy their tactics. The Swabians, in the areas of the German Empire near the Swiss border, were the first military to copy the confederates. Anxious to test their nearly identical military force against their old enemies, the Swabians got their opportunity to fight the Swiss which presented itself in the Swabian War of 1499.

Despite the significance of the Swiss military, the topic needs more clarification. Although the Swiss chroniclers and contemporary observers were very prolific in recording the activities and character

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[1] Albert Winkler, "The Battle of Morgarten: an Essential Incident in the Founding of the Swiss State," *Swiss American Historical Society Review*, 44: 3 (Nov. 2008): 3-25.

[2] Wilhelm Sidler, *Die Schlacht am Morgarten* (Zürich: Orel Füssli, 1910), 126-9.

[3] Albert Winkler, "The Battle of Murten: The Invasion of Charles the Bold and the Survival of the Swiss States," *Swiss American Historical Society Review* 46: 3 (Feb. 2010): 8-34.

of the confederate military, modern researchers have often overlooked these accounts in favor of foreign records. A close examination of the Swiss is long overdue.

Among the most noteworthy studies in English are Charles Oman's *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages* and *A History of the Art of War in the Sixteenth Century*.[4] Oman's accounts of battles are reasonably accurate even though they do not always represent the best scholarship available. His works cover many highlights of Swiss warfare, but he entirely overlooks the Swabian War, and his analyses are often mired in the mistakes of other authors. Oman relies heavily on Machiavelli for insights into the Swiss even though the great Florentine political theorist has long been discredited because his knowledge of the facts of Swiss warfare was meager.[5] Oman further looks to Carl von Elgger for many details on topics.[6] However, Oman fails to accept Elgger's conclusions and analyses of the Swiss, and Oman's works tend to be superficial. For example, he mistakenly brands the Swiss as being excessively brutal and cruel without attempting to examine their conduct more closely.

Hans Delbrück's extensive four-volume work *Geschichte der Kreigskunst* has been recently translated into English. Volume three, *Medieval Warfare*, has sections that deal with the Swiss.[7] Delbrück's study is relatively extensive and addresses a wide range of topics, but it has been criticized for its anti-Swiss bias including its obvious distortions of the numbers in the armies to make the confederates appear to have often outnumbered their adversaries when the

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[4] Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages, vol. 2, 1278-1485* (New York: Franklin, 1924) and *A History of the Art of War in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1937).

[5] Martin Hobohm, *Machiavellis Renaissance der Kriegskunst* (Berlin: Karl Curtius, 1913), 190.

[6] Carl von Elgger, *Kriegswesen und Kriegskunst der Schweizerischen Eidgenossen im XIV., XV. und XVI. Jahrhundert* (Lucerne: Militärisches Verlagsbureau, 1873).

[7] Hans Delbrück, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte, vol. 3* (Berlin: Stilke, 1923) and *History of the Art of War vol. 3 Medieval Warfare* trans. by Walter J. Renfroe, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 545-656.

reverse was almost always the case. Furthermore, Delbrück perpetuated myths about the Swiss military without adequately exploring these issues.[8]

Other works of value in German include Elgger, the best analytical study, which takes in the entire scope of the late Medieval and Renaissance Swiss military, providing numerous details to support his arguments. Other important academic studies include works by Eugen von Frauenholz, Walter Schaufelberger, Albert Sennhauser, and Christian Padrutt.[9] Emil Frey's *Die Kriegstaten der Schweizer dem Volk erzält* is the most comprehensive narrative study.[10] In this huge volume, Frey describes the entire sweep of the history of the Swiss at war from antiquity to the twentieth century, including lengthy accounts of nearly every confederate military action. A more recent narrative study is Hans Rudolf Kurz's *Schweizerschlachten*.[11]

The Swabian War is a convenient reference point to examine the Swiss. Their military system was mature at that point. Also, contemporaries and participants carefully recorded the frequent raids and military operations of that war, which present a sufficient record to review the confederates in some depth. In this study, the character of the Swiss military will be discussed, questions such as the infamous Swiss brutality will be examined, and the confederates will be shown in action in four major battles. This article will further dispel misunderstandings about the Swiss military and society and bring them out of the realm of obscurity.

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[8] Walther Hadron, "Neues zur Laupenschlacht," *Blätter für bernischen Geschichte, Kunst und Altertumskunde* 3 Jahrgang 2 Heft (May 1907): 120-5.

[9] Eugen fon Frauenholz, *Das Heerwesen der Schweizer Eidgenossenschaft* (München: Beck, 1936); Walter Schaufelberger, *Die alte Schweizer und sein Kreig: Studien zur Kreigführung vornehmlich in 15. Jahrhundert* (Zürich: Europa, 1952); Albert Sennhauser, *Hauptmann und Führung in Schweizerkrieg des Mittelalters* (Zürich: Fretz und Wasmuth, 1965); and Christian Patrutt, *Staat und Krieg im alten Bünden* (Zürich: Fretz und Wasmuth, 1965).

[10] Emil Frey, *Die Kriegstaten der Schweizer dem Volk erzält* (Neuenburg: F. Bahn, 1904).

[11] Hans Rudolf Kurz, *Schweizerschlachten* (Bern: Francke, 1962).

Tagsatzung *1481*
by Diebold Schilling (Luzern)

THE SWISS MILITARY

The Swiss Government and the Making of Military Rules

The Swiss system of government was highly important in the making of military policies and rules during the late Middle Ages. The central governing body of the Swiss Confederation was the Federal Diet or *Tagsatzung* (meet for a day). The Federal Diet met at regular intervals, usually three times a year, at one of the major cities in the Confederation. The usual meeting places rotated between Luzern, Bern, and Zurich. Each state or canton had one vote in the Diet, and the voting had to be unanimous for a resolution to pass, but the enacting of a law by the *Tagsatzung* meant little by itself because the Diet had no

power to enforce the measures it passed. Its actual function seems to have been that of making suggestions, primarily on matters of foreign affairs. The implementation of the acts passed by the Diet was left to the individual states where the real seat of power rested.

The cantons were very diverse in the political structures. The greatest disparity in political ideologies was between the predominantly urban and the rural states. Luzern, Bern, and Zurich were the chief city-dominated cantons at the close of the fifteenth century, and Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden (Obwalden and Nidwalden combined), known collectively as the Forest Cantons, were examples of the rustic states. Many of the other cantons were various combinations of towns, farms, and pastoral areas. The governments of the Swiss states varied from the near aristocratic rule of the city-dominated cantons, most notably Bern, to the near pure democracies of the Forest Cantons. The individual states had the power to enact and enforce their own laws, but the laws carried out in one canton were not necessarily invoked in others.[12]

Military rules came primarily from formal legislation or laws and from traditional practices, while custom appears to have been the most influential. The cantons and Federal Diet often tried to regulate military policy and were usually quite successful. Yet the forms that developed from military necessity over the years, and how problems were resolved by the leaders and troops in the field, meant that innovation as well as established customs and practices proved to be important in military operations.

Weapons and Armor

By 1499, the Swiss military had proved itself on numerous battlefields and operations. The confederates had an impressive string of victories to their credit covering several generations, and they were

[12] John Martin Vincent, *Switzerland at the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins Press, 1904), 7-10.

among the most experienced and successful soldiers of their age. Their excellent victories in the Burgundian Wars (1474-1477) had proved their abilities to all of Europe and the Swiss had earned a good deal of respect and praise. The confederate success and reputation for invincibility came after their adoption and skillful use of the pike and halberd in tactical formations.[13]

The Swiss were expected, most frequently, to arm themselves because they often procured and maintained their own weapons. When any region or area was added to the Confederation, it was expected to have the same or similar military requirements as the earlier members of the coalition.[14] The men usually kept their weapons in their residences, and these devices were considered personal property, but these instruments were subject to controls and periodic checks by government officials.

Strict rules regulated the storage and care of the weapons. At the risk of destruction or confiscation of personal property, the military person was obligated to see that his equipment was kept in good condition. This meant keeping all metals free from rust, all edges sharp, and all wood unbroken and free from rot. Weapons and armor were to be kept within the state, and their sale or loan outside of the canton were strictly forbidden.[15]

The number and type of weapons was graduated according to the owner's affluence. The wealthy were expected to have the most elaborate armor and the most expensive weapons, yet even the poorest man had to have at least a halberd. If a man were considered well-off, that is if he had an income of between 20 and 40 Pounds per year, he was expected to purchase his own armor. If he were considered very rich, with an income from 60 to 80 Pounds per year, he was expected to buy enough armor for two men. Some weapons, such as cannons and surplus weapons and armor, were owned by the state and kept in

[13] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 477.
[14] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 475.
[15] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 81 and Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 474.

arsenals. There were armories in nearly every Swiss city. These were large public buildings that were subject to yearly inspection and were conveniently located so the materials in them could be easily retrieved in an emergency.[16]

The confederates were considered master weapon-makers, and their weapons were both well-constructed and effective.[17] Typically, the Swiss trooper carried several weapons, including both a major device for combat and a number of smaller ones. The principal weapons were the pike, halberd, musket (*harquebus*), and, infrequently, a large two handed sword.

Early in the fifteenth century a short pike, ten feet in length, was brought from Italy to the Swiss states. The device was designed to stop cavalry charges, but after the battle of Arbedo in 1422, it was clearly shown that a longer pike would be more effective in dealing with cavalry. The long pike soon became the most important weapon used by the Swiss in dealing with mounted knights. The device was made of ash wood and was usually eighteen feet long. The point was made of steel and the whole weapon resembled a large spear. This weapon was cumbersome to carry and to wield, but it was well-designed to receive the shock of attacking cavalry composed of heavily-armored knights. This was especially true when the Swiss placed the end of the shaft into the ground, so the force of the onslaught would be directed downward into the earth.[18]

The halberd was among the earliest weapons used by the Swiss, and it was wielded by the mountain peoples long before the formation of the Swiss Confederation at the traditional founding date of 1291. The halberd was 5 to 8 feet long and was made of ash wood and steel. The head of the halberd was shaped like a single-bladed ax with a spear point at the top. By the fifteenth century, a hook had been placed at the back of the ax head. The hook was designed to snag riders and to pull

[16] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 82-3, 90-91.
[17] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 476.
[18] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 91-2; and Oman, *Art of War*, 2: 263-4.

them off their horse, the ax blade was to slash, and the spear point was used for thrusting.[19]

The development of the arquebus or harquebus and other forms of muskets often called *Handbüchse* (hand cannons) in the late fifteenth century increased the fighting capabilities of infantries in battle. In many ways, these muskets were an improvement over either the crossbow or the longbow. The arquebus was not as accurate or as rapid firing as these stringed weapons, but they often had significant penetration against plate armor, and they required less skill by the user in comparison to the other weapons. The booming sound of these devices gave their users greater battlefield presence than the relatively silent stringed weapons. The use of muskets in volley firing also improved their effectiveness, and the psychological impact of the fusillade assured the ascendancy of the hand-held gun.[20]

The hand cannon was the device that superseded the crossbow as the main Swiss weapon that could engage the enemy at a distance. The harquebus had a maximum range of about 150 to 200 paces, but was only accurate at much smaller distances, and it shot a projectile of iron or lead. By the end of the fifteenth century, the harquebus barrel was fixed in a wood stock that was pressed against the right shoulder when firing. The touch hole, where the powder was ignited, had previously been on the top of the barrel, but it had been moved to the right side to facilitate easier aiming. The weapon was aimed and steadied with the left hand while the right was free to ignite the powder. The spark was part of a smoldering cord (or match) that was commonly held in the right hand or placed on a hammer apparatus known as a matchlock. The spark was either stuck into the touch hole by hand, or the hammer—with the smoldering cord attached—was dropped by means of a lever, forcing the spark into the hole to ignite the powder. When men carrying the harquebuses were on the march, the smoldering cords were usually slung around their shoulders like bandoliers, and the men took care to make sure the spark remained lit.[21]

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[19] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 476.

[20] Oman, *Art of War*, 2: 268-9.

[21] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 480; and Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 97-8.

Swiss Halberds
at the Old Arsenal Museum, Solothurn

After the Burgundian Wars from 1474 to 1477, the 5 to 6 foot two-handed sword enjoyed some popularity, but the weapon was considered inferior to the halberd because it was too short to stab effectively. The Federal Diet, meeting in Luzern at the outset of the Swabian war, forbade the use of the device as a general weapon on March 22, 1499.[22]

Besides the main weapons, the Swiss usually carried other smaller devices. A short sword with a rounded tip was carried on the left side, and a dagger with a sharp point was carried on the right. These weapons were often used when opposing forces became so closely entwined with the Swiss that the mass of men made it impossible to use the long pikes or halberds. In such a situation, a short weapon gave its user a marked advantage.[23]

[22] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 94; and Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 479.
[23] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 94.

A proper ratio of pikemen to halberdiers was necessary to assure maximum efficiency on the battlefield. Tactics called for a large number of pikemen and a relatively small number of halberdiers, but the popularity of the shorter weapon made these ratios difficult to achieve. The halberd was lighter and less cumbersome, making practicing and marching much easier, and pikemen were also often more encumbered with armor. As a result, it was necessary to try to induce more men to use pikes. Pikemen were paid more than the halberdiers, but when monetary inducements were insufficient, the various cantons gave orders for men to carry pikes. One such order from Bern in 1515 stated: "Whoever can carry a pike should carry a pike."[24]

The actual ratio of weapons in the Swiss forces varied somewhat. In 1490, of 450 men from Wallisau, an area of Luzern, 200 carried pikes, 200 halberds, and 50 muskets. Luzern was an extreme example because it, as well as the other cantons of the central areas of the Confederation, had relatively large contingents of halberdiers among its troops. Early in the sixteenth century, the Swiss armies were composed of about one-sixth men with hand cannons and less than one-eighth being halberdiers.[25]

The Swiss also deployed small detachments of cavalry which were the wealthiest of all the Swiss military persons. Men who lived in the cities usually carried harquebuses while the peasants and other rural people wielded pikes or halberds. In the fifteenth century, even the priests, who accompanied the men into battle, were expected to be armed with swords to avoid the scorn from the troops. Of course, Church law forbade priests from shedding blood, so the weapons were only for show. In battle, the men often sought weapons and banners as chief prizes on the field of battle, and the reports of victory in the field almost always included the careful number and listing of captured enemy artillery pieces and flags.[26]

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[24] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 103-4.
[25] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 56, 105-6.
[26] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 475; and Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 83, 106-7.

Swiss hand cannons at the Siege of Burgdorf
by Diebold Schilling (Bern)

How the weapons were wielded at this period of time remains unclear. The available information comes largely from contemporary drawings and from accounts recorded in a later time frame, and many aspects remain obscure. Yet it may be surmised that the Swiss showed a high

degree of professionalism and considerable skill in the wielding of their weapons because of their success in battles and on campaigns. Another perplexing question remains because little information survives about how and at what frequency the Swiss practiced the use of their weapons, but their military prowess clearly demonstrates that they spent much time mastering their weapons and military formations.[27]

Most of the Swiss wore no uniforms, preferring to wear simple everyday clothing, either because of choice or because of the additional expense of buying specific attire. When the confederates wore uniforms, this clothing was frequently in the colors of the canton where the wearer originated. The Swiss wore white crosses either on their stockings, shoulders, or hats to distinguish themselves from their enemies who also often wore no uniforms. The use of armor varied from none at all to a complete covering consisting of an iron hat or helmet, a coat of mail, a breastplate, leg guards, and metal gloves or gauntlets. Pikemen were most often fully armored. The men wielding the hand cannons had less armor, and the halberdiers were the least protected, mostly lacking all metal defensive coverings.[28]

Each trooper was supposed to carry a haversack containing oatmeal for fourteen days as well as salt, bread, cheese, and butter. The only spare article of clothing in the haversack was a new pair of shoes. On marches into enemy territory, the Swiss lived off their plunder, and foragers often left the column of marching men in search of supplies. A baggage train with tents and other bulky supplies often accompanied the confederates, but the men certainly traveled as lightly as possible to increase their mobility while on the march.[29]

Artillery

Modern scholars seldom refer to the Swiss as great artillerymen, but in the Swabian War of 1499, cannons played a significant role

[27] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 260-4.
[28] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 91, 116.
[29] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 485.

Field cannon from the Battle of Grandson, 1476

in their martial activities because these heavy weapons aided their war effort and had a large impact on the outcome of hostilities. In 1499, the confederates had nearly one thousand pieces of artillery of various sizes to use on different operations.[30]

The Swiss had captured many artillery pieces in the Burgundian Wars, especially after the battles of Grandson and Murten, both in 1476. As a result of such an abundance, the Swiss development in the making of cannons was slowed because they did not have to manufacture or purchase those devices. The cannons were made of either bronze or iron, and they shot projectiles of either stone or iron. The artillery pieces were of various sizes, and different calibers were deployed when used in various circumstances. Large cannons were used to bombard cities and to besiege castles and towns, but they also fired on troops when the opportunity arose. Small artillery pieces were used primarily to fire on armies in the field, but the Swiss often took them

[30] Johannes Häne, "Die Kriegsbereitschaft der alten Eidgnossen," *Schweizer Kriegsgeschichte* 3 (1915): 14.

on raids as well when they could be deployed rapidly to fire on towns and fortifications.[31]

Many advances were made in cannon manufacture just preceding and during the Swabian War, marking it as a turning point in the history of artillery. The Emperor Maximilian of Austria took the first steps towards a unified caliber and barrel length during the war. In 1497, burning shells were used that could not be put out with water, and explosive artillery projectiles also found an early use in the conflict. These improvements helped advance the art of war because explosive shells more rapidly reduced fortifications and did greater damage to cavalry or to infantry formations. Burning shells also assured that a town could easily be set on fire, greatly reducing siege time.[32]

Better artillery tactics were also being employed. Cannons were often all aimed at one point greatly increasing their effectiveness, and firing the devices in a barrage created a solid wall of fire. The impact of those improvements in artillery and in its tactical use are well demonstrated near the city of Constance in July 1499 when Maximilian marched his army on some Swiss positions nearby. These defensive posts were largely unmanned because the troops were hastening to Gempen to take part in the battle of Dornach, but eighty cannons were still in position. The artillery pieces fired to such great effect that Maximillian's army was thrown into confusion and withdrew without pressing its attack further.[33]

Artillery could be fired with increasing accuracy and over ever greater distances because of longer barrel lengths and improved powders. When artillery pieces were properly aimed, they could be shot considerable distances night and day. In one instance in the Swabian War, a cannon was fired from the fortress at Constance at a group of three Swiss children playing over a mile away. The shot was right on its

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[31] E. A. Gessler's *Das schweizerishche Geschützwesen zur Zeit des Schwabenkriegs, 1499* (Zurich: Kommissionsverlag Beer & Co., 1927), 7.

[32] Gessler, *Geschützwesen*, 16 and 47.

[33] Heinrich Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2 vols. (Basel: Basel Buch-und Antiquariatshandlung, 1910) 2: 445-7.

mark, but it passed between the three children hurting none of them.[34] There were a great number of cannons of various calibers at Constance, some of which were large and are believed to have shot as far as three and a half miles.[35] At such distances the cannons no doubt had a high trajectory, shooting much like modern howitzers.

Most of the Swiss heavy cannons were placed on the border areas because of the greater need for protection, and also so they would be available to support raids into enemy territory when sufficiently mobile. Cannons had become so critical that on occasion an operation's success or failure depended on the skillful use of artillery. Often Swiss raiders were able to take towns after only a few cannon rounds had been fired. But the weapon still had drawbacks including a slow rate of fire and the difficulty in moving it. Even at the end of the sixteenth century, under ideal circumstances, a large artillery piece could only be fired four times in an hour, and movement over the poor roads common to the age often required much effort and time.[36]

Tactics and Tactical Formations

In battle and on the march, the Swiss employed tight formations, called the *Haufen* (heap or crowd). The *Haufen* was a square (*Viereck*) formed by troops lined up in rows, and the term may be best translated as a pike square.[37] The Swiss pike square developed in the fourteenth century and was probably first used at the battle of Laupen in 1339. There is no evidence that the Swiss developed this formation from reading classical authors, so the early military leaders of the Swiss Confederation must get credit for this tactical structure rather than the contemporary scholars of antiquity.[38] Even though the *Haufen*

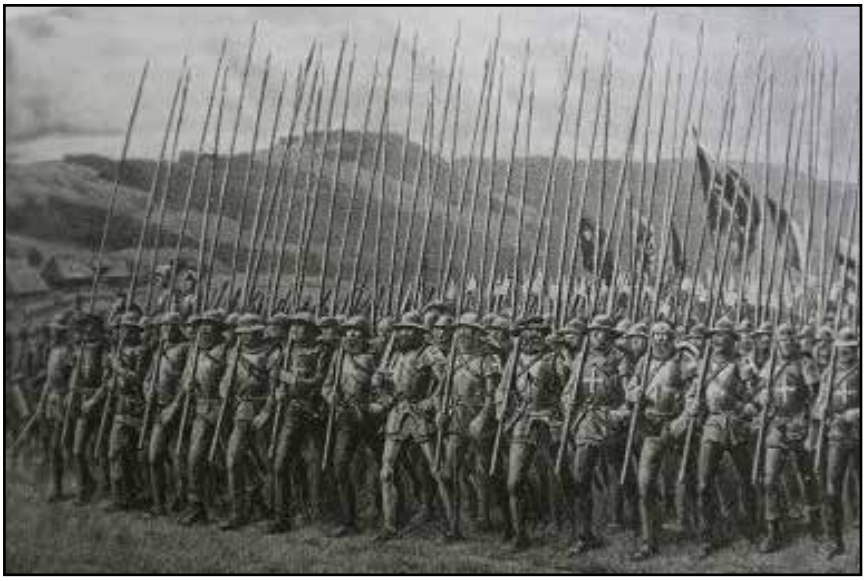
[34] Gerold Edlibach, *Chronik* (Zurich: Meyer und Zeller, 1847), 214.

[35] Gessler, *Geschützwesen*, 47-8.

[36] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 135-6 and 139.

[37] Johann Lenz, *Der Schwabenkrieg* (Zürich: Orell Füssli, 1849), 49. Important primary source from 1500.

[38] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 104-5.



Swiss Pike Square
by Evert van Muyden

was a formation similar to the ancient Greek or Macedonian phalanx, the primary and secondary Swiss sources do not call this formation a phalanx. The Macedonian phalanx was dissimilar in several ways. It had a uniformity of weapons and armor while the confederates wore different armor and wielded different weapons including hand cannons, pikes, or halberds. The Macedonians also carried shields which gave them parrying abilities and the ability to fight effectively out of formation, both advantages the Swiss pikemen did not enjoy.

The Swiss pike square was formed out of small tactical units of either 50, 100, 200, or 300 men depending on the area from which the troops originated and the conditions of their recruitment.[39] The military traditions in the various cantons and availability of manpower account for the disparity of sizes. Also, troops designated for special duty, such a garrisoning a fortress, varied in size depending on the numerous differing factors of that duty. The typical small pike square was 25 men

[39] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 14-15.

wide and 25 men deep, making a total of 625 men. This figure was considered the ideal, but there were many examples of this formation being composed of fewer men.

The Swiss standard battle formation consisted of thee pike squares. Each varied in size, position, and use. The *Vorhut* (vanguard or advanced party) was the pike square farthest forward, and it was usually stationed on the right. The vanguard was the first formation to engage the enemy, and it was supposed to penetrate and break the opposing enemy lines if possible. The advanced party was often composed of young, unmarried men who were well armored and were considered to be the very best men available. The largest pike square was the *Gewalthaufen* (main or chief formation) where the largest contingent of men was placed and at times comprised many thousands of men. It advanced in the center and was the heaviest blow the Swiss could throw, and it was always placed at least the distance of a shot from a hand cannon from the vanguard. The main formation with its pikemen and halberdiers holding their weapons vertically has been described as a walking forest. The third or last pike square was the *Nachhut* (rear guard), which was used as the reserve of the army and was often used to protect the baggage train. Most commonly, the elderly men were found in the rear guard, and in times of need, members of the baggage train, such as cooks, were found in it.[40]

The pike square consisted of pikemen three or four rows deep on each side. In the center of he formation were found rows of halberdiers. Men wielding the harquebus were not basic to the formation, but they were often placed behind the first row of pikes to shoot enemy cavalry. When there was little to fear from men on horseback, the men with the hand cannons were placed in a group separate from the main pike square.[41]

The Swiss were most often tactically on the offensive, so the pike squares were mainly used to penetrate enemy formations. The

[40] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 248, 274, and 276-7.

[41] Kurz, *Schweizerschlachten*, 144; and Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 279.

pike square would advance at a lively pace to the sound of drums and fifes which helped the troops maintain the proper steps. It is unclear if the men marched in step even though such a practice would help the men maintain good order. When the troops reached their adversary, the pikemen would level their pikes from the vertical to the horizontal and thrust forward to force a hole in the enemy lines. Then the halberdiers would rush past the pikemen with a battle cry and seek to do as much damage as possible by killing the enemy, breaking their morale, and cracking their formations.[42]

Nonetheless, it was often the case that the known terrain and position and character of the enemy forces made those tactics unlikely to succeed without some modification. Frequently, the proper ratio of halberdiers, men with hand cannons, and pikemen needed to carry out these operations was hard to achieve. As a result, those ideal formations would vary as the Swiss leaders attempted to use their available forces to the best advantage. Yet whenever possible, a battle plan with three pike squares as the basic element was used.

The pike square was only effective when order was maintained. Often, it was that discipline and order that brought the Swiss victory, and relative disorder brought their enemies defeat. The confederates had an impressive record for keeping their formations while going over many challenging obstacles even in the face of heavy fire from enemy artillery. Iron discipline was necessary to keep the men in good order under trying circumstances, and the Swiss were obliged to follow their leaders or face punishment. Any breach of discipline on operations or in combat was tried through the testimony of eye-witnesses, and the offenders of serious crimes could be summarily beheaded.[43]

Executions or the threat of capital punishment must have been common because men designated as executioners always accompanied Swiss troops in the field. An example of strict confederate discipline took place in the winter of 1499. A group of Swiss were fording the

[42] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 278.
[43] Delbrück, *Kriegskunst*, 3: 619; and Häne, "Kriegsbereitschaft," 32.

Rhine River when a few German knights appeared on the far shore a short distance away. Suspecting a trap by a large army contingent, the confederate leader ordered his men to stop and await the possible arrival of more enemy forces. The Swiss stood, in good order, for two hours in freezing water, that came up to the knees of some of them and to the shoulders of others, until they were sure no large body of the enemy approached. Some of the confederates died from exposure, and others suffered frozen feet and hands, but none of them left the battle formation.[44]

The Swiss iron discipline only applied to watch posts and when the army was either in battle or on the march. When not actually fighting or on the move the confederates were often undisciplined and disobedient. Some of the most notorious examples of misconduct came following battles or campaigns when the troopers plundered and took revenge on their enemies.[45]

Flags and banners often helped the men keep unity and order within the pike squares. Every district or region had its own banners and flags which were the pride of the populace. Such items were so prized that it was considered an honor to carry them on campaigns and into battle. This privilege typically went to high officers in the army. To prevent a banner's capture often as many as one hundred men were assigned to protect it with their lives if necessary. This practice helped keep order in the pike squares and give the troops a rallying point especially during confusing battles. Because the flags and banners were prized booty for an enemy, wild and fierce fights often took place around them. When a flag was captured by the enemy, the new one replacing it was marked with a red cross to denote that it and its army had been shamed. That sign of remorse was only removed after the flag had been redeemed by enemy blood in battle.[46]

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[44] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 222-3.

[45] Valerius Anshelm, *Die Berner-Chronik*, 2 vols. (Bern: Wyss, 1886) 2: 140, and Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 497.

[46] Gessler, *Geschützwesen*, 76; Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 122; and Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 487-8.

Whenever overwhelming numbers attacked a Swiss pike square, the formation would cease to move, and the troops would turn their pikes outward to receive attacks from all directions. Everyone in the formation, including the halberdiers, would rush to defend the sides thus leaving the center hollow. This hollow core gave the formation flexibility, which allowed it to withstand more external shock. The most vulnerable points in the pike square under heavy attack were its corners, so the tendency was to round the corners making the formation appear as a hedgehog or *Igel*. The hedgehog was so formidable that it made it possible for the Swiss to continue fighting under the most difficult circumstances. There are no examples of a hedgehog being breached in battle after it had been completely formed.[47]

During the Swabian War, the Swiss proved to be very mobile giving them great success through the use of surprise. The confederates were accustomed to marching all night to reach objectives and then to fall on enemy positions. They were so proficient at such maneuvers that the German mercenaries at Constance feared that the Swiss would one night attempt to storm that city even though it was well defended with a large garrison and high walls.[48]

The Swiss were masters of forced marches, rapid movement, and the surprise attack. Night attacks on castles and fortresses during the war were often attempted and achieved great success. The castles of Randegg, Küssenberg, and Tüngen were all taken in night attacks. In each case, the garrison was completely surprised and offered little resistance. The castle of Tüngen was quite a prize because a group of German nobles and their families were captured there. On the night of April 18, 1499, the Swiss marched rapidly to the castle and overwhelmed the surprised garrison without a fight. The nobles and their families were captured and marched off into captivity still clad only in the night shirts as the castle was plun-

[47] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 281.
[48] Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2: 445.

dered and burned. The Swiss also marched the garrison off into captivity and took cattle and other provisions from the nearby village before it was burned.[49]

One of the best examples of the Swiss effectively using good mobility and surprise was the fight at Bruderholz on March 22, 1499. Two days before the engagement a Swiss detachment of eight hundred men from Solothurn, Luzern, and Lenzburg left the area around the village of Dornach near Basel to raid in the Sundgau Valley of Alsace. In their absence, a force of three thousand German infantry and cavalry entered the Birs Valley and began to plunder and burn the villages in the area. They burned most of the village of Dornach and sent its ten defenders fleeing to the garrison at the castle of Dorneck commanded by Benedikt Hugi.

The eight hundred Swiss returned as rapidly as possible upon receiving word of the German activities. They arrived early in the morning of March 22, 1499, and spent most of the morning in search of the enemy force. At last, the confederates got word that the enemy was withdrawing up the Birs Valley towards the Rhine River. The Swiss forces assembled themselves in battle order and backed into the Bruderholz forest while maintaining their formation. Just before noon, the German force marched past the Swiss who were completely unnoticed in their hiding places. The confederates waited for the signal to attack the enemy in the rear. The German infantry offered no resistance, and these men immediately broke formation and fled. The German cavalry fought a delaying action against the advancing Swiss, hampering any effective pursuit of the fleeing infantry. The men on horseback did not long remain behind and soon joined the foot soldiers in flight. The Swiss suffered only one fatality while their adversaries lost eighty dead who were buried in one mass grave. The Germans fled the two miles to the Rhine River and continued their

[49] Peterman Etterlin, *Kronica von der loblichen Eidgnoschaft* (Basel: Eckenstein, 1752), 240 and Edlibach, *Chronik*, 216.

Swiss War Council
by Urs Graf

retreat after swimming the river. Some fled to Basel seeking a place of refuge, but the officials of the city refused to admit them.[50]

[50] Benedikt Hugi an Soloturn March 19 and 22, 1499; and Soloturn an Freiburg March 22, 1499, in Albert Büchi, ed. *Aktensücke zur Geshichte des Schwabenkrieges nebst einger Freiburger Chronik über die Ereignisse von 1499* (Basel: Basler Buch- und Antiquariatshandlung, 1901), 97-9; Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 80; Valarius Anshelm, *Die Berner-Chronik* (Bern: Wyss, 1886) 2: 153-4; and Rudolf Luginbühl, "Das Gefecht auf dem Bruderholz," *Basler Jahrbuch* (1904), 205.

Troops and Leaders

The Swiss relied on a council of war from the various states for military leadership. The war council of each Swiss canton was always comprised of experienced military men. Wealth and social position were clearly considerations in the selection of the council's members, but a man's experience and abilities were also carefully scrutinized. The war council often directed military affairs and oversaw the overall strategy of the war, but the council frequently chose commanders in the field who provided leadership during the actual campaigns.[51]

The Swiss levels of military leadership were far different than the rank structures in modern armies, and any similarity between Medieval and modern terms designating leadership is coincidental. The man designated as *Hauptmann* (best translated as leader or commander) was the highest Swiss officer, and he was considered so important that a group of men were assigned to protect him. The war council chose this officer not necessarily for his genius, but for his courage and the ability to understand the troops and the military system. It was expected, in theory at least, that the military structure, and not the abilities of any one man, was the key to victory. Yet the leaders in the field enjoyed great leeway in their decisions and often saw fit to vary the system to meet unpredictable circumstances.[52]

Several leaders were typically placed beneath the *Hauptmann*, including the men assigned to carry the flags and banners. These men were *Pannerherren*, as well as *Venner* and *Venliträger*. Each of these men had responsibilities related to carrying one of a number of flags and banners. They could properly be known as the banner or flag carriers. The *Pannerherren* usually carried city or regional flags, while the *Venner* and *Venliträger* carried banners of less significance, which represented a smaller number of men. Unlike the *Hauptmann*, these lower officers were elected by the troops after the forces had assembled. At

[51] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 33-4 and 195.
[52] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 204-5.

that time, all the leaders came together and forgave each other all hate and injury and swore loyalty one to another. The lower leaders and troops swore to follow the higher officers and the higher officers swore to all the men of the army to lead them as well as possible.[53]

The officers' most challenging functions were to organize the pike squares and decide on a course of action or battle plan when such action was warranted. A pike square was often composed of men who had never seen each other before, and great care had to be taken to assure that the formation was duly composed of the appropriate ratios of pikemen and halberdiers in their proper ranks. The leaders often demonstrated considerable skill in organizing the battle squares because they were rapidly formed in various battles. The battle plan was usually a product of consultations among the more important leaders of each contingent which comprised the army at that point. These leaders were usually *Hauptmänner* who came together to form the battle council and to decide jointly on the best course of action. They used the information and reconnaissance available to them, and they also carefully considered the abilities of their men. No doubt, the battle plan often came from the ideas and skills of one or more of the most respected and influential leaders in the battle council.

There were numerous lower officers who had specific authority over baggage, food, and artillery. Of these men, the Master of Artillery (*Büchsenmeister*) was often the most respected. The Master of Artillery was the master cannon-maker who served as artillery officer in the field. These leaders were highly skilled and provided expert leadership in directing and the use of cannons on military operations. Between campaigns, the Master of Artillery also made weapons and powder and trained persons in their maintenance and use.[54]

The Swiss troops fell basically into two broad categories, the *Landsturm* and the *Söldner*. The *Landsturm* was the Swiss Militia, and

[53] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 200-1; and Delbrück, *Kriegskunst*, 3: 620.

[54] Otto Hess, *Die Fremden Büchsenmeister und Söldner in den Diensten: Der Eidgen-Orte bis 1516* (Dietikon: J. G. Hunndel-Horner, 1919), 1-3.

The Swiss March to Baden with their Banners
by Diebold Schilling (Bern)

it consisted of virtually the entire healthy adult male population. Its function was to protect the local area. This force was called into service whenever an enemy penetrated the lands of the Confederation, and it was never used in campaigns outside of the Swiss areas. These fighters saw a great deal of service in the Swabian War, and it was used to watch the borders of the Confederation and to resist enemy raids into the Swiss territories.[55]

The men in the Militia were called to their assembly areas by the use of smoke signals, the ringing of bells, or a flag placed in a

[55] Häne, "Kriegsbereitschaft," 27; and Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 318.

stream in the daytime, while fire signals were used at night. Assembly areas were usually at churches which were located in or near the center of towns or villages. Once the men had gathered, the nature of the emergency was explained to them, and some leaders were quickly elected. Anyone failing to appear at the designated area could suffer a loss of goods, and his home could also be destroyed as a punishment for this infraction.[56]

The men in the Militia were responsible for detecting intruders, and for that purpose, numerous watch posts were placed on any avenue of approach that the enemy might use. Watch posts were commonly located on hill tops, in or near mountain passes, or any place that afforded a good view of the surrounding terrain. The person on watch had to be constantly alert. If anyone fell asleep, laid down his weapon, or failed to wear his breastplate, he could be put to death. The Swiss always build some defenses of wood, earth, or stone to prepare their positions in case of attack, and frequently dogs were used to help watch for the enemy or chase them if needed. Watch posts often became the scenes of skirmishes with hostile raiders or with larger enemy units, and they often formed the first line of defense. The confederates had an excellent record of ambushing their adversaries while these enemies were seldom successful in doing the reverse. In part, the credit for this success must go the Swiss who so carefully manned the watch posts.[57]

Another category of men in the military was the *Söldner* (soldier) or someone paid for his military service. Strictly speaking, soldiers were only garrison troops guarding city gates and castles and also acting as municipal police. However, the term often was applied to any military personnel aside from the Militia. A broad designation often given to any troops in the field was *Knechte* (servant or vassal), but more commonly these men were called *Freiwillige* or volunteers. Those were the men who waged wars outside of the borders of the Swiss Confederation, and they were often employed on raids into

[56] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 37-8.
[57] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 324-9.

enemy territories. In the classical battle formation, the volunteers took position within the vanguard or *Vorhut* of the army. These troops were usually young, vigorous men interested in fame and wealth. They were also the men recruited as mercenaries who served in foreign countries.[58]

The size of all the Swiss forces is unclear. Perhaps as many as thirty thousand Swiss were on any military operation in the late Middle Ages at one time on foreign soil. Yet this estimate refers only to volunteers and does not include the militia. Even though military service began when boys reached their mid-teens, the total army hardly consisted of more than one-fourth of the entire population. Taking this into consideration, the Swiss total forces could never equal more than one hundred thousand men. In practical terms, a plausible number of total mobilization ranged between 60,000 and 80,000 men.[59]

Yet the confederates never fielded their total strength during the Swabian War. One contemporary foreign observer, Bernardin de Vegiis, estimated the strength of the Swiss troops deployed from the various states and their allies near the borders of the Confederation. He listed 6,000 from Bern; Fribourg at 2,000; Luzern at 3,000; and Zurich at 4,500. He also listed 800 men from Uri; 600 from Unterwalden; 2,400 from Schwyz; 5,000 from Graubünden; 400 from Zug; 500 from Glarus; 6,000 from St. Gallen, Appenzell, and the Thurgau; 400 from Schaffhausen; 1,800 from Solothurn; and 1,000 from Wallis. The total was 34,400 men.[60] An anonymous, yet very thorough report, by another contemporary estimated the total Swiss strength as 20,800 men at one time during the war.[61] Both of these contemporary estimates are plausible depending, of course, on how many of the men in the militia were included in these numbers.

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[58] Hess, *Büchsenmeister und Söldner*, 49; and Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 49-50.

[59] Häne, "Kriegsbereitschaft," 24; and Delbrück, *Kriegskunst* 3: 617.

[60] Bernardin de Vegiis an den Herzog von Mailand, April 29, 1499, in *Aktenstücke zur Geschichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 167.

[61] Bericht eines Ungenannten an den Herzog von Mailand, May 29, 1499, in *Aktenstücke zur Geschichte des Schwabenkieges*, 539-47.

Popular Support for Military Service

Swiss men were required to serve in the military from a young age. In times of emergencies, young males could be enrolled in the military as early as age fourteen, but most commonly they started to serve when sixteen. From age sixteen to twenty-five, the men were considered to be in their prime for military operations and combat. Older men were often used as well, and only the physically unfit were exempt from military duty. Otherwise, everyone served regardless of wealth or station in life, although it was more common to find peasants in the army, because of their greater numbers than those who lived in cities. When a man was placed in the military, he had to swear an oath that he would serve with "goods and blood" when necessary. Training was often mandatory, but the Swiss rarely considered this duty as a chore, and they were often happy to practice wielding their weapons and marching with others.[62]

Military service was so popular for the young that they often tried to accompany forces on campaign before they reached the age of service because they were eager to share the fame, fortune, and adventure of military operations. In such instances, it was often necessary to forbid them from participation. Although every male was expected to serve in the military, at times additional men had to be induced when too few volunteers stepped forward for certain operations. This situation occurred more frequently when mercenary service in foreign lands drained the Swiss manpower. Sometimes, one of two brothers were required to serve or either a father or son had to report for duty. At times, widows of men who had fallen in battle would select those who were to replace them. It was possible to pay another man to fill one's military service requirement, but this practice was forbidden by the Federal Diet meeting in Zurich on June 16, 1499. The order stated that everyone had to serve when called. Yet it remains unclear if this order

[62] Delbrück, *Kriegskunst* 3: 615 and 622; Häne, "Kriegsbereitschaft," 13; and Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 25 and 35.

was observed, and the wealthy still had the means to pay others to take their place.[63]

Taxes on individuals, guilds, and societies supported the military. A tax was levied on the individual regardless of his ability to pay, and it was collected on a monthly or daily basis. Guilds were often responsible for the recruitment, pay, and support of the troops they sent into the field. If the troops were hired as mercenaries, their employers cared for their need and usually paid them as well. However, the men often supported themselves from plunder and the taking of booty.[64]

Military service was a popular means of employment for the Swiss, especially as foreign mercenaries, since they lived in a poor country. Military service could also be very profitable, and once-poor peasants often lived well as elderly men from the gains received from employment as soldiers. Many of these men also used martial activities as an important means of achieving social mobility. Military men often found their way onto a seat on a city or cantonal council, and at times a successful military background seemed mandatory for many high positions.[65] The Swiss often found military activities so profitable that they grouped together to fight and raid on their own without official sanction by becoming brigands. As such, they risked punishment and death as outlaws. The Swiss were very proud of their military, and soldiers were revered and respected people. Songs were composed praising military victories, and the thirst for success, praise, and fame helped motivate these troops to fight well and hard.[66]

The Swiss were very conscientious of their own troops, showing great affection and concern for them. They commonly referred to the care of the wounded as "Holy Duty." After the disastrous defeat at the Battle of Marignano in 1515, the confederates showed such loyalty for their own wounded that, while they should logically have been flee-

[63] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 61; and Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 470.
[64] Delbrück, *Kriegskunst* 3: 616; and Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 169.
[65] Hobohm, *Renaissance der Kriegskunst*, 171; and Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 227.
[66] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 472; and Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 234-5.

ing from a possible enemy pursuit, they returned to the field of battle to carry their injured men more than a mile to a location where they could be treated.[67]

The Swiss included officers responsible to care for the wounded on every military expedition. These men were *Feldschere* or barber surgeons whose only function was to care for injured men. In battle, these surgeons or doctors put up a flag where they worked, and these men and their assistants applied bandages and medications to the men when needed. After treatment in the field, the wounded were sent home where they were given good care and monetary compensation during their convalescence. If the damaged man lost a limb or was maimed for life, he would be cared for at state or community expense for the rest of his life. If a man was permanently precluded by his wounds from making a living, was killed in battle or on a campaign, his family was also cared for, once again, by the state or the community.[68]

The Swiss were a pious people. While on military service, priests looked after their spiritual needs. The priests were always present to say mass and to administer other sacred rights. Before battle, the confederates often knelt in prayer and took mass whenever possible. Frequently, the priests assured them that God and the Holy Virgin would protect them and give them victory. Before the troops arose from their knees, their officers would throw a handful of dirt on them as a reminder that the Swiss return victors or die in the effort. Often there was no other choice for the troops because they knew that retreat and surrender were usually unthinkable.[69]

Military Rules

There were six circumstances under which the Swiss could be called to fight. When a technical state of war existed, when there was

[67] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 491.
[68] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 171.
[69] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 239 and 424.

reason to fear an attack by an enemy, when fighting had occurred, when there was an agreement to help a foreigner, when hired as mercenaries, and when it was necessary to watch fortresses or to man watch posts. The Swiss Militia, always prepared for war, were able to meet all calls to arms promptly. On this, war preparedness depended much of the confederate success in resisting invasion.[70]

After the Battle of Sempach in 1386, the Federal Diet issued a general order defining acceptable Swiss military conduct. This Sempacher Letter of 1393 set down rules by which the confederates made war throughout the fifteenth century and beyond. Other suggestions and orders were given at various times, but the Sempacher Letter remained the guiding principle. In this directive, flight was strictly forbidden. If anyone fled or called for the army to retire, the troopers next to him were obliged to kill the offender on the spot. Men were often placed at the rear of the army to cut down anyone attempting to flee. Special protection was always given to women, children, and churches. No prisoner could be taken while fighting continued, because it was much easier to kill a man than to hold him, and the encumbrance of captives meant that the successful pursuit of a defeated enemy was less likely.[71]

There were also numerous rules governing the sharing of booty and the amount of plunder which could be brought home. Pillaging was only permissible with the consent of the leaders, and such practice was totally forbidden during battle. Booty was declared common property and was to be distributed as the leaders directed. Punishments were prescribed for the fighter who brought home too much loot or did not correctly share it with the other men. Laws against combatants returning with too many spoils came from the fear that foreign influences were corrupting the people and ruining morality.[72]

[70] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 42; and Häne, "Kriegsbereitschaft," 33.
[71] Sempacher Brief in Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 125-7; and Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 214-16.
[72] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 80; and Vincent, *Switzerland*, 24-9.

The Swiss were also forbidden to be under the employ of certain states and peoples to prevent them from fighting against other confederates or supporting states or causes unfriendly to the Confederation. Against the advice of their leaders in the year 1500, Swiss mercenaries were employed by both Luigi Sforza, Duke of Milan, and Louis XII, King of France. When the two armies met, the confederates under Sforza refused to fight their countrymen and returned home.[73]

Cowards and traitors were both despised. Deserters were supposed to be sentenced to death, but there are no known examples of formal executions of tried offenders. Often their names were on record to shame them for generations to come. Traitors, especially those who served the much-feared Habsburgs, were the most hated of all men. Great value was placed on the virtues of keeping promises and in being loyal. Often when the Swiss were hired to fight for other states, they considered themselves allies as well as mercenaries. They considered such loyalties as part of their responsibilities to their employers, but not at the expense of fighting other confederates.[74]

THE SWISS AT WAR

Brutality and the Treatment of Prisoners

Eminent modern scholars including Charles Oman and Hans Delbrück have called the Swiss very brutal soldiers who always killed their prisoners.[75] Such blanket assertions are overly simplistic, misleading, and untrue, and the question of Swiss brutality remains one of he most misunderstood topics on how the confederates made war. The topic has many aspects, but it focuses on how the Swiss treated people and property when a battle was not in progress. Much of the misunderstanding comes from general order from the Swiss Federal

[73] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 78-9; and Robert Laffont, *The Ancient Art of Warfare* 2 vols. (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1966) 1: 460.

[74] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 236-7.

[75] Oman, *Art of War*, 2: 253-4; and Delbrück, *Kriegskunst*, 3: 688.

Diet on March 11, 1499, when it called for all the citizens of the various cantons to take an oath that when they went to war no prisoners were to be taken but all killed "as our pious ancestors have always been accustomed" to doing.[76] This order was clearly meant to urge the Swiss to fight hard, but it was largely ignored during the Swabian War.

The Swiss could indeed be brutal as was demonstrated forcefully by the slaughters following the Battle of Calven in 1499 and activities at other times. For example, a group of confederates stabbed to death two "handsome" boys, brothers named Wasman in Habsheim in Alsace, claiming that the children were notoriously misbehaved.[77] A Swiss raiding party was calling for the surrender of a town during the Swabian War of 1499 when, from the town's walls, a Jew shot three confederate troopers dead including a Master of Artillery and his son. The town soon surrendered, and the Jewish marksman was captured. The victorious Swiss gave the town no punishment, but they decided to do something to the Jew. Three suggestions were given regarding his fate. One man wanted him tortured and killed, another wanted him cast into perpetual prison, and a third wanted the captive spared to teach him how to shoot so well. The suggestion to torture and kill the man was taken. After being hung by his feet for two days, the unfortunate man began to beg saying he had been converted to Christianity. He was then beheaded, and the Swiss said he died as a good Christian.[78]

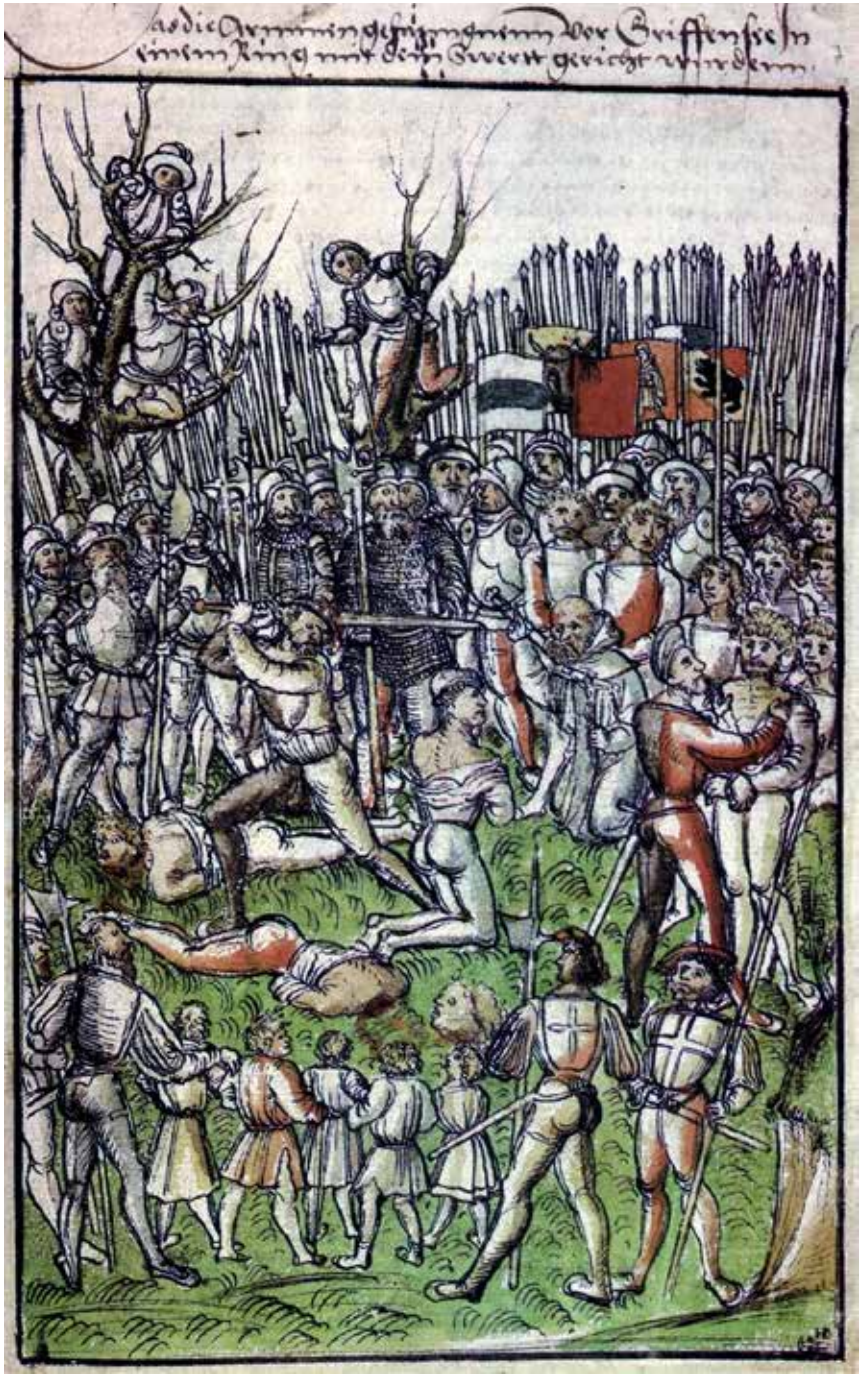
On the other hand, the Swiss could be generous and even merciful to their enemies. A raiding party captured the village of Guttendingen in 1499 and was preparing to burn it when a plea from the poor women, widows, and orphans of the town reached the confederate leaders, and they spared the village.[79] On another occasion, a Swiss contingent on a raid came to the town of Torenbüren and demanded

[76] Vincent, *Switzerland*, 54.

[77] "Freiburger Chronik des Schwabenkrieges" in *Aktenstücke zur Geschichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 603.

[78] Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 100-2.

[79] "Freiburger Chronik des Schwabenkrieges" in *Aktenstücke zur Geschichte des Schwabankrieges*, 573-4.



Swiss Execute Prisoners of War in 1444

2,200 gulden as a ransom for 160 prisoners who had recently been taken. If they were not promptly paid, the confederates threatened to burn the forest at Bregenz. The Swiss received the money but were so moved by the plight of the poor people in the area that they returned 800 gulden coins, a large sum of money.[80] Such stories were numerous. The most common acts of generosity shown by the Swiss were the releasing of captured persons unharmed and the returning of cattle and foodstuffs to the needy.

The Swiss frequently took prisoners of war during successful raids. Often the confederates took prisoners when their adversaries were surprised in the castles and towns, but more often they simply surrendered to the Swiss. The confederates would spare a garrison if it surrendered, but if it offered resistance and the Swiss succeeded in taking the castle or fortress, then the all the defenders could be killed. Usually, in negotiating the surrender of a town or castle, the Swiss would offer a simple ultimatum, surrender or die. Faced with such a choice, the garrison usually capitulated. On one occasion, the leader of a garrison put the question of surrender to a vote of the twenty-five defenders of the castle. Twenty-one voted to surrender, and only four wanted to fight, so the castle capitulated.[81]

There were three basic types of prisoners defined by social class taken in the Swabian War. These were prisoners of the nobility, army, and peasantry. The Swiss commonly released the peasantry and other low-class persons after only a brief captivity if they would swear never again to make war on the confederates. The Swiss considered enemy prisoners from the lower classes to be troublesome if they were to be held in confinement until the end of the war, and they were often released to save money. Those prisoners were divided up among the contingents that captured them. Captives were usually sent to areas away from the borders for safekeeping. These men were often treated

[80] Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2: 372.

[81] Heinrich Hug, *Villinger Chronik von 1495 bis 1533* (Tübingen: Literarischer Verein Stuttgart, 1883), 8-9.

well and given good food and housing. The treatment of prisoners must have been good because there were only two reported deaths in captivity during the entire Swabian War.[82]

The Swiss gave the nobility special treatment because they were held for ransom, and care was taken to assure that they did not escape. The captives from the upper classes were well treated and spent much of their time writing letters for the required sums of money and in awaiting the delivery of these payments. Young girls carried the money and messages, and they were allowed to travel freely between the armies. In 1499, a doctor from Basel helped three captive nobleman's sons escape from Swiss confinement. The boys successfully escaped, but the doctor was captured and killed.[83]

The late Middle Ages was a period of brutal warfare when soldiers of all nations showed little respect for the lives of others and for their private property. The Swiss military was indeed a creature of its age and should be regarded as such. Yet, it is incorrect to brand the Swiss as showing excessive brutality or cruelty either to people or to their property.

Weaknesses in the Swiss Military

There were many weaknesses in the Swiss military at the end of the fifteenth century that contributed to its decline as a dominant infantry in the coming decades. Warfare became more complex, foreign infantries were greatly improved, artillery became a greater factor in combat, and the Swiss themselves suffered from a weakening of discipline, morale, and integrity.

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[82] Burgermeister und Rat zur Chur an Hauptleute, Fähnrich Räte von Chur, Jetzt im Feld, February 16, 1499, in C. and F. Jecklin, *Der Anteil Graubündens am Schwabenkrieg* (Davos: E. Ricter'sche Buchdruckerei, 1899), 108-9. This study presents an excellent account of the battle of Calven, but it also includes almost every known source on the battle in an appendix in the back. See also, Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2: 434 and 438; and Otto Feger, "Probleme der Kriegsgefangenschaft im Schwabenkrieg," *Zeitschrift für Schweizerishche Geschichte* 30 (1950): 597.

[83] Feger, "Kriegsgefangenschaft," 600-1; and Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 87-96.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, other armies had developed into forces with artillery, disciplined infantries, and tactically flexible cavalries. They also began to more ingeniously prepare positions for defense with trenches and other obstacles. All of these developments introduced new factors into the complexity of warfare. Armies had greater opportunities to employ new methods of fighting rather than the simple cavalry attack that was so common on many battlefields in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Rather than adapting more flexibility to be effective in battle, the Swiss still clung to their old tactics of advancing in squares, which soon proved to be outmoded. True, the confederates showed some adaptability in the Swabian War, but following that conflict, the Swiss turned back to traditional ways of fighting rather than changing to meet the times.

The first foreign infantry to challenge the Swiss seriously was the Swabian *Landsknechte* (servant of the land) who were German mercenaries or Swabian infantrymen. Those two infantries met in a number of engagements, first in the Swabian War and other occasions in the early sixteenth century, the most notable of which was the Battle of Bicocca in 1522. The engagements in the Swabian War were bitter fights that were fiercely contested, and, as at the Battle of Dornach in 1499, it was not certain if the Swiss were superior to the German mercenaries. Beginning in 1500, the most effective infantry to be used against the Swiss was the Spanish infantry of Consalvo de Cordova which had adopted many of the tactics of the ancient Romans in the wars in Northern Italy. Using sword and shield, the Spanish were able to ward off the Swiss pikes in numerous engagements. Having no shield to ward off the slashing and thrusting Spanish, the disadvantaged confederates were forced to discard their longer weapons to use their swords.[84]

Artillery and the hand cannon or harquebus had become important factors in combat, and these two weapons continually killed

[84] Oman, *Art of War* 2: 275-6.

more and more men in battle.[85] The Swiss pike square was the easiest possible infantry formation at which to aim cannons, and the invention of burning and exploding bombs or cannon balls made artillery-fire all the more effective. The tactics that Heini Wolleb used at the Battle of Franstanz in 1499 of falling down before enemy fire to make smaller targets was unheard of after the Swabian War, meaning that the Swiss would frequently stand to face enemy fire. This was a costly mistake because falling to the ground was the best way to reduce casualties under heavy fire, and the great Swiss bravery was often misplaced. Starting in the early sixteenth century, such courage proved to be more costly than effective.[86]

The largest single factor in the Swiss decline was the lack of discipline and unity in battle. This was caused, to a great extent, by a major change taking place in Swiss society early in the sixteenth century. More and more, mercenary service had become a major source of wealth in the Confederation, and large sums of money came in the form of bribes and payments. Corruption at all levels became a fact, and often payoffs to state and civic officials were the major inducement to many official actions. This malfeasance went from the leaders who received bribes to the rank-and-file who got payments for military service. The once-proud Swiss military became greedy and lost the sense of duty which was more common in earlier times.[87]

The problem of corruption was not alleviated even when the Swiss defeats during the first twenty-five years of the sixteenth century made soldiers harder to procure. This difficulty in getting troops occurred because the casualties diminished the available manpower, and young men were not as eager to enlist when greater dangers were involved. Yet because of the difficulty in obtaining soldiers, the fees for their services went up, perpetuating a high level of corruption for decades to come.[88]

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[85] Kurz, *Schweizerschlachten*, 144-5.
[86] Gessler, *Geschützwesen*, 56.
[87] Vincent, *Switzerland*, 12.
[88] Vincent, *Switzerland*, 15.

The Confederation became plagued with difficulties. Agriculture became neglected by the most vigorous section of the population, and morals became increasingly lax. The change appears to have been most rapid after 1480 because at this time laws regulating standards of behavior became more frequent. By 1503, Swiss conduct and character had become objects of scorn for both citizen and foreigner alike. As in most instances of legislated morality, these statutes regulating conduct proved difficult to enforce, especially when the government officials who passed these laws were notably corrupt themselves.[89]

This decline in ethical conduct affected every facet of the military. Leaders became unwilling to lead unless they received more pay than the other troops, and soldiers themselves began to lack discipline and unity in battle. Those men no longer made such great efforts, and their great effectiveness wavered.[90] The Battle of Novara in 1513 was the last victory won by the Swiss using their traditional tactics. At the Battle of Marignano in 1515, the confederates attacking columns disobeyed orders and failed to advance on the enemy's flank. Instead, they moved head on against the fortified enemy position. As a result, the Swiss were slaughtered and faced their first major defeat on the battlefield in more than a half century. At the Battle of Bicocca in 1522, the confederates made no pretense of a flank attack and moved directly on the trenches manned by the *Lansdknechte*. As a result, the Swiss suffered a major defeat which gave the German mercenaries revenge against the confederates for numerous actions in the Swabian War.

After the Battle of Bicocca, the confederates toppled from their position as the most formidable soldiers of the age. Surprisingly, much of the Swiss reputation survived their great defeats. Although their tactics were clearly outmoded and the confederates themselves held their military in derision, they were still among the most sought-after soldiers in Europe. France, ever respectful of the Swiss military, always fielded a large contingent of Swiss mercenaries within their armies through the mid-sixteenth century. Clearly, many European states had

[89] Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik* 2:464; and Vincent, *Switzerland*, 23-9.

been so respectful of the Swiss military that its failures were put aside, and the belief in Swiss abilities persisted long after their effectiveness in battle was put in question.

BACKGROUND AND CAUSES OF THE SWABIAN WAR

After the Swiss Confederation was first formed late in the thirteenth century, this coalition was immediately at odds with the Austrian Habsburg family who wanted to increase their authority over those areas from which the Swiss were continually gaining new states and allies. During the fourteenth century and the early years of the fifteenth centuries, the Habsburgs fought many wars with the members of the Confederation over conflicting interests and disputed lands. The Swiss were successful in all of those conflicts. The Habsburgs long remembered the humiliation of repeatedly being defeated by the Swiss peasants, and the confederates continually feared that Austrian power was a menace that had never been entirely removed.[91]

For most of the fifteenth century, a member of the Habsburg family also served as the Holy Roman Emperor. The Habsburg, Frederick III, was Emperor from 1439 to 1493, and the confederate mistrust of the Austrian ruling family naturally became synonymous with the policies of the German Empire. By 1499, Swiss participation in imperial affairs had been voluntary for generations. The origins of Swiss independence can be traced as far back as the Charter of Liberty or *Freibrief* issued by Frederick II to Schwyz in 1240. That was two years before the sealing of Schwyz, Uri, and Unterwalden into their first known pact, and generations before closer alliances were created later in the century.[92] The Swiss states had infrequently participated in the

[90] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 197.
[91] Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 36.
[92] Sidler, *Morgarten*, 42-3.

affairs of the German Empire, but by the end of the fifteenth century, all the members of the Confederation except Bern had largely severed their participation in the Empire and had stopped attending the Imperial Diet or legislative body.

Most of the members of the Confederation were on good terms with France late in the fifteenth century, but again Bern was the exception. Bern was the most territorially ambitious canton, and it was covetous of the French-speaking areas immediately to its west. It had gained authority of a small number of these areas after the Burgundian Wars 1474-1477 and wished to acquire more. Bern saw France as its chief opponent in obtaining these areas, and it considered he Empire, France's rival, as a chief potential ally in forwarding its ambitions. As a result, Bern continued participation in the affairs of the Empire, while the other Swiss states did little.

By the end of the fifteenth century, the Habsburgs were beset with problems. The Turks frequently ravaged Habsburg lands, a feud continued between the Habsburgs and the Hungarian monarchy, and Bavaria was becoming increasingly hostile to the Empire and to the ruling family of Austria. Clearly, the solutions to these problems could most readily be achieved through the application of military force. But the Habsburgs did not control a good military capable of overcoming the all difficulties facing them. The ruling family recognized that the excellent Swiss military could aid them a great deal in these struggles. The family further believed that the confederates would be most effective when employed against the Turks, and for this purpose, they made attempts to gain Swiss friendship and support.[93]

An accord with the confederates appeared to be a good idea for the Habsburgs, but such an attempt was very unlikely to succeed. The aging Frederick III was a major hindrance to any such effort because he was openly disdainful of the Confederation, and his contempt for the confederates was often interpreted by them as a manifestation of a continuing policy of hostility. Although there had not been a war between

[93] Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 14.

the Habsburgs and Swiss since the middle of the fifteenth century, the confederates' hatred for the ruling house of Austria continued. This animosity ran so deep that anyone who displayed the emblem of the Habsburgs (Imperial Eagle) within the Confederation did so at the peril of his life.

Nonetheless, Sigismund Habsburg, Frederick's brother, achieved a brief success in getting Swiss support. In 1474, Sigismund sought an alliance with the Swiss. Because the Confederation was at war with Burgundy at the time, the defensive pact proposed by Sigismund was desirable to them. The Eternal Direction of 1474 was designed to assure mutual aid against any threat to the Confederation or to the Habsburgs, whether that menace came form external enemies or disloyal areas within the German Empire. Yet the agreement did not last long, because the final defeat of Burgundy in 1477 removed the immediate threat to Swiss security, and Frederick himself, in his constant contempt for the confederates, refused to negotiate a renewal of the pact.[94]

Problems continued to beset the German Empire and the Habsburg family in the 1480s. Since 1477, the Emperor Frederick III had been at war with Hungary, and the war went badly for the German Emperor. His forces were driven out of some Austrian areas, and the Hungarians captured Vienna in 1483. Frederick never saw the city again. The ravages by the Turks were a continuing menace, and the Bavarians were threatening Habsburg power in south Germany. Sigismund Habsburg, Archduke of Austria and Frederick's distant cousin, tried to take the Tirol in the western part of Austria, away from the Emperor's control in 1487.[95] Some decisive action needed to be taken to strengthen the royal family's interests, and it was Maximilian, Frederick's son, and heir, who most effectively tried to help the situation.

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[94] Emil Dürr, "Die Politik der Eidgenossen im XIV und XV Jahrhundert," *Schweizer Kriegsgeschichte* 4 (1933): 463-5.

[95] Dürr, "Politik," 469-70.

Maximilian (1459-1519) was a young, energetic leader in the 1480s—years before he acceded to his father's throne. His position within the Empire became increasingly important as he matured because of the aging of Frederick, who had been a powerful ruler, became more incompetent with age. To help alleviate the ruling family's problems, Maximilian began a program to reorganize the Empire's army in the mid 1480s. He recognized that the Swiss infantry's organization and tactics could be copied, and starting in 1485, he went to the Swabian areas of the Empire and began to organize the manpower along confederate lines.[96]

The heir to the Austrian throne recognized that a military force based on a peasant infantry was potentially loyal to a central monarch and could be more useful than the noble cavalry because the men from the lower classes could be better controlled. Maximilian also realized that, as the Swiss had proven, a good infantry could be very effective in battle. Naturally, the most valuable persons needed to help train the Swabians were the confederates themselves. An obscure knight, Konrad Gächuf of Kesswil, was the most instrumental person in hiring Swiss mercenaries to teach the Swabains confederate organization, tactics, and the wielding of weapons.[97]

Starting in 1486 when Gächuf's Swiss began their instruction, the Swabian infantry began to prove its abilities on the battlefields of Europe. These Swabian infantry, *Landsknechte*, had a deep hatred for the Swiss who shared the Swabian southern border. This hostility stemmed from raids and petty intermittent warfare between those two peoples which had occurred for many generations. The Swabian infantry with high morale and confidence obtained from their victories on the battlefields of Europe, soon showed their contempt for the Swiss and became anxious to test their abilities against their former teachers.[98]

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[96] Dürr, "Politik," 466; and Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 335.
[97] Häne, "Kriegsbereitschaft," 11-12.
[98] Etterlin, *Kronica*, 231; and Dürr, "Politik," 474.

To assure the use of the Swabain infantry and to form a power base capable of aiding the Habsburgs and their problems, Maximilian and Frederick formed the Swabian League in February 1488, consisting of local knights and cities. The Swabian League, with the Swabian infantry as its chief military contingent, was successful in retaining Bavaria and in defeating Sigismund to keep the Tirol.[99]

The existence of the powerful Swabian League on their borders made the Swiss suspicious of its intended purposes. Even though the League was apparently aimed primarily at Bavaria, the confederates feared that Frederick would one day be tempted to use it against them. The south German nobility in the Swabian League did nothing to help calm such fears. The German lords were extremely contemptuous of the Confederation. As they watched their feudal rights melt away due to the pressures of a discontented peasantry prone to violence, those nobles became fearful that the existence of the free and often democratic Swiss Confederation on their borders was a serious social threat because their peasants were seeking freedoms similar to those enjoyed by the confederates. As a result, there was much talk among the German nobles of dividing up the Confederation, repressing Swiss freedoms, and establishing nobles over them.[100]

The confederates, long protective of their hard-won rights, hated any idea of having the nobility established in their lands and seeing their freedoms abolished.[101] The agitation from such talk and the mutual hatred between the Swiss and the Swabians nearly broke into war in October 1488, but before there was any clash of arms, angers cooled, and war was averted.[102]

The kings of France had long waged an unfriendly policy against the German Empire, believing their best interests were served in undermining the strength of the Empire. France's policy included

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[99] Dürr, "Politik," 470.

[100] Christopher Hare, *Maximilian the Dreamer: Holy Roman Emperor, 1459-1519* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 98.

[101] Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 27.

[102] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 334.

retaining good terms with the confederates to assure the availability of Swiss mercenaries, and to influence the Confederation to remain on unfavorable terms with the Empire. The agents of the French king, Charles VIII (1470-1498), were active in the Confederation distributing funds and anti-imperial propaganda. Charles further stirred up Swiss feelings by employing confederate mercenaries from the Swiss cantons which bordered Swabia, where the confederates were already most antagonistic toward the Swabians. These mercenaries were used against the Empire and the Swabian infantry on operations in Flanders.[103]

The French influence over the Confederation was demonstrated when three thousand Swiss mercenaries, on the service of the Empire in Flanders, left Maximilian's army and joined the French in 1486. This, and other similar actions in the following years, convinced many German nobles and many Swabian infantrymen alike that the Swiss were disloyal to the Empire and could not be trusted. With mutual Swiss and Swabian hatred intensifying, France enjoyed increasing diplomatic success. In 1491, King Charles concluded a five-year peace and neutrality pact with eight cantons of the Confederation as a gesture of mutual friendship and support. Those Swiss Cantons were happy to sign the agreement because the pact assured the continued flow of French funds into their lands, and because it assured French support in case of war.

Long before the death of his father on August 19, 1493, Maximilian had sought reforms that would unify and strengthen the Empire.[104] That Habsburg leader sought more control over the German Empire by instituting the Common Penny (*Gemeiner Pfennig*) or universal tax and by strengthening the Imperial Supreme Court. The Common Penny was designed to be paid by all the members of the Empire. Maximilian wanted to use the funds he received from this tax to support a military that would protect the Empire and Habsburg lands

[103] Dürr, "Politik," 481-2.

[104] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 334.

from external enemies and to assure the loyalty of the various areas within the Empire. The Supreme Court was designed to handle all of the affairs within the Empire to guarantee justice and peace. Maximilian explained his reforms at the Diet at Worms in 1495. He promised the various lands of the Empire a voice in the government if the Common Penny was paid, he spoke of re-establishing the indefinable old boundaries of the Empire, and he fervently warned of the danger of disunity.[105]

Despite Maximilian's fervent plea for unity, the reforms were not well received by the members of the Diet, and the Swiss believed that the reforms simply did not apply to them. Most of the Swiss Cantons were not involved in imperial affairs for decades, and only representatives from Bern were present in 1495. The other Swiss states were unwilling to consider these reforms as anything more than vain rhetoric. They believed that the Common Penny was unnecessary for them because they already had a fine military system, and the Supreme Court of the Empire was in direct conflict with their developing system of laws and courts call the Justice Awakening. In short, The Swiss Confederation was progressing towards is own distinct national character and was sure to resent any attempt by the Empire to hamper or limit that development.[106] When Maximilian's representatives visited the Confederation to institute the Common Penny, they were politely yet definitely turned away in most areas, and Zurich's city council refused even to see those emissaries.[107]

The Supreme Court soon handed down unfavorable judgments over the lands controlled by the Swiss allies of Rottweil and Schaffhausen. The court said those two towns did not legally own certain territories, and those lands should be turned over to the Empire. Rottweil and Schaffhausen, supported by the Confederation, refused to vacate the disputed areas, thus choosing to ignore the judgment of the Su-

[105] Dürr, "Politik," 481-2.
[106] Dürr, "Politik," 484-5.
[107] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 336.

preme Court. Angered by Swiss defiance, Maximilian threatened to go to war if the Swiss did not relent. The Confederation would not be bullied. Rather, it began to prepare for war. To make good on his threat, Maximilian also began war preparations. Even though negotiations continued, both sides were clearly disinterested in compromising.[108]

The Empire's war preparations advanced slowly, but the Confederation was soon on a war footing. As a precautionary measure starting in 1490, Swiss cities began to store a year's supply of grain and, in 1495, the confederates restricted grain experts from flowing out over the St. Gotthard Pass. During the crisis of 1488 which nearly ended in war, Swiss representatives had met in Zurich to assure unity of action should the crisis result in an armed conflict with the Empire. At this conference, Zurich, Bern, Luzern, Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden, Zug, Glarus, Fribourg, and Solothurn pledged mutual support in defense of each other. Other areas of the Confederation, Apenzell, St. Gallen, and Wallis were not represented, but the agreement clearly included them. A decade later, as talk of war progressed, all of these areas were willing to honor that pledge. Only Bern spoke of peace, but it clearly felt much greater allegiance to the Confederation than to the Empire.[109]

As the Swiss Confederation and the German Empire moved closer to war, another dispute became heated between members of the Grey Leagues (*Graubünden*) and the Tirol. The Grey Leagues bordered the Confederation on the east, and it consisted of areas around Chur called the Rätier. The Grey Leagues was a small alliance of three tiny states similar to the Swiss Confederation. The freedom-loving people of the Rätier had formed an agreement in 1424 to ensure their independence from the Habsburgs, but by the end of the century, the threat from the ruling family of Austria made this self-rule uncertain. The Habsburgs controlled the Tirol, which bordered the Grey Leagues, and the two areas became involved in boundary disputes because their

[108] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 338.

[109] Häne, "Kriegsbereitschaft," 20-22; Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2: 339; and Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 339.

boundaries had never been clearly defined. Free peasants, and those owing allegiance to the Bishop of Tirol, lived in these disputed border areas, often in the same communities. The Grey Leagues asked that all these locations be made free, but the regency of the Tirol wanted to hear nothing of those privileges. The leaders of the Tirol believed it was preferable to go to war rather than give the disputed areas the independence that would allow them to join the Grey League.[110]

The Habsburg authority in Innsbruck began to pressure the Grey Leagues which realized that it did not have the strength to test the power of Tirol alone, so that alliance turned to the Swiss Confederation for help. The two coalitions had long enjoyed good relations. The similar culture, society, and beliefs in freedom and independence shared by the two alliances helped them form a bond of friendship to face the mounting threat from the Habsburgs. Much to the anger of the Habsburgs, the Grey Leagues joined in a close agreement with the Confederation in June 1497. Another two small pacts, the League of God's House (*Gotteshausbund*), and the Ten Jurisdictions (*Zehngerichtebund*), near the Grey Leagues, also felt endangered by Tirol and joined in a close alliance with the Confederation in 1498. Those areas proved to be valuable allies and fought with the Confederation in the Swabian War.[111]

The Swiss made some final attempts at negotiation by sending emissaries to the Federal Diet asking to be free of the Common Penny and the Supreme Court of the Empire. Their requests were rejected.[112] While the emissaries watched, the angry Bertold, archbishop and Elector of Mainz (1484-1505), swore to establish a nobleman (Habsburg) over the Swiss. He threatened to sign a document with a feather pen that would place the Swiss under Church excommunication and the interdict, "*mit der acht und dem bann*." One of the confederate emissaries answered that others had tried to conquer them but had not succeeded.

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[110] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 339-40; and Fritz Rieter, "Der Schwabenkrieg vor 450 Jahren," *Schweizer Monatshefte* 29 (June 1949): 132.

[112] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 398.

[112] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 398.

[113] Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik* 2: 334.

Those enemies were wielding halberds whom the Swiss could fear, but they were not afraid of goose feathers used as pens to sign documents.[113] The negotiations having failed, war almost became inevitable. All that was needed were some minor incidents to start hostilities.

To weaken the Swiss position, the Empire attempted to strip the Confederation of all the areas which owed them allegiance. Isprugg, an independent town, was offered spiritual salvation to desert the Swiss and join the Swabian League. The offer was for salvation, but the implication was clear that if Isprugg did not willingly desert the Confederation, it would face the Swabian League as an enemy. Isolated from the Confederation and weak, Isprugg had no choice but comply. Mulhouse (Mülhausen), caught in a similar situation, also complied with Habsburg demands. The city of Constance had long been friendly to the Swiss, but because of Habsburg pressure, it turned to the Empire and was also lost to the Swiss Confederation. That situation proved to be a serious blow to the confederates because Constance became one of the major garrison points of the imperial army during the Swabian War.[114]

In the winter of 1498-9, the situation had become one of watching and waiting for both sides as forces from both sides faced each other. The Rhine River formed the boundary between Swiss and imperial lands in many places. The hatred and sense of rivalry between the armies on both sides did not long remain dormant. The Swiss first made war-like moves when they seized mountain passes in the Alps and Jura mountains, but because they met no resistance, war did not start with those actions.[115] Late in January 1499, soldiers from the Tirol crossed the Rhine River into the Grey Leagues with no known objective. They were quickly confronted and driven back across the river. With this act, the Grey Leagues were at war with the Tirol.[116]

The entire Swiss Confederation was not automatically at war at that point, although the members would soon feel obligated to come

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[114] Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik* 2: 334; and Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 339.

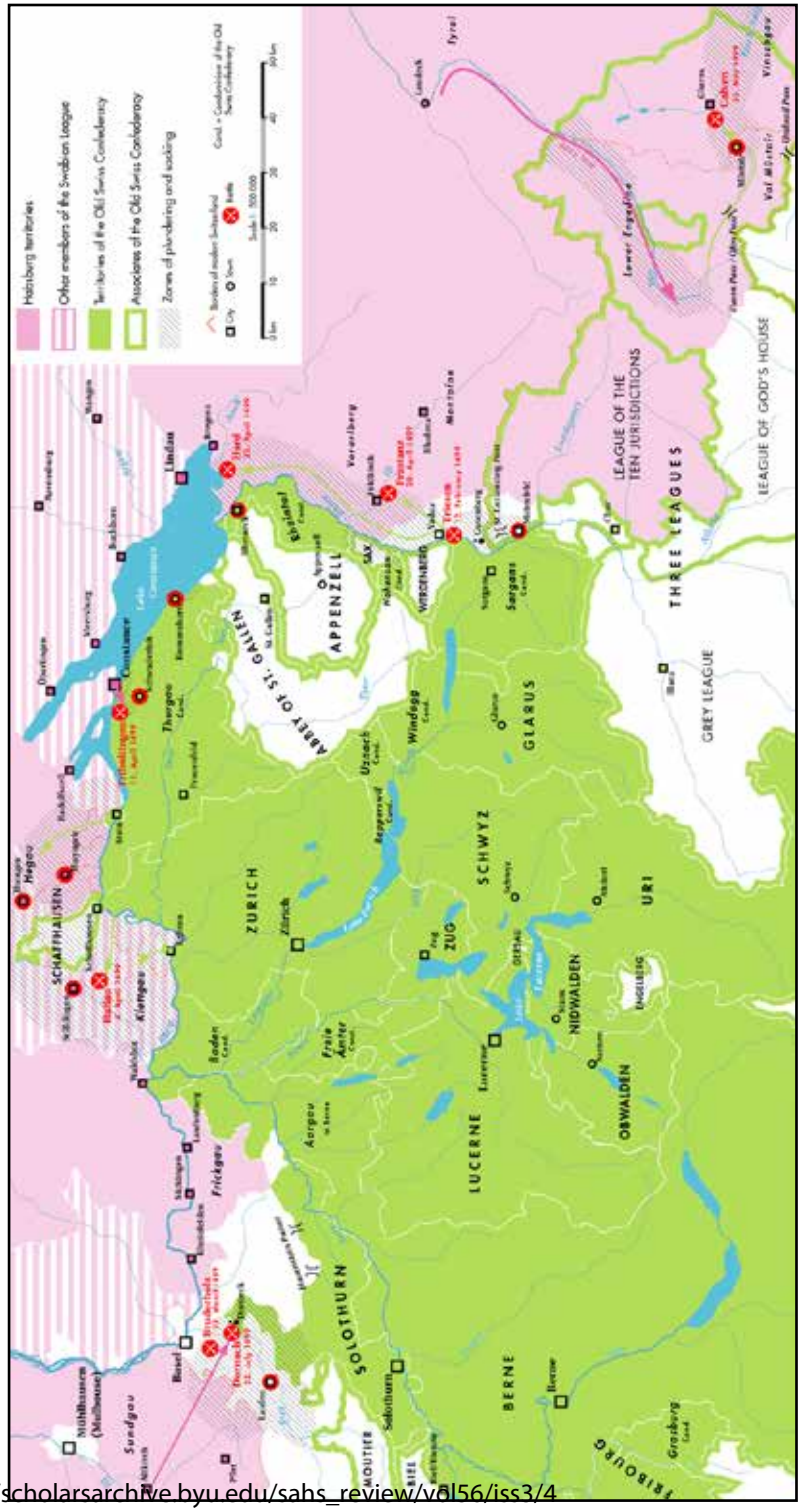
[115] Hans Ungelter an Esslingen, Feb. 1, 1499, in K. Klüpfel, ed. *Urkunden zur Geschichte des Schwäbischen Bundes (1488-1533)* (Stuttgart: literarischer Verein, 1846), 281.

[116] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 341.

to the aid of its newly-acquired ally. However, a border incident soon brought the entire Confederation into the conflict. The troops of the Swabian League and the Swiss Confederation faced each other in an uneasy peace along the Rhine River. Feeling the traditional hatred between the two peoples and bored by occupying static positions in the cold, winter months, the two armies amused themselves by shouting insults back and forth. At the castle of Gutenberg near Balzers in modern Liechtenstein, the Swabian infantry mocked the Swiss by composing unchristian songs that were insulting to the pious confederates. The final antagonism came when the Swabian troops displayed a cow and called to the Swiss to come over to act as the cow's groom. Then to complete the insult, the Swabians mooed like cows and calves. The Swiss were infuriated at being accused of making love to animals. In retaliation, the Swiss leader from Uri, Heini (Heinrich) Wolleb, took a group of men across the Rhine River on February 6, 1499, and burned a house and a stall. At this point, the war began in earnest.[117]

At the war's outset, the forces on either side quickly lined up. The Lower Union of cities on the Rhine fought for the Empire. Of their number, only Basel, which had greater economic ties with the Swiss Confederation, was able to remain neutral.[118] The only other cities that managed to be neutral were Rottweil and Constance.[119] The Empire called for support from all its lands, but it was the Tirol and the Swabian League that contributed most of the support. The Swiss Confederation called upon its members and on its allies including the Grey Leagues and France.[120] Even though the five-year peace and neutrality pact between France and the Confederation had expired in 1496, Louis XII, the new king of France, had pledged French aid in the event of war. This assistance was supposed to be in the form of money and artillery pieces. The funds reached the Confederation, but the cannons were delayed in Burgundy, and they did not arrive until the war was

[117] Frey, *Kriegstaten*, 342.
[118] Luginbühl, "Bruderholz," 205.
[119] Dürr, "Politik," 503.
[120] Rieter, "Schwabenkrieg," 134.



Map of the Swabian War of 1499

over. Except for French money, the Swiss Confederation and the Grey Leagues had to fight the war with minimal outside help.

THE SWABIAN WAR OF 1499

Strategy

The Swabian war, often called the Swiss War (*Schweizerkrieg*) in Germany, was poorly planned by either side. Overall strategy consisted largely of border raids which entailed the destruction of villages and castles and the taking of cattle and booty. The eminent historian of Swiss military history, Hans Rudolf Kurz, has described the conflict as war for war's sake that also included a number of bitter battles in which neither belligerent employed its entire army.[121]

The Empire had to wait many weeks before enough troops gathered to take definitive action. The initial imperial strategic plan was to assemble troops at various locations around castles, fortified towns, and to construct defenses of various natures. From these bases, the army was to resist confederate attacks and then to raid into Swiss territories at the best opportunities. The command of those operations was divided between Heinrich von Fürstenberg and his two brothers, Wolfgang and Ulrich.[122] In April 1499, Maximilian himself came to South Germany to give the war more definitive direction. He decided to fight against the Grey Leagues first. After two disastrous defeats at the battle of Frastanz and Calven in April and May, and following a difficult and indecisive mountain campaign in June, Maximilain turned his attention directly to the Swiss Confederation. When the Swiss defeated Heinrich von Fürstenberg at the battle of Dornach in July, the fighting quickly tapered off, and the belligerents signed a peace treaty at Basel

[121] Kurz, *Schweizerschlachten*, 141.

[122] "Kriegsplan des Schwäbischen Bundes gegen die Eidgenossenschaft," January 20, 1499, in *Aktenstücke zur Geschichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 3-4.

on September 22, 1499.[123]

Emperor Maximilian I
by Albrecht Dürer

Major problems beset Maximilian in waging the war. He had insufficient funds to pay his troops, and contingents of his army from various parts of the Empire were continually squabbling over petty matters, making a unified war effort challenging. The Emperor tried to bring some unity and direction to his army and war effort by personally overseeing the making of war preparations. He arose before everyone else in the morning and worked well into the night. He spoke only about the war and was continually figuring out how to get more funds while writing many letters in the process, but his finances were always inadequate.[124]

The Swiss overall strategy did not differ greatly from that of the Empire. The confederates had garrisons at various castles and fortified towns and churches near their borders to meet the enemy when possible and to use as staging areas to raid into enemy territory. Swiss funds were often lacking to pay their troops, but numerous successful excursions often provided enough booty to pay many soldiers. Major offensives into enemy territory were impractical because two-thirds of the Swiss border faced the Empire, and it took a great many men just to watch those borders.[125]

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[123] Kurz, *Schweizerschlachten*, 144-5.

[124] "Augustin Somenza an den Herzog von Mailand," April 29, 1499, in *Aktenstücke zur Geschichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 166-7.

[125] Kurz, *Schweizerschlachten*, 141-2.

The Swiss Confederation did not enjoy political solidarity, and it did not go to war with the backing of every canton. Basel was not yet a member of the Confederation, and it had long been friendly with the alliance, but it did not provide any help beyond feeding groups of Swiss soldiers on several occasions.[126] The largest detriment to a unified war effort was Bern's indifference. Bern had not wanted war with the Empire, and it gave reluctant support to the war effort. The cantons of Bern and Zurich were the largest in population at that time, but Bern was the most powerful state militarily in the Confederation, and its halfhearted war effort meant that the Swiss were fighting at a disadvantage. When Bern's troops march out of the city early in February 1499, the people lining the streets made fun of the fact that so few men marched out behind the city's banners.[127]

Superior strategy was not the main factor that made the Swiss effort more successful than that of the Empire. The confederates owed their success to the militia and to war-preparedness, to their better information about troop movements, and to their great courage and determination. Before the war had begun, confederate scouts were already reconnoitering the Empire's troop movements and dispositions. These men moved rapidly on horseback over the countryside gathering and delivering timely information.[128] Swiss determination also showed itself in numerous fights and in many battles and skirmishes. Even their German adversaries were impressed with the confederate fighting ability.

One example of Swiss determination was demonstrated shortly after the Battle of Schwaderloh which took place on April 11, 1499. A young knight, Gözens von Berlichingen, accompanied an imperial raid. The German party made a night attack on the village of Taingen (modern Thayngen) east of Schaffhausen. The confederates were caught coming out of their church, apparently uninformed that the Germans were present. The Swiss resisted as best they could, but their

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[126] Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 107-8.

[127] "Wilhelm Felga an Freiburg," February 12, 1499, *Aktenstücke zur Geschichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 42-44.

[128] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 331.

situation was precarious. The Germans soon called upon them to surrender, but the Swiss called back stating that "They would rather die as pious confederates" than be captured. The German infantry and cavalry opened fire on the Swiss who returned fire. One Swiss marksman shot and wounded one German soldier, but the bullet went through him, killing the man behind him.

Outnumbered the Swiss ran to the church tower, which was subsequently set on fire when the Germans exploded powder behind it. The only known Swiss survivor was a small boy who toddled away from the arms of a man who had jumped from the burning tower, killing himself but saving the boy. The Germans waited in vain for the other confederates to come out of the tower and surrender, but none came. Their only possible fate was to be burned alive. By all appearances, the Swiss perished as free men rather than flee the burning tower.[129] Such courage and determination, shown in many incidents during the war, gave the Swiss an advantage in many skirmishes and battles.

Devastation and the Tragedy of War

The war was confined mostly to the border areas, and raids and brief expeditions were constant factors in the conflict. Many valleys and regions along the Rhine River were raided several times, devastating these areas. Burned villages and starving people, driven from their homes as refugees or hostages, were common in both Swiss and German areas. At times, certain areas suffered fighting night and day.[130] The nature of the war was so violent that it soon followed its own logic, and successful attacks on the enemy often invited retaliation to avenge the pain and devastation already afflicted on each other.[131]

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[129] Gözens von Berlichingen, *Lebens Beschreibung* (Nürnberg: Adam Jonathan Fellsecker, 1731), 40-2.

[130] "Hauptleute, Venner etc. im Feld [Werdenberg] an Zürich," March 28, 1499, *Aktenstücke zur Geschichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 109-10.

[131] "Hans Ungelter an Esslingen," February 10, 1499, in *Urkunden zur Geschichte des Schwäbischen Bundes*, 284.

Fighting often occurred at so many places simultaneously that the action became difficult to follow. The actual fighting lasted only six months and one historian, Christopher Hare, has estimated that two hundred villages were burned and twenty thousand people were killed in the conflict.[132]

The war caused many problems with the Black Death, wolves, and starvation. The Plague was a menace whenever bodies were left to the vermin, and it took its toll on many unfortunate victims.[133] Another problem was wolves. In many areas, the war's dead went unburied. This situation was due to the fact that no one wanted to bury enemy dead. The area around Constance was notably bad because the opposing armies remained near each other, and fighting was frequent. The bodies were then left to be devoured by birds, rats, and wolves. The wolves so gorged themselves on human flesh that they developed a taste for it and reportedly began to wander far and wide attacking adults and small children. To control the situation in the Empire, orders were given to kill all wolves on sight.[134]

Malnutrition and starvation took an unknown number of lives. Wilibald Pirckheimer, the famous humanist from Nuremberg, was a participant in the war, and he campaigned with imperial forces against the Grey Leagues in June and wrote one of the most disturbing descriptions of the devastation of the war:

Willibald Pirckheimer, 1503
by Albrecht Dürer

[132] Hare, *Maximilian*, 102.

[133] "Landeshauptmann an der Etsch und Räte zu Meran an Statthalter und Regenten in Innsbruck," *Der Anteil Graubündens*, 183-4.

[134] Martin Crussi, *Schwäbischer Chronik*, 2 vols. trans. Johann Jacob (Frankfurt: Metzler und Erhart, 1733) 2: 152.

> "In a large mountain valley whose villages were burnt and deserted, we met two old women driving about forty little boys and girls like a flock of sheep. All were starved to the most extreme emaciation and, except that they moved, not unlike corpses, so that it was horrible to see. I asked the old women where they were leading their miserable herd. Hardly had they replied when we came to a meadow. They turned in and falling on their knees began to eat grass like cattle, except that they picked it first with their hands instead of biting it from the roots. They had already learned the varieties of the herbage, and knew what was bitter or insipid, what sweeter or more pleasant to the taste. I was horrified at so dreadful a sight, and stood for a long time like one who cannot trust his senses.
>
> "Then the woman asked: 'Do you see why this wretched crowd is led here? Well would it have been if none of them had been born . . . their fathers have fallen by the sword, their mothers have died of starvation, their property has been carried off as booty, their houses burnt; we two wretches, tottering with age, are left to lead this miserable herd like beasts to pasture, and so far as we can, keep them alive on grass. We hope that a short time will relieve them and us from our miseries. They were twice as many, but in a brief time they were reduced to this number, since daily some die of want and hunger, far happier in a quick death than in longer life.' When I had seen and heard these things I could not restrain my tears, pitying pitiable human lot, and detesting, as every true man ought, the fury of war."[135]

In great need of manpower, the Swiss at times resorted to making troops out of women and boys. Late in May 1499, the Germans entered an area near Stockach, Germany, and found a Swiss pike square facing them. Expecting the normally aggressive confederates to attack, the Germans held their ground. When the Swiss did not move, the imperial forces maneuvered to the higher ground near their adversaries

[135] Wilibald Pirckheimer as cited and translated by Paul van Dyke, *Renascence Portraits* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 318-9. Van Dyke quotes Pirckheimer, *Schweizerkrieg*, 110.

and engaged their enemies. The confederates were clearly outclassed. They lost the fight, and many were captured. Among these prisoners, who were starving, were many women and youths dressed as men.[136]

Young women were often allowed to pass freely between the armies. These "girls" (*Mädchen*) kept a channel of communication open between the antagonists and carried letters negotiating the terms of release for prisoners. In July of 1499, a letter for Maximilian was brought to Constance by an "immature" Swiss girl. Wilibald Pirckheimer, the German humanist, was present to witness the scene when the Emperor's men tried to intimidate the child into giving information on the Swiss army facing the city as she awaited a reply.

One man asked the girl what the Swiss were doing. She answered, "Don't you see they are awaiting your attack?" Then she was asked how many men they had. To which she replied, "Just enough to repel your advance." She also said that the men in Constance could have counted the Swiss in a recent battle before the city gates if flight had not blinded their eyes. She was then asked whether the Swiss had enough to eat, to which she simply responded, "How are they able to live if they do not eat or drink?" One of the men then tried to frighten the girl by threatening to decapitate her. When the girl saw this, she said, "Truly you are a hero that you threaten a young girl with death. When you have such a great desire to draw a sword, why don't you throw yourself on the enemy positions? There you will meet a man who will answer your courage. But it is easier to confront an unarmed and innocent girl than put yourself before an armed enemy who knows how to conduct himself not with words but with deeds." Pirckheimer said he was delighted with the girl's answers as well as her courage and frankness.[137]

A great deal of the war's ferocity came from the great bitterness between the combatants. On the borders of the Grey Leagues, both

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[136] "Ulrich Strauss zu Ueberlingen an Nördlingen," May 30, 1499, *Urkunden zur Geschichte des Schwäbischen Bundes*, 341.

[137] Pirckheimer, *Schweizerkrieg*, 294.

the Swiss and Tirolese peasants clashed every day to burn and kill. Despair set in among the Tirolese peasantry because of the great destruction, and they feared that the judgment of God was upon them.[138] Even through the ravages of a brutal war, many Swiss maintained a belief that God was with them. A raiding party of Germans burned a church in a Swiss town. The church was burned entirely to the ground, but the Holy Eucharist remained completely untouched and unharmed. Many confederates took this as a good omen that helped them take courage in difficult times.[139]

The entire war was needless and futile. The conflict could have been avoided, and it solved little. But the military operations were tragic for the peasants both in the Empire and the Confederation who paid a very high price for the war in privations and suffering.

The Battles

No analysis of the Swiss military would be complete without a discussion of how the confederates used their army in war. The best way to do this would be to describe the Swiss military in battle. In the Swabian War, there were a number of large engagements, but four battles deserve close attention: Schwaderloh, Frastanz, Calven, and Dornach.

Schwaderloh (Triboltingen), April 11, 1499

By early April 1499, Maximilian had assembled an impressive army around Constance, these forces coming primarily from Swabia, Austria, and Bavaria. Many of these men had assembled in retaliation for recent Swiss, most notably a campaign in the Hegau Valley east of Schaffhausen. In the last days of March, the confederates ravaged the

[138] "Hans Ungelter an Esslingen," February 22, 1499, in *Urkunden zur Geschichte des Schwäbischen Bundes*, 293-4.

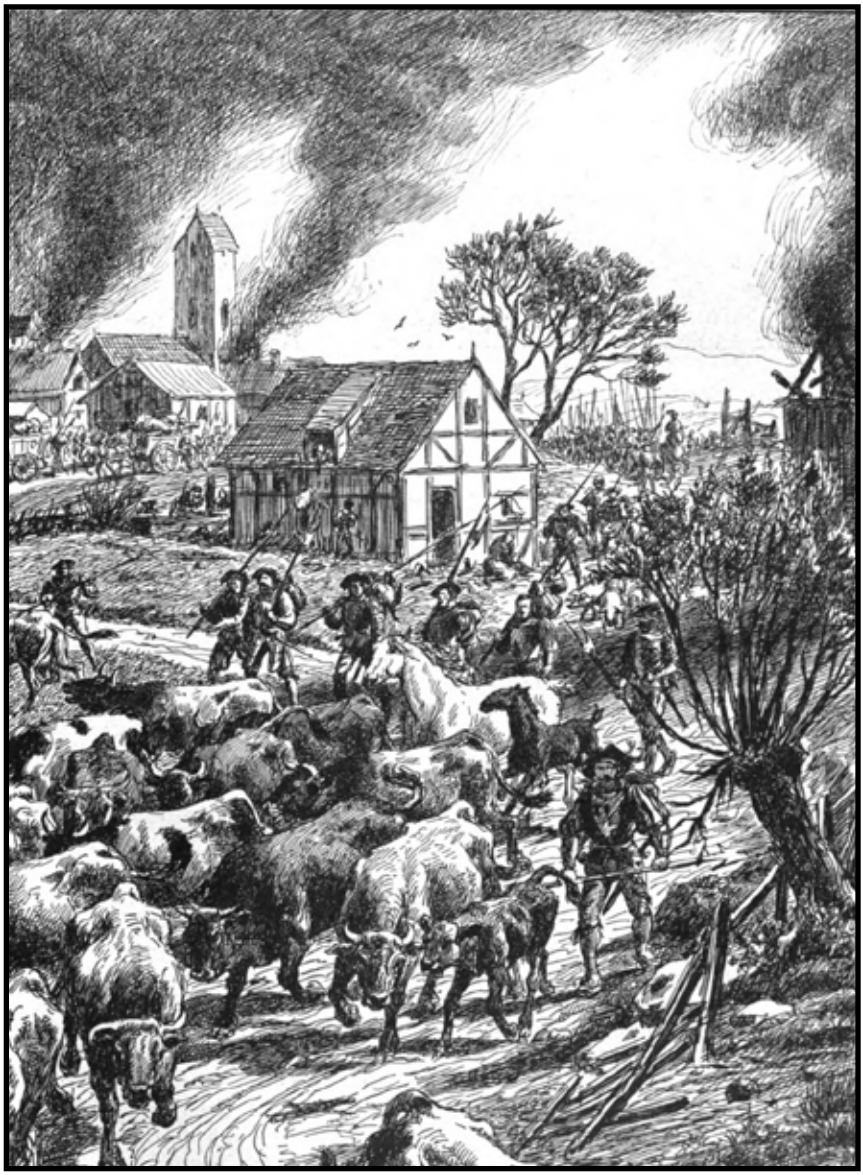
[139] Etterlin, *Kronica*, 236.

The Battle of Schwaderloh
by Johann Stumpf

Hegau burning the castles of Allisberg, Ranndeck, Roseneck, Frydingen, Stutzlingen, Hamburg, Stouffenn, and Rietheim and destroying their nearby villages.[140]

Facing the German forces at Constance was a series of confederate garrisons protecting the Thurgau which were manned mostly by men from the region, but they also included detachments from other Swiss areas. The village of Ermatingen was garrisoned by four hundred men from Bern and Fribourg. These forces engaged in skirmishes almost daily with detachments from Constance, and the village of Ow was subject to frequent bombardment from the cannon positioned in the city. To return fire, Luzern sent two large cannons early in April. This threat of artillery in Ermatingen prompted Wolfgang von Fürstenberg to lead a major attack on the village to capture the two weapons.[141]

[140] Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 57 and 63.
[141] Anshelm, *Berner-Chroni*k 2: 164; and Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 64.



The Swiss Plundering the Hegau Valley in 1499
by Evert van Muyden

Early in the morning of April 11, 1499, Fürstenberg moved his men by boat on the Rhine River and overland to strike the Swiss garrison at dawn when these men were rousing from slumber. The

leader of the Bernese, Hans Kuttler, and the commander of the men from Fribourg, Jacky Henni, were close friends, and they were talking early in the morning before the rest of the men had risen. An alarm sounded, and the two leaders went to see what was happening only to find the imperial forces attacking the village from the rear. The Swiss tried to organize some resistance, but the enemy advance was too quick and heavy for the confederates to get into formation. Some were cut down trying to dress or grab their weapons, and the Master of Artillery (*Büchsenmeister*), Rüdolf Hass from Luzern, was stabbed to death. Some of the men from Ermatingen rushed to help the garrison, but the Swabians began shouting, "Flee, all is lost, alas dear confederates!" At that moment, the Swiss ran away leaving seventy-three dead, most of whom were killed while still in bed.[142]

The imperial forces soon took Ermatingen, Triboltingen, and Mannenbach. Rushed with success, a Swabian leader, Burckhart von Randeck, a noted Swiss-hater, called for the destruction of the Swiss villages and swore to destroy many enemy areas that day. The Swabians fell out for plunder, and the men from the Hegau began to take their revenge on the confederates. In Ermatingen some people fled to a church for refuge, but the building was burned and thirty-seven people were killed in it. Many others, including women and children, were killed and the possessions of even small children and sick people were taken. Women, children, and the elderly were abused in various ways, and women and young girls were raped. The three villages were held for three hours before their destruction was complete. On leaving, the imperial forces filled the houses with straw and set them on fire. Loaded with plunder, the Swabians began to trek back to Constance.[143]

The Swiss garrison fled until they felt safe and then reorganized themselves into good order. For the two leaders, the defeat was

[142] "Luzern an Freiburg," April 13, 1499, in *Aktenstücke zur Geschichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 135-5; Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik* 2: 163-4; and Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*. 64.

[143] Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 66-7.

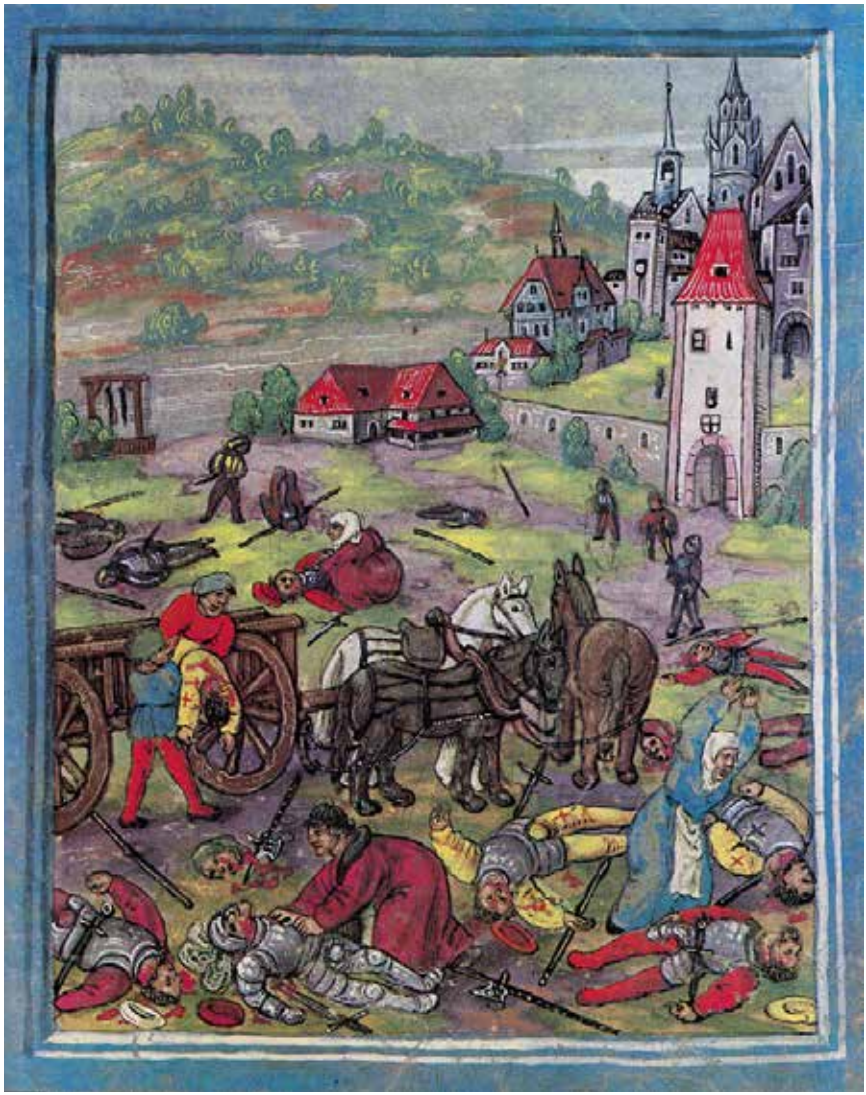
hard to bear. In their shame and misery, they cried they had lost their manliness. Eager to avenge themselves, they called for the militia to be assembled. Bells rang and fires were lit as signals for the men to assemble at the church in Schwaderloh. The militia soon arrived, and the situation was explained to them in emotional speeches in which the men were warned that they were in danger of losing face for all time. With the contingents from Bern and Fribourg, the total forces numbered about fifteen hundred. They were all placed into good order under the command of Kuttler and Henni and then marched through a forest on the way to Ermatingen. The Swiss remained in formation despite the thick trees when they received word that their enemies were withdrawing with their booty. Their leaders decided to attack immediately. The Swiss knelt in prayer, arose, and advanced from the forest to meet the imperial forces near Triboltingen.[144]

The Swabians left two cannons to protect their rear when they retreated, but these artillery pieces were poorly aimed. When the Swiss came out of the forest, the weapons shot too high. The cannons were soon taken, but their smoke momentarily obscured the field of battle. Neither force could see the other as the Swiss continued their advance past the cannons to fall upon the Swabians. The imperial infantry was in two groups and were only interested in escape. The Swiss shouted their battle cry, a Swabian flag carrier broke in flight, and the rest of the infantry followed offering no resistance. Only the knights turned to meet the attacking Swiss, but the cavalry's stand was unsuccessful, and the horsemen soon joined the flight.[145]

The Bernese and men from Fribourg then began to take their revenge for the morning's skirmish. One source reported that at this juncture the action became too confusing to record accurately. The Swabians dropped their plunder, weapons, and flags and fled overland and to their boats. The vessels soon became so full that they sank,

[144] Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik* 2: 165-6; and Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 68.

[145] "Georg von Emershofen an Nördlingen," April 14, 1499, in *Urkunden zur Geschichte des Schwäbischen Bundes*, 315-17.



Women and priests retrieve the dead bodies of Swabian soldiers just outside the city gates of Constance after the Battle of Schwaderloh
by Diebold Schilling (Luzern)

drowning many men. Others also died in the Rhine trying to swim over the river, and many fled all that day and the next night. The Swiss pursued, killing any enemy they could overtake, and hunting down

and dispatching those they found hiding in the forests.[146]

The confederates reported thirteen hundred Swabian dead on the field and eighty more bodies fished out of the Rhine River. The Swiss admitted to a loss of twenty men in the battle, including one old man. Soon after the engagement, priests and women, many of them wives of the missing, came to look among the dead for their loved ones. The captured enemy leaders were treated well, and those not held for ransom were soon sent to Constance after a prisoner exchange had been arranged. Some of the imperial dead were buried in the field where they had fallen, but most of them were left to rot where they lay and to be devoured by birds and wild animals.[147]

The remarkable feature of this battle was the fact that the members of the militia had no idea they would participate in a major engagement when they awoke that morning. They started the day as they would any other, but within hours they had formed themselves into an army complete with weapons, armor, leaders, and battle formations capable of immediate and effective campaigning. It was no wonder that it was very challenging to attack Swiss territories at this time because an effective military organization was always on hand on a moment's notice.

The Battle of Franstanz, April 20, 1499

The next major engagement, the battle of Frastanz, was the result of the Swiss and the forces from the Grey Leagues trying to remove an important base of operations from the men of Tirol. The Austrians had constructed fortifications across a mountain pass near Frastanz just north of modern Liechtenstein. From behind these walls of wood and stone, the Habsburg forces launched raiding expeditions

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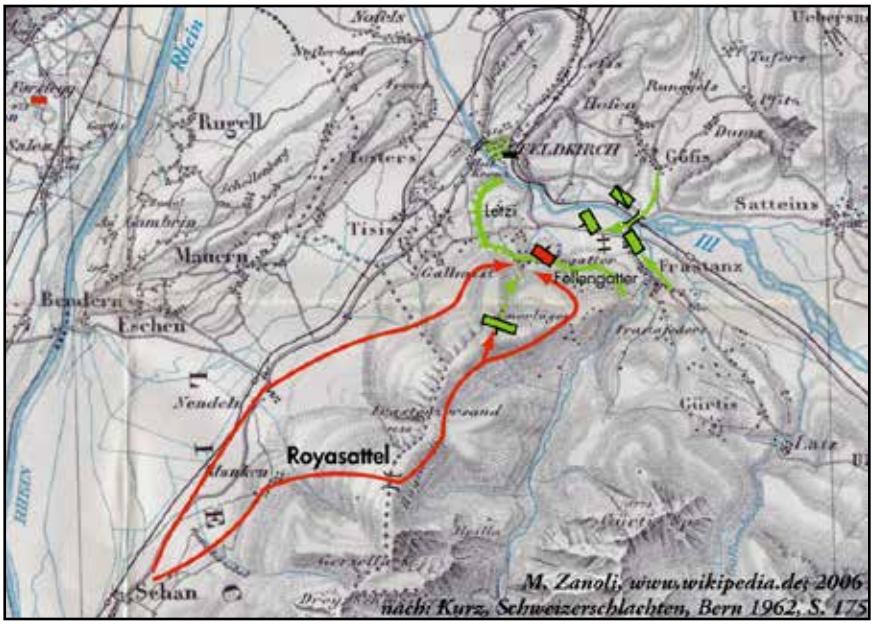
[146] "Freiburger Chronik des Schwabenkrieges" in *Aktensücke zur Geshichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 587.

[147] "Graf Wolfgang von Fürstenberg an Herzog Ulrich zu Wirtemberg," April 15, 1499, in *Aktensücke zur Geshichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 140; Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik* 2: 168-9; Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 69, 73-4; and Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2: 402.



The Battle of Frastanz. The red line shows the route of the Swiss and the green line shows the Habsburg troops.

into areas controlled by the Swiss and their close allies, the men of the Grey Leagues. When the allied army was unable to draw the Tirolese from their defenses for a decisive engagement, their leaders decided that their positions would have to be stormed.[148]

The army facing the Habsburg forces in the area was largely composed of men from the Grey Leagues, but there were also numerous small contingents from other Swiss states. In February 1499, Heini (Heinrich) Wolleb and fifty men from Uri arrived to help. Wolleb was a man of considerable military skill and determination. He knew how to exact discipline from his troops, and he expected a great deal from them. That leader from Uri led the first Swiss raid of the war in retaliation for Swabian insults on February 6, 1499. He also executed an all-night march on Ragatz (modern Bad Ragaz), and he stood a force

[148] Kurz, *Schweizerschlachten*, 152-3. See also, "Die Schlacht bei Franstanz 1499," *Rheticus: Vierteljahresschrift der Rheticus-Gesellschaft* Jahrgang 21 (1999) Heft 2: [93]-198.

of thirty Swiss in order all night in bitter cold which almost froze some of the men death.[149]

Heini Wolleb by Johann Stumpf

Ulrich von Hohensax led the entire Swiss and Grey Leagues forces in the area, but Wolleb planned the battle. He considered a simple frontal attack on the enemy positions to be too dangerous. The leader from Uri believed that coordinated attacks by two forces, one on the flank of the enemy and one frontally against the fortifications, had the best chance of success. To accomplish this, the force making the flank attack would have to climb the steep and high Royaberg Mountain and then descend on the Tirolese left flank. Wolleb was given the command of this flaking column of the two-thousand men, while Hohensax led the larger group to march directly on the Habsburg position from lower ground.[150]

Early on the morning of April 20, 1499, Wolleb assembled his column and began to scale the Royaberg Mountain some thirty-five hundred feet above where they started their climb. The men in the column stayed so close together in the ascent that there was a danger of their falling on each other's weapons. After a great effort, they approached the crest of the small mountain. They assembled themselves

[149] "[Angriff der Eidgenossen bei Triesen]" in "Freiburger Chronik des Schwabenkrieges" in *Aktensücke zur Geshichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 566-7; and "Hauptmann, Fähnrich und Räte von Uri, jetzt im Feld, an die Hauptleute der II Bünde in Churwalchen," February 15, 1499, in *Der Anteil Graubündens*, 105-6.

[150] Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik* 2: 169-70.

in good order and knelt in payer before continuing their advance because they knew they were shortly going into battle.[151]

The Tirolese had recognized the possibility that the Swiss and their allies might attempt a flanking march over the mountain and had, therefore, placed two contingents of troops on the crest of the Royaberg. One of these forces consisted of three hundred men wielding the harquebus and another group of fifteen hundred men was nearby. The Swiss column engaged the smaller unit first. When Wolleb saw that the Tirolese men with their hand cannons were about to unleash a volley, he ordered his men to duck, and to fall onto their hands and knees as the shots went harmlessly overhead. The column then got up and chase these adversaries off the mountain. Within a short distance, those troops then engaged the other force of fifteen hundred men. After a fierce contest lasting about fifteen minutes, the Tirolese broke ranks and fled in haste down the mountain to their defenses, leaving many dead in the process.[152]

Initially, the Tirolese at the defenses had no clear idea of what was happening on the slopes above them. They could hear the din of battle, but the resolution of the fighting was unclear until they saw their forces running down the mountain fleeing from their adversaries. The imperial forces were divided into two groups of infantry and one of cavalry, and they shifted their strength to receive the pending attack on their flank. Meanwhile, Wolleb placed his men in proper order before marching down the mountain. After offering another prayer, the troops began their descent.[153]

While Wolleb's force began marching on the Tirolese flank, Ulrich von Hohensax was moving his main force to attack the enemy fortifications frontally. The troops led by Wolleb and Hohensax either met and combined their power to attack the imperial positions,

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[151] Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik* 2: 169-70.

[152] Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik* 2: 170. "Hauptmann Schürpf etc. an Luzern," April 20, 1499, in *Aktensücke zur Geshichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 147-9.

[153] "Freiburger Chronik des Schwabenkrieges" in *Aktensücke zur Geshichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 590-2.

or they assaulted the defenses separately. In either case, Wolleb was instrumental in the final attack. Wolleb's column advanced towards the hastily-prepared flank positions of the Tirolese. Once again, they fired their harquebuses in unison. The opposing forces were so close to each other that the Swiss and men from the Grey Leagues could see and hear the Tirolese receiving orders to fire. Wolleb then ordered his men again to fall on the ground to avoid the enemy shots, while the volley boomed harmlessly overhead. The smoke from the shots obscured the field of battle, and the Austrians had every reason to believe that their adversaries had suffered heavy casualties from the first fusillade. The Tirolese musketeers reloaded their weapons and prepared to fire again. Wolleb then called to his anxious men to remain on the ground, ordering them to wait until their enemies fired a second time before attacking.

After the Tirolese fired another volley, Wolleb called to his troops again, this time telling them to follow him and attack with all their might. The men wielding harquebuses in the column stood up and shot their weapons, and the entire force advanced. Wolleb, conspicuous at the head of the advancing forces, was felled by a musket ball before he could reach the enemy positions. Shot in the throat, he died instantly.[154] According to the contemporary humanist, Willibald Pirckheimer, Wolleb's death was especially heroic, and he died in an identical manner as Arnold von Winkelried's supposed demise at the battle of Sempach in 1386. The Uri leader grasped the pikes of the enemy and fell upon them making a breech in the enemy lines, which allowed his men to rush through the opening giving them a big advantage as the fighting progressed.[155]

The Swiss and their allies pressed its attack without Wolleb, and the Austrian front was broken in the afternoon, placing the entire Tirolese army into flight, and the confederates began killing their ene-

[154] Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik* 2: 171; Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2: 404; and "Freiburger Chronik des Schwabenkrieges" in *Aktensücke zur Geshichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 591.

[155] *Wilibald Pirckheimer's Schweizerkrieg*, Karl Rück ed. (München: Akademie, 1895), 86.

mies as they fled. Unfortunately for the Austrians, they had the Ill River at their back, and it flowed along their only line of retreat. There were no bridges on this section of the Ill, and the fleeing troops were forced to swim the river or be slaughtered on its banks. Many swam across the river to safety, but many others, encumbered by armor and heavy clothing, drowned in the attempt. So many died in the river that their bodies reportedly clogged the Ill beneath the bridge at Feldkirch.[156]

After the battle, the Swiss and men from the Grey Leagues captured many enemy wounded and treated their injuries. The victors remained on the field of battle for five days, destroying the fortifications and burying the large numbers of enemy dead. The Austrian army had consisted of 10,000 to 14,000 men, and about three hundred were dead on the battlefield. An unknown number had drowned. The Swiss captured four fags along with twelve artillery pieces and five hundred harquebuses. Reportedly, the Swiss and their allies suffered only 8 or 10 casualties. The victors took two prominent men from Feldkirch and held them for ransom to get some reimbursement for the costly raids from the fortifications near Frastanz into the Rhine Valley.[157]

More than any other person, the credit for the victory at Frastanz must have been Heini Wolleb. He planned and executed the battle to perfection. He faced a series of difficult problems which he was able to solve, thanks to a good plan and personal leadership, which included a brilliant tactical innovation. Twice, he avoided potentially heavy casualties by ordering his men to fall to the ground, a maneuver which took great discipline to execute and still to retain the force's tactical formation. Wolleb was without doubt a leader of considerable ability, and the greatest tragedy for the Swiss at Frastanz was the death of the leader from Uri. The confederate leaders, faced with similar problems at the Battle of Calven a month later, accepted Wolleb's strategic battle

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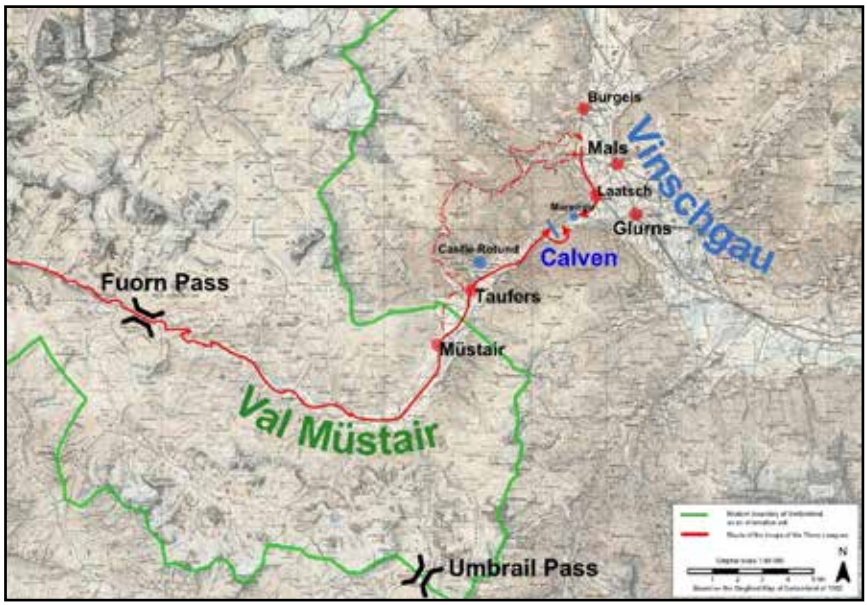
[156] Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik* 2: 171-2; and Lenz, Schwabenkrieg, 114.

[157] Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2: 406-7; "Heinrich [Ammann] Hauptmann der Bündner an Cur" April 20, 1499 in *Aktensücke zur Geshichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 149; "Zürich an Hauptleute, etc. der Eidgenossen im Feld," April 21, 1499, in *Aktensücke zur Geshichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 152; and Etterlin, Kronica, 241.

plan of marching over a mountain to attack their enemy's flank but not his tactical execution, and this oversight cost them dearly. If someone of Wolleb's leadership ability and tactical genius had been available to give acceptance to the ideal of falling down before enemy fire, the great casualties at Calven and at numerous engagements in the following century might have been avoided.



The Battle of Calven: Movements of the Swiss in Red

The Battle of Calven, May 22, 1499

The victory at the Battle of Frastanz proved to be inconclusive as far as raids in the nearby areas were concerned, since the Austrians still held other fortified mountain locations from which they could launch more raids. The frequency of these incursions increased. The Austrians had built another base of operations made of earth, wood, and stone that stretched across a narrow meadow at the mountain pass of Calven. The imperial forces raided over large distances, while the residents of the Grey Leagues in the area fought ineffectively against them. Those people soon called upon their Swiss allies to take

some definitive action, and confederate forces soon assembled in the area.[158]

The Swiss and their allies from the Grey Leagues prepared carefully for the coming action by practicing tactics together. When word came that the imperial forces were soon to receive reinforcements, the confederates decided to attack the Austrians before the new troops could arrive. The Swiss forces were comprised of contingents from the central and eastern cantons, yet the largest contingent in the army were the men from the Grey Leagues. The total force numbered about eight thousand men.[159]

The imperial army was divided into three main groups, two of infantry and one of cavalry. The largest group of foot soldiers stood at the fortifications ready to defend its position against any enemy attack, while the smaller group of infantry stood farther back to be used as a reserve. The cavalry was placed still more distant in the rear behind the village of Laatsch to be used when needed. The entire army numbered twelve thousand men who were well suppled and armed with numerous artillery pieces, and those Austrians would prove to be very formidable opponents.[160]

The Swiss leaders planned a coordinated effort consisting of a flanking march and a heavy attack on the enemy fortifications similar to the battle plan at Frastanz. The flanking column was composed of between 2,000 and 3,000 men under the combined leadership of Wilhelm von Ringk and Niclaus von Lumbrins. Their route would take hours to complete, so they left in the night to be in position to fight the next morning. Such a nighttime advance was more likely to go unnoticed because the garrison at the enemy fortress at Rotund could observe their progress only in the daylight. Shortly after midnight on May 22, 1499, the flanking column began its thirty-six hundred feet ascent

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[158] C. and F. Jecklin, *Der Anteil Graubündens am Schwabenkrieg* (Davos: E. Ricter'sche Buchdruckerei, 1899), 61-3.

[159] Kurz, *Schweizerschlachten*, 160; and "Chronik von Johann Stumpf," in *Der Anteil Graubündens*, 34 in the appendix.

[160] Kurz, *Schweizerschlachten*, 160-1.

of the mountain. The march was difficult in the darkness and covered roughly ten miles through rugged and thickly forested terrain.[161]

After the flaking column had completed its march, men placed a white flag on a hill, and they also set a building on fire to signal the main force to attack the enemy fortifications. The flanking column met an Austrian column who attempted to keep it from crossing the Marengbrücke (Mareng Bridge). The imperial forces held their ground in the face of repeated attacks by the Swiss and men of the Grey Leagues. Both Ringk and Lumbrins were killed while leading their men, but the contest continued without them, and casualties mounted. The fight continued for hours with the Swiss unable to dislodge or defeat their adversaries, while suffering two hundred dead and wounded. The confederates and their allies were slowly being worn down, and their condition became dangerous. This fight lasted five hours and disaster was avoided only because the Austrian cavalry did not participate in the contest. During the entire battle, the cavalry was the single force that could have saved the battle for the Tirolese, but it stood at a distance for some unknown reason.[162]

The main force of the Swiss and their allies saw the smoke from the signal fires but hesitated to attack. Under the influence of the leader from Schwyz, Dietrich Freuler, they decide to delay their advance, so the flanking column could draw more Austrian troops from the fortifications, but they did not know about the precarious situation of the other forces until a runner arrived telling them it was in danger. Under the command of Benedikt Fontana and Hartwig Capauls, the main Swiss and allied force was divided into three pike squares. These formations had to march for an hour and a half to reach the enemy defenses.[163]

From the outset of their approach against the enemy defenses, the Swiss and men from the Grey Leagues suffered a great deal from

[161] Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 121; and Rieter, "Schwabenkrieg," 141-2.

[162] Kurz, *Schweizerschlacten*, 163; Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2: 420; and Rieter, "Schwabenkrieg," 142.

[163] Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2: 420; and Rieter, "Schwabenkrieg," 143.

enemy fire. Muskets and cannons both took a heavy toll on the confederates. The artillery pieces knocked great holes in the advancing formations, and a single shot killed seven men including four brothers. The confederates moved along the defenses seeking a weak point where they might break through. Time after time, they attacked the fortifications only to be thrown back with heavy losses. In the heat of battle, the Austrians expended ammunition stores at a rapid rate, and the Austrians were forced to grab stones from the ground to continue to fire. Dietrich Freuler did not do his duty, but in the heat and confusion of battle, he ran from the field leaving the scene as a coward. Benedikt Fontana led his men bravely and was killed in the attack.[164]

The death of the popular Fontana helped turn the tide of the battle. Inspired by the thought of avenging their fallen leader, the Swiss staged a final heavy assault. Attacking over the bodies of their fallen comrades, and under heavy fire, the confederates and their allies were finally able to force a hole in the enemy lines. The Austrians did not flee at first but bravely held their ground until the confederates poured through in large numbers. Further resistance was hopeless, and the imperial forces began to break and run. Soon the whole army was in flight.[165]

The force, that had so long kept the Swiss flanking column at bay, also fled. The Swiss and their allies pursued the Austrians killing any of them whom they could overtake. The confederates gave no quarter, and no prisoners were taken. Many men fled to the Marengbrücke, and a huge mass of men became jammed on the bridge which collapsed under their weight, dropping many into the stream below. The Swiss and men from the Grey Leagues pursued the Austrians for the rest of the day, hunting men down in the forests and killing them whenever possible. The slaughter of the fleeing men gave the imperial forces their worst casualties of the battle. Reportedly, 4,000 Austrians and 2,000 Swiss and men from the Grey Leagues were killed that day,

[164] Jecklin, *Der Anteil Graubündens*, 72; and Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 117 and 122.
[165] Kurz, *Schweizerschlacten*, 164.

making Calven the most costly battle of the war.[166]

The Swiss and their allies were infuriated because of their heavy casualties, and they took revenge on the people in the area because they were Austrians and loyal to the Empire. The confederates took seven villages and burned them to the ground, not sparing a single house. The Swiss troopers, with a number of priests, plundered the area taking or destroying everything of value, then they went on a killing rampage. They killed every man over twelve years of age, and they also cut the bodies of thirty-three wealthy men from Meran to pieces. The Austrian losses in the battle, and presumably also in the following slaughter, was so extensive that 944 widows were much later reported in the Vingstgöw and among these were 150 in Meran. The sound of crying and wailing filled the whole area as children wept for their fathers and women for their husbands. The Swiss and their allies buried their dead in two mass graves but let the enemy dead rot where they had fallen. The confederates did not long remain in the area, choosing to withdraw when the imperial reinforcements approached.[167]

The areas bordering the Grey Leagues and the Tirol experienced considerable military activity in the weeks following the Battle of Calven, but no major engagements took place in the region. Maximilian himself led an expedition in the area in late May and early June. The Swiss did not meet him in battle, but they burned everything before him as he approached, and skirmished with the Emperor's foraging parties. His army was soon starving and was forced to withdraw. Maximilian then turned the focus of the war farther west.[168]

Calven was based on a sound battle plan, but it faltered in execution because the attacking columns which were supposed to strike the enemy frontally and on the flank, failed to coordinate their efforts.

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[166] Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2: 421; Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 123; and Rieter, "Schwabenkrieg," 143.

[167] Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2: 422; "Ursprung," *Der Anteil Graubündens*, 49, written near 1640; Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 123; and "Willibald Pirckheimers Schweizerkrieg Deutsche Uebersetzung" in *Der Anteil Graubündens*, 25.

[168] Rieter, "Schwabenkrieg," 144.

The delay in the main column attacking the Austrians allowed them to meet the two threats one after the other, and heavy casualties were the price of this procrastination. The largest mystery surrounding the battle was the nonparticipation of the Austrian cavalry. At critical junctions in the action, heavy attacks by the knights could have altered the outcome of the battle especially in view of the fact that the Swiss and their allies won a narrow victory as it was. The famous distrust of the upper-class knights and the peasant infantry may have been a factor, and the nobility might have just let the peasantry fend for themselves.

The flanking column of the Swiss and men from the Grey Leagues must be admired for their endurance. Carrying heavy weapons, the troops climbed thirty-six hundred feet, marched ten miles in 6 or 7 hours and soon after fought a battle for five hours. This column was composed of the most vigorous men available, but their physical performance was certainly admirable. From this and other examples, it was easy to understand why the Swiss troops were so prized and respected during this age.

The Battle of Dornach, July 22, 1499

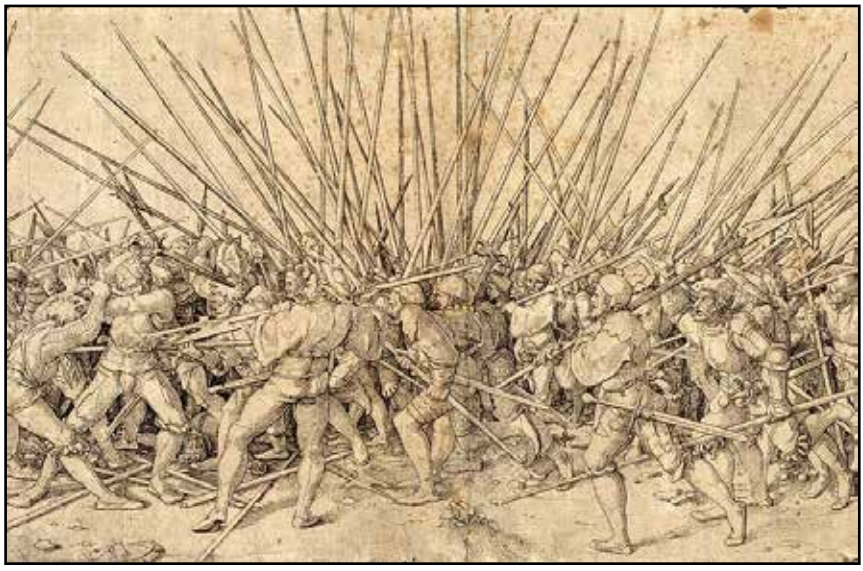
By July 1499, the war was going badly for the Empire. The Swiss had been successful in defeating the imperial forces in every important engagement of the war, and the Empire's operations in the mountains of Tirol and the Grey Leagues had floundered. Yet Maximilian could still be optimistic about the war's outcome. He had assembled large armies around Constance and in the Sundgau Valley near Basel. Most of the troops in those areas had not seen any major action, and many were still anxious to punish the Swiss and seek revenge for the confederate raids. Yet any significant operations would have to take place soon because funds were nearly exhausted, the troops were complaining of a lack of pay, and some were deserting to go home. A single key victory could secure enough booty to keep the armies intact, and such a success would doubtlessly strengthen Maximilian's war effort

Contemporary illustration of the Battle of Dornach 1499. The Swiss Forces are in the center.

and might even convince the Swiss to come to favorable terms with the Empire.[169]

Maximilian's plan was to make a demonstration in one area to divert attention and then to stage a significant strike in the other simultaneously. The largest Swiss force concentrations were around Constance, watching the Empire's troop movements very closely. A large advance in that area would attract a good deal of attention, but a demonstration of force from Constance should not risk battle because a defeat might break up or even destroy the imperial army. The main

[169] Eugen Tatarinoff's *Die Beteiligung Solothurn am Schwabenkriege bis zur Schlacht bei Dornach 22. July 1499* (Solothurn: A. Luety, 1899) presents an excellent account of the Battle of Dornach. It also includes a large appendix of correspondence between Solothurn and its military leaders. See also "Gedenkschrift 500 Jahre Schlacht bei Dornach 1499-1999," *Jahrbuch für Solothurnische Geschichte* 72 (1999): 5-[392].



The Swiss fight the Swabian Landsknechte
by Hans Holbein the Younger

attack would take place farther west, and Maximilian ordered Heinrich von Fürstenberg to advance from the Sundgau to take the strategic castle of Dorneck in the Birs Valley near Basel. Dorneck was a strategic focal point for a large area of the Swiss Confederation. From there, an army could march west to the Jura mountain passes, southwest to Bern, south to Solothurn, or east to Olten, and from Olten, down the Aara Valley to the Zurich area.[170]

In May and June 1499, Fürstenberg assembled his army in the Sundgau of south Alsace. It numbered between 10,000 and 15,000 men, but these troops varied much in quality. Many were simple conscripts who had little interest in the campaign or its outcome. Others were the superb *Landsknechte* from the Gelderland, numbering over 2,000 men who were very able and experienced German mercenaries. The infantry was armed in a similar fashion as were the Swiss with long pikes and other shorter weapons much like the halberd. The army had many large artillery pieces for sieges and smaller cannons

[170] Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 136.

to be used against the enemy infantry in battle. The cavalry consisted of eleven hundred of the feared and respected Welsch Guard (French guard) from Burgundy. However, due to lack of pay, these knights were poorly motivated and proved to be largely ineffective in battle because its members were more interested in taking booty than in the conflict.[171]

Fürstenberg could have marched on Dorneck early in July and met little resistance, but he decided to await the arrival of more horses, thus allowing the Swiss more time to react to his threat and prepare a better defense. Solothurn purchased the castle of Dorneck in 1490, and the city recognized the strategic value of the fortress and manned the position throughout the war. Benedikt Hugi led the small garrison of slightly more than twenty men, and their commander was concerned about his ability to protect the castle in case of attack. He wrote to Solothurn frequently for more men and support. The city finally reacted on July 9, 1499, and sent masons to repair the castle and artillery pieces to strengthen the fortress, but these preparations were unfinished when the enemy army arrived.[172]

Solothurn sent its mayor, Niklaus Conrad, and fifteen hundred men to Gempen, a village about four miles from Dorneck, to watch the area and harass the imperial forces should they advance. A Swiss army of six thousand men was watching the enemy forces at Constance, but the demonstration from that fortress was unimpressive, so Solothurn was able to convince them that the greatest danger was at Dorneck. When the confederates at Constance heard that Fürstenberg's army was approaching the castle near Basel, most of them marched to Gempen as rapidly as possible. For the first time in the war, Bern, angered by Swabian raids, sent a large contingent of three thousand men to help Solothurn. On July 20, 1499, the Swiss contingents began to reach Gempen.[173]

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[171] "Anonyme Chronik des Schwabenkrieges" in *Basler Chroniken*, 7 vols. (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1872-1915) 6: 11; Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik*, 2: 218; Tatarinoff, *Beteiligung*, 166-7; and Reiter, "Schwabenkrieg," 146.

[172] Anton Haffner, *Chronica* (Solothurn: Zepfel, 1849), 58-9; Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 388; Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik*, 2: 192; and Rieter, "Schwabenkrieg," 145.

[173] Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik*, 2: 218, 224-5.

The imperial army started to arrive near Dorneck early on July 22, 1499, and those troops began to prepare a siege according to all the accepted practices of the age. The nearby villages, including Dornach, had already been destroyed during a raid in March, so the armed forces could not plunder the area. July 22 was St. Mary Magdalene's day, and the army took advantage of the holiday. The men played games, danced, and sang in the fields between the villages of Dornach and Arlesheim. Only the artillerymen were busy because they had to dig into the ground to lay the largest siege cannons on the correct trajectory to hit the castle while absorbing the recoil of the weapons at the same time. Smaller artillery pieces were placed around the castle to shoot in various directions in case of an enemy advance. Those devices were also placed on the road between Dornach and Gempen to ward off any possible Swiss attack by that route. This was the only real precaution taken against the possibility of a surprise attack. Fürstenberg's men failed to place lookouts and to send scouts to reconnoiter the area. A man from Basel came to warn the troops that Swiss forces were nearby, but his timely caution was ignored.[174]

Niklaus Conrad could see the entire imperial army from the Schartenfluh hill, and he realized that a surprise attack in sufficient strength could be successful, but all available manpower would be needed to be present to make such an effort. Additional Swiss forces started to arrive in the morning, but they were tired, hungry, and wet with sweat from their long marches. By the early afternoon, they numbered over five thousand excellent troops. Among them were 3,000 Bernese troops and another 400 from Zurich. The men from Solothurn shared food and wine with these men, and they were given some time to rest. [175]

The only groups that were still on the march were 600 men from Luzern and 400 from Zug. The Swiss war council decided to go into battle without these additional men because if the attack was long

[174] Etterlin, *Kronica*, 250.

[175] Kurz, *Schweizerschlachten*, 169; and Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 152.

Skulls of Men killed at the Battle of Dornach in the Ossuary at the Battle Monument

delayed there would be little chance of concluding the battle before nightfall, but they hoped that the expected contingents would arrive in time to aid in the outcome of the battle. This time the confederates advanced in two pike squares, a vanguard (*Vorhut*) and a main formation (*Gewalthaufen*) believing that the men from Luzern and Zug would comprise the rear guard (*Nachhut*) when they arrived. To avoid detection, the men marched through the forest instead of using the road. The Swiss started their advance mid afternoon.[176]

Niklaus Conrad was the commander of the vanguard, comprised mostly of men from Solothurn. When this formation advanced out of the forest, it divided into two groups. The smaller one turned to capture some small artillery pieces, while the larger one, led by Conrad, went straight for the large siege cannons, which they were successful in taking. Heinrich von Fürstenberg heard the noise and came to see what was happening. He got too close to the Swiss who dragged

[176] Tatarinoff, *Beteiligung*, 175.

him from his horse and killed him. At the very outset of the battle, the imperial army was deprived of its commander, but much of his army continued the contest without him. Conrad's group pushed on westward right through the center of the Swabian camp. These men were surprised, thrown into great confusion, and many, including the Welsch Guard, fled across the Birs stream.

Conrad and his men had show great initiative, but that vanguard was too small to keep the imperial army long in confusion. The Swabian Army began to form up in battle formations, and the Welsch Guard returned from across the Birs to attack Conrad's forces. The Swiss vanguard was soon hard pressed and was forced to fall back towards the forest. This contingent was only spared from slaughter by the skillful use of the pike and musket.[177]

The smaller part of the vanguard was able to take the enemy cannons, but it soon met stiff resistance as well. These men had to fight desperately to keep from being overwhelmed, but they took heavy casualties in doing so. This group was saved from annihilation when the Swiss main formation (*Gewalthaufen*) of 3,000 men from Bern broke clear of the forest. The main force had advanced as rapidly as possible through the forest, but the dense undergrowth had slowed its progress. By the time it entered the field of battle, both sections of the vanguard were in grave danger, and the German mercenaries (*Landsknechte*), were forming into a large pike square. The smaller groups in the vanguard fell back to join the main formation, and these combined forces then marched to meet the German infantry.[178]

At that point, the battle became one of German foot soldiers against the Swiss infantry because the Swabian cavalry, and some of the Welsch Guard, withdrew from the fight. Many of them were raiding far away, and the four hundred remaining were more interested in robbing the dead than in actually participating in the fighting. The artillery was also no factor in the battle even after the Swabian cannoneers

[177] Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik*, 2: 229.
[178] Lenz, *Schwabenkrieg*, 152.

returned after being chased off the field. They were unable to use their artillery pieces effectively because their larger weapons were aimed high to hit Dorneck and were unable to train them on the Swiss. The confederates were also forced to leave their cannons behind because they could not bring them through the forest to the battlefield.

The German mercenaries and the Swiss fought it out on the fields between Dornach and Arlesheim. The contest was costly and a prominence on the field of battle became know as "Blood Hill." For hours the two armies fought, the outnumbered Swiss making up in ferocity what they lacked in manpower. No doubt, each side engaged by thrusting forward with their pikes, while the men with halberds looked for any opening to rush forward and engage the enemy at close quarters. The troops with muskets also fired into the ranks of the opposition bringing noise, smoke, and casualties inflicted a distance to the battle. Both armies pushed back and forth against each other as the fighting swayed over the fields. Whenever one force made and advance into the other, there would be a rally by the opposition, and the front would again become stable. Neither side was able to break the other's ranks successfully, the battle continued to rage fiercely, and the men on both sides became increasingly exhausted. The battle appeared to be a stalemate if nothing changed.[179]

As nightfall was approaching, the battle was finally decided by the timely arrival of Swiss reinforcements from Luzern and Zug. These troops entered the field of battle near Arlesheim, shouting and blowing horns, as they rushed to join the Swiss main mass. With these fresh reinforcements, the confederates staged their final attack. The weight of the advance of the reinvigorated Swiss was too much for the exhausted German mercenaries to bear, and they broke and fled. The confederates, furious after their costly and difficult victory, pursued their enemies as they attempted to flee across the Birs stream. The Swiss killed everyone of their adversaries when they could be apprehended, and in the ensuing darkness and confusion, the confederates fell upon men in

[179] Rieter, "Schwabenkrieg," 148; and Anshelm, *Berner-Chronik*, 2: 230.

their own army, killing each other. When all of the men in the imperial army had fled across the Birs and total darkness had fallen, further pursuit became impossible. The exhausted Swiss laid down where they were and slept.[180]

The contest between the Swiss and the German mercenaries was bitter, and experienced soldiers testified to the ferocity of the battle. Some 3,000 German mercenaries and 500 Swiss died in the battle. The confederates were buried, but their adversaries were left to rot. Imperial emissaries sought to retrieve the bodies of the fallen noblemen, but the Swiss replied that the nobles would have to remain with the peasants. Only the body of Heinrich von Fürstenberg was taken from the field to the church at Arlesheim.[181]

The Swiss showed a great deal of concern for their wounded and for the families of the dead. The wounded were taken to nearby towns where they were cared for until fully recuperated. By common consent of the troops, all the booty taken in the battle was divided among the wounded and the widows and orphans of the dead.[182]

After the battle, the Swiss had an excellent opportunity to march into Alsace or the Swabian lands, but the army showed no interest in such advances. They remained for six days on the battlefield and then returned home. Skirmishes took place in the area for days, but the fighting soon died down. When Maximilian heard the news of the Swiss victory, he ceased his military activities, which had become little more than an artillery exchange between armies around Constance.[183]

After the Battle of Dornach, the war effort by the Empire nearly collapsed because continued fighting was considered to be fruitless. The Swiss also showed little interest in further battles and raids, and military activity dropped off until early in August, when there was hardly any fighting at all. On September 22, 1499, the Peace of Basel

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[180] Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2: 451.

[181] "Hauptleute etc. der Stadt Bern im Feld an Bern," July 24, 1499, in *Aktenstücke zur Geschichte des Schwabenkrieges*, 389-90; and Tatarinoff, *Beteiligung*, 183.

[182] Elgger, *Kriegswesen*, 172-3.

[183] Brennwald, *Schweizerchronik*, 2: 455.

was signed. According to the agreement, Maximilian recognized no further authority to tax or to put courts over the states of Swiss Confederation.[184]

CONCLUSION

The Swabian War was one of Maximilian's failures in his attempt to unify the German Empire under the control of the Habsburgs. While the conflict did not spell the end of his efforts, it was a major setback. Militarily, the war was very significant. In it, Europe witnessed the first clashes between two genuine tactical infantries since the era of Ancient Rome. Infantries were not to replace cavalries entirely for centuries, but the era of cavalries supported by weak and ineffective foot soldiers was over.

Despite the victorious outcomes of the major engagements in the Swabian War, the confederates had been unable to show an overwhelming superiority over their enemies. Both the battles of Calven and Dornach had been costly and closely-contested affairs which left open the question of the continuing dominance of the Swiss. In the war, the Swabian *Landsknechte* proved themselves to be a very formidable force, but the Swiss remained undefeated and still at the height of their prestige. The resolution of the contest between the Swiss and the German mercenaries for domination was not final in the Swabian War and would not be decided until the severe Swiss defeat at the Battle of Bicocca in 1522.

The Swiss Confederation fought the Swabian War with ten official members. Because the Confederation had shown itself to be viable and able to protect its interests, other states joined, and it soon had thirteen members. Yet, the most important result of the Swabian War for Swiss history could not be visualized at the time. This conflict was to represent the last major attempt by a foreign power to invade the Confederation for nearly three centuries. A major reason for this

[184] Kurz, *Schweizerschlachten*, 178.

situation was the respect in which the Swiss military was held. Time and again, it had shown its superiority over virtually all forces sent to meet it over the previous two centuries. This impressive feat meant that the confederates could work out their own destiny free from the domination of foreign powers. The Swiss national development owed much to the military, but this advance would have been impossible without the significant social developments which made that martial institution possible.

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