

Camp Security



Schild-Wachten (possibly by Adolph Menzel)

During the eighteenth-century, camp security was a necessity of military life. In this article, I intend to briefly outline the security practices of the Prussian army in the eighteenth century. The historical regiment von Itzenplitz was adept at this type of operation. In his memoirs, Frederick the Great recalled around the 25th of October, 1756, "Itzenplitz's Regiment was attacked at night while guarding the river Elbe near the village of Salesel. They defended themselves so well that they were not content to merely repulse the enemy, but took many prisoners."¹ While perhaps not as interesting as the full field battles of the eighteenth century, these operations took up much larger portion of soldiers time. In the eighteenth century, securing the position of the army was a vital part of military service. Soldiers knew that hostile forces could achieve total surprise if the army was not properly protected.

At Moys, Hochkirch, Burkersdorf, Trenton, Paoli, and Germantown, eighteenth-century soldiers attempted to make surprise attacks on enemy positions. To avoid total disaster, then, armies needed an early warning system. The Prussian army of the eighteenth-century possessed just such an early warning system. We will examine this early warning system from the earliest

¹ Frederick II of Prussia, *Oeuvres de Frederic le Grand*, Vol. 4, 112-3.

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doctors of danger to how the army prepared itself for an imminent attack, specifically with an eye to the job of infantry regiments, rather than specialized light forces such as hussars and frei-battalions.

Schild-Wachten (sentries)

This term refers to individual/multiple soldiers deployed in advanced positions around the main Prussian force. These men were often deployed as sentries in the advance of larger groups of soldiers in support. Sentries would always be deployed in pairs.² Chapter 6 of the 1757 infantry regulations deals with the posting of these soldiers, giving explicit instructions to regimental commanders on where their men were to be posted. Officers were ordered, "never to post sentries in open and expos'd places."³ They often used the names of Prussian towns/villages, or the names of religious figures for watchwords.⁴ The sentries were allowed to order their arms once posted, and Frederick gave them the following instructions: "The sentries must not smoke tobacco, and should not venture further than 10 paces beyond their posts, keeping their weapons in their hands, and not on the ground, under pain of running the gauntlet."⁵ Frederick instructed sentries to, "to challenge, and demand the counter-sign; suffer no person to pass, without having first strictly examin'd him; and in the nighttime, in case they receive no answer, to a second challenge, to fire."⁶ If unauthorized persons passed the sentry after nightfall but answered the counter-sign, he was to direct them to the *Fahnen-Wacht*.

Fahnen-Wacht und Brand-Wacht (Flag-guard and Fire-guard)

These terms refer to a larger body of men, Christopher Duffy argues that it is about 20-30 strong.⁷ The Prussian regulations indicate that the *Fahnen-Wacht* consisted of 30 men, while the *Brand-Wacht* consisted of 39 men.⁸ The *Fahnen-Wacht* was deployed to the front of the regiment, while the *Brand-Wacht* was deployed to the rear. Both groups brought two tents out from their forward positions. These units were rotated on a 24 hour basis after and they remained under arms during that time, in order to support the *Schild-Wachten* deployed to their front. These men would support their comrades in the *Schild-Wachten* during small scale skirmishes. Frederick instructed his men for this type of fighting: "If behind a rampart, wall, or hedge, draw up in two ranks, in close order, but if behind a river, trench, or chevaux-de-frise, three deep."⁹ He

² Frederick II, *Reglement Vor Die Königl.-Preußische Infanterie: Worinn Enthalten: Die Evolutions, Das Manual Und Die Chargirung Und Wie Der Dienst Im Felde Und in Der Garnison Geschehen Soll.* (Berlin, 1757), 192.

³ William Faucitt, *Regulations for the Prussian Infantry: Translated from the German Original. With Augmentations and Alterations Made by the King of Prussia since the Publication of the Last Edition. To Which Is Added, the Prussian Tactick; Being a Detan of the Grand Manoeuvre, as Performed by the Prussian Armies* (London: Printed for J. Nourse, against Katherine Street, in the Strand, 1759), 209.

⁴ Duffy, *Military Experience in the Age of Reason*, 162.

⁵ Frederick II, *Reglement Vor Die Königl.-Preußische Infanterie*, 212.

⁶ Faucitt, *Regulations*, 209.

⁷ Duffy, *Army of Frederick the Great*, 217.

⁸ Frederick II, *Reglement Vor Die Königl.-Preußische Infanterie*, 200.

⁹ *Ibid*, 250.

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continued, "All patrols, be they ever so small, must arrange themselves in two parts, so that if case of attack, they may alternate their fire."¹⁰ Soldiers often envisioned this type of combat whenever they heard musket fire. An anonymous NCO from IR 3 (incorrectly as it turns out) assumed that such a combat was happening the night before the Battle of Lobositz:

"I walked around for almost an hour in order to try and resist the cold, now and then stopping around a fire, and I came to a carriage guarded by four grenadiers. Immediately I heard the sound of several hundred muskets discharging. The king stuck his head out of the carriage and asked, 'what is that?' A grenadier answered, 'the enemy are attacking our people.'"¹¹

In modern military terms, the *Wachten* provide a localized quick reaction force, to contain any small enemy skirmishing which might otherwise annoy a much larger body of men. In the event of an attack by a large enemy force, the *Feldwachen* are the first line of defense that might slow opposing forces. Frederick stipulated that the *Wachten* should be, "protected by redans which are joined to light entrenchments."¹²

Piquets

This was the true quick reaction force of the Prussian army at large. Each battalion provided a lieutenant, a pair of NCOs, a drummer, and 24 enlisted men to form this large response force. These men were combined with the other force from their regiment, and 4 battalions worth of these men could quickly be placed under the command of a captain, who was detailed for this purpose. In this way, in the event of an emergency, around 120 men could be immediately available to defend the regimental outposts. Both the *Fahnen-Wacht* and *Piquets* provided men for the *Schild-Wachten*.

Together, these men protected the Prussian army against suffering worse defeats at battles like Hochkirch.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Jany, *Urkundliche Beitrage*,

¹² Luvas, *Frederick the Great on the Art of War*, 117.