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„Soldier drill“ in the k. (u.) k. Army

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Hugo Kerchnawe, latter Austrian major general and military historian, authored the book „Military and Civilian“ as „Anonymous“ in 1904. In this publication, Kerchnawe demonstrated articulately his critical distance towards the army and its practice of training soldiers. In the introduction he writes that he „does not try to hide his sympathy for the army at all“, but that he, on the other hand, „had not been rendered blind“ for its weaknesses and been hindered from discussing and „vituperate“ them. Naturally, he knew that this courage was resented and criticized by many in the army. Kerchnawe proved convinced that the course taken by him was the only correct one and would contribute to the best of the army. The hush-up system customary in the country did not help the military much. It only strengthened its (numerous) opponents and achieved the opposite of what was to be purposed. Nevertheless, there were some „short-sighted“ circles in the army who suspected animosity or at least inappropriate deprecation in such positive criticism. He himself wished that these „short-sighted“ people understood that it certainly was not true exaltation to deny the mistakes of one stands for, and not to mend them. In his book, Kerchnawe also deals with the topic „maltreatment of soldiers“. Apart from the reproach of „militarism“ (military dominance), nothing was so often brought forward against the military as these maltreatments of soldiers. There was not a single parliamentary session without such accusations, which were discussed in the most „spiteful“ way. An objective treatment of this problem did not exist in the Austrian press - nearly the entire press „stood under the banner of the ideals of 1848 without exception“, opposing the military, bringing forward not a single word in its favour. Thus, Kerchnawe continued, one ought to advise the military authorities emphatically to investigate every suspicion of maltreatment by a superior. After an accurate investigation of the circumstances, the guilty must be punished without lenience, thus stopping the spiteful palaver against the military. As Kerchnawe states, nothing was worse than the operated (popular) hush-up system. In the „darkness of keeping secrets“ and „in the uncertain twilight of sugar-coated presentments“, the maltreatments of soldiers looked even uglier than they were in reality. For this reason, the public were permanently given the levelheadedness and verisimilitude they had the right to receive. The military would „profit“ from that. Despite his understanding for superiors sometimes losing their temper, Kerchnawe did not support „violent pedagogy“ at all, meaning that he depreciated brutality. As Kerchnawe pointed out, there were indirect maltreatments in the military as well. The originators were officers, often even with higher ranks, and their motives were recklessness and indifference for the well-being of their subordinates. Often together with the ambition to „shine with extraordinary military strains“. These often resulted in (startling) high numbers of sick soldiers, numerous sunstroke and heatstroke cases, and even fatalities. So, this maltreatment of the personnel manifested in „unreasonable and not seldom barbarous exigencies“. Thus, Kerchnawe (stridently) criticized the evils in the k. u. k. Army without questioning the entire system. Military drill aims at forming up the drives and emotions of single soldiers appropriately. That means that the training (drill) ought to evoke and consolidate military obedience with the soldiers (especially in the turmoil of battle). According to that, the total character of the military is based on a strict hierarchy, as well as on certain assumptions concerning the social behaviour both of the individual and the troops in the extraordinary situations of combat. The ultimate purpose of achieving military discipline thus was eliminating of uncertainties in the face of the unpredictable circumstances of war. The traditional appearance of the soldier of the 1860ies was re-analysed due to different reasons, but pure humaneness was (mostly) not the impetus. On the contrary, many people realized that with soldiers who had been „unlearned“ any independence one could not win wars. On the other hand, however, a deep hiatus arose between theory and practice as far as the „drill“ of soldiers was concerned. Obviously, the (positive) theoretical considerations

