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The Duke of Marlborough in the Writings of Frederick the Great

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ABSTRACT

The Duke of Marlborough was Britain's most celebrated soldier of the early eighteenth century and deeply connected to the wider European continent. However, the writings of Frederick the Great of Prussia highlight how Marlborough's memory has been neglected outside the Anglophone world. Frederick certainly respected Marlborough in general terms. However, the Prussian king almost completely ignored the details of Marlborough's military campaigns and portrayed him as being as much a politician as a soldier. This reflected a wider divergence in military literature following the War of the Spanish Succession, as Anglophone authors lionised Marlborough while continental Europeans focused on other figures.

Introduction

Recent scholarship has emphasised that the British army of the eighteenth century was influenced by a wider world that extended far beyond Britain itself. Huw Davies described Britain's soldiers in this period as 'a wandering army', whose military methods were strongly influenced by their experiences in America and India as well as by the examples of other European armies. Davies, Ira Gruber and J. A. Houlding described how defeats in the 1740-1748 War of the Austrian Succession galvanised British officers in the second half of the eighteenth century to seek out the best military

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practice from other European states.¹ The development of the British staff system in the Napoleonic period was also substantially influenced by European examples.² These revelations naturally beg the question of how much the British army, in its turn, influenced military practice elsewhere in Europe.

This article discusses the degree to which Britain's most celebrated soldier of the early eighteenth century, John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough (1650-1722), influenced the famous Prussian military monarch Frederick II ('Frederick the Great', reigned 1740-1786). Frederick was not only one of the most notable commanders of the eighteenth century but also left prodigious writings, many of which were published in later source editions. This includes three volumes dedicated specifically to Frederick's military writings. These source editions have recently been digitised, allowing historians to search for mentions of particular words and topics across Frederick's writings, including his poetry, his history-writing and his correspondence.³ This combination of military prominence and excellent primary source material makes Frederick II a key figure for historians seeking to understand the military ideas of the eighteenth century. While the Prussian king certainly respected Marlborough as a great hero, he scarcely mentioned the details of his military campaigns, and saw Marlborough as being as much a politician as a soldier. The example of Frederick thus highlights a wider divergence between Anglophone and continental European literature on Marlborough and on the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) more broadly.

Marlborough has been lionised by many Anglophone historians, not least his own descendant, Winston Churchill.⁴ The American historian Russel Weigley called Marlborough 'truly an example of the earth-shaking hero in history'.⁵ Commanding armies of British and allied troops, Marlborough collaborated above all with Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736) to win victories at Blenheim in 1704, Ramillies in 1706, Oudenarde in 1708, and Malplaquet in 1709, driving the French out of southern Germany and then advancing across the southern Netherlands and into northern

¹Huw J. Davies, *The Wandering Army: The Campaigns that Transformed the British Way of War, 1750-1850*, (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 2022); Ira D. Gruber, *Books and the British Army in the Age of the American Revolution*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); J. A. Houlding, *Fit for Service: The Training of the British Army, 1715-1795*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 166-255.

²Davies, *The Wandering Army*, pp. 323-325.

³<https://friedrich.uni-trier.de>. Accessed 20 March 2026.

⁴Winston Churchill, *Marlborough: His Life and Times*, (London: Harrap, 1933); Clément Oury, *Le duc de Marlborough. John Churchill: Le plus redoutable ennemi de Louis XIV*, (Paris: Perrin, 2022), pp. 13-14, pp. 19-26, pp. 382-387.

⁵Russell F. Weigley, *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 103.

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France. David Chandler, one of Britain's leading military historians of the later twentieth century, called Marlborough 'probably the pre-eminent military figure in Western Europe between the eras of Turenne and Condé on the one hand and the period of the mature Frederick II of Prussia on the other'.⁶ Only more recently have scholars like Jamel Ostwald, Clément Oury and Cathal Nolan gone beyond this chorus of adulation. Nolan noted the cost of Marlborough's battles, and Ostwald emphasised that his successes did not have quite such far-reaching effects as his admirers have claimed. There is also now a much greater understanding of the degree to which Marlborough depended on his allies and on able subordinates.⁷

In contrast to the praise of Marlborough in the Anglophone world, Oury noted that French military historians have generally neglected the British general, a trend that began in the eighteenth century. They have preferred instead to focus on his colleague Eugene of Savoy, perhaps because Eugene was originally from France.⁸ Michael Hochedlinger similarly noted that German-language scholarship on Eugene has tended subtly to denigrate Marlborough, just as Anglophone studies of Marlborough have typically given their hero precedence over Eugene. In his 30-page final assessment of Marlborough as 'man and soldier', David Chandler devoted just three sentences to Eugene, whom he described as 'less successful in fighting the French than the Duke'. In contrast, Hochedlinger noted that 'Max Braubach ... , Eugene's great German biographer, ... disqualified the English general as a 'real hero''.⁹ Frederick II of Prussia was a great admirer of French culture and was hugely influenced by French military methods.¹⁰ He was also a German prince and had served under Eugene in person. It

⁶David Chandler, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Marlborough*, 2nd edn., (Tunbridge Wells: Spellmount, 1990), p. 9. See more broadly David Chandler, *Marlborough as Military Commander*, 3rd edn., (Tunbridge Wells: Spellmount, 1989).

⁷Cathal J. Nolan, *The Allure of Battle: A History of How Wars have been Won and Lost*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 121-138; Jamel Ostwald, 'The "decisive" battle of Ramillies, 1706: Prerequisites for decisiveness in early modern warfare', *The Journal of Military History*, 64 (2000), pp. 649-677; Jamel Ostwald, 'Marlborough and Siege Warfare', in John B. Hattendorf, Augustus J. Veenendaal Jr., Rolof van Hövell tot Westerflier (eds.), *Marlborough: Soldier and Diplomat*, (Rotterdam: Karwansaray, 2012), pp. 122-143; Clément Oury, *La guerre de succession d'Espagne: La fin tragique du grand siècle*, (Paris: Tallandier, 2020), pp. 205-218; Oury, *Marlborough*.

⁸Clément Oury, 'Marlborough as an Enemy', in Hattendorf et al., *Marlborough*, pp. 211-215; Oury, *Marlborough*, pp. 16-17, pp. 387-389.

⁹Chandler, *Marlborough as Military Commander*, pp. 300-331 (quotations, p. 300, p. 329); Michael Hochedlinger, 'Friendship and Realpolitik: Marlborough and the Habsburg Monarchy', in Hattendorf et al., *Marlborough*, p. 251.

¹⁰Adam L. Storrington, 'The age of Louis XIV': Frederick the Great and French ways of war', *German History*, 38 (2020), pp. 24-46.

was thus not surprising that, as Jay Luvaas noted, Frederick ‘was interested in Eugene, not Marlborough’.¹¹

‘The Great Smartness of Which the English Troops Gave the Example’

For the British army, Marlborough’s influence was huge. His emphasis on infantry musket fire as a key tool for winning battles remained an important theme of British military practice. As the veterans of Marlborough’s wars began to disappear, Lieutenant Colonel Humphrey Bland published his *Treatise of Military Discipline* in 1727 to codify the duke’s military practice. Bland’s book became essential reading for British officers until the 1760s. Brigadier General Richard Kane’s work of military history, which was first published in 1745 and described Marlborough’s campaigns in detail, was also very popular.¹² At the 1745 battle of Fontenoy, three decades after the War of the Spanish Succession, the British commander, the Duke of Cumberland, tried to break through the enemy centre just as Marlborough had so often done.¹³

The Prussian army was very much like the British one in developing a tradition that emphasised infantry firepower. Indeed, the focus on musketry in both armies developed in the same period: the Nine Years War (1688-1697) and the War of the Spanish Succession. In the later eighteenth century, the complex system of ‘platoon fire’ – whereby the different sub-divisions of a battalion fired in succession to maintain a continuous series of volleys – came to be considered a Prussian speciality. It had, however, originally been developed by the Dutch and Danish, before becoming firmly established in the British army under Marlborough.¹⁴ Surveying the history of the Prussian army, Frederick II noted that ‘discipline became stronger during the reign of [King] Frederick I [1688-1713]’, as the Prussian troops fought in Flanders and Italy as part of the coalitions against Louis XIV. Frederick described how ‘the officers who served in Flanders learned their trade (*apprentrent leur métier*) from the Dutch: they [the Dutch] were at the time our masters. We also imitated the great smartness (*propreté*)

¹¹Jay Luvaas (ed. and trans.), *Frederick the Great on the Art of War*, (New York and London: The Free Press, Collier-Macmillan, 1966), p. 26.

¹²Gruber, *Books and the British Army*, p. 13, p. 17, p. 19, pp. 30-32, p. 35, p. 39; Houlding, *Fit for Service*, pp. 173-185.

¹³Armstrong Starkey, *War in the Age of Enlightenment, 1700-1789*, (Westport, CT, London: Praeger, 2003), pp.108-124.

¹⁴Alexander S. Burns, *Infantry in Battle, 1733-1783*, (Warwick: Helion & Company, 2025), pp. 142-143, pp. 145-147; Chandler, *Art of Warfare*, pp. 111-113, pp. 116-117, pp. 128-130, pp. 136-137; Curt Jany, *Geschichte der Königlich Preußischen Armee bis zum Jahre 1807*, 3 vols., (Berlin: Siegmund, 1928-9), vol. I, pp. 614-621; Oury, *Marlborough*, pp. 381-382.

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of which the English troops gave the example.¹⁵ The military discipline that has been considered so archetypally Prussian, and the Prussian use of platoon fire, thus had roots in the practice of other armies. As Frederick's remarks made clear, these developments were not just about the personal influence of Marlborough. Rather, they reflected a broader evolution in tactics, as the widespread introduction of the flintlock musket and socket bayonet in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries led to a greater focus on firepower and the deployment of infantry in shallower line formations.¹⁶ Full investigation of the broader origins of Prussian military discipline and firing drill sadly lies beyond the scope of this article, but it would certainly repay scholarly attention.

'Prince Eugene, Who I Saw'

When it came to examples of great generals to emulate, however, Frederick II focused much more on Eugene of Savoy rather than Marlborough. Eugene was the most celebrated soldier to emerge from the Holy Roman Empire during the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and had already established a formidable military reputation even before his collaboration with Marlborough. Appointed commander of the Habsburg forces against the Turks in 1697, he defeated and almost annihilated an Ottoman army at Zenta in September that year, helping secure the Habsburgs an advantageous peace at Karlowitz in 1699. In the early years of the War of the Spanish Succession, Eugene led the Habsburg forces in Italy with enormous energy, ultimately executing a four hundred kilometre march in July and August 1706 to relieve Turin and defeat the French army besieging it. Clément Oury noted that Turin was an even more significant victory than Marlborough's success in the same year at Ramillies. Ramillies represented the culmination of a steady allied advance in the Netherlands over the previous years. In contrast, the French had had a strong position in Italy in summer 1706 and actually hoped that the war in that theatre would soon be decided in their favour. Instead, defeat at Turin drove the French and their allies out of northern Italy entirely. Eugene again commanded Habsburg forces against the Ottomans in 1716-1718, winning further victories and capturing Belgrade in 1717.¹⁷

The future Frederick II served under Eugene's command in 1734, when the ageing general led the Empire's troops against France in the War of the Polish Succession

¹⁵*Œuvres de Frédéric le Grand* (hereinafter *Œuvres*), J.D.E. Preuss (ed.), 30 vols., (Berlin: R. Decker, 1846-56), vol. I, p. 214. See also *Ibid*, pp. 215-216.

¹⁶Jeremy Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 156-158; Chandler, *Art of Warfare*, pp. 136-137.

¹⁷Michael Hochedlinger, *Austria's Wars of Emergence: War, State and Society in the Habsburg Monarchy 1683-1797*, (London: Longman, 2003), pp. 164-196; Oury, *La guerre de succession d'Espagne*, pp. 190-191, pp. 193-195, pp. 200-203, pp. 208-217.

(1733-1735). On his father's instructions, Frederick, who was then Prussian crown prince, spent as much time as possible with Eugene, dining with him, and accompanying him to observe the progress of operations.¹⁸ The young prince for instance described how Eugene often drilled the Hapsburg troops for three hours a day.¹⁹ The campaign was, as Frederick put it, 'very sterile in laurels', as Eugene was unable seriously to trouble the French.²⁰ The imperial commander, then 70 years old, was 'only the shadow of the great Eugene'.²¹ Nevertheless, when Frederick listed a series of generals, including Marlborough, as great men in a September 1739 letter to Voltaire, he referred to 'Prince Eugene, who I saw'.²² The Prussian king discussed Eugene's campaigns repeatedly, with great enthusiasm, in his military writings, focusing above all on the Hapsburg commander's 1702 attempt to surprise the French army in the Italian town of Cremona.²³

Frederick certainly lauded Marlborough in general terms as a great man.²⁴ In his *Epistle on Chance*, Frederick referred to,

Marlborough, . . .
Who, fighting battles, won all of them,
Who never besieged a place without taking it,
Liberator of the Rhine, Conqueror of Flanders,
Marlborough the hero . . .²⁵

¹⁸Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (hereinafter GStA PK) BPH Rep. 47 Nr. 636, pp. 2v-3v, p. 4v, p. 5r, pp. 7r-7v; Reinhold Koser, 'Tagebuch des Kronprinzen Friedrich aus dem Rheinfeldzuge von 1734', *Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preußischen Geschichte*, 4 (1891), pp. 219-222.

¹⁹*Œuvres*, vol. XXVII Pt. III, p. 202.

²⁰*Œuvres*, vol. XVI, p. 142.

²¹Quotation, *Œuvres*, vol. I, p. 192. See more broadly Hochedlinger, *Austria's Wars of Emergence*, pp. 209-212.

²²*Œuvres*, vol. XXI, p. 359.

²³*Œuvres*, vol. VIII, pp. 170-171, p. 321; *Œuvres*, vol. IX, p. 219; *Œuvres*, vol. X, p. 285; *Œuvres*, vol. XII, pp. 70-72; *Œuvres*, vol. XXVIII, p. 42, p. 72, p. 141, p. 146; *Œuvres*, vol. XXIX, pp. 88-89; *Politische Correspondenz Friedrich's des Großen* (hereinafter *Politische Correspondenz*), J. G. Droysen et al. (eds.), 46 vols., (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1879-1939), vol. IV, p. 217.

²⁴*Œuvres*, vol. II, p. xi, p. xxi; *Œuvres*, vol. VII, pp. 81-82; *Œuvres*, vol. VIII, p. 20, p. 122, p. 150, p. 257, p. 297; *Œuvres*, vol. IX, p. 167, p. 263; *Œuvres*, vol. X, p. 234; *Œuvres*, vol. XI, p. 265; *Œuvres*, vol. XIV, pp. 288-290, p. 295; *Œuvres*, vol. XXI, p. 359; *Politische Correspondenz*, vol. XIV, p. 403; *Politische Correspondenz*, vol. XV, p. 230.

²⁵*Œuvres*, vol. XII, p. 72.

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Frederick, however, almost never discussed the details of Marlborough's military tactics and strategy. The three published volumes of Frederick's military writings contain only one mention of the British general, and that single reference was a criticism of Marlborough and Eugene for not organising a more effective pursuit after the 1709 battle of Malplaquet.²⁶ Describing Ramillies, one of Marlborough's most notable victories, Frederick accurately criticised the mistakes of the French commander, the duc de Villeroi, in deploying his army, but he did not mention Marlborough by name or describe how the English general had taken advantage of his opponent's errors.²⁷ In his writings, the Prussian king said nothing at all about Marlborough's victory at the 1708 battle of Oudenaarde beyond noting the achievements of the Prussian units there and the battle's personal importance for King George II of Britain.²⁸ Frederick described the events of the 1704 battle of Blenheim and the campaign leading up to it three times in his published writings. However, only one of those descriptions mentioned Marlborough and his actions during the battle. Frederick's two other accounts of Blenheim referred only to Prince Eugene, reflecting the Habsburg general's greater importance for Frederick in comparison to Marlborough.²⁹

'Obstinate', 'Bloody Theatres'

Frederick's comparative neglect of Marlborough may have reflected the fact that the Prussian king's battle tactics focused on outflanking an enemy army, whereas Marlborough's approach typically involved a breakthrough in the centre.³⁰ In his poem *The Art of War*, Frederick made a distinction between the kind of outflanking movements in battle that he particularly favoured and, on the other hand, 'those [battles] known under the name of regular affairs'. Frederick described these latter as 'obstinate', 'bloody theatres' where 'one sees . . . the murderous blade flash'.

Thus the great Eugene, at that famous village [Blenheim, 1704]
Where Tallard and Marsin [the French commanders] were so badly posted,
With a general effort from all sides
He broke through their centre, he split their army.³¹

²⁶*Œuvres*, vol. XXVIII, pp. 136-137.

²⁷*Œuvres*, vol. XXVI, p. 537; *Œuvres*, vol. XXVIII, p. 30, p. 86. Note in contrast the more balanced account in Voltaire, *Le siècle de Louis XIV*, 2 vols., (Berlin: C. F. Henning, 1751), vol. I, pp. 385-387.

²⁸*Œuvres*, vol. I, p. 136, p. 191, p. 216; *Œuvres*, vol. III, p. 6; *Œuvres*, vol. XI, pp. 253-254; *Politische Correspondenz*, vol. VII, p. 398.

²⁹*Œuvres*, vol. I, pp. 128-129, *Œuvres*, vol. X, p. 314; *Œuvres*, vol. XXIX, pp. 88-89.

³⁰Storring, 'Age of Louis XIV', pp. 32-38. For a reassessment of Marlborough's tactics, see Oury, *Marlborough*, pp. 383-384.

³¹*Œuvres*, vol. X, pp. 313-315 (quotations, pp. 313-314).

Frederick – who noticeably credited the victory at Blenheim only to Eugene, without any mention of Marlborough – thereby made a distinction between his own preferred outflanking movements and the tactics of breakthrough in the centre that were typical of Marlborough's battles.

Undoubtedly the most 'obstinate' of Marlborough's 'bloody theatres' was his Pyrrhic victory at the 11 September 1709 battle of Malplaquet. In that engagement, an allied army of 86,000 troops successfully gained the field, but suffered some 21,000 killed and wounded, whereas their 75,000-strong French opponents suffered 11,500 casualties or roughly half those of the nominal victors.³² Contemporaries were shocked by the appalling bloodletting, as was Marlborough himself.³³ Even Richard Kane criticised the decision to fight at Malplaquet.³⁴ An account of the battle among the papers of Frederick's brother Prince Henry of Prussia noted how, in one allied attack, 'every single colonel, lieutenant colonel or major [involved] was killed or wounded'. At the end of the battle some battalions 'did not [even] have two or three officers left' uninjured. In one sector 'one did not see the slightest ground ... which was not covered with dead bodies'.³⁵

Frederick's writings showed good familiarity with the events of the battle of Malplaquet, including how the French left flank had eventually been turned by the allies because it was not protected by natural obstacles. The Prussian king remarked caustically that, if the allies had discovered this fact beforehand, 'this would have saved the lives of about fifteen thousand men' of their troops, who they first lost in bloody frontal attacks.³⁶ Indeed, Frederick argued that the Dutch never recovered from losing 'the flower of their troops' in this battle.³⁷ Malplaquet was certainly not an example that any later commander would want to emulate. Indeed, the heavy casualties suffered in Marlborough's battles were an important reason why, even within the allied army, he seems to have been less highly esteemed than Eugene.³⁸

³²John A. Lynn, *The Wars of Louis XIV 1667-1714*, (Harlow: Longman, 1999), pp. 331-335.

³³Chandler, *Art of Warfare*, p. 124; John B. Hattendorf, 'Courtier, Army Officer, Politician, and Diplomat: A Biographical Sketch of John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough', in Hattendorf et al., *Marlborough*, pp. 90-91.

³⁴Gruber, *Books and the British Army*, p. 38.

³⁵GStA PK, BPH Rep. 56 II F Nr. 9, pp. 3r – 8r (quotations, p. 4r, p. 5v, p. 8r).

³⁶*Œuvres*, vol. I, p. 137, p. 216, pp. 221-222; *Œuvres*, vol. VI, p. 110; *Œuvres*, vol. XXVIII, p. 38, p. 79, p. 137 (quotation, *Œuvres*, vol. XXVIII, p. 79).

³⁷*Œuvres*, vol. II, p. 18.

³⁸See Oury, *Marlborough*, p. 377, p. 381, pp. 385-386.

French Literature

However, Frederick's neglect of Marlborough's military methods may also have reflected the British general's broader place in the historiography of the War of the Spanish Succession. The conflict had a huge impact on those who lived through it and sparked numerous publications, above all in France, where the defeats suffered by French armies came as a profound shock. Jean-Charles, chevalier de Folard (1669-1752) argued that the French should in future focus on shock tactics and *élan*: a very different approach from Marlborough's emphasis on infantry firepower.³⁹ The Prussian army drilled rigorously to achieve rapid musket fire, but Frederick was also attracted to Folard's shock tactics, and he published an abridged version of the French thinker's work for distribution to his officers.⁴⁰

Frederick's favourite military author, Antoine de Pas, marquis de Feuquières (1648-1711) was another veteran of the wars of Louis XIV, although the French king had refused to give him a command during the War of the Spanish Succession. Feuquières' *Mémoires* were not only a profound discussion of the nature of contemporary warfare but also an opportunity for the sharp-tongued marquis to settle scores, as he fiercely criticised certain French generals and indeed the king himself.⁴¹ Frederick was therefore very much following the spirit of Feuquières when he focused on the errors made by the French general Villeroy at the battle of Ramillies, rather than on the skill of Marlborough in taking advantage of them.⁴² Indeed, there was a broader French tradition arguing that Marlborough's victories resulted from the failures of French commanders rather than Marlborough's own abilities.⁴³ Feuquières' ten-page description of the battle of Malplaquet did not mention the name of Marlborough once. Instead, he referred to the commander of the allied army throughout as 'Eugene'.⁴⁴

One of Frederick's key sources for the events of the War of the Spanish Succession was the multivolume work of Charles de Sevin, marquis de Quincy (1660-1728):

³⁹Starkey, *War in the Age of Enlightenment*, pp. 34-37, pp. 52-53.

⁴⁰Storring, 'Age of Louis XIV', pp. 38-39.

⁴¹Jean-Pierre Bois, 'Le marquis de Feuquières, stratège au temps de Louis XIV', in *Economica* (ed.), *Combattre, Gouverner, Écrire: Études réunies en l'honneur de Jean Chagniot*, (Paris: Economica, 2003), pp. 147-160; Storring, 'Age of Louis XIV', pp. 24-25, pp. 39-41, pp. 43-45.

⁴²For Feuquières' criticism of Villeroy at Ramillies, see Antoine de Pas de Feuquières, *Mémoires*, new edn., (London: Pierre Dunoyer, 1736), p. 139, p. 260, p. 359-364.

⁴³Oury, 'Marlborough as an Enemy', pp. 195-200, p. 211.

⁴⁴Feuquières, *Mémoires*, pp. 366-375.

essentially the French official history of the wars of Louis XIV.⁴⁵ Frederick's libraries were full of books describing the campaigns of French generals, whereas the works of Bland and Kane were absent.⁴⁶ Quincy and especially Voltaire, in his book *The Age of Louis XIV*, certainly wrote of Marlborough's military abilities with great respect.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, there was a notable division in the historiography of the War of the Spanish Succession. British officers focused on adulation of Marlborough. In the three decades following his campaigns, they did not show much interest in developments on the continent. In contrast, French authors paid far less attention to the British captain-general. Since French was the international language of the time and French-language books dominated military literature, this had significant implications for Marlborough's reputation.⁴⁸

'The Ability of a Profound Politician'

Marlborough was in any case a controversial figure even in Britain. The target of fierce criticism from Tories, he went into voluntary exile between 1712 and 1714.⁴⁹ The French, in particular, saw Marlborough as conniving with Eugene and with the Dutch pensionary Anthonie Heinsius to prolong the War of the Spanish Succession unnecessarily in the service of their own 'personal interest'.⁵⁰ Voltaire described Marlborough as being motivated by the opportunity to gain not only 'glory' through 'the continuation of the war' but also 'an immense fortune, which he loved just as much'.⁵¹

⁴⁵Hannelore Röhm and Sabine Scheidler, 'Die Bibliotheken Friedrichs des Großen', in Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten (ed.), *Friederisiko – Friedrich der Große. Die Ausstellung*, (Munich: Hirmer, 2012), p. 324, p. 327; Charles Sevin de Quincy, *Histoire militaire du règne de Louis le Grand, Roy de France*, 7 vols., (Paris: Denis Mariette, Jean-Baptiste Delespine, Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1726).

⁴⁶Bogdan Krieger, *Friedrich der Große und seine Bücher*, (Berlin and Leipzig: Giesecke & Debrient, 1914), pp. 140-146, pp. 173-174.

⁴⁷Quincy, *Histoire militaire*, vol. V, pp. 495-501; Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, vol. I, pp. 385-387, pp. 409-413.

⁴⁸Davies, *The Wandering Army*, pp. 4-6; Gruber, *Books and the British Army*, pp. 13-19.

⁴⁹Oury, *Marlborough*, p. 17, pp. 21-22, pp. 357-361; Tobias Roeder, 'Scipio or Crassus? The contested heroic image of John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, (1650-1722)', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 96 (2018), pp. 1-20.

⁵⁰Oury, 'Marlborough as an Enemy', pp. 206-211; *Mémoires du duc de Villars*, 3 vols., (The Hague: Pierre Gosse, 1734-6), vol. II, pp. 373-374 (quotation, p. 373).

⁵¹Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, vol. I, p. 420, p. 444 (quotation, p. 420). See also Feuquières, *Mémoires*, p. 25. On Marlborough's appetite for financial gain, see Oury, *Marlborough*, p. 366.

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Frederick was happy to defend Marlborough's reputation when it suited his own rhetorical purposes.⁵² In 1773, he wrote an imagined *Dialogue of the Dead*, in which the recently deceased Austrian soldier Prince Joseph Wenzel of Liechtenstein descended into the underworld and told Marlborough and Eugene how much things had changed since their time. This text was primarily intended to be an assertion of Frederick's authority vis-a-vis *philosophes* like Denis Diderot, editor of the *Encyclopédie*, who had snubbed an attempt by Frederick to invite him to Prussia. Responding to enlightened criticism of war, Frederick used the examples of Eugene and Marlborough to argue that military glory, such as he himself had won, was still worthy of praise. In such a context, the Prussian king naturally denounced scurrilous attacks on the reputation of a great general like Marlborough.⁵³

However, Frederick had always depicted Marlborough as being as much a politician as a soldier. He praised the British general's '*coup d'œil*' in battle but also how '*politique*' ('*politique*') he was.⁵⁴ In his *History of the House of Brandenburg*, Frederick described how Marlborough successfully negotiated to get Prussian troops sent to Italy in 1705, combining 'the flatteries of a courtier' with 'the merit of a great captain and ... the ability of a profound politician'.⁵⁵

In contrast to his almost total neglect of the details of Marlborough's generalship, Frederick repeatedly emphasised that the course of the War of the Spanish Succession had been altered by the fall from grace of Marlborough's wife, Sarah Churchill, whose position as Queen Anne's favourite had helped maintain royal support for Marlborough's prosecution of the war. Frederick repeated this again and again in his writings, starting with his *Refutation of the Prince of Machiavelli*, which was written even before he came to the throne. Indeed, Frederick's lavish praise of Marlborough in his *Epistle on Chance*, cited above, was written primarily to show that even such a successful military commander had been thwarted by the vicissitudes of political fortune.⁵⁶ Marlborough was thus important for Frederick primarily as an example of the interplay between war and politics.

⁵²On the 'rhetorical function' of Frederick's writings, see Andreas Pečar, *Die Masken des Königs. Friedrich II. von Preußen als Schriftsteller*, (Frankfurt am Main & New York: Campus, 2016) (quotation, p. 10).

⁵³*Œuvres*, vol. XIV, pp. 284-297; Pečar, *Masken des Königs*, pp. 145-170; Storr, 'Age of Louis XIV', pp. 27-31.

⁵⁴*Œuvres*, vol. VII, p. 100.

⁵⁵*Œuvres*, vol. I, pp. 129-130 (quotations, p. 129).

⁵⁶*Œuvres*, vol. I, p. 140; *Œuvres*, vol. V, pp. 185-186; *Œuvres*, vol. VIII, pp. 171-172, p. 322; *Œuvres*, vol. XII, p. 72; *Œuvres*, vol. XV, p. 73.

Indeed, Napoleon Bonaparte took a not dissimilar view, seeing Marlborough above all as an example of a general who was also a statesman. When Napoleon listed great commanders to learn from, he mentioned Gustavus Adolphus, Turenne, Eugene and Frederick the Great, but not Marlborough. However, in 1806, Napoleon sponsored the publication of a biography of Marlborough, which emphasised that the British commander was not only an important general but also a diplomat. This implied a comparison with Napoleon himself, who also combined the roles of general and statesman. During his exile on the island of Saint Helena, Napoleon more than once praised Marlborough in these terms, calling him 'both captain and diplomat'. The French emperor was partly trying to diminish the reputation of his rival the Duke of Wellington, the other great British soldier of the long eighteenth century, through comparison with Marlborough. However, Napoleon also genuinely seems to have wanted to compare himself with the British captain-general, as two successful soldiers who also played an important role in politics.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Marlborough was not only one of the ablest military commanders of the eighteenth century but also exemplified Britain's links to the wider European continent. He served part of his military apprenticeship in the French army and was made a colonel by Louis XIV. During the War of the Spanish Succession, it was above all Marlborough who kept the different states of the allied coalition together, maintaining close relationships with Eugene, Heinsius and many other key figures from across Europe. He was also for some time a prince of the Holy Roman Empire. Indeed, much of the later criticism of Marlborough in England centred on suspicion of his close relations with foreigners.⁵⁸ This makes it all the more surprising that subsequent adulation of Marlborough has been mostly restricted to the Anglophone world.

However, while Marlborough repeatedly defeated the French on the battlefield, Francophone authors dominated the military literature of the eighteenth century. The three decades following the War of the Spanish Succession were a period of substantial divergence between the 'military literary world' in Britain and that on the continent, and this had implications for Marlborough's reputation.⁵⁹ While British writers lionised their hero, French authors focused on their own debates and

⁵⁷Chandler, *Marlborough as Military Commander*, pp. x-xi; Alan J. Guy, 'John Churchill, Professional Soldiering, and the British Army, c. 1660-c.1760', in Hattendorf et al., *Marlborough*, p. 104; Oury, 'Marlborough as an Enemy', p. 212; Oury, *Marlborough*, p. 16, p. 20, pp. 387-388 (quotation, p. 388).

⁵⁸Guy, 'John Churchill', pp. 110-111, p. 119; Hattendorf, 'Biographical Sketch', pp. 96-97; Hochedlinger, 'Marlborough and the Habsburg Monarchy', pp. 248-273; Oury, *Marlborough*, pp. 14-15, pp. 357-361, pp. 363-365, pp. 386-389.

⁵⁹For the phrase 'military literary world', see Houlding, *Fit for Service*, p. 168.

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preferred not to think too much about the English general who had beaten so many of their armies. The Prussian army's emphasis on infantry firepower was very much comparable with the British army's development under Marlborough's influence. However, the example of Frederick the Great exemplifies the dominance of French military culture during the long eighteenth century. The Prussian king read French authors like Feuquières and Folard, while almost completely neglecting the details of Marlborough's generalship. Frederick certainly expressed respect for Marlborough in general terms, seeing him as one of the great men of the age. However, the Prussian king considered the English captain-general to have been as much a politician as a soldier, and sought military inspiration far more from Eugene. Given Marlborough's success in holding together a pan-European coalition during the War of the Spanish Succession, it is deeply ironic that he should posthumously have been celebrated above all in the Anglophone world, while being less respected on the continent.