In 1894, Ludwig von Estorff (1859–1943), at this time a young captain in the Prussian-German Army, decided to turn away from a predictable and promising career in the Kaiserreich’s armed forces and instead, join the just recently established colonial Schutztruppe (protection force) in South-West Africa. Estorff justified this career move, because it was disputable in the eyes of many of his colleagues. He referred to the examples of older officers, especially «many of [the] great generals, who browsed around the world in their younger years, Moltke, Grolman, Werder».

When considering a hierarchical, conservative and tradition-based institution like the Prussian Army, a reference to the achievements of famous ancestors would not take us by surprise. However, what seems indeed unusual was Estorff’s appeal to a group of Prussian officers of the early nineteenth century, who have been – except for the famous Moltke of course – largely forgotten and known even to specialists merely for their role during the German wars of unification, but not for any kind of engagement outside Europe. If we take a closer look at the buried details of their earlier biographies, we find indeed activities outside the usual range of duty of a Prussian officer long before the Reichsgründung, such as Helmuth von Moltke’s (1800–1891) deployment as military instructor in the Ottoman Empire in the 1830s, August von Werder’s (1808–1887) expedition to the Caucasus in the 1840s, and Wilhelm von Grolman’s (1829–1893) travels to Persia and again the Caucasian region in the early 1860s. Obviously, there was a tradition of colonial engagement

in the German army that could be revitalised with the beginning of German colonialism in the late nineteenth century. Like all traditions, this one was also certainly «invented» and constructed, but it nevertheless referred to real undertakings from the decades before and are hardly known in our days even to specialists of German imperialism.

With some justification we could claim that Estorff just attempted to justify the comparatively late German engagement in colonial affairs with a retroactive and arbitrary construction of colonial traditions in the German armed forces before 1871. Nevertheless, the question remains: How could Estorff himself have been aware of the non-European engagements of high-ranking Prussian generals decades ago? In fact, this knowledge was obviously widespread and easy to access in the late nineteenth-century German army. Different officers at the time referred to the same institutional heritage not only to justify their own engagement in the least appreciated formation of the Schutztruppe, but also to draw concrete conclusions from these earlier experiences with regard to the appropriate methods of colonial warfare and rule to apply during conflicts at that time.

One of Estorff’s contemporaries and colleagues in the South-West African «protection force», First Lieutenant Paul von Heydebreck, summarised these experiences, which «a number of our most prominent military leaders» developed in «wars against native mobs in distant countries» as «the ability to find the appropriate measures and use in specific combat situations (Kriegslagen)», or in a nutshell, «to gain a broad and practical perspective (einen weiten praktischen Blick)» on military problems. Heydebreck referred to an even broader group of examples from which these experiences stemmed and reminded his readers, with the clear expectation that they were already aware of the biographies mentioned, «of Yorck – South Africa; Gneisenau – America; Moltke – Turkey; Werder and Grolman – Kaukasus; Goeben – Carlist Wars».

If Estorff’s and Heydebreck’s enumerations give an accurate insight into the sources of this institutional and personal knowledge, this knowledge dates back at least to the early nineteenth century, when officers from different German states started to join other more advanced colonial powers in their undertakings in the Americas, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. A prominent role in the first practical exercises of officers from German states in non-European areas was obviously played by a region that was usually not included in the prehistory of German colonial expansion before 1884 – the Caucasus. It was this turbulent frontier region of the Russian Empire that not only occupied an important place in the phantasies of the European public and military of the time – including the Prussian one. These phantasies also had practical consequences. The Caucasus attracted at least three

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expeditions of Prussian officers before the formation of the German Reich in 1870/1871; expeditions, from which the participants returned full with new impressions, knowledge and the social prestige gained from their combat experience abroad.\textsuperscript{3}

The aim of this article is not only to portray these expeditions for the first time in greater detail. Furthermore, these examples will be used to question in a more general way our usual assumption that the interest of the Prussian and later German imperial military in non-European endeavours only developed at the very end of the nineteenth century, and that it remained confined to a rather limited and – not only geographically but also institutionally – peripheral group within the Prusso-German officer corps. The central thesis developed in this article is that the roots of the Prussian military’s interest in colonial undertakings lay far before the usually assumed beginnings.\textsuperscript{4} It also claims that the institutional standing of the officers putting colonial imaginations in practice was far better than commonly assumed, thereby countering the idea that they usually belonged to the less gifted, less successful and less influential bottom of the Prussian officer corps. In addition, the thesis seeks to analyse the relationship between the Prusso-German military and European imperial expansion in a way that pays greater attention to usually underestimated factors in the military realm such as expectations, phantasies and imaginations. This is not to say that these influences on European imperialism in general have not been realised and investigated – most notably in Edward W. Said’s influential study on European Orientalism.\textsuperscript{5} However, while Said’s work inspired various elaborative studies, it was only recently used for an analysis of German attitudes towards extra-European regions without paying greater attention to military actors.\textsuperscript{6} This article deals with three German military expeditions to the Caucasus between 1840 and 1862, using them as examples to explore the formation, effect and transmission of knowledge and imaginations not only about the specific region of the Caucasus, but also about the possibilities of non-European military activities in general. It thus exemplifies the transimperial production and diffusion of colonial knowledge and narratives – a process that led to the establishment of a common imperial reservoir of knowledge: an «imperial cloud». Furthermore, this article offers a description of how initial impressions from military campaigns

\textsuperscript{3} For an exhaustive examination of the earlier history of Prussian-German imperial ambitions and actions, see C. Kamissek, «Transnationaler Militarismus. Politische Generationen deutscher Offiziere zwischen militärischem Internationalismus und imperialer Nation (1770–1870)», unpubl. PhD-thesis, European University Institute, Florence 2014.


\textsuperscript{6} See, for example, S.L. Marchand, German Orientalism in the Age of Empire. Religion, Race, and Scholarship, Washington D.C. 2009.
in colonial areas became part of the common knowledge at least in parts of the Prussian military, how this knowledge was passed on and how it could be used then at the end of the nineteenth century for the justification of German colonial undertakings in very different regions such as East and West Africa. What we can gain from these observations is a more comprehensive picture of the prehistory of German military imperialism from a usually neglected direction – the hills of the Caucasus.

1. The Caucasus in Early Nineteenth-Century German Military Imagination

Interest in and knowledge about the Caucasian region in German-speaking countries grew at the beginning of the nineteenth century driven by two interconnected factors: the Russian military expansion against the Ottoman empire, and the subsequent colonisation of the newly acquired territories at the southern frontier of the Russian empire with the help of, among other foreign immigrants, «German» – that is, in this period mostly Swabian – settlers. But what primarily made frontier regions like the Caucasus attractive and interesting in the eyes of German militaries was their qualification less as settlement areas but more so as military playgrounds. Especially the long period of peace that followed the Napoleonic Wars after 1815 became a heavy burden to the German military profession. Colonial powers such as Great Britain and France had the possibility to redirect the now unemployed forces from the continental theatres of war to non-European territories – an alternative the German states and their militaries lacked until the 1880s. The actions of the Russian military, and their slow and painful successes against the Ottoman Empire were internationally recognised and propagated. This dissemination of knowledge benefited from the traditionally close connections between the Prussian and Russian military, which became re-established and deepened with the conservative restauration of the Holy Alliance. Members of the Russian and Prussian army regularly exercised and paraded together, bringing Prussian soldiers in direct contact with the Russian «colonial» forces.

An even broader and especially younger stratum of Prussian officers got the news of the Russian expansion to the south via scientific and popular literature and their instructions at the Prussian War Academy (Kriegsakademie) in Berlin. One of the first popular propagandists of Prussian military action outside Europe was the famous geographer Carl Ritter (1779–1859), who was appointed to the first chair

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7 Interestingly, their fate was exactly remembered at a time in which the new German colonial endeavour in Africa came under strong pressure with a wave of colonial wars after 1904. See P. Hoffmann, Die deutschen Kolonien in Transkaukasien, Berlin 1905.

8 For usage of veterans for imperial endeavours by the British Empire, see, for example, C. Wright, Wellington’s Men in Australia: Peninsular War Veterans and the Making of Empire c. 1820–40, Basingstoke 2001.

in Geography at a German university in 1820; at the same time, he took a permanent teaching position at the Berlin War Academy.\textsuperscript{10} In Ritter’s conception, which gives a fair impression of the general consensus among the teachers at the War Academy, military geography was not only an academic discipline, but also a substitute for the lack of colonies, which could serve as practical training ground for young officers:

Our time requires with necessity to familiarise oneself with the most common, most important ideas which affect the world. For not floating around on this ocean of commonalities, a scientific compass is needed, especially since the Prussian military, which looks to the Russian north, the Spanish south, to France and England, to Greece and the Sublime Porte, has no possibility to train itself in a practical way like England with her colonies, France with her missions, Russia with her possessions in Asia, Austria with her touch with the Orient and the South, etc. […] Our profound scientific education has to be a substitute for this.\textsuperscript{11}

But a mere scientific and theoretical substitute was not what Ritter had in mind. Hidden in geographical lectures and historical descriptions of famous expeditions to distant countries, Ritter subtly motivated his young military students to freelance activities as long as the official stands of the Prussian state towards colonial acquisitions was still reluctant. In 1829, Ritter gave a lecture at the Prussian Academy of Science about the Indian campaign of Alexander the Great via the Caucasian region, which became published only a few years later.\textsuperscript{12}

Among Ritter’s students at the War Academy at that time was the later lieutenant general of the Prussian army August von Werder, one of Estorff’s examples for early German interest in colonial activities in the 1890s. Werder and the other participants of the first Prussian military expedition to the Caucasus belonged to what could be coined – with reference to studies about the militant paramilitary groups after the Great War – the «war youth generation» (\textit{Kriegsjugendgeneration}) of the Napoleonic Wars: the age-groups born around 1800, who were too young to participate in the battles with or against France before 1815 but had a clear memory of the war and were deeply impressed by the prestige that the active members of the armed forces had gained for their heroic performance.\textsuperscript{13}

The desire «to see war in its reality» became an obsession for many of these younger soldiers, among them the famous future chief of the Prussian and German

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\textsuperscript{10} E. Kessel, \textit{Moltke}, Stuttgart 1850, 39.
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general staff Helmuth von Moltke (1800–1891), whose deployment to the Ottoman Empire in the 1830s laid the foundation of his later reputation and career. Another representative of this generation was the second participant of the Caucasian expedition, Lieutenant Wilhelm Baron Hiller from Gaertringen, who also attended Ritter’s lectures at the War Academy in the early 1830s. Hiller’s father was the Prussian general August Hiller von Gaertringen (1772–1856), who had served as adjutant to the famous Yorck during Napoleon’s campaign against Russia and had excellent connections with the highest ranks of the Russian military, a connection from which his son’s expedition to the Caucasus benefited a lot.

Ritter’s lectures had obviously turned the attention of the young officers to the battle ground in the Caucasian region. After 1840, the Russian casualties in the Caucasian campaigns sharply increased as a consequence of more organised and coordinated resistance of different ethnic groups in the Northern Caucasus. Therefore, the Russian military expanded its presence in the region and deployed at times almost 200,000 soldiers to the southern frontier areas. Here, the Russian troops restored a belt of advanced fortresses, used mobile Cossack units and passed on to a strategy of demographic warfare by expulsions, as well as the destruction of villages and forests, a measure that was widely covered by the Western press.

2. Theory Turns into Practice: The First Prussian Expedition to the Caucasus 1842/1843

Shortly after the beginning of this renewed Russian campaign, another young Prussian officer, Lieutenant Hermann von Gersdorff, presented himself together with Werder and Hiller to Prince Adalbert of Prussia (1811–1873), one of the earliest and most dedicated advocates of a Prussian fleet and colonies before the foundation of the German Reich. Adalbert obviously supported the grass-roots initiative of Gersdorff and his comrades, turned to his brother-in-law, the Russian Tsar Nicholas I. (1796–1855) and received an official permission for his officers to participate in the Russian operations. Thereby, this originally private initiative of a small group of soldiers became an official enterprise and an example of binational cooperation in colonial affairs. In May 1842, Werder, Hiller and Gersdorff left Berlin and reached Stawropol almost four weeks later, the base of operations of the Russian Caucasus.

14 For Moltke’s benefits from his journey to the Ottoman Empire, see O. Jessen, Die Moltkes. Biographie einer Familie, Munich 2010, 74.
16 See letter from Wilhelm Hiller v. Gaertringen to his father (21.2.1844), ibid.
17 See K.S. Jobs, «Die transkontinentale Expansion des Zarenreiches», in: T. Bührer et al. (eds.), Impe-
18 K.F. Batsch, Admiral Prinz Adalbert von Preußen. Ein Lebensbild mit besonderer Rücksicht auf seine Ju-
gendzeit und den Anfang der Flotte, Berlin 1890.
army, where almost 80,000 men were concentrated for a new offensive against the resisting «mountain peoples».  

What the trigger-happy Prussian soldiers immediately realised was that war is about mostly waiting. Due to heavy losses in previous campaigns, the Russian commanders of the Caucasus Army had decided to attack the enemy only selectively, or otherwise expedite and strengthen the ring of fortresses to far dangerous areas – a strategy aimed at long-term success and the short-term reduction of unnecessary risks. This strategy was also built on patience and therefore not really compatible with the impatience of twitchy rookies, who were eager to try and prove their military abilities in order to finally measure up to their battle-tested forefathers. However, despite their deployment to an advanced post in the middle of a contested no man’s land near Tbilisi, the Prussian war tourist only spotted the enemy from a distance and learned a lot about the Russian abilities in construction works and logistics, but not so much about actual colonial warfare. In a condensed form, Werder, Hiller and Gersdorff experienced here what the whole Prussian army had to go through during a large part of the nineteenth century – a highly trained and motivated institution prepared for war without almost any possibility to turn theory into practice. But untypically for the Prussian army, this dilemma made the young men betake themselves to arbitrary acts and private initiatives, heavily stretching the patience and hospitality of their Russian hosts. One of these actions, a reconnaissance expedition waged «from pure boredom» in September 1843 with a group of Russian soldiers, finally brought at least Werder the desired baptism of fire and afterwards lifelong glory – although certainly not in the way he had hoped for. When the expedition inspected the river Urup near the Mountain Kephart in today’s Armenia, the group was ambushed and Werder was hit by a bullet below his shoulder. For some time, the doctors considered amputation as the only chance to save his life. In the end, Werder’s arm and life could be saved after weeks of uncertainty, but in the following months before his return to Prussia, he had to stay in a hospital and afterwards in a sanatorium to recover from his wound. However, despite the fact that his only actual combat ended in a disaster, the injury became a real boost for Werder’s military career. Via letters, which he had sent to his royal sponsor, the Prince of Prussia, the news about the heroic officer, who «leading a Cossack squadron had hammered the enemy and paid for his courage with a heavy injury», reached the German-speaking press and made Werder – initially ashamed of the unjustified glory – a real celebrity, especially among the ranks of the Prussian officer corps.

20 Ibid., 20–30.
21 Ibid., 41–44.
22 Ibid., 54.
23 Ibid., 57.
To almost the same degree, Hiller and Gersdorff became well-known because of their engagement in the Caucasus. All three officers were rapidly promoted within the following years and thereby preferred to senior colleagues due to their «experience in battle» (Kriegserfahrung), an almost exclusive qualification among younger officers in the Prussian army at the time. All of them had reached a general’s rank by 1866 and commanded divisions or brigades during the war against Austria. Nevertheless, the remembrance of the first Prussian Caucasus expedition remained controversial and multifaceted. Already during his stay in the Caucasus region, Werder had drafted extensive reports about his travels and experiences for the Prussian general staff. The expedition thereby became inserted into the material archive and institutional memory of the Prussian military. Publicly, though, after the first round of news coverage, no further descriptions of the journey appeared since the Russian authorities gave the order to keep silent about still ongoing operations. Werder’s diaries only became published in the late 1880s, while a biographical appraisal of his colleague Gersdorff merely appeared another twenty years later. By that time, Germany had reached the status of a colonial power and urgently needed insights into the strategy of colonial warfare. Yet, the Caucasus episode played almost no role in this biographical account but was superposed in a rather characteristic way by the famous deeds of Werder, Hiller and Gersdorff during the wars of German unification.

Nevertheless, as the references of Estorff and Heydebreck prove, there were alternative recounts of the essentials of Werder’s career within the Prussian military, and the physical records deposited in the archives of the Prussian general staff were not the decisive ones. It was not the concrete experiences or lessons the travelers had learned about the nature of colonial warfare that became essential for later generations serving in the African and East Asian colonies of the German Empire, but the sheer fact of their early service abroad and the institutional appraisal of this kind of career decision. For this purpose, the idea that Werder and his companions were – at least as far as we know – not interested in the permanent conquest of territories or the strategies of colonial rule that Russia employed was obviously not so important. Because of their long and successful careers, which led them to attain distinguished positions within the military apparatus, the few German officers with combat experience from extra-European deployments personally embodied the possibilities that this kind of random service could offer. But since these deployments never led to any prolonged engagement or even colonial activity in the territories visited by the early Prussian military expeditions, their remembrance became partly

separated from the concrete territory of the Caucasus, and at the same time «the Caucasus» turned more into a symbol of extra-European activities in general.

3. The Second Wave – The Caucasus Expedition of 1860

The first Prussian military expedition to the Caucasus was motivated by the generationally determined desire of young officers to «face the enemy» (an den Feind kommen) and thereby compete with the extraordinary social prestige and professional experience that the older generations had gained from their service in battle before 1815. That their attention was turned especially to the Caucasus region was due to a conjunction of several factors – the Russian military actions of the early 1840s, the short-term but intense media coverage of this distant battlefield and longer intellectual preparations as well as their acquaintance with the region via, for example, Ritter’s lectures at the War Academy. We can find a similar constellation in the formation of the second Prussian expedition to the Caucasus twenty years later. Here contingency played, at least at first sight, an even greater role, since the initial endeavour was not even intended to reach the Caucasus but Persia. On closer inspection, however, we can see that this early practical realisation of the Prussian military’s imperial ambitions was also caused by several factors, making its implementation maybe not inescapable, but highly probable at the very least. 

In 1857, Prussia, as the representative of the German Customs Union (Zollverein), had signed a treaty of friendship and a commercial contract with Persia, which two years later should be filled with life by sending a Prussian delegation to Tehran, thereby exploring the country and further possibilities for trade and cooperation. The former superintendent of the Berlin police Julius Baron Minutoli (1805–1860) became head of the delegation. He had fallen from grace as a reaction to his mediation among insurgents, the military and the Prussian court during the tumultuous days of March 1848. Initially suspended from public service and then neutralised as Prussian consul general to Spain and Portugal after 1853, Minutoli was reactivated for the delicate mission to Tehran due to his diplomatic experience, his extraordinary language abilities and his interest in archaeology. When he was asked to name a military attaché for his small expedition, Minutoli chose the young premier lieutenant Wilhelm von Grolman, who happened to be not only the son of the famous Prussian military reformer Karl von Grolman (1777–1843), but also Minutoli’s nephew.

27 For a theoretical evaluation of social phenomena along the lines contingency vs. determination, see L. Althusser, «Contradiction and Overdetermination», in: Althusser, For Marx, London 1969.
30 See Minkels, 1848, 316.
While it seems like the younger Grolman showed no independent interest in opportunities for extra-European service before his uncle’s call, he came to this opportunity not without preparation. Retrospectively, in fact we discover many factors distinguishing Grolman for his later mission and making his selection an almost logical choice. The first influence that had probably helped him to go beyond the usual geographical and mental limitations of the Prussian military service came from his family. Already in 1809, Grolman’s father had decided to leave Prussian service temporarily and fight with the Spanish insurgents against Napoleon.\footnote{See R. Wohlfeil, Spanien und die Deutsche Erhebung 1804–1814, Wiesbaden 1965, 213.} Already back then, ideological motives had gone hand in hand with the professional unrest of a dormant army, damned to passivity by political circumstances. In later decades the older Grolman concluded from his own experiences that officers should participate in foreign wars and even leave Prussian service for a while for that purpose if this was the only way to gain military experience and learn about other armed forces.\footnote{See E. v. Conrady, Leben und Wirken des Generals der Infanterie und Kommandierenden Generals des V. Armeekorps Carl von Grolman, vol. 3, Berlin 1896, 295–303.}

In addition, institutionally, Wilhelm von Grolman was obviously well-prepared for service abroad. He served in the same elitist First Foot Guards Regiment (1. Garde-Regiment zu Fuß), from which already the members of the first Caucasus expedition Werder, Hiller and Gersdorff had come. Of course, the eagerness to gain military experience by all means, including the step outside of the European borders, was strong in this unit, given the fact that members of this self-proclaimed «most noble regiment of Christendom» also had applied in droves for other extraordinary endeavours such as the training mission to the Ottoman Empire, which had later brought the chief of staff of the Prussian army, von Moltke, experience and glory.\footnote{For the history of self-understanding of this unit until the time of Grolman’s expedition, see C. v. Reinhard, Geschichte des Königlich Preußischen Ersten Garde-Regiments zu Fuß, Potsdam 1858. H. Brugsch, Reise der Königlichen Preußischen Gesellschaft nach Persien 1860 und 1861, vol. 1, Leipzig 1862, 80–81.} It seems likely that the remembrance of Werder’s, Hiller’s and Gersdorff’s deeds had also found their way into the institutional memory of their home unit in particular, and survived there for the next twenty years, given the intense sympathy with which the members of the guards units in Potsdam followed the fate of their comrades and the general awareness of their institutional history in military units.

Not only did the institutional memory, with its inclusion of the remembrance of earlier imperial endeavours in disguise, favour the realisation of the second Prussian military expedition to the Caucasus. When in April/May 1860 on their way to Tehran the group around Minutoli made the acquaintance of several Russian officers during a stay in Tbilisi and learned about a forthcoming new Russian offensive aimed at the subjugation of the western border regions of the Caucasus, this information fell on a well-prepared ground.\footnote{Not only Prussian officers such as...}
Grolman had been captured by the Romantic image of the Caucasus Wars. Most notably, the French writer Alexandre Dumas (1802–1870) had inscribed this image into the common European imagination – not least of the European transnational military caste – with the travelogue of his own journey to the region in 1858/1859. Other participants of Minutoli’s expedition to Tehran, such as the Egyptologist and linguist Heinrich Brugsch (1827–1894), had obviously read Dumas, as indicated by his comment: «[T]he fightings of the Russians against the Circassians have their own poetical side, which even in distant Europe, where exact and extensive reports get only randomly, provoke extraordinary suspense and sympathy.» This excitement was not only a Prussian affair, but must be seen against the backdrop of a high alertness for the military campaigns in the Caucasus among the whole European military in the 1850s and early 1860s, which had been fostered by Russian writers’ idealisations of the Caucasian theatre of war. Not only Prussian, but also Roman, Sardinian and other officers joined the Russian service «because of their passion for the so dangerous, Caucasian War» to participate actively in the battles against the «mountain peoples».

Thus, when the opportunity came for Grolman to depart from the designated route of the expedition – which turned out to be a mostly diplomatic and scientific endeavour without any kind of military involvement –, he was ready to take his chances. The final trigger was a conjunction of quite tragical events. On a side journey to the port city of Bushir at the Persian Gulf in October/November 1860, Minutoli and Grolman came down with cholera. Minutoli did not recover from the disease and died on 5 November 1860 in the caravanserai Kaneh-Zenjan. He was buried in Shiraz, 700 kilometres south of Tehran. Only shortly after his death, news about the demise of Friedrich Wilhelm IV, King of Prussia and royal supporter of the expedition, reached the mission after their return to the Persian capital together with the order to return in time for the coronation of his successor Wilhelm I in Berlin. When the rest of the delegation reached Tbilisi in late April 1861 on their way back to Prussia, Grolman decided to take his chances and use this opportunity «to participate as an officer in the fighting against the Circassians». In Stavropol he left Brugsch and joined the Russian expeditionary forces to Western Caucasus for several months, before returning to Berlin only in late 1861.
Immediately after his return, Grolman published an extensive account of his experiences with the Russian army in the Caucasus, where he praised the life at the imperial frontier and implicitly recommended this kind of imperial training ground for the Prussian military as well.\footnote{See W.v. Grolman, \textit{Militärische Aufzeichnungen während eines Aufenthalts im Kaukasus und in Persien}, [Danzig 1862], in: \textit{Beihefte zum Militär-Wochenblatt} 5–6 (1893), 157–235.} In particular, Grolman wrote about the performance and the military abilities of the Russian soldiers with great sympathy: «The consciousness of their own achievements leads to a boosted self-appreciation among officers and soldiers. They speak about Caucasian and Russian troops and look down with contempt on them. The officer corps is filled with military ambition; not bound to soil or garrison, spoiling and convenience are unknown. Permanent warfare gives every individual the opportunity to achieve something on their own and earn honourable distinctions.»\footnote{Ibid., 193.}

In his reflections about his Caucasus experience, Grolman implicitly but constantly drew comparisons with the far less challenged Prussian army, which had been living in peace for almost fifty years and in which institutional success depended on seniority and performance in manoeuvre. Due to its experiences on the imperial frontier, the Caucasian army was even considered by Grolman to be the best one in Europe.\footnote{Ibid., 194.} His subsequent transfer to the Third Guards, Regiment in provincial Gdansk as well as the contrast between the eventful months at the Caucasus frontier and the tranquillity of Prussia’s borderlands to the East, made Grolman emphasise the value of colonial campaigns for the army’s practical abilities even further and strengthened his call for similar possibilities for the Prussian army.

4. The Expedition of 1862 as a Symbol of Russo-Prussian Imperial Cooperation

Grolman’s cautious but understandable demand for a similar colonial field of action for the Prussian forces remained not unheard. Only months after his return to Berlin, another far more comprehensive expedition to the Caucasus was launched, which from the beginning was aimed at this particular theatre of war and had not only materialised by chance like its predecessor. Whether this undertaking was informed and inspired directly by the example of Grolman or not is not definitely clear, but – as with the other expeditions under consideration here –, Grolman’s influence is at least highly probable. Grolman remained officially assigned to the Topographical Unit (\textit{Topographisches Büro}) of the Prussian General staff during his time in the Caucasus, where his deployment did not remain unnoted at least because he needed his superiors’ consent for his initial journey to Tehran, as well as the subsequent extension of his absence to stay even longer with the Russian troops in the Caucasus. In addition, the publication of Grolman’s account of his combat experiences – at least as a personal and not anonymous publication – was
accessible to active officers only if approved by their superiors. In addition to Grolman’s account, the surviving civilian participant of the original Minutoli expedition, Heinrich Brugsch, published an extensive travelogue about the expedition in 1862, which intensified the circulation of information about their Caucasus campaign.\footnote{\textit{See} Brugsch, Reise.}

Again, it was not an individual impulse that initiated the third Prussian expedition to the Caucasus in August 1862, but a combination of factors. This time, the central figure of the enterprise was also not a low-ranking junior officer of the Prussian officer corps as was on the last two occasions, but a member of the royal family. Prince Albrecht of Prussia (1809–1872), the younger brother of King Wilhelm I, was a cousin of Adalbert of Prussia, who had facilitated with his personal request to the Russian Tsar Werder’s expedition twenty years earlier. Also Albrecht of Prussia had developed a sustained interest in extra-European territories, which he had already tried to pursue during an expedition to Egypt in 1843, an endeavour that in fact had a thoroughly touristic quality. Therefore, despite the fact that Albrecht had nominally become a general of the Prussian cavalry unit in 1862, he possessed, in contrast to other members of the Prussian Royal family, no practical military experience at all.

As with Werder and Grolman on earlier occasions, also Albrecht only needed a rather arbitrary direction for his appetite for military action, which was suddenly provided by news about new fighting in the Caucasus underlined by the incoming reports about earlier Prussian engagements there. Thus, an expedition was swiftly prepared by August 1862, which clearly exceeded earlier undertakings in seize and the high-ranking composition of its participants. Albrecht was accompanied not only by his personal physician and his secretary, but also by six civilian servants and four officers, among them Major Baron Walter von Loë (1828–1908), the aide-de-camp of King Wilhelm I and later field marshal of the German army.\footnote{\textit{See} L.v. Schlözer, \textit{Generalfeldmarschall Freiherr von Loë. Ein militärisches Zeit- und Lebensbild}, Stuttgart, Berlin 1914. 30.} Loë’s assignment to the expedition is also an indication that the third military journey to the Caucasus had in part the purpose to stimulate diplomatic relations with Russia, which had become heavily damaged by Prussia’s neutrality during the Crimean War between 1854 and 1856.\footnote{\textit{For the diplomatic consequences of the Crimean War, see} C. Friese, \textit{Rußland und Preußen vom Krimkrieg bis zum Polnischen Aufstand}, Berlin 1931.} The irony was that Loë, together with many of his younger comrades, had hoped for a deployment to the Crimea already at the beginning of the war in 1854 – regardless on which side of the struggle he would serve as long as he could get a second chance.\footnote{\textit{Loë’s assign- ment to the expedition is also an indication that the third military journey to the Caucasus had in part the purpose to stimulate diplomatic relations with Russia, which had become heavily damaged by Prussia’s neutrality during the Crimean War between 1854 and 1856. The irony was that Loë, together with many of his younger comrades, had hoped for a deployment to the Crimea already at the beginning of the war in 1854 – regardless on which side of the struggle he would serve as long as he could get a second chance.} Thus, when the members of the group arrived in Odessa in September 1862 and learnt about Russian preparations for an imminent punitive expedition against the Circassians, they hurried up to arrive in time at Stavropol, the home base of the
Russian forces in Northern Caucasus. There they learned that the operations would not start until mid-October, since only then the falling leaves would make advancements possible in the nearly impenetrable forest areas of the region. Despite all disappointment, this break gave Loë time firstly to study the Russian colonisation of the Caucasus, which made use of Cossack settlers for the «pacification» of the region, and secondly to get to know the central protagonists of the Russian colonial military. When the Russian commander-in-chief Count Alexander Baryatinsky (1815–1879) explained to his Prussian guests that he was about to «conquer the Caucasus not with the sword, but with axe and shovel», Loë clearly foresaw the consequences of this kind of warfare: «The Russians with their system of colonisation and their advanced firearms push the Circassians back step by step against the coast of the Black Sea. When they arrive there the nations will be wiped out, since this is a war of extermination man to man.»

Loë also learned to appreciate the Russian tactic of using other battle-tested groups adapted to the landscape and the local way of life, with a self-interest in defending the new settlements for the colonisation project. Only the Cossacks, he wrote in a pamphlet on «Russian Colonisation», were able «to assimilate their enemies, the Circassians, in such a way that together with their armament and costume they also took their way of fighting» and became equipped not only to «fight the enemy’s ploy with ploy, his vigilance with vigilance, but also his cruelty with retaliation».

These lessons on colonial warfare not only remained theoretical insights gained during a passive observer mission. In a sudden fulfilment of their desire for battle and military experience, the group was finally invited by the Russian General Nikolay Yevdokimov (1804–1873) to participate in an expedition to the Pshecha River Valley, to «cleanse» the area of remaining insurgents, «clear out the forests for military columns, edify new streets and survey the region». When Yevdokimov fell off his horse immediately before the departure of the expedition and was badly hurt, he even offered Prince Albrecht as a «proof of the faithful comradeship and respect» between them and their armies, to command the expedition. The Prince accepted the offer immediately and received the long-desired «baptism in fire» while the column was attacked and involved in a major battle that left forty men killed or wounded. Although the main success of the expedition was the capture of «800 cattle, sheep and goats», the task of the journey was completed for Albrecht and he returned to Berlin with his delegation in late 1862 – with the singular experience of having commanded a Russian colonial campaign in the Caucasus.
5. Repercussions and Transformations of the Caucasus Expeditions in Military Memory

With Grolman’s and Loë’s evaluations of their experiences in the Caucasus, in the 1860s the Prussian army had also already collected information and concepts for the conduct of colonial campaigns. Grolman’s and Loë’s accounts treated the question of the military’s role in colonisation and the role of colonisation for the military from different perspectives – Grolman from the perspective of an active line officer interested in the value of colonial experiences for military training and practice, and Loë from the perspective of the strategist interested in the modes of colonial warfare. For both of them and for most of the participants of the Prussian Caucasus expeditions before 1870, their rapid advancement and splendid careers were to a considerable extent a direct consequence of their experience in battle, which differentiated them from the majority of the Prussian officer corps and gave them a distinct reputation within the institution. However, the attention given to the Caucasus as a military training ground and area open for colonial adventures suddenly disappeared in the later 1860s. Grolman and Loë did not evaluate further and share their experiences at the Caucasus frontier – at least in public.

The reason for this was not so much the official refusal of colonial plans in Prussia or the political marginalisation and prosecution of their proponents as in the decades before, when this kind of reasoning was still associated with political radicalism and anti-royal nationalism. In fact, the early non-European orientation in the Prussian officer corps was quickly overrun and buried under new and formative experiences during the political and military events of latery 1860s and early 1870s, as well as by their consequences for the task description of the Prussian military. After 1866, Prussia became involved in a series of large-scale continental wars, which focused the resources and professional attention of its army on conventional warfare and finally offered the kind of challenge and the fields of activity, for which Prussian officers had so long hoped.\(^\text{56}\) Grolman’s earlier career with its formative experience in the Caucasus, for example, was superposed by his engagement in the German wars of unification, in which he took part in the Bohemian campaign of 1866 and then – promoted to colonel in 1870 – in the battles of Gravelotte and the enclosure and capture of Paris.\(^\text{57}\) During his later career he was promoted to the rank of a general of the infantry; he retired highly decorated in 1892 and died the following year. Loë also served during the German wars of unification, and he rose even more quickly in the military hierarchy, he was already promoted to commanding general in 1884 – he was the first Catholic in the Prussian officers corps ever to hold such a position.\(^\text{58}\)

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\(^{58}\) See Stumpf, Loë.
In later recounts of Grolman’s, Loë’s and Werder’s lives, the Caucasus experience became a biographical footnote for quite a long time. Nevertheless, as its rediscovery by a later generation of German officers in the 1890s indicates, it remained an arcane part of the institutional memory of the Prussian army. The repository, in which the remembrance of their deeds was preserved over the following decades, was only in part material, since we see no further publications, recorded discussions or other information about their endeavours between the mid-1860s and the early 1890s. Nevertheless, it survived even the great political and institutional upheavals of these three decades and reappeared exactly at the time when the Caucasus episodes could be used as justification for imperial engagement in Germany’s colonial territories – regardless of later analytical differentiations between «continental» and «overseas» colonialism. Informal mouth-to-mouth propaganda played an important role here. Especially in the intellectual vanguard unit of the Prussian-German army, the Great General Staff (Großer Generalstab) in Berlin, this legacy was well-remembered, since without this already existing consciousness, later admirers such as Estorff and Heydebrecht could not have evoked their legacy with such an implicitness and confidence in the memory of their readers.

The re-publication of Grolman’s account in 1893 was not only a souvenir rediscovered on the occasion of his death. It followed a need for information, instruction and examples at a time in which the Prussian army had for the first time a real chance for the realisation of colonial aspirations after the German Reich had joined the league of colonial powers in 1884. Edited and commented by Major Gustav Krahmer (1839–1905), head of the so-called «Russian department» within the General Staff, Grolman’s account served as an instrument in the internal dispute among the German military regarding the difference between continental and maritime imperialists, a distinction that made practical sense only now, when both strategies seemed to be fruitful for the further projection of unified Germany’s military and political ambitions. Yet, while Grolman’s original experience was based on a companionate relationship and a close alliance with the tzarist army, this relationship now turned more and more into competition and enmity. The envy aroused by Russia’s imperial advance, which turned now towards Central Asia after the completed subjugation of the Caucasus, made Russia in the eyes of a younger generation of German officers not only a rival, but even an object of possible conquests.

Besides the political context, the «biological factor», that is the steady diminution of living members of earlier generations, made the transformation of the previously mainly orally transmitted and personally embodied experience into a written source necessary to keep it available for later generations.

59 See Grolman, Aufzeichnungen.
60 For the development of Russian-German relations against the background of colonial competition in Central Asia, see: R.A. Mark, Im Schatten des «Great Game». Deutsche «Weltpolitik» und russischer Imperialismus in Zentralasien 1871–1914. Paderborn 2012.
6. Conclusion

German imperial ambitions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century could refer to a heritage dating back to before the days of the German nation state and of the antagonistic national competition for colonial territories. Taking this heritage into account, German colonialism was not «secondary» in the sense that German politicians and officers had not shown any «national» interest in colonial adventures before the last third of the nineteenth century, as claimed by Said and others.\textsuperscript{61} For political reasons, the supporters of colonial projects for Prussia and the other German states before 1871 could not fulfil their fantasies and desires, but nevertheless took part in the production and circulation of knowledge about possible fields of colonial action. The Caucasus is only one example for such kind of colonial phantasies that lasted over decades. Further evidence suggests that at the same time as the beginning of the Caucasus expeditions, other areas that were already occupied by competing European colonial powers in Africa and West Asia drew the attention of the Prussian military.\textsuperscript{62} In almost all known cases and contexts, the initial motivation of Prussian officers to fight in distant countries, taking into account enormous personal and professional risks, came not from a clear vision of colonial conquest and rule for their home country. What they first and foremost appreciated was the opportunity to gain experience in combat and thereby shape their professional reputation as officers.

This initial lack of distinct and explicit «colonial» interest should not mislead us to disconnect the early military experiences of Prussian officers in areas such as the Caucasus from later German colonialism. The motivation of later generations of German officers to serve in the \textit{Schutztruppe} in Africa was not very different from the motivation of their superiors. In addition, colonial ideology was often only a justification for seeking rather personal career opportunities abroad and not the other way around. A particular area overseas became interesting to the military not because of its qualification as a settlement area but as a zone of war and practical training ground. Different areas such as the Caucasus, the Ottoman Empire and the African continent were more or less interchangeable. Therefore, the examples of Grolman, Werder and Moltke could serve as reference points and strategic arguments for officers such as Estorff and others, with an interest in South-West Africa.

This is the point at which the concept of the «imperial cloud» – as a designation of the space in which these phantasies and images of colonial activity, together with concrete information about actual expeditions of the Caucasus, became preserved, passed on and transformed – has its value for the study of German colonialism. The metaphorical appeal of this concept to postmodern information technology offers a


\textsuperscript{62} For additional cases and evidence, see Kamissek, \textit{Transnationaler Militarismus}. 

https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944-2016-2-183
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more precise description of the structure and peculiarities of this space of knowledge than other concepts. It pays tribute to the fact that this repository was primarily material – in the sense that the information was written down on paper, stored in archives and distributed in written form. It was stored in archives, but without a parallel oral transfer in individual networks that, for a long time, also included the authors of the original accounts of the Caucasus undertakings. These accounts would have become dead artefacts very quickly. Especially the living representatives of colonial orientation within the Prussian army certified the social and institutional value that colonial engagement could have for younger generations of officers. Therefore, a conceptualisation that takes into account the constitutive role of individual actors for knowledge production, application and preservation as a supplement to the mechanisms of anonymous discourses, is needed. By focusing more on the role of these actors, the ways of transfer between very different geographical contexts can also be better described if experiences, as in the cases above, travelled not as immaterial entities, but with the individuals acquiring them from one context to the other. These actors were motivated to their actions by influences, which even though not traceable to the last detail, became effective only in their combination: the combination of social contexts with written information, informal mouth-to-mouth propaganda with personal example, etc.

To approach the relevance of previous military activities of German-Prussian officers outside Europe for later full-fledged German colonialism, it seems important to consider another aspect of the theoretical concept of the imperial cloud: The disbanding of the idea of unidirectional «transfers», when the relationship between different geographical contexts and periods of earlier German imperial military activity and later formal German colonialism, is analysed. The cases above were presented to underline the multidirectional, reciprocal and transnational nature of knowledge transfer that we can discover in the «imperial cloud».

Not one single context and previous experience like the Caucasus had direct and causal impact on later German colonialism. But, taken together, the different areas and individual undertakings of German informal imperialism formed a reservoir of knowledge that supported and informed the ambitions of Imperial Germany and its military in the last third of the nineteenth century. Now, as the examples of Estorff and others demonstrate, the reference to officers known for their earlier experiences abroad and the information about their campaigns served as inspiration, and legitimation and made the decision to join the newly established Schutztruppe less refutable in the eyes of superiors within the military hierarchy.

The original and central motivation for imperial service by militaries in general – not only German ones – was an institutional and structural one, based on professional and not so much ideological ambitions. Nevertheless, phantasies and imaginations about distinct areas such as the Caucasus, which were stored in the imperial cloud and remained accessible for the whole nineteenth century also for the
German military, played their role in giving these ambitions aim and direction. Their attractiveness changed depending on political circumstances, the military needs of the German-Prussian army in Europe and other factors, but they were never fully forgotten. What we can observe here is not so much a linear development from small-scale continental imperialism to global colonialism, but rather an alternating sequence of booms and circles. When in the last third of the nineteenth century German military and imperial ambitions did not seem feasible in the spheres of influence of other powers, other areas so far untouched by imperial ambitions in Africa and Eastern Asia suddenly became more interesting. After the loss of the colonies during the First World War, the attention was turned back to Eastern Europe and also the Caucasus, a move further motivated by German military successes against Russia. Put into this context and considering the continuity, the Caucasus expeditions offer us a widely neglected strand in the prehistory of German colonialism that demands further investigation to examine its exact range and influence. Especially the question on the impact of concrete experiences in imperial warfare on later actions of the German army in Africa and elsewhere seems to deserve further attention.