War is a science so obscure and imperfect that, in general, no rules of conduct can be given in it, which are reducible to absolute certainties; custom and prejudice, confirmed by ignorance, are its sole foundation and support.

All other sciences are established upon fixed principles and rules, while this alone remains destitute; and so far from meeting with anything fundamental among the celebrated captains, who have written upon this subject, we find their works not only altogether deficient in that respect, but, at the same time, so intricate and indigested, that it requires very great parts, as well as application, to be able to understand them: nor is it possible to form any judgment upon history, where everything on this head, is totally the product of caprice and imagination....

**Article I: Of Raising Troops**

Troops are raised either by voluntary engagement, or by capitulation; sometimes too by compulsion, but most commonly by artifice. When you recruit men by capitulation, it is barbarous as well as unjust to recede from it; they being free at the time of their contracting themselves, it becomes contrary to all laws both divine and human not to fulfill the promises made to them, their dependence upon which was what alone induced them to accede to the obligation. Neither is the service benefited by those unlawful proceedings, for sensible of the hardship imposed upon them, they seize the first opportunity to leave it; and can one, after having first cancelled all engagements by a breach of faith, proceed afterwards against them with any degree of justice for the crime of desertion? Nevertheless, severe examples are sometimes necessary for the support of good discipline, although in the execution they are attended with an appearance of cruelty; but concerning the grievance of which I am speaking, as there are many soldiers in the beginning of a campaign, whose time of service is expired, the captains, desirous to keep their companies complete, detain them by force, which is the occasion of it.

The method of raising troops by artifice, is likewise altogether scandalous and unwarrantable; such, among other instances, as that of secretly putting money into a man’s pocket, and afterward challenging him for a soldier. That of raising them by compulsion is still more so: it creates a general ravage, from which there is no exemption of person, but by force of money, and is founded upon the most unjustifiable principles.

Would it not be much better to establish a law obliging men of all conditions of life to serve their king and country for the space of five years? A law, which could not reasonably be objected against, as it is both natural and just for people to be engaged in the defense of that state of which they constitute a part, and in choosing them between the years of twenty and thirty, no manner of inconvenience can possibly be the result; for those are years devoted, as it were, to libertinism; which are spent in adventures and travels, and, in general, productive of but small comfort to parents. An expedient of this kind could not come under the denomination of a public calamity, because every man, at the expiration of his five years service, would be discharged. It would also create an inexhaustible fund of good recruits, and such as would not be subject to desertion. In course of time, everyone would regard it as an honor rather than a duty to perform his task; but to produce this effect upon a people, it is necessary that no sort of distinction should be admitted, no rank or degree whatsoever excluded, and the nobles and rich rendered, in a principal manner, subservient to it. This would effectually prevent all murmur and repining, for those who had served their time, would look upon such, as betrayed any reluctance, or dissatisfaction at it, with contempt; by which means, the grievance would vanish insensibly, and every man at length esteem it an honor to serve his term. The poor would be comforted by the example of the rich; and the rich could not with decency complain, seeing themselves on a footing with the nobles.
War is moreover an honorable profession; how many princes have voluntarily condescended to carry arms? And how many officers have I seen serve in the ranks after a reduction rather than submit to live in a state of indolence and inactivity? Nothing therefore but effeminity can make a law of this kind appear hard or oppressive.

If we take a survey of all nations, what a spectacle do they present to us? We behold some men rich, indolent, and voluptuous, whose happiness is produced by a multitude of others, who are employed in flattering their passions and who subsist only by preparing for them a constant succession of new pleasures. The assemblage of these distinct classes of men, oppressors and oppressed, forms what is called society, the refuse of which is collected to compose the soldiery, but such measures and such men are far different from those by means of which the Romans conquered the universe....

**Article 2: Of Clothing Troops**

Our dress is not only expensive, but inconvenient, no part of it being made to answer the end required. The love of appearance prevails over the regard due to health, which is one of the grand points demanding our attention.

In the field, the hair is a filthy ornament for a soldier, and after once the rainy season is set in, his head can hardly be ever dry. His clothes don’t serve to cover his body, and in regard to his feet, they with stockings and shoes rot in a manner together, not having wherewithal to change; and provided he has, it can be of little signification, because presently afterward, he must be in the same condition again; thus, as may be naturally supposed, he is soon sent to the hospital. White garters are only fit for a review, and spoil in washing; they are also inconvenient, hurtful, of no real use, and very expensive. The hat soon loses its shape, is not strong enough to resist the rains and hard usage of a campaign, but presently wears out; and if a man, overpowered perhaps by fatigue, lies down, it falls off his head, so that sleeping with it uncovered and exposed to dews or bad weather, he is the day following in a fever.

I would have a soldier wear his hair short, and be furnished with a small wig either grey or black and made of Spanish lambskin, which he should put on in bad weather. This wig will resemble the natural head of hair so well, as to render it almost impossible to distinguish the difference, will fit extremely well, when properly made, cost but about twenty pence, and last during his whole life. It will be also very warm, prevent colds and fluxes, and give quite a good air. Instead of the hat, I would recommend a helmet made after the Roman model, which will be no heavier, be far from inconvenient, protect the head against the stroke of a saber, and appear extremely ornamental. In regard to his clothing, he should have a waistcoat somewhat larger than common with a small one under it in the nature of a short doublet and a Turkish cloak with a hood to it. These cloaks cover a man completely and don’t contain above two ells and a half of cloth; consequently, are both light and cheap. The head and neck will be effectually secured from the weather, and the body, when laid down, kept dry, because they are not made to fit tight and, when wet, are dried again the first moment of fair weather.

It is far otherwise with a coat, for when wet, the soldier not only feels it to the skin, but is reduced to the disagreeable necessity of drying it upon his back; it is therefore no longer surprising to see so many diseases in an army. Those who have the strongest constitutions, perhaps escape them the longest, but they must at length submit to a calamity which is unavoidable. If, to the distresses already enumerated, we add the duties they are obliged to do, particularly those, whose burdens are increased by what they carry for their sick comrades; for the dead, wounded, and deserted, one ought not to wonder that the battalions are reduced at the end of a campaign to one hundred men....

**Article 3: Of Subsisting Troops**

The institution of messing among troops contributes much to good order, economy, and health; debauchery and gaming are thereby prevented, and the soldier is at the same time very well maintained; nevertheless, it is subject to many inconveniences; a man harasses himself after a march in search of wood, water, etc., is tempted to maraud, is perpetually dirty and ill-dressed, spoils his clothes by the carriage from one camp to another of all
the necessary utensils for his mess, and likewise impairs his health by the extraordinary fatigues which
unavoidably attend it....

The use of biscuit in the field is much preferable to bread, because it is a composition which does not spoil with
keeping, is very wholesome, and a soldier can carry a sufficient quantity of it for seven or eight days without
any inconvenience. But we need only apply to such officers as have served among the Venetians to be informed
of the general rule, as well as convenience of it. The Muscovite kind, called Soukari, is the best, because it does
not crumble; it is made in a square form of the size of a small filbert, and, as it takes up but little room, will not
require such numbers of wagons to convey it from place to place as are necessary for bread. The purveyors,
indeed, very industriously propagate the opinion that bread is better for a soldier; but that is altogether false,
and proceeds only from a selfish regard to their own interest; for they don't more than half bake it, and blend
all sorts of unwholesome ingredients, which with the quantity of water contained in it, renders the weight and
size double; add to this, their train of bakers, servants, wagons, and horses, upon all which they make a large
profit, they are also a great encumbrance to an army; must be always furnished with quarters, mills, and
detachments to guard them. In short, it is inconceivable how much a general is perplexed with the frauds they
commit, the embarrassments they create, the diseases they occasion by the badness of their bread, and the
extraordinary trouble they give to the troops. The erecting of ovens, is a circumstance which in general
discovers so much of your intentions to the enemy that it is needless to say any more about it. If I undertook to
prove everything which I advance by facts, I should not be able to dismiss this subject so soon; but, upon the
whole, I am convinced that a great many misfortunes have proceeded only from this evil, which have been
falsely ascribed to other causes....

**Article 4: Of Paying Troops**

Without entering into a detail of different pay, I shall only say in general that it ought to be such as will afford a
competency: a handful of men well subsisted and disciplined is superior to a multitude of such as are neglected
in those important particulars, for it is the goodness, and not the number of troops, on which victory depends.

Economy is commendable, while confined within certain limits, but in exceeding those, it degenerates into
sordid parsimony. Unless your appointments for the officers are such as will support them genteely, you must
dispose of them either to men of fortune, who serve only for their pleasure, or to indigent wretches, who are
destitute of spirit. The former of these, I make but small account of, as being for the most part impatient of
fatigue and repugnant to all subordination, who are addicted to perpetual irregularities and no more than mere
libertines. The latter are so depressed that it would be unreasonable to suppose them capable of anything great
or noble. For as preferment is not rendered an object of sufficient importance to influence their passions, their
ambition is naturally soon gratified, and they are full as happy to remain in their old stations, as to accede to
higher at any expense.

Hope encourages men to endure and attempt everything; in depriving them of that, or removing it to too great
a distance from them, you divest them of their very soul. For which reason, all degrees of advancement ought to
be accompanied with a proportionable increase of honors and advantages, and every officer should not only
regard the command of a regiment as a post of the highest dignity, but moreover be assured that he himself, by
good behavior and perseverance in his duty, will at length attain the same. When this kind of spirit is made to
prevail among your troops in the manner it ought, they may be kept under the severest discipline, but to speak
the truth, the gentry, who are what we call soldiers of fortune make the only good officers, whose
appointments ought nevertheless to produce an income sufficient to maintain them in a handsome manner.
Because a man who devotes himself to the service should look upon it as an entrance into some religious order,
he should neither have nor even acknowledge any other home than that of his regiment, and at the same time,
whatsoever station he may be in should esteem himself honored by it.

According to the fashion of the present times, a man of quality thinks himself very ill used, if the court does not
present him with a regiment at the age of eighteen or twenty; this extravagant partiality destroys all manner of
emulation amongst the officers of inferior birth, who thereby become in a great measure excluded from any chance of succeeding to the like preferments, and consequently to the only posts of importance, the glory attending which would atone for the toils and sufferings of a tedious life to which they cheerfully submit in hopes of acquiring reputation and a future recompense.

Nevertheless, I would not be understood to argue that princes and other persons of illustrious originals should be denied all marks of preference and distinction, but only that some regard should be had to their abilities, and the privileges of birth required to be supported by those of merit. If properly qualified therefore, they might be allowed to purchase regiments of such of the gentry, as had been rendered incapable of service by age or infirmities, which permission would at the same time prove a recompense for both. But they are notwithstanding by no means to be entitled to the liberty of selling again to another, because that of purchasing at unseasonable years is an indulgence sufficient. Their regiments, therefore, as often as they become vacant, ought to be afterward disposed of in recompensing long service and conspicuous merit.

Article 5: Of Exercising Troops
The manual exercise is without doubt a branch of military discipline necessary to render a soldier steady and adroit under arms; but it is by no means of sufficient importance in itself to engage all our attention. So far from it that it even deserves the least, exclusive of that part, which it is dangerous to make use of in the face of an enemy, such as carrying the firelock over the left arm, and firing by platoons, which, as will hereafter be explained, has occasioned many a shameful defeat. After this exception, the principal part of all discipline depends upon the legs and not the arms. The personal abilities which are required in the performance of all maneuvers and likewise in engagements are totally confined to them, and whoever is of a different opinion is a dupe to ignorance and a novice in the profession of arms. The question whether war ought to be styled a trade or a science is very properly thus decided by the chevalier Folard: "It is a trade for the ignorant, and a science for men of genius."

Article 6: Of Forming Troops for Action
I propose to treat of this subject, which is a very copious one, in a manner so new that I shall probably expose myself to ridicule. But in order to render myself somewhat less obnoxious to it, I shall examine the present method of practice concerning the forming of troops for action, which is so far from being confined within a small compass, that it is capable of furnishing matter enough for a folio volume. I shall begin with the march, which subjects me to the necessity of first advancing what will appear very extravagant to the ignorant. It is that notwithstanding almost every military man frequently makes use of the word "tactic" and takes it for granted that it means the art of drawing up an army in order of battle, yet not one can properly say what the ancients understood by it. It is universally a custom among troops to beat a march without knowing the original or true use of it and is universally believed that the sound is intended for nothing more than a warlike ornament.

Yet sure we ought to entertain a better opinion of the Greeks and Romans, who either are or ought to be our masters, for it is absurd to imagine that martial sounds were first invented by them for no other purpose than to confound their senses.

But to return to the march, which, according to the present practice, is accompanied with so much noise, confusion, and fatigue, to no manner of effect; and the sole remedy for which appears to be a secret left for me to disclose. As every man is suffered to consult his own ease and inclination, consequently some march slowly, others again fast; but what is to be expected from troops that cannot be brought to keep one certain, regular pace, either quick or slow, as the commanding officer shall think proper, or the exigency of affairs requires, and that an officer is obliged to be posted at every turning, to hasten the rear, which is perpetually loitering behind? A battalion moving off its ground not improperly conveys the idea of a machine constructed upon no principle, which is ready to fall in pieces every moment and which cannot be kept in motion without infinite difficulty.
If on a march the front is ordered to quicken its pace, the rear must unavoidably lose ground before it can perceive it; to regain which, it sets up a run. The front of the succeeding corps will naturally do the same, which presently throws the whole into disorder. Thus it becomes impossible to march a body of troops with expedition without forsaking all manner of order and regularity.

The way to obviate these inconveniences and many others of much greater consequence, which proceed from the same cause, is nevertheless very simple, because it is dictated by nature - it is nothing more than to march in cadence in which alone consists the whole mystery and which answers to the military pace of the Romans. It was to preserve this, that martial sounds were first invented and drums introduced, and in this sense only is to be understood the word "tactic," although hitherto misapplied and unattended to. By means of this, you will be always able to regulate your pace at pleasure; your rear can never lag behind, and the whole will step with the same foot; your wheelings will be performed with celerity and grace; your men's legs will never mix together; you won't be obliged to halt, perhaps in the middle of every wheel, to recover the step, nor the men be fatigued in any degree equal to what they are at present. Nothing is more common, than to see a number of persons dance together during a whole night, even with pleasure; but deprive them of music, and the most indefatigable amongst them will not be able to bear it for two hours only, which sufficiently proves that sounds have a secret power over us, disposing our organs to bodily exercises, and, at the same time, deluding as it were, the toil of them. If anyone, thinking to ridicule what I have advanced, asks me what particular air I would recommend to make men march, I will readily answer without being moved by his raillery that all airs, in common or triple time, will produce such an effect, but only in a greater or less degree, according to the taste in which they are severally set; that nothing more is required than to try them upon the drum accompanied by the fife and to choose such as are best adapted to the nature and compass of those instruments. Perhaps it may be objected, that there are many men whose ears are not to be affected by sounds, which, in regard to this particular, is a falsity; because the movement is so natural, that it can hardly be even avoided. I have frequently taken notice that in beating to arms, the soldiers have fallen into their ranks in cadence without being sensible of it, as it were—nature and instinct carrying them involuntarily; and without it, it is impossible to perform any evolution in close order, which I shall prove in its proper place.

If what I have been saying is only considered in a superficial manner, the cadence may not appear to be such of great importance; but to be able to increase or diminish the rapidity of a march during an engagement is an advantage which may be of infinite consequence. The military pace of the Romans was no other than this with which they marched twenty-four miles, equal to eight of our leagues, in five hours. Let us try the experiment upon a body of our infantry, and see whether they will be able to perform as much in the same space of time. It must be allowed indeed, that marching composed the principal part of their discipline. Nevertheless, one may from hence form a judgment of the pains they took in exercising their troops, as well as of the importance of the cadence. It will be no difficulty to prove, that it is impossible to keep the ranks close or to make a vigorous charge without it; notwithstanding all which, I don't believe a single person has paid any regard or attention to it for these three or four ages past.

It now becomes necessary to examine a little the present method of forming troops for action; and those who understand it the best, divide a battalion into sixteen parts, which are distinguished by different apppellations according to the peculiar customs of places. A company of grenadiers is posted upon one flank, and a picquet upon the other. It is drawn up four deep, and that its front may be rendered as extensive as possible, it marches to the attack in a line. The battalions which form the whole line of battle are close to each other, the infantry being all together in one body, and the cavalry in another—a method contradictory to common prudence, and of which we shall speak more at large in another place. In advancing toward the enemy, they are compelled by the nature of their disposition to move very slowly. The majors are calling out, "close!" on which they press inward, and crowding too much upon their center, it insensibly breaks and becomes eight deep, while the flanks remain only four. An instance which every person who has been in an engagement will acknowledge the truth of: the general, seeing this disorder and being afraid to have his flanks exposed by the intervals which
have consequently been made between the battalions, is obliged to halt, which, in the face of an enemy, is very dangerous. But as they also from similar measures are probably in as much confusion, the mischief is not so great as it would be otherwise. Nevertheless, a person ought at all events to persist in advancing, and never make a halt to remedy such disorders, because if the enemy takes advantage of that opportunity to fall upon him, he must inevitably be undone.

When the two armies arrive within a certain distance from each other, they both begin to fire and continue their approaches, till they come within about fifty or sixty paces, where, as is usually the case, either the one or other takes to flight; and this is what is called a charge. It is inconsistent indeed with the nature of their present bad order that they should be able to make a better, because I look upon it as an impossibility without the use of the cadence. But let two battalions, which are to engage each other, march up with straight ranks, and without doubling or breaking, and say which of them will gain the victory - the one that gives its fire in advancing, or the other that reserves it? Men of any experience will with great reason give it in favor of the latter; for to add to the consternation into which the former must be thrown in seeing their enemy advancing upon them through the smoke with his fire reserved, they will be either obliged to halt or, at least, to march very slowly, till they have loaded again, during which time they are exposed to a dreadful havoc, if he enlarges his pace and falls upon them before they are ready again.

Had the last war continued some time longer, the close fight would certainly have become the common method of engaging; for the insignificancy of small arms began to be discovered, which make more noise than they do execution and which must always occasion the defeat of those who depend too much upon them. If therefore the firings had been laid aside, it is highly probable the present method likewise of forming three or four deep, would have soon shared the same fate; for what service could reasonably be expected from a body of men rendered slow and unwieldy by their extent of front against an opposite one, who were able to march with more rapidity and to perform every movement with more ease?...

...The effects of gun powder in engagements become less dreadful, and fewer lives are lost by it than is generally imagined: I have seen whole volleys fired without even killing four men, and shall appeal to the experience of all mankind, if any single discharge was ever so violent as to disable an enemy from advancing afterward, to take ample revenge by pouring in his fire, and at the same instant rushing in with fixed bayonets; it is by this method only that numbers are to be destroyed and victories obtained.

At the battle of Castiglione, Monsieur de Reventlau, who commanded the Imperial army, had drawn up his infantry on a plain with orders to reserve their fire till the French approached within twenty paces, expecting by a general discharge made at that distance to defeat them. The French, after having with some difficulty reached the top of a hill, which separated them from the Imperialists, drew up opposite to them, with orders not to fire at all; but as M. de Vendome judged it imprudent to make the attack, till he had first possessed himself of a farm which was situated upon his right, the two armies stood looking at each other for some time; at length the orders to engage were given; the Imperialists, in obedience to their instructions, suffered the French to approach within about twenty or twenty-five paces at which distance they presented their arms and fired with all possible coolness and precaution; notwithstanding which, before the smoke was dispersed, they were broken to pieces; great numbers of them were destroyed upon the spot, and the rest put to flight.

What I have been advancing appears to me supported by reason, as well as experience, and proves that our large battalions are vastly defective in their composition; as the only service which they are capable of doing in action, is by their firing, their construction is therefore adapted to that alone; and when that is rendered ineffectual, they are no longer of any consequence, conscious of which, their own safety becomes naturally the next object of their attention. Thus it is that everything centers from its very nature in its point of equilibrium. The original of this method of forming our battalions was probably taken from reviews, for, drawn up in such extensive order, they make a more pleasing appearance; to which being familiarized by custom, it insensibly became adopted in action.
Yet notwithstanding the weakness and absurdity of such a disposition, there are many who pretend to vindicate it by reason, alleging that in thus extending their front, they will be able to enlarge their fire; and, in compliance with this opinion, I have known some draw up their battalions even three deep; but they have been made sensible of their error, by severe experience. Otherwise, I really imagine they would soon have formed them two deep, and not improbably in ranks entire; for it has been hitherto an invariable maxim in all engagements, to endeavor to outflank the enemy by exceeding him in front. But before I enlarge too much on this subject, it is necessary that I should describe my method of forming regiments and legions after which I shall treat of the cavalry and endeavor to establish a certain order and disposition, which, although it may be subject to some change from the variety of situations, ought never to be totally departed from.

W. Fawcett, translator. *Reveries or Memoirs upon the Art of War, by Field Marshal Count Saxe* (London: 1757).