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# Bernhardi, Friedrich von

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Bernhardi, *Friedrich* Adolf Julius von  
German general (Prussian) and military writer  
Born 22 November 1849 in Saint Petersburg, Russia  
Died 11 December 1930 in Kunnersdorf, Silesia

**Friedrich von Bernhardi was one of the most important and most controversial military writers and armchair generals in pre-1914 Europe. During the First World War, he commanded German forces in Russia and France.**

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## Career

Stemming from a Baltic family background, Friedrich von Bernhardi (1849-1930) was born in Saint Petersburg as son of a Prussian diplomat and historian and the daughter of a Russian admiral. The family later moved to Lower Silesia. In 1869, Bernhardi joined the 14<sup>th</sup> Hussar Regiment in Kassel and fought with the unit in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/1871. His subsequent career saw various troop commands in the cavalry, a tour as military attaché in Switzerland (1891-1894), a rather brief period as head of the general staff's military history section (1899-1901), and a final posting as Commanding General of the VII Corps in Münster. In 1909, Bernhardi resigned as *General der Kavallerie* and became a professional military writer. During these years, he published "Reiterdienst" (1909), "Vom heutigen Kriege" (1912), and "Deutschland und der nächste Krieg"

(1912).

In August 1914, Bernhardt was reactivated as a territorial commander. He then took command of the 49<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division in September 1915, followed by the 55<sup>th</sup> Corps (*Generalkommando z. b. V. 55*) in October 1916 in Galicia and the [Ukraine](#), respectively. In early 1918, his staff was moved to Flanders where Bernhardt participated in the [German spring offensive](#). He was decommissioned in 1918. Given his age and his reputation as a penman, Bernhardt proved an unspectacular yet resilient commander. He received the Prussian order *Pour le mérite* with oak leaves.

## Military writings

Bernhardt's comprehensive *oeuvre* circles around four major topics: history of the campaigns of [Friedrich II, King of Prussia \(1744-1797\)](#); organization and tactics of modern cavalry; the character of contemporary war; and Bernhardt's political demand for an aggressive war for global domination. The latter aspect – brought forward in his early anonymous pamphlet "Videant consules" (1890), and later notoriously elaborated in "Deutschland und der nächste Krieg" – determined his legacy.

But Bernhardt also played a central role in the long-lasting historical debate with the historian [Hans Delbrück \(1848-1929\)](#) on the wars of Friedrich II (*Strategiestreit*) and a vendetta against the military writer [Fritz Hoenig \(1848-1902\)](#). Bernhardt's memoirs count among the more profound and reflexive testimonials of the conservative Prussian military elite.

## Impact

Friedrich von Bernhardt's career started as a cavalry officer and an official historian of the Prussian general staff. Following his temporary resignation from the army, he developed into the archetype of a new literature and politics: a *fin de siècle* figure, a military writer with a strong political agenda. His stance would bring him in discrepancy not only with critical academics like Hans Delbrück but also with military opinion leaders like [Alfred von Schlieffen \(1833-1913\)](#). In this role Bernhardt stands solitary in Imperial [Germany](#). His impact as an apostle of war on the officer corps and public opinion in Germany (and beyond) is contested to this day.

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