

## chapter 6

# *The Age of Monarchy*



The period from the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 to the French Revolution in 1789 was truly the age of the absolute ruler. Powerful monarchs ruled all the nations and principalities of Europe. They believed in the doctrine of the divine right of kings.

Certain conditions were necessary to maintain a strong central monarchy. The monarch must control the aristocracy, ensure the loyalty and obedience of the army, run the administration efficiently from the seat of government, and pursue a clear foreign policy.

In the past, struggles for thrones had been common. Members of royal families had been known to murder one another or engage in civil wars in their desire for power. Once a monarch had power, he or she could never feel secure. One of the best ways to protect the throne was to keep control over the nobles, the most likely and most powerful source of any conspiracy against the monarch.

During the Middle Ages and beyond, armies were made of small, localized units. These troops usually remained loyal to the lord for whom they fought. The seventeenth century saw the birth of the national standing army, which owed its loyalty to the monarch as the head of state. A loyal army would not support an uprising among the common people or the nobility; instead, the monarch would use the army to crush the rebellion.

Ancient Rome had existed as a centrally controlled empire with a vast bureaucracy. In the seventeenth century, European states began to pattern themselves on the Roman model. The civil service was essential to control all the territory outside the capital city. It was responsible for collecting taxes, settling court cases, and so on. No central government could maintain control over the people without having an efficient civil service.

Defending the national borders was an important aspect of maintaining power. No ruler could remain secure on his throne without a clear foreign policy. Monarchs had to maintain defensive alliances and strive to maintain the balance of power among nations; they also had to take steps to avoid being overwhelmed by hostile neighbors.

## CHAPTER 6 OBJECTIVES

- Describe the characteristics of a strong monarchy.
- Identify the strong monarchies of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
- Describe the policies of the monarchs and their chief ministers.
- Explain how England evolved from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy.

### Chapter 6 Time Line

- 1643 Louis XIV becomes King of France
- 1649 Charles I of England is executed; English monarchy abolished
- 1653 Oliver Cromwell becomes “Lord Protector” of England
- 1660 Restoration of monarchy in England; Charles II crowned king
- 1661 Mazarin dies; Louis XIV becomes chief minister as well as king
- 1682 Peter I becomes czar of Russia
- 1688 Glorious Revolution; James II deposed; William and Mary become king and queen of Great Britain
- 1689 English Bill of Rights
- 1700 Philip V becomes king of Spain
- 1701 War of Spanish Succession begins

- 1740 Maria Theresa becomes empress of Austria; Frederick II becomes king of Prussia
- 1762 Catherine II becomes empress of Russia
- 1780 Maria Theresa dies; Joseph II becomes emperor of Austria

## Louis XIV

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In 1643, a five-year-old child was crowned Louis XIV of France. He would reign until his death in 1715. Known to the world as the Sun King, Louis was perhaps the most absolute of the absolute European monarchs of the seventeenth century. He chose the sun for his symbol because it was the source of all light and life on earth.

Like all the monarchs of his era, Louis believed in the divine right of kings. This was not a theory to him, but a reality by which he lived and ruled. Louis considered that he and the state of France were one entity. He had no intention of ceding any of his power to the aristocracy, the Church, or the common people of France.

### Domestic Policy

King Louis XIII's chief minister of state, the highly able Cardinal Richelieu, had believed in a strong central monarchy. Jules Mazarin, also a cardinal, succeeded Richelieu in 1642 and became Louis XIV's chief minister. He espoused the same policies as Richelieu; like his predecessor, he discouraged representative institutions. France had no equivalent of the English Parliament. It had a body called the Estates General, which consisted of three groups of deputies representing the hereditary nobility, the clergy, and the commoners. Louis never once convened the Estates General. He and Mazarin preferred to govern without their advice or interference. During Louis' reign, opposition to the king was considered treason; even had the Estates General met, the deputies would have had no power to do anything other than agree with whatever the king wanted. After the death of Mazarin in 1661, Louis served as his own chief minister rather than summon the Estates General.

The reign of Louis XIV saw numerous construction projects. The building of the Canal du Midi (1665–1681), which connected the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, was important for trade and an impressive feat of engineering for

the time. The crown also pursued an aggressive tariff policy that discouraged imports and bolstered French luxury industries such as the textile industry. Louis hired architects to oversee the restoration and remodeling of the Louvre and the building of Versailles, the king's "retreat" fourteen miles outside of Paris. An enormous palace with endless corridors of mirrors, marble, and gold leaf, Versailles became a major symbol of the king's absolute power; it also symbolized the dominant role France played in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

To exercise as much control as possible over the hereditary nobility, Louis XIV required all of them to spend part of each year at Versailles. In the short term, this policy prevented the nobles from hatching any conspiracy against the crown. In the long term, it weakened the all-important bond between estate owners and their tenants. Instead of living on their estates and managing their land and their people, the nobles spent half their time at Versailles; the money that should have been spent on maintaining and improving their estates was wasted on court finery and travel expenses. Louis did not know it, but he was helping to lay the groundwork for the French Revolution. (See Chapter 9.)

Louis XIV also helped to lay the groundwork for the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. The crown was the most important patron of arts and letters in France. Investigation, learning, and publication in the arts and sciences flourished under official state sponsorship, with the establishment of the French academies of letters, science, and the arts. Not since the Renaissance had artists enjoyed such a degree of official protection. This helps to explain why the Enlightenment was centered in France. (See Chapter 8.)

The Fronde was a series of uprisings and rebellions in the Paris-Bordeaux region over the issue of new taxes Mazarin levied on the people to pay for debts run up during the Thirty Years' War. Since the state controlled the army, which had greatly expanded during the war, the rebels were doomed from the start. The Fronde was crushed in 1652.

## Foreign Policy

Louis XIV conducted a series of wars in the hope of strengthening France's position in Europe. They included the War of Devolution (1667–1668), the Dutch War (1672–1678), the War of League of Augsburg (1689–1697), and the War of Spanish Succession (1701–1713).

Louis' foreign wars included both successes and failures. He expanded French territory on the northern front, with the annexation of Flanders and Strasbourg. However, he supported the losing side in the power struggle for

England between the Stuarts and the Hanoverians. The worst effect of Louis' wars was that they drained the French treasury of money. This damage to the domestic economy would have serious consequences under Louis' successors.

The most important of Louis' wars was the War of Spanish Succession, which pitted France and Spain against the Netherlands, England, and the Holy Roman Empire. The war began after Louis' grandson was crowned Philip V of Spain in 1700; the idea of a close alliance between France and Spain, or perhaps even a union of the two kingdoms, made the rest of Europe unite in alarm to prevent it. A United Kingdom of Spain and France would be by far the largest nation in Europe, and would disrupt the balance of power. The war was ultimately settled by the Treaty of Utrecht. In exchange for remaining on the throne, Philip V agreed that the crowns of Spain and France would never be united.

## England

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England had already experienced a century of absolute monarchy under the Tudors. Although Henry VII had taken the English throne by right of conquest, he and his descendants believed in the divine right of kings as much as any hereditary monarch. This belief continued when the Stuart dynasty succeeded the Tudors on the death of Elizabeth I in 1603.

James VI of Scotland ruled England as James I until his death in 1625. An unpopular monarch, James achieved one major accomplishment: he commissioned a new translation of the Bible, to be as scholarly and accurate as possible. The King James Bible, published in 1611, is one of the most influential works in the history of English literature. It inspired generations of English and American writers and statesmen, such as Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill, and countless idioms of everyday speech come from its pages. Scholars and historians agree that although more technically accurate English translations of the Bible have been made since, none can rival the beauty, power, and poetry of the King James version.

In 1625, Charles I inherited the throne of England. He was not much more popular than his father James had been, for several reasons. First, Charles's personality was shy, stiff, and rather pompous. Second, the people looked askance on Charles's marriage to French Catholic princess Henrietta Maria; they were concerned that the heirs to the throne might be raised as Catholics. Third, congregations throughout the nation had become divided between high-church and low-church Anglican. High-church Anglicans, of whom Charles was one,

favored a ceremonial style of worship that was very similar to the Catholic mass. Low-church Anglicans preferred more Spartan rites and practices that made them more spiritually akin to Presbyterians and Calvinists.

Until this time, Parliament's major purpose had been to grant the monarch any funds necessary to carry out affairs of state such as wars. The request had always been treated as a matter of form. James I had been at odds with Parliament throughout his reign, preferring to rule as an autocrat. Many members of Parliament, resenting the king's lack of respect for their official position, began insisting on a greater say in national policy. They were united in their determination not to allow Charles to rule with the heavy hand his father had shown—especially because many members of the House of Commons were low-church Anglicans or Calvinists and did not look on the king's religious beliefs with favor. Parliament refused to allow the king to raise funds without its permission. Charles agreed to this demand, but as soon as the funds were granted, he disbanded Parliament. The legislative assembly would not meet between 1629 and 1640.

Working with William Laud, the archbishop of Canterbury, Charles tried to impose high Anglican rules and rites throughout Scotland, including a new prayer-book. Scotland, which had been staunchly Presbyterian since the days of the Reformation, showed that it was willing to go to war to defend its religious liberty. Fighting began in 1640 when the Scots marched into England. This in turn forced Charles to convene Parliament to request funds for the war. The representatives immediately realized they were in a position of strength; they passed a series of laws designed to weaken absolutism. The year 1641 saw the imprisonment and execution of Archbishop Laud and an uprising in Ireland. In 1642, Charles I led an armed attack on Parliament, initiating a civil war that lasted until 1649. Oliver Cromwell, a member of the House of Commons, led the Parliamentary forces; thanks largely to Cromwell's considerable military ability, Parliament's troops defeated the monarch's. Later, Cromwell's soldiers conquered both Scotland and Ireland.

Parliament voted to abolish the monarchy, the House of Lords, and Anglicanism as the state religion. In 1649, Charles I was put to death; his teenage sons Charles and James fled the country, eventually finding their way to Holland and safety.

English kings had lost their lives on the battlefield in the past, with the crown going to the victor in battle, but no English monarch before Charles I had ever been condemned to death by due process of law. This marked a major defeat for the European tradition of absolute monarchy and ushered in the modern era of republican government.

Cromwell argued in Parliament for a platform of certain reforms, but his colleagues refused to pass them. By 1653, Cromwell ran out of patience and disbanded the legislature. In 1654, he became the first commoner and the only military dictator ever to rule England, under the title Lord Protector.

Cromwell was a devout Puritan—a sect that practiced an extreme form of Calvinism. Like other British monarchs before him, Cromwell imposed his own religious faith on his kingdom. He closed all theaters and saloons, since Calvinists believed that pastimes such as drinking, gambling, and attending plays were sinful. Cromwell did not go out of his way to persecute Anglicans or Lutherans, but Catholics were forced to practice their faith in secrecy during his reign.

Cromwell ruled England until his death in 1658; this period is called the Interregnum, meaning “between reigns.” His son Richard succeeded him, but proved ineffective. It was not long before loyalists restored Charles I’s eldest son to the throne he should have inherited on his father’s death. With the blessing of Parliament, Charles II was crowned in 1660. His reign is known as the Restoration.

Charles II was an easygoing, tolerant monarch. However, he soon found that Parliament was by no means willing to give up any of the power it had won so recently. As often as not, Parliament opposed the king’s attempts to assert his authority. It was clear that in England, the days of absolute monarchy were over.

Since Charles II had no legitimate children, his heir was his brother James, a devout Catholic. A sizable faction in Parliament, dreading the possibility of another Catholic ruler, proposed a bill called the Exclusion Bill. It would bar James or any other Catholic from inheriting the throne. In the argument over the Exclusion Bill, the first British political parties were formed. The Whigs supported the bill and the Tories opposed it. The bill passed the House of Commons but not the House of Lords, and James II succeeded to the throne on his brother’s death.

James’s harsh anti-Anglican policies made the Whigs and Tories unite against him; when his wife gave birth to an heir to the throne, who would ensure Catholic rule for another generation, they agreed that the monarch must be deposed and replaced. The best candidate appeared to be Mary, James’s grown daughter by an earlier marriage. Deputies from Parliament invited Mary and her husband, William of Orange, to rule jointly. They arrived in England in 1688, James fled to France without a shot being fired, and the Glorious Revolution was won.

The most important result of the Glorious Revolution was the passage of the English Bill of Rights. It had two main goals: to unite the people and their monarch once and for all under the same state religion, and to balance the government by giving Parliament certain important rights over the monarch. The Bill of Rights stated that no Catholic could rule England and no British monarch could marry a Catholic. Parliament felt that this step was necessary to avoid any more of the civil wars that had torn the island apart since the days of Queen Mary.

Parliament reinforced its own authority by declaring that it must meet every year. This ensured that the legislative assembly could step in and assume power if the monarch proved irresponsible or incapable. Parliament also assumed other major legislative functions: from this time on, the authority to suspend laws, maintain a standing army, and impose new taxes rested with Parliament, not with the monarch.

In 1707, England and Scotland were officially incorporated as one nation, known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain.

## Peter the Great of Russia

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Peter Romanov was born in 1672. When Peter was ten, he and his brother Ivan were named dual monarchs of Russia; their older sister Sophia would serve as regent until the boys grew old enough to rule. In 1689, the nobles ousted Sophia from power. On Ivan's sudden death, Peter became Czar Peter I of Russia. Known to history as Peter the Great, he would rule Russia until his death in 1725.

Peter was characterized by genuine intellectual and scientific curiosity. He also had a strong, dominant personality and believed in absolute rule with a very heavy hand. These two qualities of the czar's character had a decisive effect on Russia's development during the early eighteenth century.

Peter was fascinated by European culture. In 1697, he left his homeland to tour Europe in disguise. Given that the czar was six feet, six inches tall—a true giant in an era when people were much smaller than they are today—his disguise fooled no one. However, he enjoyed his ability to speak directly with commoners of all types, and even share their heavy manual labor, as he could not easily have done had he traveled in a more ceremonious style.

When Peter returned to Russia, he made plans to turn it into a modern nation that would take its place beside the great states of Europe. Western influence was soon apparent everywhere in Moscow. At the court and elsewhere, Peter



began requiring Western administrative practices and Western efficiency. During Peter's reign, many French, English, and German books were translated into Russian for the first time; Peter himself acquired an impressive personal library. He introduced Western-style dress to replace the traditional Russian costumes; the most famous innovation in personal style was a law against beards, since European fashion dictated a clean-shaven face for a man. Many nobles and gentlemen opposed this law with surprising vigor, for two reasons: first, Orthodox doctrine required believers to wear full beards, and second, a beard was welcome protection against frostbite during the bitter Russian winters. In the end, Peter exempted priests from the no-beard policy.

Peter kept up a constant state of warfare during his reign; the standing army reached a new high of two hundred thousand troops under his rule. By 1721 he had moved Russia's border far to the west, acquiring Estonia, Livonia, and part of Switzerland. In 1703, Peter founded a new capital city at the mouth of the Gulf of Finland, naming it St. Petersburg after himself. Peter would use this beautiful city much as Louis XIV used Versailles; he required the boyars to attend him there during part of every year and forced them to pay for its construction.

Peter the Great died in 1725. Since he named no successor, a period of some chaos ensued. At first, his widow assumed power, ruling as Catherine I; after her death, various factions struggled for power. The situation was resolved in 1762 when Peter II became czar; however, mental and emotional instability made him incapable of ruling. His German wife, Catherine, assumed power when he died suddenly; historians agree that she either murdered him or ordered her followers to do so.

Catherine II, like Peter the Great, was determined to make Russia into a European nation, not surprising given her German origins. She continued Peter's policy of moving the nation's border ever westward. Between 1769 and 1774, Russia gained territory along the Danube River and also a port on the Black Sea.

Catherine absorbed many ideas from the Enlightenment. She introduced Russians to Western music, art, literature, and philosophy. She corresponded with the famed author Voltaire. She founded and supported a number of institutions that would improve society, including a major hospital and a medical school, and led a campaign for inoculation against smallpox. She supported education for girls and young women and opened Russia's first public library. She reformed the legal code to limit the use of torture of prisoners and expanded religious freedoms.

Like other absolute monarchs, Catherine understood the need to protect her position by controlling the aristocracy. She took two major steps to keep the nobles content with their lot. First, she exempted them from taxes. Second, and partly in response to a major peasant uprising, she granted them absolute control over their serfs. With the loss of many important freedoms, including the right to move, the serfs in effect became slave labor. Their status would not improve until the 1860s.

## Poland

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Poland had been a strong nation-state during the late Middle Ages; a dynastic marriage in 1386 between Princess Jadwiga of Poland and the Grand Duke of Lithuania united the two as the Kingdom of Poland-Lithuania. However, the dynasty died out in 1572, at which point the nobles seized power, granting themselves the right to elect the monarch. The aristocracy proved too powerful for the monarchy, which never recovered enough strength to suppress the nobles. In 1764, Stanislaw Poniatowski was elected king; unfortunately for the immediate future of Poland, he was romantically involved with Catherine the Great of Russia, who would use the personal relationship to take over half the kingdom.

By 1772, Russia had annexed Lithuanian territory as far west as the Dvina River. At the same time, Prussia and Austria began taking over Polish territory on their own borders. The Second and Third Partitions of Poland followed in the 1790s, effectively erasing Poland as a nation from the map.

## Holy Roman Empire: Austria and Prussia

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During the age of monarchy, the Holy Roman Empire as an entity began to pass into history. Its various states began to take shape as independent nation-states, of which the two strongest were Austria and Prussia.

### Austria

The Hapsburg family continued to rule in central Europe. In 1711, Charles VI became the latest Hapsburg to be elected Holy Roman Emperor. As time went on with no son being born to inherit the throne of Austria, Charles took steps to prevent the Hapsburg estate from breaking up. He signed the Pragmatic Sanctions, which stated that his eldest daughter, Maria Theresa, would inherit on his death.

When Maria Theresa became empress of Austria in 1740, Frederick of Prussia promptly invaded her territory. The Prussians won the ensuing war and took over the province of Silesia.

Maria Theresa proved to be an enlightened ruler. She centralized her government in Vienna and worked to make the civil service run more efficiently. She made it a matter of domestic policy to bring tax relief to the poorest peasants in the realm.

In 1765, Maria Theresa elevated her son Joseph to the status of a co-ruler. On her death in 1780, he succeeded her as Emperor Joseph II. Like all the Hapsburgs, Joseph believed in his divine right to rule; however, he was a far more benevolent monarch than most. Social reform under Joseph was highly unpopular with the upper classes, who did not welcome notions of equality that weakened their own position atop the structure of power and privilege. (See Chapter 12.)

## Prussia

The history of Germany as a nation-state really began in 1640, when Frederick William Hohenzollern became king of Brandenburg-Prussia (later known simply as Prussia). Frederick's main goal was the same as that of all absolute monarchs of his era: to rule over a centrally controlled state. First, he enlarged and strengthened the standing army, ensuring its loyalty to the throne. Second, he achieved control over the junkers—Prussian hereditary nobles—by giving them administrative duties. Third, he began to lay the groundwork for uniting all the territories he had inherited under his sole control.

In 1688, the elector's son became King Frederick I of Prussia. For twenty-five years, he maintained the modern state his father had created. In 1713, his son took over. King Frederick William I continued to streamline the bureaucracy of government and to make it more efficient. Frederick William I also concentrated on the Prussian army, expanding and lavishing money and attention on what soon became a fighting force admired and envied by all Europe. Although the army did not spend much time on the battlefield during this period, it was an intimidating and impressive symbol of the power of the Prussian state.

As the king lay on his deathbed in 1740, he felt apprehensive about his heir. The young man who would rule as Frederick II did not seem to be the stuff of which autocrats were made. As a prince, he spent most of his time reading, composing music, and playing the flute. However, he had always been fascinated by military strategy and would prove a highly effective ruler. He became known to history as Frederick the Great. He took over Silesia, led his nation

to victory in the Seven Years' War, occupied West Prussia, and drove both the army and the bureaucracy to greater heights of efficiency and discipline.

Frederick's daring foreign policy was dictated by Prussia's geographical position. Prussia was in the middle of Europe, surrounded on all sides by other nations; this made it vulnerable to invasion at any time. Frederick's solution to this dangerous situation was twofold. First, he built up such an impressive, efficient army that other nations hesitated to attack him. Second, he himself struck aggressive blows to enlarge his territory and intimidate his neighbors.

The blow against Silesia had been carefully calculated. This province was rich in natural resources, which Prussia lacked. Since Maria Theresa was new to the throne, Frederick believed Austria was at its most vulnerable. His gamble paid off in 1745 when he agreed to recognize Maria Theresa as empress and her husband as emperor in exchange for Silesia. The result of this was to elevate Prussia's position among European nations; Prussia and Austria were now considered equally strong German powers.

In the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), Prussia took no part in the fighting over North American colonies. Frederick's goal was to maintain Prussia's position of power in Europe. England allied itself with Prussia, since fighting between Prussia and France meant that France could not concentrate its forces in America. (See Chapter 7.)

Frederick's reign also revealed the influence of the Enlightenment on his thinking. He stressed the importance of merit in the ranks of the civil service, raising the standards for admission. He expanded freedom of speech, promoted education, and reformed the legal system. Although the Prussian state was overwhelmingly Protestant, Frederick did not hinder Catholics from observing their faith. He also developed something of a friendship with Voltaire, entertaining him at court.

By the time Frederick died in 1786, Prussia had become a strong, centralized state. It formed the core of what would become, a hundred years later, a unified Germany.

## The Netherlands

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The Netherlands became a parliamentary republic after gaining its independence from Hapsburg rule in the Treaty of Westphalia. It consisted of several provinces, each of which sent deputies to the national assembly, the States General, which met in The Hague, at the mouth of the Rhine River on the North Sea. This was also the residence of the hereditary ruler of the Orange

family, known as the *stadholder*. In 1688, *stadholder* William of Orange became William I of England, thanks to his marriage to the Stuart princess Mary.

Because the Dutch provinces were small and the population was culturally homogeneous, the provincial deputies of the States General tended to work effectively together rather than bickering. They controlled all foreign-policy decisions, subject to the approval of the provincial legislatures, called "estates."

## QUIZ

- 1. The Restoration occurred in 1660 when Charles II was crowned king of \_\_\_\_\_**
  - A. England.
  - B. France.
  - C. Prussia.
  - D. Russia.
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_ were the first nation-states to achieve true representative government.**
  - A. Prussia and Austria
  - B. The Netherlands and Austria
  - C. England and the Netherlands
  - D. England and Prussia
- 3. What was the main reason for the expansion of the Prussian army during this period?**
  - A. to extend Prussia's borders by military conquest
  - B. to defend the Prussian kingdom from attack
  - C. to keep the nobility loyal to the crown
  - D. to win foreign wars in the American colonies
- 4. The English Bill of Rights was passed as a result of \_\_\_\_\_**
  - A. the Restoration.
  - B. the Glorious Revolution.
  - C. the English Civil War.
  - D. the Exclusion Bill.

5. **Peter the Great's main reason for dictating changes in Russian fashion was**
- to modernize Russian society and culture.
  - to intimidate the boyar class.
  - to encourage Russians to travel to the West.
  - to strengthen his personal popularity among his subjects.
6. **Louis XIV required the hereditary nobles to attend him every year at Versailles because**
- he wanted to prevent them from conspiring against him.
  - he wanted to consult them regularly about government policy.
  - he wanted be able to raise the army on a moment's notice.
  - he wanted their protection in case of a peasant uprising.
7. **The establishment of \_\_\_\_\_ helped lead to the Enlightenment.**
- the Estates General
  - the English Bill of Rights
  - the Whig and Tory parties
  - the French academies
8. **The War of Spanish Succession was a threat to**
- the Spanish colonial empire.
  - the monarchy of France.
  - the balance of powers in Europe.
  - the alliance between Prussia and Austria.
9. **During the Seven Years' War, England allied itself with Prussia in order to defeat**
- France.
  - Russia.
  - Spain.
  - Italy.
10. **The main reason for the failure of the Fronde was the opposition of**
- the common people.
  - the nobility.
  - the clergy.
  - the army.