



Baron Henning-Hubertus von Steuben

THE DEFENSE COUNCIL ON INTEGRITY AND EFFICIENCY: “PRUSSIAN VALUES”

Remarks as Prepared by Baron Henning-Hubertus von Steuben to the Defense Council on Integrity and Efficiency (DCIE), Arlington, Virginia; Thursday, July 15, 2004.

(Introduction of Baron von Steuben by the Honorable Joseph E. Schmitz, Inspector General of the U. S. Department of Defense)

Thank you very much Mr. Schmitz, for the introduction and the friendly reception, including my lady Katharina and my son Karl-Christoph, who are with me this time.

As a member of the Steuben family it is a real pleasure for me to speak about a man who wrote history in your country – my ancestor, Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, often called the “drillmaster of the revolutionary army.” Some remarks to our relationship: There are 221 years and 13 generations between him and me. The brother of his grandfather is my direct ancestor – the general had no children.

In the historical meaning Steuben stands – still today – for Prussian values like discipline, responsibility and fulfillment of duty. But especially in the German postwar history, Prussian values have always been well discussed. In more recent times people have regarded Prussian values as dusty and antiquated – as an expression of a rigid military commanding structure.

Unusable for a modern, liberal and open society; this is how they describe Prussian values. On the other hand, particularly, these terms very often mark the spirit of the times and its moral conditions: Interchangeable, unpredictable and without solid rules for a working society.

The Fact is: Prussian values have a long tradition in the Steuben family, even today. So I will try to judge this question from my personal point of view and set off three essential points: duty, discipline and integrity!

The first time I became familiar with these values was during my law-studies in the mid-seventies. The years before, I had spent in a boarding school and in the army. Both institutions are characterized with discipline, consideration and reduction of my personal needs.

So my time as a student [at University] was the first chance to leave this all behind. My father knew about this. He told me: Enjoy your life, go out as often as you want – but do not forget your studies! But this was not a deal: Students in Germany have the so called “academic freedom.” That means: If you go to class after a drunken night depends exclusively on yourself – nobody forced you to do so.

“To do so,” said my father, “is your duty.” To do so on your own will is your personal freedom. Because freedom in mind is nothing else than to accept what has to be done.” For me this was prime example of Prussian values. For my father it was an effort to save money – he did not want me to become an eternal student.

Let’s go back to history. My ancestor made a similar experience when he came from Prussia to America. At that time the Prussian, army was becoming the best of the world – although the famous Prussian drill was nothing than blind obedience – the soldier had to obey, not to think. Steuben saw very quickly that this old Prussian principle could not be realized in the revolutionary army.

He tells about this in a letter to his old friend, the Prussian field commander Friedrich Wilhelm Gandy, “You tell your soldiers what he has to do and he follows.” I have to explain at first, why something has to be done - and then it happens. It is a sign for self-respect and a tribute to the soldiers as free and independent individuals.”

This understanding of orders and obedience gave reason for Steuben’s reputation as a democratic military reformer. Democracy clearly defined military limits – that is what he believed in. It is an obvious example how Prussian values can be, still today, important elements of the army as a part of a democratic society. But the most important value to my mind is integrity. My experiences as a journalist show that moral values get lost more and more – in almost all selections of society.

So integrity must be the basis for discipline and duty fulfillment. Especially in military: A soldier gets his orders. How he follows depends on his understanding of dignity and honor. Thousands of American soldiers have proved this numerous times, especially in my country. My generation, which was never involved in Nazi-activities, has asked its parents and grandparents many difficult questions to answer. We did not get always the right answers; many things have been driven away. But one thing we heard again and again: Thank God that we were taken by the Americans. They treated us with dignity and respect – in spite of everything that had happened. Even the actual discussion about prison abuse in Iraq cannot overlook that America is still keeping up these ideals as it always did in its great history.

All this shows that Prussian values are still existent and effect the IG’s role. They address the matter with straightness and constancy, regarding the people with clearness, clarity and the power of conviction.

Only the combination of both makes a country strong. It can bundle up its abilities, motivate its people and defend its own values – inwards and to the outside. The Prussian King Frederick the Great once described himself as “first servant of his state.” I think nothing describes the timeless meaning of Prussian values better than this famous sentence. Thank you very much.

