

IMPACT OF GERMAN MILITARY RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS
UPON FIELD COMMANDERS OF THE GERMAN ARMY,
1933-1944

An abstract for a thesis presented to the Faculty of
the U. S. Army Command and General Staff College in
partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
degree of

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by
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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the individual student author and do not necessarily represent the views of either the United States Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. References to this study should include the foregoing statement.

A revolutionary tradition did not exist in the Imperial German Army. But during the years 1918-1944 events occurred which produced such an impact on the moral fibre of the German Officer Corps that eventually a few of them participated in a conspiracy against Hitler. This work seeks only to throw light on those aspects of German military history that portray the gradual disintegration of the monolithic structure of the German Army that occurred prior to 20 July 1944.

The study has been divided into four major parts: the revolutionary days following the defeat of World War I, 1918-1920; the development of the Reichswehr and the rise to power of Hitler, 1920-1933; the transition from Reichswehr to Wehrmacht, 1933-1938; and the period of active opposition to Hitler, 1938-1944. The analysis, generally, follows a chronological course, and results in an examination of those events which influenced the German officers who were the field commanders of World War II.

The initial period revolves around the early days of the Weimar Republic and the efforts of the General Staff to restore order following the defeat in World War I. During this period the German Army was augmented by independent "Free Corps" units, some of which were comprised of revolutionary elements, and out of which arose a threat to the existence of the German Army.

The second period centers around the dominant personalities of Generaloberst Hans von Seeckt and Generalmajor Kurt von Schleicher, the former responsible for the development of the Reichswehr. While

Chief of the Truppenamt or General Staff, General von Seeckt brought order to Germany and provided the stability that offered the leaders of the Weimar Republic an opportunity to establish an effective government. He created a "leaders" army, reintroduced the strategy of mobile warfare, and attempted to separate the Officer Corps from domestic politics. He sought to reestablish Germany as a world power, and, in so doing, evaded the military provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. Junior officers under General von Seeckt could not fail but observe the treaty violations and secret rearmaments. Thus, the Prussian traditions of discipline, duty, and honor that General von Seeckt hoped to develop were undermined to some extent by General von Seeckt himself.

General von Schleicher, on the other hand, attempted to use the Army to arbitrate political disputes. Lacking the full support of the Officer Corps, General von Schleicher used the "unpolitical" Army created by General von Seeckt to influence domestic political decisions. Unknowingly, his political maneuvers assisted Adolf Hitler's legal ascendancy to power.

The third period begins on 30 January 1933, when Adolf Hitler became Chancellor. There is no evidence that the German Army or its leaders had been active in bringing Hitler to power. Once in office, Hitler maintained good relations with the leaders of the Army, and any conflicts between the Nazi Party and the Army were resolved on 30 June 1934 when the Sturmabteilung (SA) was purged by Hitler. During the purge, however, General von Schleicher was murdered, an act passively accepted by the Officer Corps with a resulting stain on their honor.

The SA was replaced by the Schutzstaffel (SS) which was to develop further as Hitler's private Army. The two forces competed for recruits, equipment, supplies, replacements, even for missions.

President Hindenburg died on 1 August 1934. On 2 August, the Army took the Oath of Allegiance to Hitler personally. An oath which was not dissimilar to the one taken to the Emperor prior to 1918. The inviolability of the oath had a special significance to the German Officer Corps. What the German Officer Corps did not recognize was that Hitler never considered seriously his reciprocal responsibility to the German nation.

Soon after taking office, Hitler decided to abrogate the military provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. This action was followed by an expansion of the Army from a 100,000-man strength in 1933 to 2,300,000 in the German Field Army alone by 1939, an expansion of 23 times its original size in six years. The leading members of the Army, including Generaloberst Freiherr Werner von Fritsch and General Ludwig Beck, expressed opposition to a too rapid expansion and the resulting deterioration of professional standards. But Hitler, determined to permit no opposition to his military policy, would not accept words of caution.

Extremely fortunate circumstances played into Hitler's hands during the months of January-March 1938 in the form of the "Blomberg-Fritsch" crisis. Hitler seized the opportunity to remove the two most senior Army officers from office and to overcome Army opposition to his regime. The significance of these two events had a direct impact on the moral fibre of the Officer Corps. Hitler took command of the

Wehrmacht himself, "declaring that he had lost confidence in the generals. "

The fourth period concerns the period of active opposition to Hitler, the years from 1938-1944. For the first time, senior German officers began to oppose Hitler actively, initially by legal means, later as conspirators. On 31 August 1938 General Beck, Chief of the General Staff, resigned in protest to Hitler's planned foreign policy. Shortly thereafter, General Halder, who succeeded General Beck, received two important policy changes introduced by Hitler, changes which removed the Army High Command from its traditional influential position within the State.

The campaigns of World War II and the simultaneous plots to kill Hitler are not discussed in detail. Of the various campaigns of World War II, four are of importance to this thesis: the successful 1940 campaign in France; the almost simultaneous disasters at Stalingrad and in North Africa; and the Allied breakthrough at Avranches. The French campaign of 1940 seemed to completely vindicate Hitler's judgment, and those officers who had feared the consequences of such an attack were thoroughly discredited. But the ever accelerating disintegration of the monolithic structure of the German Officer Corps was already firmly underway. As a result, in the fall of 1940 the military situation in France was not as favorable for Germany as purely outward appearances seemed to indicate.

The disastrous results of Hitler's aggressive policies were felt by all Germans following the defeats at Stalingrad and in North Africa. There is ample proof that the German Officer Corps maintained a high degree of organizational integrity and fighting effectiveness

through the long series of almost unbroken retreats that followed the military reverses at Stalingrad in the East and later at Avranches in the West. But at the same time, elements of the Officer Corps were engaged in the conspiracy that finally found expression on 20 July 1944.

In conclusion, then, there was a gradual decline of the German military ethic which began as early as 1914. Thereafter, a series of events influenced the basic concepts of the Officer Corps. By 1944 the impact of these forces, coupled with Hitler's illegal policies, his continuous assaults on the integrity of the Officer Corps, climaxed by his inept invasion of their professional control over the tactical conduct of the war, could not help but provoke not only opposition, but resistance.

In this tragedy, it would appear that the German Officer Corps was less to blame for its actions--or lack of action within the broader framework of the German nation--than has often been believed to be the case, primarily because the actions of the officers were often the result of factors beyond the control of soldiers. Such a conclusion may be at variance with that of other writers on the subject. The weight of evidence examined, however, will not support a different conclusion, particularly when one analyzes the conduct of tactical units at Field Army and lower echelons of command.

In this century the soldiers of the German Army have undergone two severe tests. It remains only for history to establish the answer to this question: Has this been the German Army's guilt or the German Army's fate?

"Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad" -
Euripides.

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PREFACE

A revolutionary tradition did not exist in the Imperial German Army. But, during the years 1918-44 events occurred which produced such an impact on the moral fibre of the German officer that eventually some of them were led to participate in a conspiracy against Hitler. Anyone who considers this problem is likely to think primarily of the unsuccessful attempt on Hitler's life that took place on 20 July 1944. That occasion has been covered most adequately and in great detail in contemporary writings. What has received far more inadequate attention are the historical forces which were active on the German Officer Corps between World War I and World War II. This work seeks only to throw light on those aspects of German military history that portray the gradual disintegration of the German Officer Corps that occurred prior to 20 July 1944.

It is the opinion of this author that the German officer of 1944 was one whose generation had been subjected to a series of events which made 20 July inevitable.

The study has been divided into four major parts: the revolutionary days following the defeat of World War I, 1918-20; the development of the Reichswehr (State Defense Forces) and the rise to power of Hitler, 1920-33; the transition from Reichswehr to Wehrmacht (Fighting Forces), 1933-38; and the period of active opposition to Hitler, 1938-44.

The results of my investigation have led me to conclude that the gradual decline of the German military ethic began as early as

1914. Thereafter a series of events influenced the basic concepts of the Officer Corps. By 1944 the impact of these forces coupled with Hitler's illegal policies, his continuous assaults on the integrity of the Officer Corps, and climaxed by his inept invasion of their professional control over the conduct of the war, could not help but provoke not only opposition but finally resistance. In this tragedy the results of my investigation have led me also to conclude that the German Officer Corps is less to blame for its actions - or lack of action within the broader framework of the German nation - than has often been believed to be the case, primarily because the actions of the officers were often the result of factors beyond the control of soldiers. Such a conclusion, I am aware, is at variance with that of most other writers on this subject. However, the weight of evidence examined will not support a different conclusion when one analyzes the conduct of tactical units at Field Army and lower echelons of command.

Even from an historical perspective the forces active within the German Army during the period 1918-44 are difficult to relate. To be objective it is necessary first to capture the psychology of defeat. Then it is necessary to understand, and have compassion for, human behavior acting under the duress of a totalitarian state. What is perhaps even more important, it is necessary to consider the national characteristics of the German people; often paradoxical events can only be explained through an appreciation of what is implied by the fact that these people were German.

There are elements in the character of the German people, for example, that do not conform to Anglo-Saxon traditions of personal liberty. The German has a higher regard for state government than

he has for the innate value of the individual. Thus the Germans of the period were, by choice and inclination, a nation of regimented soldiers rather than free citizens.¹

And it is important also to emphasize that the subject matter of this study is the German Army and its field commanders. A problem of definition arises immediately because of the large number of military and paramilitary organizations that emerged during this period. Frequently these units are incorrectly assumed to have been a part of the German Army. Actually, the transition from the Imperial Army of 1914 to the Wehrmacht of 1944 is an evolutionary process that forms a portion of the essay that follows.

A definition is required also for "field commander" which as used in this paper includes commanders at all echelons of command with emphasis on those officers who held command positions at division, corps or field army echelons of command. This study also refers to the "German General Staff" as a group because members of the General Staff were in a position to influence the field commanders in a direct manner. Finally, the study refers to the German "Officer Corps" when the field commanders and all other officers were influenced by the events described.

This author is fully cognizant of certain limitations in this essay which merit comment. No one who has not experienced life

¹Godfrey Scheele, The Weimar Republic (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1945), p. 29. Also see Koppel S. Pinson, Modern Germany, Its History and Civilization (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1954), p. 19 and Kurt F. Reinhardt, Germany 2000 Years (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1961), pp. 523-601.

under the totalitarian system Hitler superimposed over the German Army and the German nation is justified to pass judgement on the failure of the German Army to more actively resist their Fuehrer. Thus, I have refrained from passing judgement in this respect.

It is also important to acknowledge that all levels of society - Civilian, Military, Liberals, Socialists and Conservatives - were represented in the German resistance movement against Hitler, each in their own way, but all with a common motivation. This thesis, however, is concerned with the opposition by officers of the German Army and--as a general rule--excludes the efforts made by the other groups, not because they did not resist or because their actions were not important, but in order to remain within the scope of this study. In those instances where the resistance offered by other groups had an influence on the field commanders of the German Army, exceptions to this general rule have been made.

Finally, as a professional military officer, I find it especially difficult to criticize members of the German Army for not more actively resisting the illegal practices of the National Socialist regime. This is understandable, I believe, because acts of active resistance would have violated the legal order of the State, and would have opened the way for charges of sedition, high treason, and treason during war to be levied against members of the Army. All of these are charges with special significance--aside from fear of punishment--to men of a military tradition. To arrive at an unbiased judgment, the time proven but intangible moral foundations of any army - discipline, duty, honor and loyalty - must be the basis for any appraisal. Since a correct evaluation of these factors is among the most difficult

problems of military science, I must acknowledge that an answer to the difficult question of the right and duty to resist is not provided in this paper. The answer can only be found in one's own heart.

Many people have assisted me during the preparation of this thesis, among them typists, librarians, archivists, researchers, and faculty advisors. To all of these I express my deepest gratitude. However, I alone am responsible for any errors in fact or interpretation.

The feeling that springs spontaneously from an unprejudiced judgment of the history of humanity is compassion for the contradictory qualities of this poor human race of ours, so rich in abnegation, so ready at times for personal sacrifice, yet whose every attempt, whether more or less successful or not at all successful, to attain moral and material betterment, is coupled with an unleashing of hates, rancors, and the basest passions. A tragic destiny is that of men! Aspiring ever to pursue and achieve what they think is the good, they ever find pretexts for slaughtering and persecuting each other.

--Gaetano Mosca, The Ruling Class

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CHAPTER I
IMPERIAL ARMY TO REICHSWEHR,
1918-1920

7 November 1918. Reichstag (Legislature) deputy Matthias Erzberger crossed the border into France and proceeded by car in search of Marshal Foch of France, the Allied Commander-in-Chief, who was designated to accept the German surrender. That a civilian was chosen to seek an armistice and end World War I is significant. By avoiding any participation in the armistice negotiations, the German High Command sought to shift the responsibility for the military defeat to Imperial Germany from the German Army and to convince the German people that the Army had not been defeated in the field. From this came the famous "stab-in-the-back legend."¹

9 November 1918. The last day of Imperial Germany. A general strike was called in Berlin and the workers were massing in the streets. The Naumburg Jaeger, a trusted infantry detachment, mutinied and deposed its officers.

¹Charles F. Horne, Source Records of the Great War (7 Vols.; Indianapolis: 1931), VI, 402. The Reichstag was the representative legislative body of Germany prior to 1933. Erzberger was the leader of the Catholic Center Party and an important figure in the formation of the Weimar Republic. He was murdered on 26 Aug 21 by persons opposed to the democratic constitution established at Weimar. Also see Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 22.

At 0900, Generalfeldmarschall Paul von Hindenburg, Chief of the General Staff, spoke to a conference of divisional, brigade and regimental commanders (see Appendix I). Then, he and the First Quartermaster General, General Wilhem Groener, left to see the Kaiser.²

²The Prussian War Ministry was divided into five departments. The First, Fourth and Fifth Departments were concerned with routine military administration, finance, and supply matters. The General Staff was the Second Department entrusted with operational matters, while the Third Department managed personnel affairs.

The General Staff was further divided into the Great General Staff in Berlin and the General Staff with Troops.

In 1864, while planning operations against Denmark, the operational chain of command went from the King through the Minister of War to the field commander. The King and his private cabinet were served by a separate staff that helped to direct the military operations. In 1866, Field Marshal Helmuth Count von Moltke, Chief of the General Staff, because of his abilities, was empowered by the King to issue orders directly to the field commander, first during the campaign against Austria and then against France in 1871. The authority to issue orders in the name of the King was a major step in establishing the predominant position of the General Staff within the Army.

From 1871 until the end of World War I the term "German General Staff" was synonymous with machine-like efficiency in planning and directing land warfare. As warfare became more complicated through technological developments, the system of planning by map and directing by written orders became necessary. The General Staff met this need with exceptional ability and a homogeneity of outlook that was a product of the German military school system. It is well to point out, however, that the Prussian General Staff in Berlin was known as the "Great General Staff" to distinguish it not only from army, corps and division staffs, but also from the Bavarian General Staff from which officers were also obtained. Significantly, great rivalries developed between the officers of the Prussian oriented schools and the officers from Bavaria. The lack of complete homogeneity was a serious cause of conflict that persisted well into World War II.

A member of the General Staff did not return to his parent unit after schooling, but remained a member of the General Staff or as a staff officer at a division or corps headquarters. As members of the General Staff with Troops, they retained a loyalty to their unit commander as well as a loyalty to the Chief of the General Staff in Berlin. The Chief of Staff of a corps was more than a subordinate, but rather an adviser with the right to enter the chain of command on matters where he differed from his commander. The position of the Chief of the General Staff was further enhanced by the German tradition that a

As late as 8 November, both Field Marshal von Hindenburg and General Groener had felt they should continue to support the Kaiser, that he should not abdicate or flee the country.³

On 8 November, Admiral Paul von Hintze, the State Secretary at the Foreign Office, visited Field Marshal von Hindenburg and convinced the latter that the Emperor should abdicate his throne and leave Germany to save his life. Field Marshal von Hindenburg told General Groener of his change of feelings just prior to the 9 November commanders' conference the ostensible purpose of which was to determine

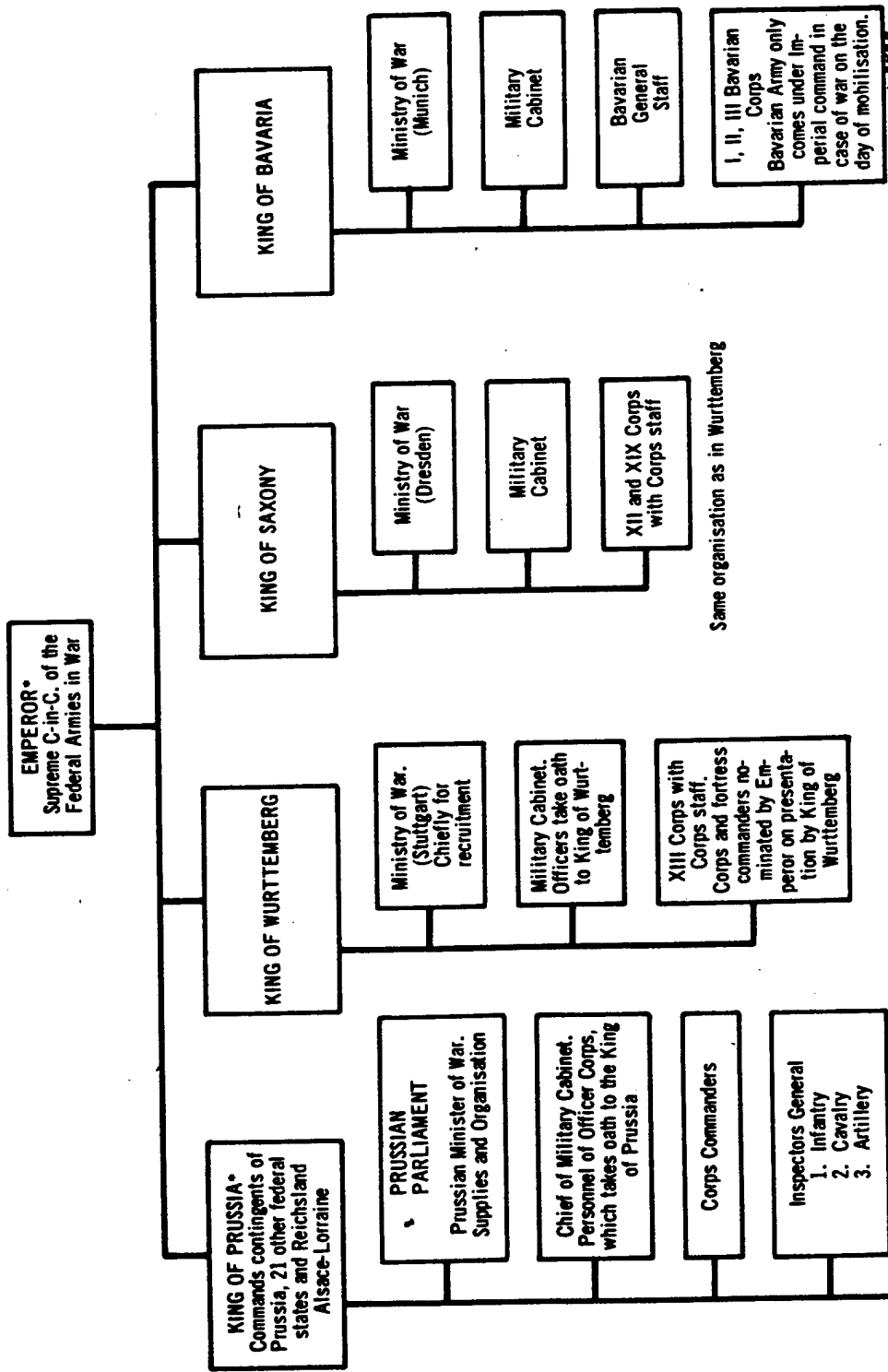
royal prince should command armies in battle, despite insufficiency of military experience.

Officers were chosen for assignment to the General Staff through an integrated system of selection for academic training, and subsequent selection from among those who most successfully completed that training. General Staff officers were trained in the same traditions; academically, in the Staff Academy, operationally, by alternate assignments with troops and with successively higher assignments in the General Staff System. The General Staff officer held a traditional status as an elite group with special insignia which was worn even during troop assignments. The criteria for assignment to the Great General Staff and for General Staff with Troops was based on a program to provide each General Staff officer broad and continuous staff training duties throughout an officer's service while at the same time filling each staff position with a competent officer.

The German Constitution of 1871 had provided that in time of war the armies of the federal states should pass under the supreme command of the Emperor, who, in 1918, was also the King of Prussia. Field Marshal von Hindenburg had been the Chief of the General Staff since 29 August 1916, a position which amounted to Commander-in-Chief of War. He was assisted by a Deputy to the Chief of the General Staff with title of First Quartermaster General, a Chief of Staff to him. (See Figure 1.) See Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945 (New York: Praeger, 1953); Godfrey Scheele, The Weimar Republic (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1945), pp. 78-79; and Detmar Finke, "German Army Staff System, Evolution of the German Army Staff," unpublished manuscript, copy in the office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington 25, D. C. (Typewritten.)

³John W. Wheeler-Bennett, Wooden Titan (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1936), p. 192. See also J. L. Jarman, The Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany (New York: University Press, 1956), pp. 64-67.

ORGANISATION OF THE IMPERIAL ARMY, 1914¹



* Kaiser Wilhelm was King of Prussia and Emperor in 1914.

¹ Godfrey Scheele, *The Weimar Republic* (Faber and Faber Ltd., 1945), facing p. 84.

Figure 1.

the loyalty of the troops.⁴ In reality, though, Field Marshal von Hindenburg knew the Army was no longer a cohesive force. Torn between two conflicting loyalties to his Emperor, Field Marshal von Hindenburg addressed the officers only briefly without discussing the basic issue of troop loyalty.

When the Field Marshal and General Groener arrived at the Emperor's palace on 9 November Field Marshal von Hindenburg was incapable of telling the Emperor that the Army was no longer loyal to him. Prussian military tradition labeled such action as disloyal. "Hindenburg made an effort to speak, but his voice choked and he could not. With tears running down his face he begged his Emperor's leave to resign."⁵ Then Field Marshal von Hindenburg ordered General Groener to explain the situation to Kaiser Wilhelm. This General Groener did, stating quite plainly that an operation against the interior would mean civil war and that there could not be, under the circumstances, any guarantee that the armed forces could be controlled. The Emperor exclaimed that he would lead his army against the rebels. General Groener answered that the Army no longer stood behind the Emperor. "Have they not taken the military oath to me?" "In circumstances like these, Sire, oaths are but words," answered General Groener.⁶ In the words of one author, "With these words, the whole world of

⁴Kurt F. Reinhardt, Germany 2000 Years (2 Vols.; New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Company, 1961), II, 642.

⁵Wheeler-Bennett, Wooden Titan, op. cit., p. 195.

⁶Ibid., p. 197.

Prussia and particularly the world of the Prussian Army was shattered. . . ."7

On the evening of 9 November, General Groener read the terms for the armistice. He telephoned a friend, Chancellor Friedrich Ebert, the leading Social Democrat who was elected by the Reichstag to head a new government.⁸ General Groener informed Chancellor Ebert that the High Command would support the new government in exchange for assurance that the government would support the Officers' Corps and properly maintain the Army. In addition, General Groener indicated that the Officers' Corps expected the government to fight against Bolshevism and that the Army was available to help the

⁷Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 201. The Imperial Army of 1918 was essentially a citizens army, a war army. The professional German Army of Prussian tradition had ceased to exist as early as 1914 following the large combat losses sustained during the First Battle of the Marne. As early as June 1918 soldiers of the 41st Infantry Division refused to return to their trenches. On 8 August this unit completely broke under heavy Allied tank-infantry attack. In Germany, the guardhouses were overcrowded with deserters and with men who refused to return to the front. Regiments and divisions returning to Germany literally fell to pieces when they reached their home areas. Even units such as the Second Guards Division, with the Alexander, Franz and Augusta Regiments, were totally ineffective. The widespread yearning for peace was soon made ripe for a totalitarian dictatorship. The German Army was but one of many groups that searched for a national ideal to correct déeprouted social and economic conditions following the collapse of Imperial Germany. The German field commanders of World War II were products of this period. See General der Infanterie Alexander von Falkenhausen, "Von Falkenhausen 1922-1945" (Manuscript No. B-289 prepared for Historical Division, Headquarters, United States Army Europe, November 1946), pp. 1-2. (Mimeographed.); and Harold J. Gordon, Jr., The Reichswehr and the German Republic, 1919-1926 (Princeton: University Press, 1957), pp. 3, 16.

⁸Robert G. L. Waite, Vanguard of Nazism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 5-6. In Weimar Germany the position of Chancellor represented political leadership of the Reichstag.

government for this purpose. Chancellor Ebert concluded the conversation with words of thanks for the support of the Army.

When the armistice was reached on 11 November 1918, there were four political forces active in Germany: the High Command; the dissolving armies of defeated Germany; the official government of Chancellor Ebert; and the revolutionaries.⁹

General Groener had, to some extent, anticipated the loss of control that accompanied the end of the war. He and his staff had drawn up a three-point plan for the High Command--the troops along the Western Front would be withdrawn behind the Rhine; order would be restored and military discipline enforced; and strong forces would be sent to the Eastern Front to hold the Ukraine, Poland, and Baltic areas to establish a barrier against Bolshevism.¹⁰ But to save the German position in the East, and to avoid a civil war, General Groener realized that Germany's internal conditions would have to be stabilized as quickly as possible.

Chancellor Ebert and the Social Democrats were not prepared for the power that was thrust upon them on 9 November.¹¹ One thing seemed reasonably certain: "Whoever controlled the field army might be able to control the course of the revolution."¹² The Field Army was itself divided into two parts: the High Command which included the General Staff, and the returning troops. Chancellor Ebert was

⁹Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 204.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 205.

¹¹William Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1946), p. 108.

¹²Waite, op. cit., p. 3.

forced to make a choice. He could either choose the High Command and the forces it still controlled, or he could organize the Soldiers' and Workers' Councils.¹³

In making his decision, Chancellor Ebert faced another consideration. The withdrawal of the troops from the Western Front would be a complex maneuver, and only the General Staff was capable of executing it within the time limit established. If the withdrawal got out of control, Germany faced the possibility of civil war. Chancellor Ebert had little choice but to side with the High Command.

Field Marshal von Hindenburg's consent to the agreement reached by General Groener and Chancellor Ebert opened up the way for General Groener to implement his program to save what could be saved of the German Army, a plan that called for the predominance of the Oberste Heeresleitung (OHL), the Army High Command, over all other centers of military power. The agreement with Chancellor Ebert left the OHL free to move against the radical revolutionaries and to demobilize the dissolving masses of soldiers.

To accomplish his objective, General Groener used a tactic perfected by General Erich Ludendorff--the "doctrine of responsibility."¹⁴ This doctrine implied that the High Command could only stand behind those actions of the government which it approved. If

¹³Reinhardt, op. cit., p. 645. The German Soldiers' and Workers' Councils were patterned on those established by the Russian Communists. They rivaled the legal government and were the actual ruling bodies in many areas.

¹⁴Wheeler-Bennett, Wooden Titan, op. cit., pp. 82-85. General Ludendorff had been First Quartermaster General to Field Marshal Hindenburg prior to General Groener.

any action of which it did not approve was carried out, then the High Command would resign and refuse to support the government.

General Ludendorff had used this principle to establish his authority over the Emperor and the cabinet during World War I. When Chancellor Ebert agreed to use the OHL to suppress the revolution, he passively accepted this doctrine.

The High Command then proceeded to resolve the problems of the revolution. On 10 November, delegates of the Soldier's Councils were persuaded to support the High Command, a victory easily won because only the General Staff had the technical competence to carry out the troop withdrawals ordered by the Allies.¹⁵

General Groener realized that the real test would come in Berlin when the withdrawing troops arrived from the front. His plan called for nine trustworthy divisions under General Freiherr von Lequis, who was to be Military Commandant of Berlin, to enter the city on 5 December and disarm the civilian population.¹⁶

Chancellor Ebert could not make up his mind, while the Independent members of the cabinet definitely opposed organized troops entering Berlin because of fear of widespread bloodshed. On 6 December, Chancellor Ebert was forced to make a decision. On that day, Count Wolff Metternich led an abortive putsch (riot) against the government, and Chancellor Ebert called General Groener for help. He was informed that if aid were given, the High Command would expect the government to allow General von Lequis to enter Berlin; otherwise, the

¹⁵Herbert Rosinski, The German Army (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1940), pp. 167-68.

¹⁶Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 209.

High Command would withdraw its support from the government. This was General Groener's first application of the doctrine of responsibility.¹⁷

Chancellor Ebert acquiesced; on 12 December, the Guards Cavalry Rifle Division - some 800 strong - entered Berlin.

The day before, on 11 December, the first troops had returned to Berlin from the front. Chancellor Ebert and the Socialists had made elaborate preparations to receive them. Chancellor Ebert--addressing them in front of the Brandenburger Gate: "I salute you, who return unvanquished from the field of battle"--naively intended to win the support of the disbanding soldiers.¹⁸ In this he failed.

The average attitude of the soldiers from the front was expressed by one who said:

The "reception committee" under Ebert's leadership and his speech had no effect on us. We were only aware of one fact: That the fight against the "masses of mankind" would be hard and bloody . . . it would now be necessary to fight all physical and psychological resistance, to become hard--even against ourselves --to become free of all sentimentality. A great task lay before us.¹⁹

The returning soldiers became the decisive element in Berlin, and the General Staff lost control of the situation. The demobilization plan broke down completely. Chaos reigned. Each political faction attempted to win the support of the mobs of soldiers.

¹⁷Waite, op. cit., p. 7. See also Halperin, op. cit., pp. 114-16.

¹⁸Scheele, op. cit., p. 81.

¹⁹Major W. Pabst, "Spartakus" in Deutscher Aufstand: die Revolution des Nachkriegs (Stuttgart, 1934), pp. 30-31, quoted by Waite, op. cit., p. 8. Pabst was later dismissed from the Army in July 1919 after attempting a Putsch within the Guards Cavalry Rifle Corps.

The People's Deputies issued a decree on 12 December which called for the formation of a Republican Civil Guard, an attempt to dispose of the High Command. The Congress of Soldiers' Councils met on 16 December, and, on the following day, asked that Field Marshal von Hindenburg and the General Staff be dismissed, and the Hamburg program adopted.²⁰ The latter called for the abolition of all badges of rank and the formation of a Republican Civil Guard. The Army High Command was infuriated.

Hopeful of some reconciliation, Chancellor Ebert called a meeting of the OHL, the People's Deputies, and the Soldiers' Councils. The meeting, held on 20 December, was doomed to failure before it began, because none of the antagonists was willing to compromise.

General Groener opened the meeting by invoking the doctrine of responsibility, and informed Chancellor Ebert that the programs proposed by the Deputies and by the Councils were unacceptable. If the demands of the Councils were not rejected immediately, the Army could not be responsible for the existence of the government.²¹

The High Command carried the day, a victory which produced two significant results--it established the German Army within the new Republic; and it infuriated the radical wing of the Socialist Party.²² The split between the Army and the radical Socialists, which Chancellor Ebert had sought to avoid, was now a fact. The consequences were not unexpected.

²⁰Halperin, op. cit., pp. 114-15. Also see Waite, op. cit., p. 8. The Hamburg program was put forth by a delegate from Hamburg from whom the program got its name.

²¹Waite, op. cit., p. 9.

²²Ibid.

General Groener knew there would be open conflict with the radical element and he set in motion plans to insure a favorable decision for the OHL. On 16 December, the General Staff officers who were in Berlin met to discuss the Army's position. It was quite apparent that the General Staff, the Council of People's Deputies, and the Committee of the Soldiers' Council faced each other without either possessing effective means of power. Four days later, Major Kurt von Schleicher, a member of the General Staff and Aide de Camp to General Groener, proposed a plan to create volunteer formations to support the government. The plans were approved and a new era opened for the German Army--the era of the Freikorps (Free Corps).²³

On 24 December, the sailors of the Volksmarine Division, led by Erich Dorrenbach, head of the People's Naval Division from Hamburg, demanded payment of 80,000 marks from the government. Chancellor Ebert refused and the sailors surrounded the Chancellory. This was the chance the High Command awaited. The issue of power between the Army and the revolutionaries would be decided. The troops led by General von Lequis--800 strong--supported by a battery and a half of field artillery, attacked the revolutionaries entrenched at the Imperial Palace. By 0930, the jeering crowds and sailors had routed the poorly organized Imperial troops. As a result of this failure, it was obvious to the High Command that the Army must be reorganized and consolidated before its position in the new Republic could be established.²⁴ Although Dorrenbach was unsuccessful in his

²³Goerlitz, op. cit., pp. 210-11.

²⁴Halperin, op. cit., pp. 117-18.

effort to get Chancellor Ebert to pay his men, he was successful in forcing the General Staff to revise its strategy.

The first phase of the revolution had passed. The second phase, as the first, began with a conversation between Chancellor Ebert and General Groener. This time Chancellor Ebert asked for the support of the General Staff to combat Bolshevism. But General Groener now realized that he had underestimated the revolution. The High Command could not afford a fight without certain concessions from the government, and he insisted that the government unite behind Chancellor Ebert and dismiss the Independent members of the Council.

Chancellor Ebert knew that the split in the Council of People's Deputies was already irreparable and he went along with the High Command. Both General Groener and Chancellor Ebert understood that the old Imperial Army could not handle the situation, and that a new military basis would have to be found, and with it a new civilian leader.²⁵ On 27 December, Gustav Noske, the Governor of Kiel, was empowered to conduct all military affairs.²⁶ A week later, he reviewed the Volunteer Rifles of General Maercker, and for the first time, Prussian soldiers passed in review for a civilian. A new age of German history had begun. But the significant fact is that seeds of political disunity were sown in the form of the Free Corps.

Before the Free Corps could be organized and control established, however, the Spartacists--as the Communist revolutionaries were known--seemed to be on the verge of a successful counter-

²⁵Waite, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁶Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 212.

revolution. There was no visible means of stopping the Spartacists-- the OHL and the Free Corps could not equip four thousand men.²⁷ But the government called upon the Free Corps to defend the Republic, and the real power in Germany shifted from the High Command to the Free Corps.

By granting unlimited authority to each Freikorpsfuehrer, and by failing to force the separate corps into an effective military organization, Minister Noske relinquished the control his office should have established. The High Command seized the opportunity to reassert its authority and to bring order to the chaotic situation. The revolution dissolved into a power struggle between the High Command and the Free Corps. The first phase developed over the reorganization of the High Command and the Treaty of Versailles in the summer of 1919.

The High Command had split over the issue of the Treaty of Versailles. General Walter Reinhardt, Minister of War, favored outright rejection and withdrawal to Prussia.²⁸ General Groener disagreed.

Six hours before the time limit set by the Allies expired, Chancellor Ebert telephoned General Groener. "Would the OHL support an armed resistance?" General Groener agreed to consult Field Marshal von Hindenburg and provide an answer. Field Marshal von Hindenburg had assumed an attitude that "as a soldier he preferred

²⁷Waite, op. cit., p. 58.

²⁸The Minister of War occupied a staff position subordinate to the Defense Minister and coequal to the Chief of the General Staff.

honorable defeat to a shameful peace."²⁹ General Groener confirmed this position, but unlike Field Marshal von Hindenburg, he advised acceptance of the treaty. He felt that the country had no other choice.

On 28 June 1919, the day the Versailles Treaty was signed, General Hans von Seeckt was appointed Chief of the General Staff to replace Field Marshal von Hindenburg,³⁰ who had resigned in protest to the terms of the treaty. The name of the General Staff was changed to Truppenamt (Office of Troops) and on 1 October 1919, the reorganization was carried into effect. (See Figure 2.) The Reichswehr Ministry moved to the Bendlestrasse in Berlin; the old Prussian War Ministry closed; the High Command was formally dissolved; and General Groener retired.

General von Seeckt headed the Truppenamt and was directly subordinate to General Reinhardt, the Chief of the Heeresleitung or Army Command. When the reorganization was completed, the days of the Imperial Prussian Army formally ended.³¹

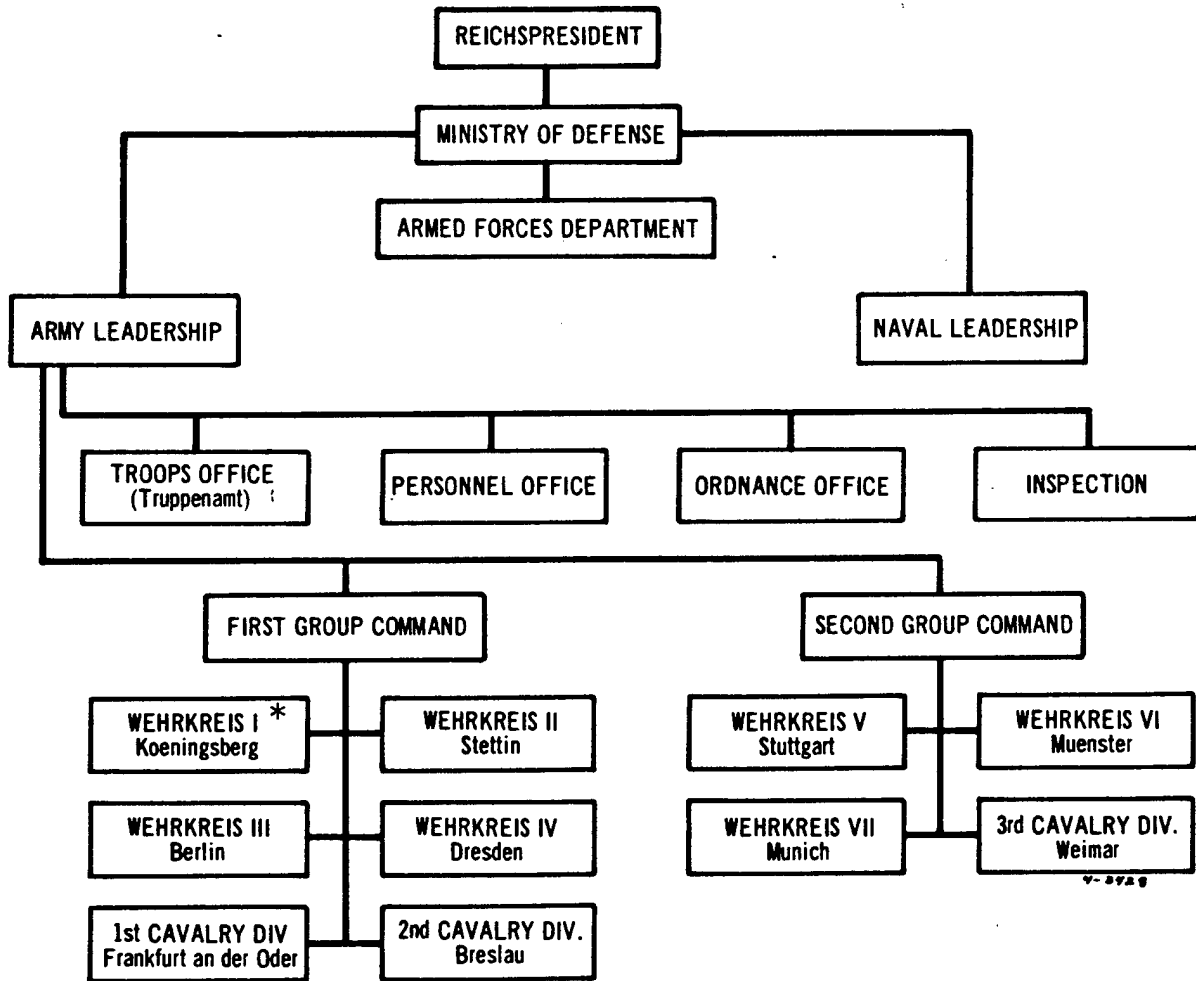
²⁹Halperin, op. cit., p. 149.

³⁰Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 217.

³¹The Treaty of Versailles established the German Army with a strength of not more than 4,000 officers and 96,000 enlisted men, divided into seven infantry and three cavalry divisions under the Army Command and two Group Commands. The soldiers served for not more than twelve years, the officers for twenty-five years.

The Truppenamt differed some from the Great Prussian General Staff. Before 1919 there had been no Army Chief between the Chief of Staff and the Chief of State and the War Ministry was a coequal rather than a superior headquarters. The Truppenamt was two steps removed from the President, whereas the General Staff of the Prussian Army had direct access to the Kaiser. The functions performed remained generally the same and by 1922 General von Seeckt in fact, though not in name, was the Commander of the Army. See Gordon, op. cit., p. 178.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REICHSWEHR 1920-1935¹



¹Telford Taylor, *Sword and Swastika* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), p. 382.

*Defense District.

Figure 2.

These events had significant effects on the commanders and General Staff officers who were to serve Germany during the next few years. The psychology of defeat and the provisions of the Versailles Treaty provided the link between the Free Corps and National Socialism. The leadership of the German Army was seriously effected, especially the social-psychological thinking of the junior officers. Included in this group were almost all the officers who were to serve Hitler as senior commanders and General Staff officers during World War II. Von Manstein was a junior officer, as was Ludwig Beck, von Blomberg, von Reichenau, von Rundstedt, von Fritsch, Rommel, Guderian, von Witzleben, and others.

During the turbulent period 1918-1920, a transformation in professional ethics began to occur in the German Army. Men and officers were insecure. There was insufficient food and clothing for the troops. Rapidly rising prices without pay increases made it impossible to provide the minimum essentials of family life. Hungry, poorly clothed and miserably housed, the soldiers remembered that the Emperor had always managed to take care of them better than was now the case.

The Officer Corps was embittered by changes made by the Republic in their uniform, including the abolition of the shoulder-board rank insignia. Of greater impact was a change of National Colors. The black-white-red standard associated with the victories of 1870 and the struggle of 1914-1918 was replaced by the black-red-gold standard associated with the ill fated revolution of 1848. These changes seemed to be a direct attack upon military tradition, an attempt to break with matters held dear by those concerned. And the War Guilt and

Extradition Clauses of the Versailles Treaty were disliked by every soldier.³²

The traditional Prussian military ethic founded on Christian principles of duty and honor were to be further transformed by some of the military leaders of the Free Corps. For the most part, these leaders were not of the General Staff; in fact, they were a menace to the General Staff system, because they were, individually, centers of political unrest. The Free Corps provided its leaders a life even better than in the Imperial Army. Each leader recruited his own men, trained them as he wished, and he was responsible to no one. Here was where Corporal Adolf Hitler worked as an "Education Officer," and here was where political violence found expression as a substitute for the professional ethic of duty and honor.³³

³²Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-89. See Articles 235 and 238 of The Treaty of Versailles for the War Guilt and Extradition Clauses.

³³Many Free Corps units were cohesive military organizations, a number of which performed valuable service especially in the East as frontier guards against Polish and Russian expansion. It was the Free Corps that provided much of the cadre for the provisional Reichswehr in 1920, and those members that joined the Army were highly selected. The mass of the Free Corps rose, flourished and disappeared between November 1918 and March 1920 either to join the Army or to form other paramilitary organizations that were later to serve Hitler so well. The chief objection to the Free Corps in 1919 was that they could not be controlled. Many of their leaders lacked a sense of responsibility and often recognized no higher authority than themselves. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

CHAPTER II
THE ARMY IS THE STATE,
1920-1933

The history of Germany during the next thirteen years includes the development of the Reichswehr and the demise of the Weimar Republic. During this period, the Provisional Reichswehr of 1918-19 was replaced by a professional Army and Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor by legal means.

Cold, reticent, aloof, General Hans von Seeckt symbolized the fusion of the traditions of Prussian aristocracy with that of the General Staff officer. During World War I, as Chief of Staff to Generalfeldmarschall August von Mackensen, he had amazed the High Command by engineering a successful frontal attack against the Russians. The credit for the breakthrough at "Gorlice" belongs to him.

Intellectually, General von Seeckt was outstanding among his contemporaries. He possessed, to an extraordinary degree, the ability to size up people and make them do what he wanted. He was realistic and took things as they came; he kept his own counsel, a trait from which he received the nickname of "The Sphinx."

He eventually replaced General Reinhardt as Chef der Heeresleitung, when the latter resigned following the Kapp Putsch.¹

¹The Kapp Putsch of March 1920 was an unsuccessful uprising staged by the Free Corps against Chancellor Ebert's government. It

The Kapp Putsch is important because it reveals the philosophy which General von Seeckt used to construct the Reichswehr, although it must be admitted that the question of why General von Seeckt refused to support the government is not easily answered. To seek an answer really, one must examine the philosophy of the man.

General von Seeckt was determined to keep the Army out of domestic politics. "There is a danger of mistaking the state for the state form and even more, the party for the state," he said.² And, further, "We . . . look for the healthy development of the empire structure along the following lines: unconditional maintenance of empire unity toward the outside world . . ."³

was the first protest against the sudden changes which had taken place since the fall of Imperial Germany, and against the acceptance of the Versailles Treaty. Wolfgang Kapp, an East Prussian landowner; Captain Hermann Ehrhardt, commander of a Free Corps marine brigade; and retired General Erich Ludendorff, who had been First Quartermaster General prior to General Groener, provided the leadership for the uprising. They were joined by General Freiherr Walther von Luetwitz, commander of Reichswehr Group Command I in Berlin. General von Luetwitz was a sternly aristocratic nobleman schooled in the traditions of the Prussian Officer Corps. He was a good soldier, courageous, able and highly regarded as a result of his performance during World War I. He had been induced to join the putschists because of his concern for his troops. The actual cause of the Putsch was an attempt to dissolve a part of the Free Corps in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. Ehrhardt's marines defied the order, marched on Berlin and demanded the government hold new elections to bring about a government which would more actively resist the dictate of Versailles. The government was forced to leave Berlin when General von Seeckt refused to allow the Army to defend the Republic against Kapp, Ehrhardt, and Luetwitz. The Putsch failed because of a mass strike by the people of Berlin, who would not support the putschists. See John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power (London: MacMillan Company, Ltd., 1953), p. 77. Also see Harold J. Gordon, Jr., The Reichswehr and the German Republic, 1919-1926 (Princeton: University Press, 1957), pp. 90-143.

²Hans von Seeckt, The Future of the German Empire, trans. Oakley Williams (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., no date), p. 115.

³Ibid., p. 107.

He felt that the purpose of this unity was to develop the historical mission of Germany within which " . . . the Defense Force is the most significant symbol of empire unity." ⁴ To General von Seeckt, a unity of purpose in the Army represented the real strength of Germany. ⁵

General von Seeckt's basic political philosophy was aristocratic, autocratic, and perhaps reactionary. He did not respect a parliamentary system, such as that of the Weimar Republic. He said that "the principal foe of a sound self-administration is the parliamentary system. That is quite intelligible and natural as long as its claim to govern persists. It is neither called nor qualified to do so." ⁶ But General von Seeckt was opposed to any rash action to restore the monarchy or overthrow the government. He saw that the fulfillment of his objective, the building of the Reichswehr, could only be accomplished through a long and concentrated effort.

In rebuilding the Army, General von Seeckt was guided by two basic goals--to create a kernel of a great national Army and to keep the Army out of contemporary politics. When he replaced Field Marshal von Hindenburg, General von Seeckt wrote: "If I succeed in preserving, not the form but the spirit, then I shall be able to see in my work more than merely the burial of the General Staff." ⁷

⁴Ibid., p. 135.

⁵Gordon, op. cit., p. 102. Positive proof that General von Seeckt disapproved of the position taken by General von Luetwitz is contained in General von Seeckt's order of 18 October 1919 to all General Staff officers in which he prohibited putschist action.

⁶Seeckt, op. cit., p. 117.

⁷Godfrey Scheele, The Weimar Republic (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1945), p. 88.

The spirit which General von Seeckt referred to was the Prussian idea of discipline based on the authority of the chain of command with the Officer Corps bound by its oath and honor. Authority would have to be restored in the Army as a preliminary step. It was for this reason that General von Seeckt refused to allow the Kapp Putsch to destroy the unity of the German Army.⁸

General von Seeckt's guiding principle in the new Army was that it had to stand apart from politics.⁹ His purpose was to withdraw the officers and men from the influences and pressures of political parties and political questions. General von Seeckt expressed his principle by saying: ". . . the Army must be 'political' - i. e., it must grasp the concept of the State. But it certainly must not be 'political' in the sense of party politics. 'Hands off the Army' is my cry to all parties. The Army serves the state and only the state because the Army is the state."¹⁰

Militarily, General von Seeckt accomplished two objectives-- he created a "leaders' Army" that served as the cadre for the Wehrmacht of the Third Reich; and, he reintroduced the strategy of mobile warfare that had suffered an eclipse during World War I.

He used the 100,000-man limit on the size of the German Army and the twelve year service limitation imposed by the Allies as assets.

⁸Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945 (New York: Praeger, 1953), pp. 220-21.

⁹Alan Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), p. 130. Actually, legislation passed by the Weimar Republic and Army Regulations banned soldiers from all political activity, including voting.

¹⁰Robert G. L. Waite, Vanguard of Nazism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 184.

To place emphasis on the training of staff officers, he duplicated staffs. Duplication was practiced at all levels of command until 1923 when the Allies discovered the fact and required the practice to be discontinued.¹¹ Nevertheless, General von Seeckt's emphasis on training resulted in an Army in which the Officer Corps was cross-trained and schooled in terms of military expediency. One author emphasizes that this would have been a good effect had it not been accompanied by an enforced political naivete among the younger officers.¹²

The Hitler Putsch of 9 November 1923 marked the high point of General von Seeckt's power.¹³ He correctly saw that inflation was

¹¹The Allies made the basic decisions as to the type, size, composition, and organization of the German Army. Similarly it was the Allies who specified that Germany would have a small, long-term professional Army instead of one formed by short-term conscripts. Many of the elements of the Imperial Army were not permitted in the Reichswehr. Schools, experimental stations, factories, and certain branches of the service, such as an air force and heavy artillery, were prohibited. What was far more important, the German Army was permitted no reserves whatsoever, a fact which greatly facilitated the growth of the armed political--para-military organizations--which were characteristic of Germany at this time. Gordon, op. cit., pp. 149 and 172.

¹²Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 200.

¹³The abortive Munich "Beer Cellar Putsch" staged jointly by Adolf Hitler and Erich Ludendorff aimed at the abolishment of parliamentary institutions, the suppression of civil liberties, and the liquidation of political opponents. At the time, the Putsch received little attention. S. William Halperin provides an interesting discussion of the attempted Putsch and its causes in his chapter, "From the Advent of Stresemann to the Hitler-Ludendorff Putsch," Germany Tried Democracy (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1946), pp. 261-279. Of interest is the fact that the Bavarian Division enjoyed a position of practical autonomy within the Army up until this Putsch. The Bavarian military autonomy caused considerable difficulty and proved to be of great significance in fostering internal strife within the Army and in aiding Hitler.

the real German revolution, and, under military protection, the currency was stabilized and the economic independence of the cartels restricted.

General von Seeckt's foreign policy was based on the belief that the Treaty of Versailles was unjust to Germany. He believed that German foreign policy should have but one goal: "The restoration of Germany as a might state." His beliefs were based on the conviction that Germany had been reduced to serfdom by the treaty and that the arbitrary frontiers, particularly the Polish Corridor, were wrong and could not stand. To abrogate the treaty, Germany needed one thing-- "Might - the creation of which is its first task." ¹⁴

Since the principal task was to scuttle the Versailles Treaty and to rearm, General von Seeckt secretly sought an alliance with Russia to further these objectives. He chose Russia because the latter was not a signatory to the Treaty of Versailles. ¹⁵

The real significance of Germany's secret rearmament was the effect on the attitude of the Reichswehr. The Officer Corps was impressed that the policy of rearming was an objective to be placed above any other consideration--moral or otherwise. Equally important, General von Seeckt's policy accustomed people to the idea of engaging in violations of a duly signed treaty. ¹⁶ The German government,

¹⁴Seeckt, op. cit., p. 153.

¹⁵Edward H. Carr, German-Soviet Relations Between The Two World Wars, 1919-1939 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1951). See also John Erickson's Chapter 6, "Towards Collaboration with the Reich," pp. 144-63, and Chapter 9, "Military and Naval Trafficking with Germany," pp. 247-82, in his book The Soviet High Command (London: Saint Martins Press, 1962).

¹⁶Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 248.

acting on the advice of the High Command, had accepted the treaty. The policy adopted by General von Seeckt, however, was that the treaty could and should be violated. At the time, then Generalmajor Werner von Blomberg, is reported to have said: "It was a point of honor with the Prussian officer to be correct; it is a duty to the German officer to be crafty."¹⁷

Thus, the tradition General von Seeckt hoped to develop in the new Reichswehr was undermined to some extent by General von Seeckt himself. That which was morally decent in the Prussian tradition was accompanied by a new practice of deception and intrigue, a factor on which Hitler was to capitalize when he came to power in 1933.

During the period of crisis in the early 1920s, an idea had begun to crystallize in General von Seeckt's mind. Though he refused to entertain thoughts of a personal dictatorship in 1923, he believed he was capable of governing Germany. Chancellor Ebert's term would be over in 1925, and by then General von Seeckt hoped to be ready for the election. The unexpected death of Chancellor Ebert in February 1925 was a serious blow to his plans.

Field Marshal von Hindenburg was elected to succeed Chancellor Ebert. For General von Seeckt it meant that he was no longer the first soldier of Germany. Field Marshal von Hindenburg always considered the Reichswehr his private domain and a clash between the two was inevitable.

The expected clash did occur, brought about by a somewhat shortsighted act on General von Seeckt's part. He had always maintained friendly relations with the Imperial family, and when he

¹⁷Carr, op. cit., p. 30.

received a request for the son of the Crown Prince to participate in maneuvers, he felt it would be a nice gesture. Of course, General von Seeckt knew this was a violation of the Versailles Treaty, and would arouse the opposition of his opponents. He therefore ordered that the affair should be conducted discreetly.

But the news got out. It caused a Cabinet crisis, and Field Marshal von Hindenburg was forced to relieve General von Seeckt, who passed out of the Reichswehr and into retirement.

At the time of General von Seeckt's dismissal, Kurt von Schleicher was a lieutenant colonel serving as a General Staff officer. As a major von Schleicher had been a protege of General Groener and it was Major von Schleicher who first suggested the formation of the Free Corps. In the years 1926-1933, this relatively junior officer occupied a position of power and influence within the Army that makes an examination of his role important to this thesis. During these years, General von Schleicher in effect controlled the Reichswehr; later, in 1933, it was General von Schleicher serving as Chancellor who urged President Hindenburg to admit the Nazis to power.

General von Schleicher came from an old Brandenburg family. Upon graduating from the military academy, he entered the exclusive Prussian Third Foot Guards as a lieutenant in 1900. In this same regiment, he served with Oskar von Hindenburg, son of the President. During World War I, General von Schleicher served on various staffs except for a brief period in 1917. It was during this period that he met and impressed Field Marshal von Hindenburg and General Groener, who referred to him as "my adopted son."

When World War I ended, von Schleicher was serving on the General Staff of the High Command, and, when General Groener became the First Quartermaster General, he made von Schleicher, then a major, his aide-de-camp. When General Groener retired, General von Schleicher became General von Seeckt's assistant, and continued to display a talent for organization and a special gift for political astuteness.

While General von Schleicher was a soldier by profession, he was political by nature. He had a forceful personality and an extreme degree of self-reliance. It was a combination of these qualities that prompted General von Seeckt to delegate to General von Schleicher those matters that came before the Reichswehr which dealt with political issues.¹⁸ It appears that through his efforts, field commanders of the German Army were to remain politically neutral and there is little evidence that the Officer Corps, including General von Schleicher, intentionally aided Hitler in his rise to power.¹⁹

From 1926 on, President Hindenburg was swayed by the counsel of General von Schleicher. To succeed General von Seeckt, General von Schleicher recommended General Wilhelm Heye, an officer poorly suited for the job, and two years later, in 1928, he used his influence with President Hindenburg to have Minister of Defense

¹⁸Georg von Sodenstern, "Events Leading up to 20 July 1944" (Manuscript No. B-499 prepared for the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington 25, D. C., March, 1946), p. 12.

¹⁹B. H. Liddell Hart, The German Generals Talk (New York: William Marrow and Co., 1948), pp. 81-82.

Otto Gessler dismissed and General Groener appointed to the vacated post.²⁰

Although he was able to represent the Army politically, General von Schleicher did not have the support of the Officer Corps. His quickness in political matters did little to ingratiate him with the officers who had grown up in the tradition of General von Seeckt. Political soldiers were an anathema to them. In addition, General von Schleicher had gained the nickname of "desk general"; he was particularly resented by those officers who had served at the front during World War I.

With President Hindenburg and General Groener, however, General von Schleicher continued to seek power without responsibility. A major problem for General von Schleicher was finding a successor for General Heye, who in 1929 was talking of retirement. By tradition, the Chef des Truppenamt was usually in line for promotion, as had been the case with General von Seeckt and General Heye. Since 1927, this had been Generalleutnant Werner von Blomberg, who had gained a reputation as an able soldier and a personable and intelligent man.

But General von Blomberg was not General von Schleicher's choice and, as one author states, he manufactured a charge against General von Blomberg for violating "border security measures."²¹ In any event, General von Blomberg was removed from his office and

²⁰Telford Taylor, Sword and Swastika (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), p. 51, and Wheeler-Bennett, Wooden Titan, op. cit., p. 299.

²¹Taylor, op. cit., p. 53. As of 1 May 1930, von Blomberg was the ninth ranking generalleutnant; von Schleicher, the fifteenth ranking generalmajor.

General von Schleicher's friend, Generalmajor Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord, received the position.

By September 1930, when General von Hammerstein took office, Hitler once again had become an important figure. But the situation was not the same as it had been in 1923. Now Hitler was on the offensive, and there was no General von Seeckt to oppose him. To meet the challenge of the day--depression--General Groener, advised by General von Schleicher, sponsored Heinrich Bruening as Chancellor.²²

With the appointment of Bruening, the group known as "the palace camarilla" became, for practical purposes, the rulers of Germany.²³ The group included General von Schleicher, Oskar Hindenburg, and Otto Meissner, Presidential Secretary to President Hindenburg. The dominant personality was General von Schleicher.

It was General von Schleicher who maneuvered his old friend, General Groener, out of office. It was General von Schleicher who made promises to Hitler, and tried to maneuver Hitler out of his own party. It was General von Schleicher who proposed Bruening as Chancellor and then dropped him for a new favorite, Franz von Papen, and who finally overthrew Papen and took the Chancellorship himself. It was General von Schleicher who, on 29 January 1933, was forced to hand over the powers of German government to Adolf Hitler.²⁴

²²Ibid., p. 57.

²³Ibid.

²⁴These events are confirmed by Goerlitz, op. cit., pp. 257-72, and Halperin, op. cit., pp. 409-10, p. 472, p. 487, pp. 512-16, and p. 526.

During the various maneuvers of General von Schleicher, his source of power had been the German Army. What he failed to realize, however, was that the loyalty of the Reichswehr belonged to President Hindenburg. More significantly, some officers--especially the younger ones--supported Hitler. Also important, General von Schleicher failed to win the support of the senior officers.²⁵

Under General von Schleicher, General von Seeckt's Reichswehr had ceased to be a "State within the State" and had become a faction among factions. Now "the Officer's Corps was about to meet the most deadly challenge of its entire history--a challenge which it proved incapable of coping with and which all but brought about its extinction"--Adolf Hitler.²⁶

The tragedy of General von Schleicher should not be attached to the German Army as a corporate group. He was but a tragic example of Gaetano Mosca's thesis: "A tragic destiny is that of men! Aspiring ever to pursue and achieve what they think is the good, they ever find pretexts for slaughtering and persecuting each other."²⁷

The Army was in fact engaged as one would expect, training to fight a defensive war. To the officers of the German Army, the threat of attack especially from the East was ever present.

²⁵An example was Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt, who at the time, was a Generalleutnant and Commander of the Berlin Military District. At Nuremberg, he testified that all the generals considered themselves above politics. Field Marshal von Rundstedt also testified that the generals either rejected the Nazi Party or were indifferent to it, as a result of General von Seeckt's thorough indoctrination. See Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal (42 Vols. ; Nuremberg: 1948), VXXI, 21.

²⁶Taylor, op. cit., p. 55.

²⁷Gaetano Mosca, The Ruling Class quoted by Koppel S. Pinson, Modern Germany (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1954), p. vi.

The German Army created by General von Seeckt and used by General von Schleicher consisted of 100,000 officers and men, divided into seven infantry and three cavalry divisions under the Army Command and two Group Commands. (See Figure 2.)

The Army was billeted, trained and recruited on a territorial basis. The territorial unit was the Wehrkreis (military district). The number of Wehrkreis corresponded to the seven infantry divisions and the commanding generals of the infantry divisions also functioned as Wehrkreis commanders. The 7th Infantry Division, for example, was billeted in Wehrkreis VII, with its headquarters in Munich, the capital of Bavaria. Its personnel was drawn from within the boundaries of the Wehrkreis. The subordinate units of the division were distributed in garrisons throughout the Wehrkreis.²⁸

As commanding general of an infantry division, the general was directly subordinate to the Army Group commander. In his capacity as Military District commander, the general was directly subordinate to the Heeresleitung rather than to the group commander.²⁹

The infantry division consisted of division headquarters, division infantry headquarters, division artillery headquarters, three infantry regiments, one artillery regiment, one engineer battalion, one signal battalion, one motor transport battalion, one horse-drawn transport battalion, and one medical battalion. Each infantry regiment consisted of headquarters, three rifle battalions, one mortar company,

²⁸Detmar Finke, "Training Area Study" (On file in the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington 25, D. C., no date).

²⁹Gordon, op. cit., p. 182.

and a training battalion. Each rifle battalion included three rifle companies and one machine-gun company.³⁰

As early as 1923-24 Lieutenant Colonel von Brauchitsch, who was later to be Commander-in-Chief of the Army, tested during maneuvers the possibilities of employing motorized troops supported by aircraft.³¹

It was in 1924 that a young Captain named Heinz Guderian discovered that much could be learned about tanks by exercises which employed motorcycles, armored cars borrowed from the police, and dummy vehicles.³² At first, the latter was interested in the reemployment of tanks for reconnaissance purposes. As early as 1929, however, he became convinced that tanks working on their own or in conjunction with infantry would never fully exploit the possibilities of the tank. "My historical studies, and our own experience with mock-ups had persuaded me that tanks would never be able to produce their full effect until the other weapons on whose support they must inevitably rely were brought up to their standard of speed and of cross country performance. In such a formation of all arms, the tank must play the primary role, the other weapons being subordinated to the requirement of the armour."³³

³⁰Ibid., p. 183.

³¹Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1952), p. 21.

³²Craig, op. cit., p. 396.

³³Guderian, op. cit., p. 24.

In 1929, General Guderian, then a major, was given command of a motorized battalion consisting of four companies: one company was equipped with armored reconnaissance cars, one with motorcycles, one with dummy tanks and the fourth with wood-dummy antitank guns.³⁴

Equally important to the new concept was the problem of new equipment. General von Seeckt had started the relationship with Russia with this in mind. As early as 1921 secret conversations were begun in the Berlin apartment of General von Schleicher, in which the Soviet Commissar for foreign trade participated; and in these talks the scheme of rebuilding the Soviet armaments industry in exchange for the supply of illegal weapons to Germany were discussed.³⁵ These plans for collaboration were helpful to the German Army in that steady progress was made in mechanizing the Army.³⁶

The training program developed by General von Seeckt was developed to emphasize a "mental and spiritual rearmament." His goal was directed not only at making the German people defense-minded, but at making the Officer Corps mentally alert.³⁷

The entire theoretical basis of military operations was reexamined. Military geography and psychology were studied, as well as history and tactics. Theoretical studies in the use of heavy artillery and armor were encouraged.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Craig, op. cit., pp. 409-10.

³⁶The extent of Soviet-German collaboration is discussed by Carr, op. cit. See also Erickson, op. cit.

³⁷Gordon, op. cit., pp. 299-300.

Individual training was divided into three parts, each of which was further subdivided by specialty and grade of the soldier concerned: enlisted training, officer's training, and General Staff and higher training. The training of General Staff officers received the most meticulous attention and division and group commanders were also included in General von Seeckt's training program. General von Seeckt himself conducted "generals' rides" to discuss large-scale tactical problems.³⁸ As a result of the emphasis General von Seeckt placed on training, sound basic tactical doctrines applicable to modern mobile warfare were taught the Reichswehr soldier and officer.

Operationally, the first post World War I mobilization plan was prepared in 1929. The plan called for the Army to expand in case of war from its seven infantry divisions to twenty-one divisions. The expansion was to be accomplished by creating three units from each of the existing units. Each division headquarters was to create the nucleus for three such headquarters; each regiment was to be subdivided to form three regiments and each battalion, three new battalions.

Thus, the years prior to 1933 were profitable. Despite the restrictions on rearmament established by the Treaty of Versailles, considerable progress had been made. By the end of 1932, irresponsibility and indiscipline among troop commanders had long been eliminated. The excesses and chaos that had existed in the Army during 1918-23 had been supplanted by military efficiency. For the first time

³⁸For detailed training schedules and subject scope see "German Military Training, A Study of German Military Training" (Produced at GMDS by a combined British, Canadian, and U. S. Staff, May, 1946), Part I, and Gordon, op. cit., pp. 300-303.

Germany had a national Army with a unity of command that was responsive to civilian leadership. Despite acts of individuals, the officers and men of the Army were patriotic and loyal to the Republic. They served faithfully and prepared for their defensive mission with far less friction with the government than is generally believed. Large numbers did long for a return of the Monarchy. And monarchism plus the belief that the Republic did not appreciate them created morale problems of some significance.

The Army in 1932 had major defects. Some resulted from the historical background of the Army in the German State. Others were characteristic of almost any Army--officer selection; how to keep the Officer Corps young; training problems with limited maneuver areas and equipment shortages.

Always, there was the fear of an attack from the East.

But what is more significant is the effect that the years of putschs, rivalry, intrigue, and distrust had on the Officer Corps. A trend started in the 1920's that in the years ahead would lead to the disintegration of the German military ethic.

CHAPTER III
REICHSWEHR TO WEHRMACHT,
1933-1938

Adolf Hitler became Chancellor on 30 January 1933. He had promised the German people that the German State would be raised again to what he considered its rightful place within the community of nations--by force if necessary. To do this, he said, it was necessary to create a large army and a war industry to support it. The Enabling Act of 23 March 1933 enacted by the Reichstag granted Hitler the dictatorial powers necessary to accomplish these ends, and his assumption of authority was approved by a national plebiscite on 19 August 1934.

Germany withdrew from the League of Nations and the disarmament conferences then in progress on 14 October 1933. Events followed which undoubtedly had an impact on the officers of the German Army. In appraising these events there is a paradox that always symbolized the opposition within the Army--the officers had the ability to separate Hitler's basic aims (which they agreed to) from their dislike of the evils of the Nazis, which they only associated with the National Socialist German Workers Party and never with Hitler personally.

Insofar as the Army was concerned, there was no reason to oppose Hitler during these early years. In Hitler's first cabinet, the position of Minister of Defense was given to Generalleutnant Werner

von Blomberg, who remained on active service. Generalleutnant Werner von Fritsch became the Chief of the Army Command and Generalleutnant Ludwig Beck became the head of the Truppenamt, or General Staff. All three officers were respected within the Army as were the two principal field commanders, Generalleutnants Gerd von Rundstedt and Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb, who commanded the two Group Commands. Each of these officers was promoted during the early days of the Nazi regime.

The appointment of General von Blomberg as Minister of Defense proved fortunate for Hitler. At Nuremberg after World War II, General von Blomberg testified to his early association and enthrallment with National Socialism. He stated that during those early years--1933-37--the German generals were not opposed to Hitler. "There was no reason to oppose Hitler since he produced the results . . . desired."¹

Hitler needed the respectability that only the Army could provide and he initially courted the military leadership of Germany to insure their support when the time came to select a replacement for the aging President von Hindenburg. Even General Beck, later a leader of the active opposition, is on record as a supporter of Hitler during the early years.

Hitler decided to execute the mobilization plan of 1929 soon after taking office. The Army High Command objected to the directed

¹Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression (Washington: U. S. Chief of Counsel Prosecution of Axis Criminality, 1946), VI, 414. General von Blomberg's technique of command is narrated by General Walter Warlimont, "Reflections on a High Command Organization, Some Lessons From the German Experience" (Manuscript No. C-070 prepared for Historical Division, European Command, October, 1949), pp. 13-14.

rate of expansion. Trained manpower was available only among the veterans of World War I. Younger men had not received military training since 1919, except those who were a part of the 100,000-man Army. Nonetheless, Hitler ordered the peacetime expansion of the Army to twenty-one divisions to be completed by the end of 1934.

As early as October 1934, large numbers of volunteers began to enter the Army secretly. Seven corps headquarters were activated and assumed the territorial responsibilities of the seven divisions, which, in turn, were expanded to the twenty-one divisions.

Two new corps headquarters were added and a special office of the Commander of Motorized Combat Troops was activated. The three cavalry divisions were broken up to form additional motorized units, or reorganized to form light divisions. The seven existing motorized combat battalions were expanded to form fourteen motorized combat battalions. By early 1935 the German Army had accomplished essentially the ordered expansion. At that time the Army consisted of 21 infantry, two cavalry, one light, and one armored divisions with an overall troop strength of approximately 240,000.

The Army suffered acute growing pains. Officers and non-commissioned officers were far too few to command and staff the expanded force. Some help was found by the incorporation of military police units into the Army, but the high and rigid standards of the professional Army could not be maintained during this period of growth. Educational requirements for officers were lowered and several thousand noncommissioned officers became junior officers. In addition, thousands of World War I officers were recalled to bridge the gap.

But there still remained a serious shortage of trained commanders of the proper age groups. (See Appendix II.)

Party formations also played a significant role in the Germany of the 1930's, particularly the SA and the SS.

As early as 1921 Hitler had created the Sturmabteilung (SA)--best known probably as the "Brown Shirts" or "Storm Troops"--the purpose of which was to assist the Nazi Party seize power by any means. After the Nazis were in power, the SA continued to inculcate the Nazi ideology into the minds of the German people.

By the end of 1933, Ernst Roehm, Chief of Staff of the SA, claimed to command 400,000 men, who were organized into divisions, regiments, battalions, companies, platoons and squads similar to the organization of the German Army.²

The first threat to Hitler developed ironically enough within the SA. The SA had given Hitler the power of bargaining from the beginning of the Nazi Movement in 1921. Hitler realized his indebtedness to the SA, but he also knew that his revolution must be stabilized. There were two particular dangers: disruption of the economic organization of the country, and the risk of interfering with the inviolability of the Army. Although Hitler planned to bring the Army under his control, he realized that the time was not yet at hand. Further, if Hitler was to secure the needed Army support for his succession to the Presidency, the removal of the SA was necessary.³

²"Statements of Generals of the Former German Army at Nuremberg" (Unpublished sworn statements on file in the U. S. Army Command and General Staff College Library, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; November, 1945), p. 13.

³Alan Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), p. 250.

On 11 April 1934 Hitler left Kiel on the cruiser Deutschland, to go to Koenigsberg for the Spring maneuvers. Accompanying him were Admiral Erich Raeder, Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy, and Generals von Blomberg and von Fritsch. It is believed that during the trip Hitler came to terms with the military: the succession for himself in return for the suppression of the SA.⁴ On his return, General von Fritsch held a conference of senior officers at Bad Nauheim and they indorsed the decision in favor of Hitler but only after the terms of the Deutschland pact had been communicated to them.

In any event, the tradition that the Army served not the party but the state had been clearly broken. Now Hitler was assured of the support of the Reichswehr, provided he acted against the SA. The blood bath of 30 June 1934 was the result.

Using "special police units," Hitler struck in all directions. Not only were SA leaders murdered, but old political enemies were made victims. Among this latter group were retired Generals von Schleicher and von Bredlow, both respected members of the German Army.

The Army accepted the purge passively; some members even approved. Generalleutnant Erwin von Witzleben, corps commander in Berlin, on hearing of the shootings is said to have remarked: I wish I could be there. . . ."⁵ But the death of General von Schleicher was considered an insult throughout the Army. Formal protests were submitted to General von Blomberg the Minister of Defense by General

⁴Ibid.

⁵Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945 (New York: Praeger, 1953), p. 228.

von Rundstedt and General von Witzleben, but these were of no avail.⁶

The victory over the SA was the only success the Reichswehr ever gained over Hitler, and even this victory was an incomplete one. The "special police units" used to carry out the purge were part of the Schutzstaffel (SS), under the command of Heinrich Himmler, which had been created by Hitler as his own private, personal police organization. On 26 July 1934, one month following the purge of the SA, the SS was made an independent branch of the Nazi Party.⁷

At first the mission of the SS was to "serve as the protector of the Fuehrer," but this mission was later expanded "to include the internal security of the Reich."⁸ Himmler interpreted his mission: "We shall unremittingly fulfill our task, the guaranty of the security of Germany from the interior, just as the Wehrmacht guarantees the safety, the honor, the greatness, and the peace of the Reich from the exterior."⁹

Significantly, the SS had its own supreme command and subordinate departments, or General Staff. Operating units included the Security Service (SD), the Waffen SS (organized in 1939), the SS Death Head units who ran the concentration camps, and the SS Police Regiments who eventually assumed control over all police activities.

⁶Telford Taylor, Sword and Swastika (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), p. 80.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, II, op. cit., p. 17.

⁹Ibid.

The Waffen SS was the combat arms element of the Nazi movement, created and trained for "special" operations in an aggressive war.

The Waffen SS originated out of the thought: to create for the Fuehrer a selected long service troop for the fulfillment of special missions. It was to render it possible for members . . . to fight in the battle for the evolution of the National Socialist idea, with weapon in hand, in unified groups, partly within the frame work of the Army.¹⁰

In practice, the Waffen SS was a separate military organization in close competition with the German Army. It competed for missions and for recruits, equipment, supplies, and replacements. In early 1940, the Waffen SS had a strength of approximately 100,000 men. This strength was augmented with approximately 50,000 men during the rest of 1940; 70,000 in 1941; 110,000 in 1942; 210,000 in 1943 and 370,000 in 1944. Recruiting and replacements, at least until 1944, were from selected volunteers, and only during 1944 did the SS share the manpower made available to the Army.

At certain times units of the Waffen SS operated under the tactical control of the Army. But even then the SS maintained its own system of supply. The SS had its own network of depots extending into occupied areas; it maintained its own personnel, replacement and military justice system; and "For constitution of new units and rehabilitation of divisions, it can not be denied that the SS enjoyed preferential treatment in comparison to the Army."¹¹

¹⁰"Organizations Book of the Nazi Party for 1943" quoted in Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, III, op. cit., p. 180.

¹¹Detmar H. Finke, "The Origin and Development of the SS, 1925-1939" (Unpublished manuscript prepared for the Office of the Chief of Military History, Washington 25, D. C., May, 1958), p. 3. (Typewritten.)

The strength of the SS on 30 June 1944 was 794,941 (see Appendix III).

President Hindenburg died on 1 August 1934. Now the leaders of the German Army completed their part of the bargain, and Hitler became both Fuehrer and Reichskanzler. On 2 August, the Army took the oath of allegiance to Hitler personally.

I swear by God this sacred oath, that I will render unconditional obedience to Adolf Hitler, the Fuehrer of the German Reich and people, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and be ready as a brave soldier to risk my life at any time for this oath. ¹²

This oath was not dissimilar to the oath taken to the Emperor prior to 1918. ¹³ Significantly, none of the Generals refused to take the oath. After 2 August, it appears that the officers of the German Army inwardly debated whether they should have taken the oath. General Beck, for example, often spoke of 2 August as "the black day of the German Army." ¹⁴ After that day, there was no longer an independent Reichswehr.

On 16 March 1935 Hitler denounced the Treaty of Versailles, an act supported enthusiastically by all Germans. Not only was the treaty abrogated, but compulsory military service was introduced

¹²Taylor, op. cit., p. 81. The effect of the oath on the field commanders of the German Army received widespread publicity at Nuremberg. Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring, for example, refused to surrender the German forces in Italy until the news of Hitler's death was announced, thereby freeing him from his oath. General Franz Halder, who followed General Beck as Chief of the General Staff and a member of the resistance movement spoke of his dilemma: "I was in the dilemma of one who had a duty of a soldier and also a duty I consider higher. Innumerable of my old comrades were in the same dilemma"

¹³Allen W. Dulles, Germany's Underground (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1947), p. 37.

¹⁴Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 290.

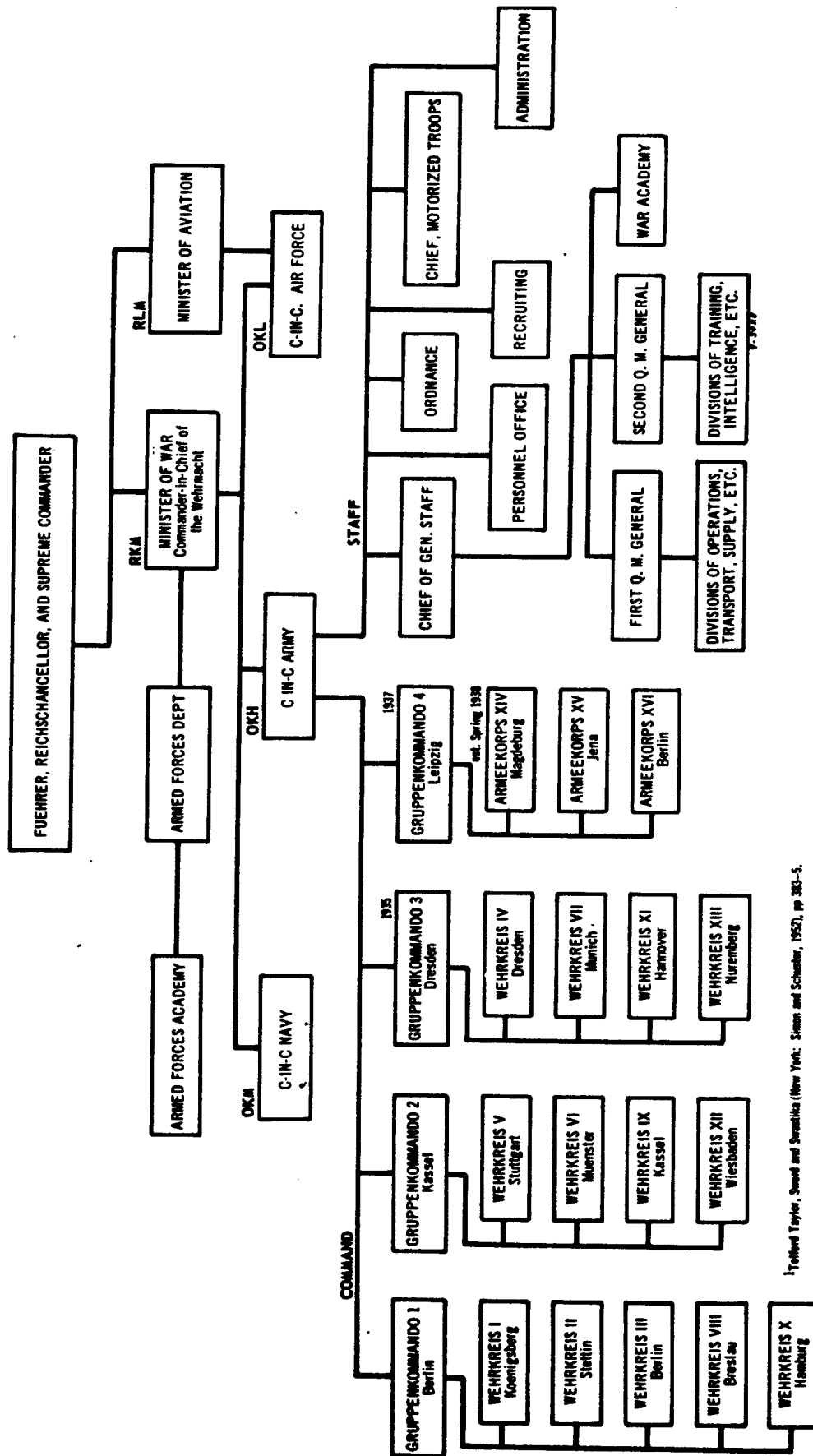
along with a plan to increase the size of the Army to 36 divisions in 12 corps. The Reichswehr became the Wehrmacht. General von Blomberg, Minister of Defense, assumed the new title of Minister of War. The old title, Chef der Heeresleitung was abolished and General von Fritsch was now known as the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. The independence of the German Air Force was established under the leadership of Hermann Goering. And the Truppenamt once again became the General Staff, still under the leadership of General Beck. (See Figure 3.)

The general atmosphere within the Army was one of changing times characterized by innovation and experimentation, especially with tanks. The senior commanders, however, were most anxious to avoid precipitate growth. Their reasons are apparent--training would be hampered by the large numbers and insufficient cadres of the 100,000-man Army; many Army officers joined the Air Force, which further aggravated the trained personnel shortage of the Army; and the influx of new recruits were largely youths who had participated in the Hitler Youth Movement and who were imbued with a spirit that was in conflict with military discipline.

These proved to be manageable problems, however, and the Officer Corps as a whole viewed the expansion as a "breath of new life."

In 1935 the General Staff was reorganized by General Beck. Made subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, the General Staff was removed from all political questions and limited strictly to military affairs.

ORGANIZATION OF THE WEHRMACHT, 1935-FEBRUARY, 1938¹



¹Trotter Taylor, *Seed and Sproutling* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), pp 303-5.

Figure 3.

There were many promotions, however, and all open and most passive opposition was supplanted by a genuine enthusiasm for Hitler and his policies. This was amply demonstrated on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the German War Academy, founded by Scharnhorst in 1810 but closed in 1920 as required by the Versailles Treaty. On 15 October 1935, Hitler, accompanied by Goebbels, attended the reopening. Among the officers present were retired General von Seeckt, Generals von Blomberg, von Fritsch, and Beck from the High Command, and General von Rundstedt and von Witzleben, the principal field commanders in Berlin. Addressing the students of the Academy, General Beck reminded them "of the duty which they owe to the man who recreated the Wehrmacht and made it strong again, and who finally struck off the fetters of Versailles, and to the new State which assured us a foundation stronger than ever in a united nation."¹⁵

Gradually, though, the General Staff came to realize that there was a fundamental conflict between the new "Leader" principle Hitler had introduced and the traditional General Staff doctrine of co-responsibility.¹⁶ This problem was magnified for General Beck by the fact that the number of officers who had attended the Great General Staff School were insufficient to meet the needs of the expanding Army. Further aggravating the problem was competition from the Air Force and SS for high quality people. As time progressed, many of the corps

¹⁵Trials of War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal (15 Vols. ; Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1949), X, 79.

¹⁶Goerlitz, *op. cit.*, p. 276. The German General Staff tradition made a subordinate take and share responsibility for advice offered to a superior. Hitler, seeking to gain complete control over the Army, introduced the "Leader" principle which held the commander alone responsible for decisions. This change was to have disastrous effects when Hitler became Commander in Chief, Army.

and division commanders were men untrained in the traditions of the Imperial Army.

General Beck's views on expansion, and particularly his view as regards the "Leader Principle," brought him into conflict with those of his fellow officers who accepted the "Leader Principle."¹⁷ The more senior of these opposed to General Beck were Generalmajor Wilhelm Keitel and Generalmajor Alfred Jodl, both of which were to "fall under the magical hypnotism of Hitler's 'intuitive genius.'"¹⁸

Occupation of the Rhineland took place on 7 March 1936. General von Blomberg was aware of Hitler's intentions at an earlier date but the decision descended on the Army with dramatic suddenness. The plans for the operation were drawn up in 6 hours by then Oberst Fritz Erich von Manstein, under the supervision of Generals von Fritsch and Beck.

For Hitler, this was but the first of a series of successful gambles. As Generalfeldmarschall von Manstein pointed out later, the suddenness with which the whole move was announced to the German Army was the first warning of Hitler's innate distrust of conservative officers.¹⁹

Hitler's success vindicated his judgment and repudiated the fears of the Army. The fundamental difference was clear--Hitler considered war as the essence of policy, while the mass of the officers of the Army, in keeping with the theory of Clausewitz, regarded war

¹⁷Ibid., p. 294.

¹⁸Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg, The Critical Years (London: Alan Wingate, 1952), p. 63.

¹⁹Ibid.

as a continuation of policy by other means. Hitler was willing to risk war if his intuition told him the time was right.

General Beck, therefore, as early as 1936, found himself in conflict with Hitler and his supporters, Generals von Blomberg, Keitel, Jodl and Goering.

Despite some apprehensions, the years 1936-37 gave little cause for concern, because they were the respectable years of the Third Reich. But on 5 November 1937 Hitler broke the spell. He called a secret meeting at the Reich Chancellery, and among those present were Generals von Blomberg, von Fritsch, and Goering and Admiral Raeder, Commander-in-Chief, Navy.²⁰ Hitler's thesis for the evening was that Germany needed living space (Lebensraum). This space could only be found in Europe, and, if necessary, by force of arms. The problem must be decided by 1943-45 at the latest, and to solve the problem by force would entail the risk of war. The immediate objective would be to overrun Czechoslovakia and Austria in order to secure Germany's southern and eastern flanks. The neutrality of Poland would depend on the swiftness of the military decision.²¹

During the discussion which followed Hitler's talk both Generals von Blomberg and von Fritsch protested against any war that would involve Britain and France. General von Fritsch was so upset that he offered to cancel a planned trip to Egypt, but Hitler assured

²⁰Bullock, op. cit., p. 320. For exact minutes of this conference see Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945 (Washington: United States Printing Office of Materials From the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry, 1949), pp. 29-39.

²¹Ibid., p. 321.

him it would be alright to go. General von Fritsch met with Hitler again on 9 November and renewed his objections to a war that might involve the Western Powers. This conference confirmed for Hitler what he had long suspected--the German Army did not want war. If he was to carry out his aims, then he would have to forge his own instrument of war.²² And it was obvious at this time that the military High Command would have to be changed at the earliest opportunity to eliminate the objectors.

News of the conference was conveyed to General Beck, who immediately outlined a strong criticism of Hitler's theories.²³ Now that Hitler had revealed his true plans, General Beck seemed determined to act in opposition.

²²Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 309-12.

²³Hans Rothfels, The German Opposition to Hitler (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1962), pp. 56-57. Beck's resistance at this time was not rooted in the moral foundation it assumed in later years. Basically he was only opposed to the premature use of the German Army before it was properly trained and equipped.

CHAPTER IV
OPPOSITION AND RESISTANCE,
1938-1940

Extremely fortunate circumstances played into Hitler's hands during the months of January-March 1938 in the form of the "Blomberg-Fritsch" crisis.¹ Two separate incidents connected only in time and through the manipulations of Field Marshal Goering and Heinrich Himmler gave Hitler the opportunity he had been awaiting.

In the one, Field Marshal von Blomberg's marriage was the dominating factor. In the other, General von Fritsch was confronted with charges of homosexuality. When these two incidents were resolved, Hitler emerged as the complete victor and master of the German Army.²

General von Fritsch was the only soldier available capable of concerted action, and since it was his honor at stake he did nothing. Efforts elsewhere within the Army to meet this challenge to their

¹The details of the Blomberg-Fritsch crisis are narrated by Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945 (New York: Praeger, 1953), pp. 312-16. The effects of the crisis on the Officer Corps is expressed by General der Infanterie Georg von Sodenstern, "Events Leading up to July 1944" (Manuscript No. B-499 prepared for the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington 25, D. C., March, 1947), pp. 18-19.

²For Goering's and Himmler's underhanded methods see Hans Bernd Gisevius, To the Bitter End, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Boston: The Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), pp. 219-65.

honor and position in the State failed miserably; in this failure personal ambition, lack of solidarity, and moral instability all played a part.³

These events not only had their impact on the senior officers of the Army, but reached throughout the Officer Corps. One officer, who was serving as commander of an infantry regiment, said: "The experience . . . and the struggles of General von Fritsch . . . increased my aversion to Hitler . . . to an extremely acrid opposition against the whole National Socialist system."⁴

The same officer went on to say that:

. . . These years were devoted to the training of a fighting force which was given completely to soldierly virtues which would cause a soldier to carry out every order given to him by his commander without hesitation. At the same time, the difference between soldierly thoughts and deeds and National Socialist arrogance was accentuated. But the methods which were applied in this case (Fritsch) showed up the ruthlessness with which Hitler pushed all legal apposition out of the way and (these methods) led the author to the resolution to exert an enlightening influence on all professional soldiers and to admonish against a development which would finally provoke the whole world (to a struggle) against Germany. This (admonishment, etc.) took place in unofficial conversations with officers of all ages, but also especially in the course of official discussions which the author had to lead and in which all of the regiment commanders participated.⁵

Hitler did not replace Field Marshal Blomberg immediately, but when he did, he took command of the Wehrmacht himself "declaring that he had lost confidence in the generals."⁶ (See Figure 4.)

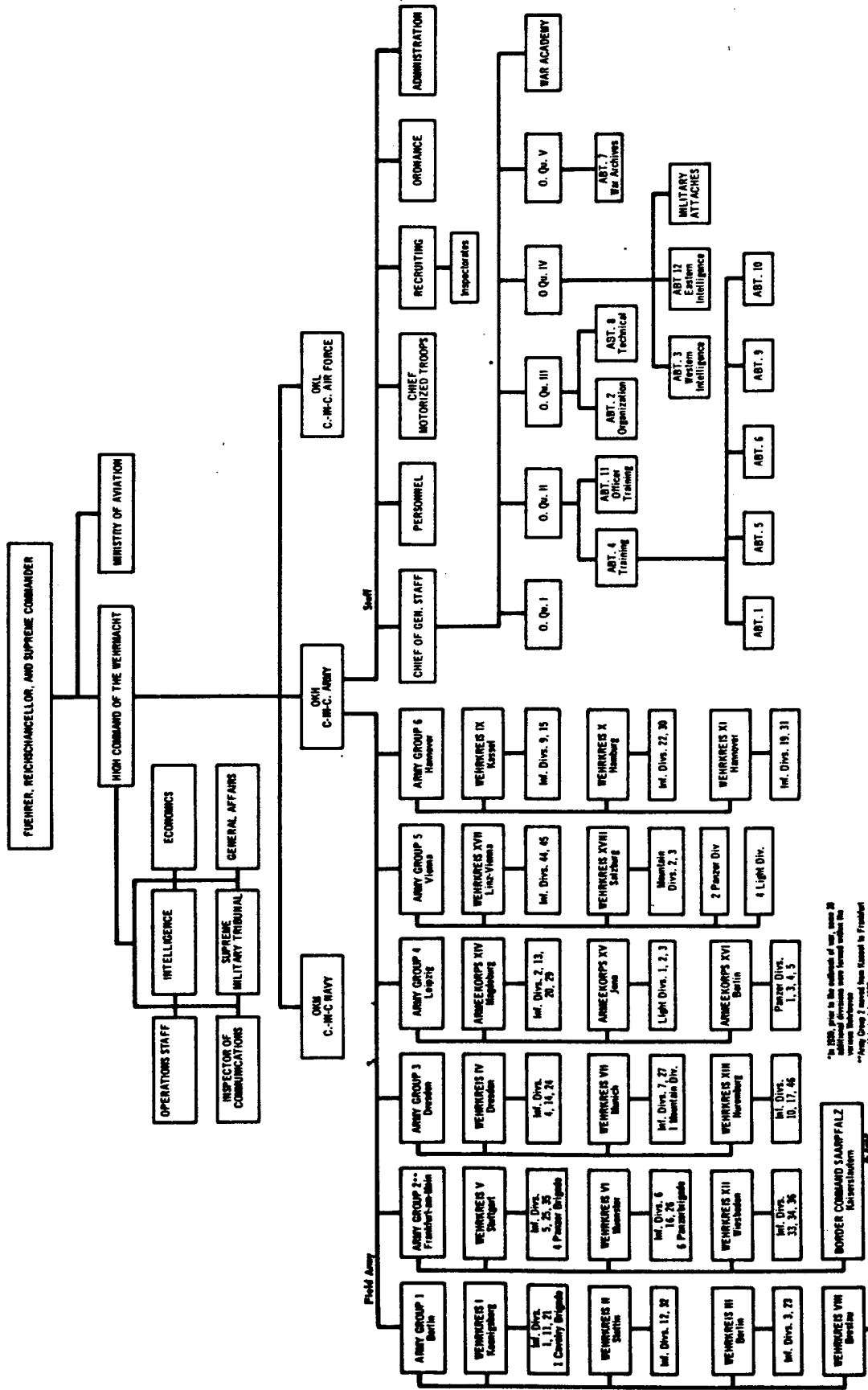
³Trials of War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunals (15 Vols. ; Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1949), X, 81.

⁴Von Sodenstern, op. cit., p. 26.

⁵Ibid., p. 27.

⁶B. H. Liddell Hart, The German Generals' Talk (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1948), p. 29.

ORGANIZATION OF THE WEHRMACHT, FEBRUARY, 1939-SEPTEMBER, 1939¹



¹In 1939, prior to the outbreak of war, some 20 additional divisions were formed within the various Wehrkreise. Only the 1st and 2nd were based in Prussia on 1 July 1939.

²These units were based in Prussia on 1 July 1939.

Figure 4.

For an Officer's Corps that prided itself on soldierly concepts of honor to suffer the indignities of February and March, 1938 was a complete break with the moral concepts of the German Army as they existed before 1933. The Officer Corps was beginning to feel the impact of Nazi ideology.

The General von Fritsch crisis marked the beginning of the resistance movement within the German Army. For the first time the leaders of the Army came face to face with the Nazi State. The "nonpolitical" Army which had been undermined since the dismissal of General von Seeckt now collapsed. And if there had been no resistance to Hitler by the military, as Field Marshal von Blomberg stated later, there was now a definite reaction to Hitler's attack on the Officer's Corps.

Throughout the month of February 1938 the Army and Nazi Party maneuvered to bring about a decision in the case of General von Fritsch. The Army pressed for a court martial, and Hitler agreed to some sort of Court of Honor. What General Beck hoped was that General von Fritsch's acquittal could be used as a basis for a demand by the commanding generals for the reinstatement of General von Fritsch and punishment of the guilty SS personnel who had trumped up the false charge. As the preliminary investigation revealed blackmail, bribery, threats on the part of Reich Marshals Goering and Himmler, the generals became encouraged. General von Brauchitsch agreed to take action, if after the trial the evidence was such as to convince Hitler of the treachery of Himmler and Goering.⁷

⁷International Military Tribunal Trial of the Major War Criminals (15 Vols. ; Nuremberg: April, 1945), XII, 203.

The case was set for 11 March, but external events intervened to destroy the plans. On 9 March 1938 the Austrian Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg, announced a plebiscite for 13 March. Hitler issued the directive to intervene in Austria with force on 11 March, and the trial was postponed.

When the Court of Honor for General von Fritsch reconvened on 17 March, Hitler's position was secure, and General von Fritsch's acquittal was satisfactory to the Officer's Corps.⁸

After the trial, General Beck began to devote his time to two tasks--preventing a war, and formulating plans for a coup d'etat.⁹ He knew that a successful revolt could only be based on force, and that this meant he must have the cooperation of the field commanders.

General Beck hoped to convince his chief, General von Brauchitsch, and, in turn, the commanding generals of the field commands, of the futility of a war at any time. In May 1938, on the basis of military studies conducted on the military-political position of Germany, Beck set forth his ideas which showed that Germany could not win a world war that would most certainly result from Hitler's policies.¹⁰ The memorandum was submitted to General von

⁸General von Fritsch initially retired. In 1939 he rejoined his old 12th Artillery Regiment as its chief of staff and was killed during the Polish campaign before the gates of Warsaw. See testimony of Field Marshal Georg von Kuechler, Trials of War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunals, X, op. cit., pp. 576-80.

⁹Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 328. General Guderian in his book Panzer Leader takes a different view of General Beck.

¹⁰Trials of War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunals, X, op. cit., p. 542.

Brauchitsch as a rebuttal to the plan for the occupation of Czechoslovakia.

On 30 May the principal commanders were summoned to hear Hitler exonerate General von Fritsch. But Hitler used the occasion to announce his plans to eliminate Czechoslovakia. On the same day General Beck drew up another memorandum for General von Brauchitsch. In Beck's mind the Czechoslovakia problem no longer justified the risk of war. General Beck's advice went unheeded, and the plans for the attack proceeded.

During July 1938, General Beck wrote a number of additional memorandums, including one that called for a planned revolt. On 29 July, General Beck was most explicit: "the Army must not only prepare for a possible war, but also 'for an internal conflict which need only take place in Berlin.'"¹¹ In the end, however, General von Brauchitsch refused to take any action, and General Beck rendered his resignation on 31 August.

General Beck was the first important military figure to leave the German Army in protest to Hitler's war plans. It did not occur to General von Brauchitsch, who shared General Beck's views, to resign. The tradition of his office demanded that he too should resign but

¹¹Fabian von Schlabrendorff, They Almost Killed Hitler, ed. Gero v. S. Gaevernitz (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1947), p. 57. Beck's activity in the resistance movement is validated by numerous accounts. See Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg, "Anti-Nazi Military Activity" (Manuscript No. B-279, prepared for the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington 25, D. C., February, 1946), pp. 2-4.

instead he ". . . hitched his collar a notch higher and said: 'I am a soldier: it is my duty to obey.'"¹²

General Beck's resignation was a significant date for the German military resistance movement. It marked his transition from Chief of the General Staff to the leader of a group of conspirators. From 27 August 1938, retired General Beck led his group toward the revolt of 20 July 1944.

General Franz Halder, who followed General Beck as Chief of the General Staff, had been won over to the ends of the resistance movement.

As it became evident that Hitler was leading Germany to war, General Halder became involved in the first plot within the German Army to overthrow the regime. The plot included Generalleutnant von Witzleben, Commander of Military District III in Berlin, Generalmajor Erich von Brockdorff-Ahlefeld, Commander of the Potsdam Division, and Generalleutnant Erich Hoepner, Commander of the 2d Panzer Division in Thuringia.¹³ In essence, the plan was to seize Hitler the moment the command for the move into Czechoslovakia was given. The plot was based on the assumption that the Czechoslovakian crisis would lead to war and that Hitler, therefore, could be revealed to the German people as a warmonger. Preparations were completed in early September, 1938. Even General von Brauchitsch gave his acquiescence, although he would not actively participate.

¹²The Von Hassel Diaries, 1938-1944 (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1947), pp. 21-22.

¹³John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1953), p. 407.

The visit by the British Prime Minister Lord Chamberlain to see Hitler in Munich was entirely misinterpreted. The conspirators believed he had come to deliver a final ultimatum, which they had been urging.¹⁴ On the morning of 28 September, as General Halder prepared to give General von Witzleben orders to act, the announcement came through that Chamberlain was flying to Munich to negotiate peace. General Halder immediately backed down, and the putsch dissolved.

In the face of Hitler's success at Munich all opposition within the German Army dissolved. Even General Beck temporarily gave up hope. On 1 October 1938 he expressed the wishful hope that the regime would simply collapse.¹⁵ Many in the German Army who had been doubters were now convinced of Hitler's genius.

¹⁴Earlier, in August, Oberst Hans Oster, operations officer in the Abwehr (Intelligence Division of OKW) instigated the dispatch of a special envoy to England to bring Hitler's intentions to their attention. Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, a member of the old Conservative Party, arrived in London on 18 August. He spoke with Sir Robert Vansittart, the Chief Diplomatic Adviser to the Government, saying that Hitler was determined for war; that the Army was unanimously against it - but though the Generals were against war they were powerless without outside help. If encouragement from outside was not received, they could not refuse to march on Czechoslovakia on the date already established. The English response to the request for encouragement was to label the information "clearly biased and largely propaganda." The reaction is no longer important - what is important is the efforts taken by a colonel of the General Staff to prevent war. The warning to the British Government was repeated in Berlin, where one of Colonel Oster's agents informed the English Military Attache on 21 August of the plan to attack Czechoslovakia. The attache was also informed that an immediate intervention upon the outbreak of war by England and France would bring about the overthrow of the Nazi regime. Ibid., pp. 410-12.

¹⁵Peter de Mendelssohn, Design for Aggression (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), p. 67.

While the resistance languished, Hitler carried out his march into Prague on 15 March 1939. Less than six months later, German armored troops crossed the Polish border.

It is difficult to state with any degree of accuracy just how the German Officer Corps was effected by the Polish campaign. It is known, however, that during the Polish campaign indignation to Nazi atrocities led to deeds founded on a genuine military spirit. During the Polish campaign, for example, regimental commanders are quoted as having put an end by force of arms to pillage and murder by the SS.¹⁶ There is also the testimony of Oberst Helmut Stieff, who later became a Generalmajor, and who, after witnessing the work of the SS, wrote to his wife: "I am ashamed to be a German."¹⁷ Generaloberst Johannes Blaskowitz, Commander of the Army of Occupation of Poland, through military channels, protested to General von Brauchitsch against the conduct and illegal activities of the SS. General von Brauchitsch indicated that he protested to Hitler over the unnecessary attack on Warsaw, which was surrounded, and against the excesses committed by SS police forces. "Hitler made biting remarks about the 'antiquated ideas of chivalry' on the part of the generals."¹⁸

There is no doubt that these excesses caused a widespread revulsion within the German Army to the Nazis' methods. The Polish campaign for the first time planted an element of doubt in many

¹⁶Hans Rothfels, The German Opposition to Hitler, trans. Lawrence Wilson (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1962), p. 66.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸"Statements of Generals of the Former German Army at Nuremberg" (Unpublished sworn statements on file in the U. S. Army Command and General Staff College Library, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; November, 1945), pp. 21-22.

German hearts. General Fedor von Bock, an Army Group commander, was appalled by the SS atrocities. Even party generals like Walter von Reichenau began to have doubts about the true character of the Third Reich.¹⁹

These feelings were offset by the psychological effect of war on the German Army. The oath taken to Hitler now took on even more significant meaning with Germany involved in a life and death struggle. In December 1939, General Halder expressed his reason for following Hitler's orders: ". . . we ought to give Hitler this last chance to deliver the German people from the slavery of English capitalism; . . . one does not rebel when face to face with the enemy . . ."20

Despite the power of the oath, Hitler's plans to attack France in November 1939 was the signal for a second attempted coup. The officers of the High Command had fully expected a quick peace after the Polish campaign. On 10 October 1939, when Hitler announced to the senior commanders his plans for the invasion of France, the announcement came as a rude awakening. In addition to a preference for a defensive war the officers were convinced that a fall offensive would fail because of unfavorable weather for tanks. In this they were supported by the tank experts.

General von Brauchitsch was caught between the opposing groups of the OKH and the OKW. Generalleutnant Keitel was willing to agree to anything that Hitler proposed, while General Halder was becoming determined in his opposition.

¹⁹Von Hassell, op. cit., pp. 79, 84, 100.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 92-94.

In the meantime, retired General Beck and a group around Colonel Hans Oster of the Abwehr began making preparations for a second coup. General Halder was again to be the center of plans, and he believed that a collective effort on the part of the Army Group commanders was quite feasible.²¹ The plan called for the field commanders to hamstring the attack by the simple means of not issuing the necessary attack orders.

This time Generalleutnant Hoepner, who had succeeded Generalleutnant Guderian in command of the XVI Armored Corps, was to take over Berlin with his troops. A doctor would find Hitler incapable of ruling, and a new regime would seek to make a peace with the Allies.²² These arrangements were confirmed by General von Brauchitsch and General Halder on 2 and 3 November during a tour of the Western Front.

On 5 November General von Brauchitsch confronted Hitler with determined opposition to a western offensive. But the opposition faded in the presence of Hitler who so upbraided General von Brauchitsch that he lost his nerve and disavowed all further interest in any attempted putsch. Thus, the second planned revolt evaporated.

Of the various German campaigns of World War II, the successful campaign in France holds special importance. Prior to this quick victory, hope remained in the German Army that a peace with the Western Powers could be arranged. But now all hope faded.

²¹Goerlitz, op. cit., p. 365.

²²Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, op. cit., p. 470. Also see H. A. DeWeerd, "The German Officer Corps vs Hitler," Military Affairs, XIII (Winter, 1949), p. 202.

Here was the strange paradox of an Army plotting to overthrow its ruling regime, and at the same time crushing an opponent beneath its heel. After June 1940, the officers of the German Army seem to have become dazzled by Hitler's brilliant success. As one author points out, the German Army devoted itself to the utmost to the tasks of a professional army from June 1940 to the first defeats in Russia.²³

Certain symptoms of decay were noticeable in the German Army, however, due not only to the effect of the Nazi system on the moral fibre of the officers but also because of their accumulated experiences. Over the next few years a lack of moderation on the part of certain field commanders was to become noticeable. "The practice of compromising with the formerly incorruptible principles of leadership increased even in the ranks of those who had been taught differently."²⁴

Thus in the fall of 1940 the military situation of Germany was not as favorable as purely outward appearances seemed to indicate. A latent conflict existed within the Wehrmacht, between the officers of OKW and OKH, between the Air Force and the Army, and between Hitler and his Army Commanders.

In this period from 1938-40 active opposition to Hitler would have been regarded by the overwhelming mass of the German people as stupidity and high treason. Hitler's successes blinded the nation

²³Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, op. cit., p. 500.

²⁴General der Panzertruppe Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg, "Training and Development of German General Staff Officers," Vol. XXIV (Historical Division, U. S. Army, Europe), p. 19.

and seemingly robbed the people of their instincts, consciences, and capabilities to judge right from wrong.

Because of political naivete and inborn trustfulness, the German military ". . . had permitted power to slip gradually out of their hands. When at that time Nazism dropped its mask, the Army was faced with the enemy in the war, and, driven by the idea of defense of the Fatherland, threatened to become a mindless tool of a criminal leadership."²⁵

²⁵Generalmajor Rudolf Freiherr von Gersdorff, "History of the Attempt on Hitler's Life (20 July 1944)" (Unpublished Manuscript No. A855, Historical Division, U. S. Army, Europe), p. 4.

CHAPTER V
ACTIVE RESISTANCE;
1940-1944

Through 1940 the plans to oppose Hitler actively had been centered around the Army High Command--General von Brauchitsch, General Halder, and retired General Beck--and in three field commanders--General von Witzleben, General Hoepner, and General von Brockdorff-Ahlefeld. General Hoepner was a corps commander at the time, and General von Brockdorff-Ahlefeld commanded the Potsdam Division. Efforts to win other commanders over to the plots had been unsuccessful. There is no evidence that those approached, other than the ones already mentioned, supported the conspirators in any way. The very nature of a totalitarian state suggests that the circle of officers informed of these plans was of necessity quite small.

On 22 June 1941 the German Armies entered Russia and the character of the war changed, although it would take a Russian winter before the change would become apparent. The decision to invade Russia was in no way welcomed by the Army, and as the war shifted to the East, the opposition grew. For the first time opposition to Hitler reached into the ranks of the Army's junior officers.

The order to attack Russia introduced serious morale problems at the lowest troop levels. One regimental commander reported that:

Finally . . . battalion commanders had to properly influence the morale of officers and men. This task was particularly difficult since nobody in the regiment, myself included, was convinced that an attack against Russia without a declaration of war was warranted. The troops were oriented through explanations received from higher headquarters - "an imminent Russian attack against Germany was to be forestalled." . . . As a result the men were not enthusiastic about the war, but resigned themselves to the order; their morale was based on unconditional military obedience.¹

Initially the attack against Russia went according to plan and was successful. But from the winter campaign of 1941-42, a steady deterioration of German strategy set in, and after the summer of 1942, offensives were few and far between. They were never started with adequate concentration of forces to gain any permanent success. The vast spaces conquered in the East were never utilized for mobile warfare, with planned withdrawals and offensive thrusts. The preparation of defensive positions, on which the troops could fall back, was expressly prohibited by Hitler himself.

The art of war boiled down to one recipe--stay where you are until you are surrounded; then you may get permission to fight your way out. The losses in men, material and territory was considered the fault of the tactical unit commanders who were dismissed or not, according to Hitler's whim of the moment. Those dismissed were

¹Hans Bergen, "Part Played by the 187th Infantry Regiment in the 87th Division's Attack at the Beginning of the Russian Campaign on 23 June 1941" (Unpublished Manuscript No. D-074, on file in the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, 1947), p. 13. The author further states that junior officers recently promoted by Hitler reported that Hitler had told them that he would soon make a decision which they would not understand, but which was necessary, nevertheless, to preserve and save Germany. "Hitler had appealed to their code of conduct as officers, according to which an officer owed blind obedience, even though initially he did not understand the purpose and background on an order."

invariably replaced by officers equally helpless, or hamstrung by a lack of experience and without a true feel for the welfare of the troops. These conditions were further aggravated by the military chain of command in which Hitler attempted to control personally all military operations.

Even before these conditions emerged, the resistance movement which had been centered in Berlin shifted to the East. As the Russian campaign progressed, the circle of conspirators spread and the principal actors of 20 July 1944 began to appear.

The resistance movement in the East centered around more junior officers. Foremost among these was Generalmajor Henning von Tresckow, initially operations officer in Army Group Center, then Chief of Staff of Second Army under Field Marshal von Bock and finally Chief of Staff of Army Group Center. The group included several General Staff officers--Oberst (later Generalmajor) Rudolph Christoph von Gersdorff and Leutnant Fabian von Schlabrendorff, as well as Oberstleutnant Hans von Boeselager, who commanded a cavalry regiment.

The object of the group was to convince Field Marshal von Bock and later von Kluge, the Army Group Commanders, to act against Hitler.² Field Marshal von Bock had already refused to issue the

²The reasons behind the planned conspiracy are narrated in Rudolf Christoph von Gersdorff, "History of the Attempt on Hitler's Life" (Manuscript No. A-855, on file in the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, n. d.), pp. 4-7. In part Gersdorff states that to the soldier in the field (referring to Tresckow's group), the final impetus to resist was an abhorrence of the objectives and methods of the SS in the Russian campaign vis-a-vis the Commissar Order and treatment to civilians. In connection with the Commissar Order, Hitler had this to say to his Generals: ". . . I know that the necessity for making war in such a manner is

"Commissar Order," but he was not willing to lift a hand against Hitler: "I do not allow the Fuehrer to be attacked. I shall stand before the Fuehrer and defend him against anyone who attacks him."³

Being unable to win over the commander of the Central Army Group, General von Tresckow decided to act on his own responsibility. The first plan was to do away with Hitler during a briefing session in the headquarters of Army Group Center about August 1941, but this plan was abandoned because security measures were too strong.⁴ It was at this time that the objective of seizing Hitler and putting him on trial were abandoned, to be replaced by plans for assassination.

Increasingly, the military officers had overcome their religious and moral scruples against killing Hitler.⁵ In the words of Lieutenant Schlabrendorff, who was particularly close to General von Tresckow, ". . . his opposition to Hitler which had existed since long before the war was founded on: 'A distaste for everything which grew from the root of foul play . . . and . . . he threw his whole personality into the political battle.'"⁶ In 1942 and 1943 more than 7 plans to

beyond the comprehension of you Generals, but I cannot and will not change my orders and I insist that they be carried out with unquestioning and unconditional obedience." Hitler then formally issued the order to liquidate Commissars attached to the Soviet Armies. See John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1953), p. 513.

³Fabian von Schlabrendorff, They Almost Killed Hitler, Prepared and Edited by Gero von Gaevernitz (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1947), pp. 33, 36, 44-45.

⁴Ibid., pp. 47-48.

⁵Quoted by Hans Rothfels, The German Opposition to Hitler, trans. Lawrence Wilson (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1962), p. 77.

⁶Ibid., p. 73.

take Hitler's life were worked out. All, for one reason or another, came to nothing.

One of the plans revolved around Generalfeldmarschall Friedrich von Paulus' Sixth Army, encircled at Stalingrad.⁷ Field Marshals von Manstein and von Kluge were to demand the complete command of the Eastern Front from Hitler on a signal from Field Marshal von Paulus, while a coup would be carried out in the West under Field Marshal von Witzleben. But Field Marshal von Paulus surrendered to the Russians, and Field Marshal von Manstein renewed his pledge to Hitler. Field Marshal von Kluge vacillated and the putsch failed.

Another plan called for the placing of a bomb with a time fuse on Hitler's plane while he visited Army Group Center. But the bomb that was placed on Hitler's plane on 13 March 1943 failed to explode because of a faulty fuse.⁸

On 15 March 1943, General von Gersdorff, then intelligence officer of Army Group Center and later Chief of Staff, Seventh Army, in Normandy personally attempted to do away with Hitler. On this occasion, Army Group Center had prepared, in the Armory in Berlin, an exhibit of captured Russian arms and equipment. Hitler's adjutant

⁷Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, op. cit., pp. 533-34. This account is confirmed by Ulrich von Hassell, The Von Hassell Diaries, 1938-44 (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1947), p. 284. But the plan hinged on von Paulus fighting his way out, a withdrawal action Hitler would not permit until there was no opportunity to save the encircled Sixth Army. Von Paulus elected to stay with his men because that was his place according to German military tradition. Von Paulus was promoted to Field Marshal on 1 January 1943 but this is not believed to be significant.

⁸Rudolf Christoph von Gersdorff, "History of the Attempt on Hitler's Life" (Manuscript No. A-855, on file in the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, n. d.), pp. 9-14.

announced that the Fuehrer would personally open the exhibition. This occasion appeared to be an excellent opportunity and according to General von Gersdorff: "Upon Tresckow's request, I declared myself ready to make the assassination attempt."⁹ After elaborate preparations, the attempt was not carried out because Hitler could stay at the exhibit only eight minutes and the fuse was one of at least twenty minutes length.

Several times General von Tresckow succeeded in convincing Field Marshal von Kluge, who followed Field Marshal von Bock as Army Group commander, that something must be done to avert the coming catastrophe, only to have von Kluge relapse into a state of indecision and confusion.¹⁰ Field Marshal von Kluge's attitude was quite typical of the positions that were held by many "non-Nazi" commanders who were willing to participate only if "Hitler was removed."

Conditions within the divisions on the Eastern Front were deplorable during 1943-44. But even those officers engaged in the conspiracy fought bravely, while at the same time hoping for defeat --because they fought for their country.¹¹ There is ample evidence that the German Army maintained a high degree of organizational integrity and fighting effectiveness through the series of almost unbroken retreats following Stalingrad, all the while wishing for an early end to the Hitler regime. (See Appendix V.)

⁹Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁰Schlabrendorff, op. cit., p. 39.

¹¹Frido von Senger und Etterlin, Neither Fear Nor Hope (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1964), p. 62.

The resistance movement spread back to Berlin and the two groups headed by retired General Beck and General von Tresckow informally joined together to plan another attempt to eliminate Hitler. General officers began to appear more often in the plans of the conspirators--General Helmuth Stieff, Chief of the Organization Department of the OKH; General Erich Fellgiebel, Signal Officer of the OKW; and General Fritz Lindemann, Artillery General in the OKH. On the Western Front, Generals Heinrich von Stuelpnagel and Alexander von Falkenhausen, military governors of France and Belgium respectively, were numbered among the ranks of the opposition. Two key figures in the Berlin group were General Friedrich Olbricht, Chief of the General Army Office, and his Chief of Staff, Oberstleutnant Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg.

It was Colonel von Stauffenberg, a member of the Bavarian nobility, who eventually became the driving force behind the revolt of 20 July 1944. In 1942 in North Africa he had received a severe wound from a land mine, and subsequently lost his right forearm, his left eye, and two fingers on his left hand. As a Catholic, with a strong Christian background, he was opposed to every form of totalitarianism.

Thus it was that General von Olbricht proposed Colonel von Stauffenberg as the contact agent between Berlin and the Eastern Front. In July 1943 Colonel von Stauffenberg was initiated into the conspiracy, which he adopted with great enthusiasm. Building on General von Tresckow's preparatory work, Colonel von Stauffenberg completed the technical preparations for an attempt to overthrow Hitler.

By 1944 the character of the resistance group had undergone a distinct change. Gone were all religious obstacles to Hitler's assassination. The officers now accepted that the first step in any successful coup was the elimination of Hitler. Gone also was any hope of saving the war for Germany. Finally, these officers began to accept the fact that a victory for the Nazis would be worse than defeat. The moral force that was now behind the movement made it all the more imperative that an attempt be made to avert the catastrophe and demonstrate to the world that there were Germans who opposed Hitler.¹²

General von Tresckow expressed the feelings of all the conspirators when he said in the summer of 1944:

The attempt on Hitler's life must take place at any cost. If it does not succeed, the coup d'etat must nevertheless be attempted. For what matters is no longer the practical object, but that before the world and history the German Resistance Movement should have staked its life on risking the decisive throw. Compared with this nothing else matters.¹³

On 20 July 1944 the plan was carried out. It failed.¹⁴ When it failed, anyone within Germany who may have been associated with the plot in any way was purged by Himmler. And, thus, the disintegration of the German Army was all but complete.

¹²Hans-Adolf Jacobsen and Erich Zimmermann, Germans Against Hitler, trans. Allan and Lieselotte Yahraes (Bonn: Bertov-Verlag, 1952), pp. 319-22.

¹³Rothfels, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁴Detailed narratives of the day are found in Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., pp. 635-93; and Hans Bernd Gisevius, To the Bitter End, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), pp. 490-575. For a narrative of the day in the German Army in the West see Wilhelm von Schramm, Conspiracy Among Generals, trans. R. T. Clark (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956).

The list of victims indicates the extent of the military resistance.¹⁵ It also points up the essentially Prussian-aristocratic character of the resistance within the Army. Three Field Marshals (Rommel, von Kluge and von Witzleben), three Colonel Generals (Beck, Hase and Hoepner), four generals and many of lesser rank were executed or committed suicide. General von Tresckow is an example. Upon hearing of the failure he said: "Everybody will now turn upon us and cover us with abuse. But my conviction remains unshaken - we have done the right thing."¹⁶

The attitude of the rest of the Army is exemplified by the new Chief of the General Staff, Generaloberst Heinz Guderian. General Guderian disapproved of the assassination on a religious ground, "Our Christian religion forbids it in the clearest terms."¹⁷ His attitude is significant because he was in no sense a party general; he was the type officer on whom all plans for resistance floundered. Thus, he well represents the German professional soldier.

In answer to the question why he had accepted his appointment as Chief of the General Staff following 20 July, General Guderian

¹⁵Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, op. cit., pp. 744-52. Of the 160 victims listed by name nearly one-fourth were titled but only seven of these were troop commanders. According to Hans Rothfels, The German Opposition to Hitler (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1948), p. 9, seven hundred officers were executed following 20 July for complicity in one form or another.

¹⁶Schlabrendorff, op. cit., p. 120. Tresckow then went to the 29th Infantry Division and out into no man's land alone. "There using two revolvers, he pretended an exchange of shots and then let off a hand grenade. His head was found severed from his body." Schlabrendorff was Tresckow's aide-de-camp.

¹⁷Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1952), p. 348.

answered ". . . because I was ordered to do so--there can be scarcely anyone who feels more painfully than I do for the fate of our eastern territories--after all, I, myself, am a Prussian."¹⁸

¹⁸Ibid., p. 340.

CHAPTER VI

RETROSPECT

This study has attempted to portray the gradual disintegration of the monolithic structure of the German Officer Corps which occurred during the generation of that group of German officers who were the field commanders of World War II.

The study concludes that in a sense 20 July was inevitable. The gradual breakdown of integrity since 1933 had forced the conspirators into a position of resistance. Hitler's continuous assaults on the political neutrality of the Army, followed by the invasion of the soldier's professional control over strategy and tactics, could not help but provoke opposition; antagonism developed finally into resistance.

Significantly, as World War II progressed and even after 20 July 1944 the field commanders of the German Army continued to fight valiantly, all the while hoping for an early end to the Hitler regime. Throughout the war, tactical units at all echelons of command maintained both a high degree of organizational integrity and fighting effectiveness despite a long series of almost unbroken retreats which occurred following the military reverses first on the Eastern Front--at Stalingrad--and later on the Western Front--at Avranches.

Despite these reverses, officers and soldiers alike, for the most part, within the field armies were unaware until 20 July 1944 of

the plots to eliminate Hitler.¹ Even after this event, the German soldier fought bravely--ample testimony to the soldierly qualities of the German nation. And ample testimony that the resistance movements had no apparent significant impact on the field commanders of the German Army.

At the same time, however, a relatively small element of the Officer Corps was engaged in a conspiracy to eliminate Hitler--certainly an indication that the events of the previous twenty-six years were to culminate in total catastrophe. The events leading up to 20 July and the subsequent purge illustrate dramatically that the disintegration of the monolithic structure of the German Officer Corps was complete.

In order to appreciate the German experience it is essential to identify those factors peculiar to the German situation only--but difficult for the non-German to appraise. These factors are basically either historical, geographical, or psychological and they represent forces over which officers within the German Army had little control.

Summarized, they are:

- a. The national concept of the soldier-King that collapsed when Kaiser Wilhelm abdicated in 1918.
- b. The century-long military tradition which set the armies apart from the German States, thus facilitating the process by which Hitler assumed direct command of the Army.

¹An opinion confirmed by Dr. Earl F. Ziemke, Mr. Detmar Finke and Mr. Charles V. von Luttichau, Official Historians, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, 13 February 1964. (Personal Interview.)

c. The geographical location of Germany in Central Europe, with hostile neighbors to the east and west.

d. The dilution of professional standards within the German Army that was the inevitable result of its rapid expansion.

e. Personalities.

Considered in their entirety, these five factors peculiar to Germany represent the forces that were to seal the fate of the German Officer Corps.

In this century the soldiers of the German Army have undergone two severe tests. It remains only for history to establish the answer to this question: Has this been the German Army's guilt or the German Army's fate?

APPENDIX I

COMPARATIVE TABLE OF RANKS¹

| German Army | U. S. Army |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Generalfeldmarschall | General of the Army |
| Generaloberst | General |
| General (der inf. , arty. , panzer)* | Lieutenant General |
| Generalleutnant | Major General |
| Generalmajor | Brigadier General |
| Oberst | Colonel |
| Oberstleutnant | Lieutenant Colonel |
| Major | Major |
| Hauptmann) Rittmeister) | Captain |
| Oberleutnant | Lieutenant |
| Leutnant | Second Lieutenant |

*The German Army rank equivalent to the U. S. Army rank of Lieutenant General includes the bearer's branch of service - General der Infanterie, General der Artillerie as the case might be. In practice officers of this rank ordinarily commanded either a corps or a division or held a high staff position on the General Staff.

¹Telford Taylor, Sword and Swastika (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), pp. 374-76.

APPENDIX II

GERMAN ARMY EXPANSION, 1933-39¹

- 1933 The German Army had an overall strength of 100,000 long term volunteers organized into 7 small infantry and 3 cavalry divisions maintained at cadre strength.
- 1934 Large numbers of volunteers entered the Army secretly as early as October. Seven Corps headquarters were activated from the 7 infantry divisions who in turn were to be expanded to 21 divisions. The 3 cavalry divisions were broken up to form motorized units or reorganized as light divisions.
- 1935 The German Army had expanded to an overall strength of 240,000 men organized into 3 group commands, 7 corps, 21 infantry - 1 light - and 1 armored divisions. Police regiments were incorporated into the Army and in October, the first class one one-year conscripts were called to service.
- 1936 The one-year military service law was changed to two years. At the end of the year the Army had expanded to the strength ordered by Hitler in 1935. There were 36 infantry, 1 mountain, 3 armored, 4 reserve and 31 Landwehr divisions and

¹Unless otherwise noted, the material on German Army Expansion was taken from Detmar Finke, "The German Army, Organization and Expansion" (Unpublished study on file in the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington 25, D. C., n. d.).

1 cavalry brigade but these units had large gaps in supporting troops.

1937 By October the active Army had 500,000 - 600,000 men under arms and its tactical force consisted of 4 group commands and 14 corps, with 39 active divisions, including 4 motorized infantry and 3 armored divisions. The cavalry divisions had been inactivated. Twenty-nine reserve divisions had been organized and could be called into service on mobilization. The number and quality of reserve divisions would increase as men were released from the active Army upon completion of their period of compulsory training.

1938 Two group command headquarters, 5 new corps, with 4 infantry, 2 mountain, 1 armored and 4 light divisions were added. Provision was made for the organization of an additional 22 reserve divisions.

1939 As of March the Army had a total of 102 active and reserve divisions and 1 cavalry brigade. The 51 active divisions were maintained close to full strength needing only certain supply, medical and transportation services to take the field. The total strength of the active Army was approximately 730,000; that of the reserve, about 1,100,000. The 51 reserve divisions were all infantry divisions similar to the active infantry divisions except for some items of equipment, armament in short supply, and certain units. Following the full mobilization in 1939, the Field Armies alone were over 2,300,000 men strong. The German Army had expanded up to 23 times its original size in six years.

APPENDIX III

THE STRENGTH OF THE SS ON

30 JUNE 1944¹

| | |
|--|---------|
| Called up into the Wehrmacht | 115,908 |
| Called up into the Labor Service | 722 |
| Called up for other employment | 19,254 |
| Inactive | 64,614 |
| | <hr/> |
| Subtotal | 200,498 |
| | |
| Waffen-SS | |
| Field units | 368,654 |
| New formations | 21,365 |
| Training and reserve units | 127,643 |
| Training schools | 10,822 |
| Other units directly subordinate to SS | |
| High Command | 26,544 |
| Waffen SS personnel at headquarters | 39,415 |
| | <hr/> |
| Subtotal | 594,443 |
| Grand Total | 794,941 |

¹Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Supplement A (Washington: Office of United States Chief of Counsel For Prosecution of Axis Criminality, 1947), p. 1014. In June 1944 the Waffen-SS maintained at least 13 corps, consisting of 3 divisions, at the front.

APPENDIX IV

MILITARY CHAIN OF COMMAND, 1944¹

Heads of the Armed Forces

Supreme Commander.....Adolf Hitler
Highest ranking officer.....Hermann Goering (Reichsmarschall)
CinC Army.....Adolf Hitler (predecessors - von
Brauschitsch, von Fritsch)
CinC NavyKarl Doenitz (predecessor - Raeder)
CinC Air ForceHermann Goering

High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW)

Chief of High Command.....Wilhelm Keitel
Chief of Operation Staff.....Alfred Jodl
Deputy ChiefWalter Warlimont

Army High Command (OKH)

CinC Army.....Adolf Hitler
Chief of Staff, ArmyHeinz Guderian (predecessors -
Zeitzler, Halder and Beck)

Navy High Command (OKM)

CinC NavyKarl Doenitz

¹Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression (Washington: Office of United States Chief of Counsel For Prosecution of Axis Criminality, 1947), II, 1064.

APPENDIX V

TESTIMONY OF A DIVISION COMMANDER¹

"It is so often asserted with vehemence that it was the officers of the Army who were the real warmongers..... But actually, from all I was able to learn in my intercourse with higher ranking officers, it was plain that the very opposite was the case! Today it is clear from the facts which have come to light - despite all the fulminating against the military - that it was precisely the higher officers of the Wehrmacht who were most bitter in their determination to stand up to Hitler - to National Socialism - and to the Nazi warmongers! The annexation first of Austria and then of the Sudetenland drowned the critical voices of the soldiers - a result to which the artful propaganda of Goebbels contributed not a little! But it was only after the War had gone on for some time and many successful battles had been fought - to be followed by the arduous march on Stalingrad, that people began to come to their senses - and even then a soldier was able to glean very little really dependable information from the cross-currents of rumor then circulating! It was only after I had been wounded and had been flown home for treatment that I came to hear about the

¹Hyanzinth Graf Strachwitz, "A Contribution to the History of the German Resistance Against the National Socialist Regime" (Manuscript No. B-340, on file in the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, February, 1947), pp. 2-4. General Strachwitz was the commander of a tank regiment in the Grossdeutschland Division and later a division commander in Russia.

machinations of the Party personages behind the front..... It was then that I was told about that inflated set of windbags in the Party who - after a short spell of duty in the frontline - had contrived to get themselves placed on the list of reserved persons indispensable at home for the conduct of the War! It was Baron Freitag-Loringhoven - a Lieutenant-Colonel in the General Staff and a personal friend of mine - who enlightened me on the mass shootings of Jews and intellectuals.....

He told me about such matters and about others proceeding behind the front - outside of the purely military domain..... And to reinforce the impressions made by such tidings there came the inner revulsion growing among the 'Stalingrad fighters' against the senseless sacrifice of so many valient warriors, forbidden even to fight their way free and offered up needlessly in contradiction to the views of all leading military minds at the behest of a certain 'One'.....

To describe adequately the mood of the men at the front is a difficult matter..... The spirit of comradeship prevailing there and their own esprit de corps had created, it is true - the will to resist to the end in any situation - however dire..... The mere fact that the fate awaiting most of them- was....death....made of each and every one of them valient and reckless fighters..... And so, the front held together - and each man - from General down to simple soldier - helped to maintain its coherence..... To be sure, one very often heard sharp criticism directed against the 'highest leadership'...that is - against Hitler...not against the Generals themselves. How often have I been asked by one or other of my brave

N C O's if this Hitler fellow really did understand anything about military leadership! Was it right for him, if he did....to throw us all to the wolves like this?! And these were men who had already done almost more than was humanly possible to fulfill their conception of duty!

How saddened and depressed we all were when on a certain day Generals Wietersheim and Hube appeared before us and told us it was at the beginning of the Battle of Stalingrad that we should have to retreat on the very next day for a while.....it was the only way we could re-assemble for another effort.....and then next morning how shocked we were to hear the news of the recall and dismissal of General Wietersheim, simply because he had had the courage to speak his mind freely to the Fuehrer on the situation as it undoubtedly was! If it is a fact that no man fell out of line even in the hail of artillery fire coming over except on explicit orders - even when many had been wounded several times over, it was due only to the spirit of unity which reigns among soldiers.....to the magnificent comradeship which exists among men whose souls, at least...are free and which helps them to look death in the eye without flinching. And it is very likely that it was at this time that the last soldier gained an insight - for the first time....into the contrast between Hitler's generalship and that of the Generals at the front.....

I unburdened my own soul for the first time when, on the first day of October, 1942 I reported to my superior officer and Commander - General Hube, on the Stalingrad front..... Wounded more than once....dirty....lousy....half-starving like most of my comradesI reported to him and told him quite frankly of the exploits of the

troops - and in particular of the mood they were in by this time.....

The bitterness of the words I had to speak was such as to induce the General to send away his Chief of Staff and to conduct me to his own private carriage...where we could talk openly without fear of being overheard. And I could see from the expression of his face as he listened to me without speaking that in his heart he was in full agreement with me. On my remarking finally that something must really be done now to mend matters he arose suddenly, saying only: "You'll have to be careful what you say here. But I can quite understand..... you are only speaking your mind honestly and frankly...as you have always done". A short time afterwards I was loaded onto a plane, having been wounded again, and sent off home to Germany.....for treatment in a hospital there..... On this day, the day I left my comrades behind in a hopeless situation....I took a firm resolve to seek a way of freeing our military leaders from the thralldom of Hitler's and restoring freedom of action to German politics.

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