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Republic of Violence: The German Army and Politics, 1918-1923

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Republic of Violence: The German Army and Politics, 1918-1923

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Abstract

November 1918 did not bring peace to Germany. Although the First World War was over, Germany began a new and violent chapter as an outbreak of civil war threatened to tear the country apart. The birth of the Weimar Republic, Germany's first democratic government, did not begin smoothly as republican institutions failed to re-establish centralized political and military authority in the wake of the collapse of the imperial regime. Coupled with painful aftershocks from defeat in the Great War, the immediate postwar era had only one consistent force shaping and guiding political and cultural life: violence.

This dissertation is primarily an examination of the development of a broad atmosphere of violence created by the deliberate efforts of the Freikorps movement to influence political and cultural activity in Germany in the immediate aftermath of World War I. Principally, it explores the activities of Freikorps units and their allies to use tactics and methods to threaten and intimidate their enemies and the civilian populace, and engage in what Hans von Seeckt called a broader "spiritual battle" for the fate of Germany. It traces the development, proliferation and termination of a violent network of civilian and militant organizations that served as a mouthpiece for a dissident and disaffected segment of German society after the war. It is a history of civil-military relations in an era when the boundaries between the two had become blurred and all but disappeared. It highlights a moment when citizens sought to settle their disputes, not just through democratic elections and political compromises, but also with rifles, pistols and murder.

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Abbreviations

BA-MA – *Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv* – Federal Military Archive of Germany, Freiburg im Breisgau
BArch-Koblenz – *Bundesarchiv-Koblenz* – Federal Archiv – Koblenz.
BArch-Licht – *Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde West* – Federal Archive – Lichterfelde, Berlin.
BHStA – *Bayerische Hauptstaatsarchiv* – Bavarian State Archive, Munich.
FLK – *Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps*
GKSK – *Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps*
KPD – *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* – Communist Party of Germany NARA – National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland, USA.
NSDAP –*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* - National Socialist German Workers' Party
OHL – *Oberste Heeresleitung* – Supreme Army Command
SPD – *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* – Social Democratic Party of Germany
USPD – *Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* – Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany
ZFK – *Zeitfreiwilligenkorps*

INTRODUCTION

Huddled together in their muddy trenches, hastily dug as German troops attempted to desperately hang on to the remaining strips of French territory still in their possession, the men of the Third Army had come to the end of a long and bloody war as November 1918 dawned. Most of them had suffered through the American-led Meuse-Argonne offensive that had pushed the German Army to the breaking point. Some troops still remained from First Quartermaster General Erich Ludendorff's last gamble to win the war with a German victory during the Champagne-Marne offensive earlier that year. A very small number of *Frontschweine* ("front pigs" in the nomenclature of the men in the front-lines) had fought in the First Battle of the Marne in August 1914. Despite the differences within the units of the Third Army, most soldiers, whether young or old, veterans or green recruits, committed monarchists or working-class socialists, believed that their long and violent ordeal was finally coming to an end. They had no idea how wrong they were.

The Great War came to an end on 11 November 1918, but it did not bring peace to Germany. Instead, the former Hohenzollern Empire descended into political and military turmoil as old imperial authorities crumbled before a new wave of democratic and radical leftwing revolutionaries. Although more than two million Germans had been killed in the war, and an estimated 7 million wounded, people continued to die as the opening clashes of the *Bürgerkrieg* (civil war) raged across the countryside and in the cities. Violence and destruction from the industrial killing fields of the First World War returned with the demobilizing field armies as professionally trained soldiers engaged in a new form of deadly political discourse.

But what had really changed after the end of the war? Socialists and communists continued to clash with their opponents on the rightwing, and with each other. Captains of industry and organized trade unions still fought over wage increases, pensions and working conditions. Bavaria and the other former independent kingdoms chafed under the provisions of Otto von Bismarck's Prussian dominated constitution. Yet even as these patterns continued to shape social, political and economic life, two major events initiated a sweeping alteration of the expression of these tensions and relationships. The complete defeat of the German Army in the First World War and the destruction of imperial political authority through the outbreak of revolution in Kiel, Berlin and the rest of Germany simultaneously destabilized all military and political relationships in a single week. As a result, the growing democratic impulses within German society that gave birth to the new republic developed alongside destructive violent tendencies, each playing crucial roles in the first few years of the Weimar experiment.

Indeed, the ability to use deadly force played a central role in shaping everyday life in the early Weimar Republic. Unlike other instances of peacetime in Germany, directly following the First World War the pervasive use of professionalized violence was normalized through a variety of hybrid social-political-military organizations operating outside of the control of central institutions. Although the nation was nominally no longer at war and combat forces were dissolved, Germany failed to undergo a meaningful process of *social* demobilization. Expressed through political divisions, but supported by sub-sections of society which were now well-armed and trained, segments of German

society took to the streets and fields of their country, seeking to enact change through violent means, even ordinary citizens received new democratic access to control over the highest political authority and direction of the country. Further exacerbating this dangerous and violent climate were new challenges to pre-war political and military institutions, representing a violent breakdown of the complex system of compromises and agreements that had underpinned the Bismarckian constitution. Therefore, despite agreement made between the remnants of the officer corps and the new political masters of the republic seeking to stabilize military affairs in the new republic, between the November Revolution in 1918 and the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch in March 1920, central administrative bodies were unable to dominate access to the means of violence leading to a vast proliferation of violent political organizations reflecting the full diversity of German society. Without the stabilizing influence of a constitutionally legitimized government, confidently issuing orders to a subordinated military institution, the military sphere fragmented along social and political lines in the absence of a clear hegemon.

The result – a more open, one could almost say democratized access to the means of violence – was a passionate civil war between deeply divided segments of society. Although the various classes and demographics in conflict with each other were in many ways products of prewar trends and developments, their *violent* nature after the war differentiated them from their pre-1914 existence. Historian Jeffrey Verhey noted that "before 1914, German political life was not national, but

divided into partial political cultures."[1] Indeed, such analysis of the so-called "*Blocbildung*" (or "block-building") within Wilhelmine Germany has been widely accepted and researched, and will not be challenged here. Instead, the significant change after the war was not the emergence of a nation deeply divided along political, economical and social lines, but rather the specific *violent* expression of those earlier divisions as they navigated through the events of the immediate postwar era.

The use of violence in the early years of the *Bürgerkrieg* was predominantly shaped by competing political objectives, as left- and right-wing supporters fought each other for control of the future direction and shape of the Reich. But how did open access to the means of violence influence the new political reality in Germany's first republic? What place would bullets, rifles and artillery pieces find next to traditional components of political life like ballots, speeches and Reichstag debates? Would former front soldiers fight for new political causes or melt away into civilian life or some unpredictable combination of both? In light of these questions, the leaders of political parties and movements, both large and small, welcomed home the returning soldiers cautiously, uncertain of the role veterans would play in German political life, but no one could afford to snub such a potentially powerful and decisive demographic. Before long all major political parties attempted to mobilize militant wings or a variety of sympathetic organizations, operating to guarantee the security of their events, members and leaders with varying levels of success. However, by 1919 one thing was increasingly evident; the Bürgerkrieg was

[1] Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9.

not merely a physical clash between opposing forces. In the ongoing propaganda battle between hostile factions, the display of the violent potential at one's disposal was considered an important asset. Indeed parade marches, unit insignia, flags, and arm bands were all crucial elements in the discourse of political violence that developed in postwar Germany.

Chief among these new purveyors of deadly force were the Freikorps. The majority of this study will focus on their various mechanisms of creation, proliferation, nature, and eventual marginalization. Their actions and ubiquity, combined with a highly active propaganda wing that continued to engage in myth-making long after the final units were disbanded, made them a lasting symbol of the breakdown of central political and military authority as well as the fusion between politics and military affairs in Weimar Germany. Often only mentioned as an early indication of republican weakness on the path to the National Socialist "seizure of power" in 1933, directly after the war the Freikorps were far more than a mere incubator for the fledgling the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party). Although certainly some Freikorps members went on to join the Nazi Party, in the immediate postwar era, Freikorps units were an expression of a broader segment of German society, unwilling to accept the new republican experiment in Berlin and determined to support attempts to violently oppose any ideology or political party that it felt was too 'Bolshevik.' Therefore the Freikorps were not simply an incubator for the future leaders of the Third Reich, but rather a diverse social, political, military movement that encompassed many ideologies and worldviews.

Representing a diverse coalition of monarchists, anti-communists, ultra-nationalists, radical militants, and "patriotic-minded" individuals who felt threatened by the advance of Polish and Russian forces in the East, the Freikorps movement was an important demographic in postwar German society. Containing far more than just the classic Freikorps units, such as the Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps, the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps and the Ehrhardt Brigade, this was an expansive and diverse network of formations spanning a full spectrum from highly professional combat forces, who were the equal of the Reichswehr, to mix-matched units of old men and young boys, barely able to establish an effective municipal watch but who nonetheless served an important role in the active mobilization of the segment of society that supported the Freikorps. Despite their varied quality and strength, at the height of their power, the broader Freikorps movement counted nearly two million supporters.[2] Although there were institutional distinctions between the various units within the complex system of *freiwillige* units, operational patterns and regional alliance structures clearly demonstrate the close bonds uniting this diverse assortment of formations.[3] Supported by a host of civilian propaganda and fundraising organizations, the Freikorps system highlighted the close connection between civilian and military life

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[2] This figure includes all of the ancillary units created by the Freikorps, including the Einwohnerwehr, the Sicherheitswehr, the Zeitfreiwilligenkorps, and the Volkswehr. For more on the size of the Freikorps movement, see Part II: The People at War, and specifically Chapter V: The Creation of the Freikorps.

[3] The German word "*freiwillige"* translates to "volunteer" in English, however at this time it was used specifically by rightwing supporters to refer to units that were described as a part of the broader Freikorps movement.

as well as their increasingly politicized nature in postwar Germany immediately after the war.

However, two main issues have weakened early examinations of this period. Either historians have tended to view each sub-component of the Freikorps movement as entirely separate organizations, operating almost independently from each other, or have glossed over important distinctions between groups and simply lumped all so-called "para-military" units together under the catchall term "Freikorps." Works by historians such as Harold Gordon, Francis Carsten and Gordon Craig emphasized the role of the traditional power sources in the military sphere, specifically the German General Staff and the remnants of the imperial officer corps in narratives concerning military affairs directly after the war.[4] These foundational works dismissed the Freikorps as rebels, revolutionaries and troublemakers, quarrelsome outlaws making difficulties in the military sphere, and excluded them from their larger narratives of the armed forces between the world wars. Focused primarily on institutions rather than the broader society in which they operated, these Reichswehr-centric analyses shaped the discourse on violence and military power in Germany for decades, and still influence our understanding of the Bürgerkrieg era today as even the most current examinations of this period still reference these works frequently.

Alongside those historians seeking to understand the postwar German military sphere by primarily examining the Reichswehr, other scholars chose to

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[4] Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955); Francis Carsten, *The Reichswehr and Politics, 1918-1933* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1966); Harold Gordon, *The Reichswehr and the German Republic, 1919-1926* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

directly research the combat forces of the Freikorps movement. The earliest works published before the Second World War benefitted from access to primary sources now lost during the Allied bombing campaigns, but were heavily influenced by political authorities during their production, or were largely self-aggrandizing or justifying propaganda pieces and so have only been incorporated into the historiography with the utmost caution. Most of the works of the prolific Ernst von Salomon must be treated more as Freikorps literature than historical analysis, and even Friedrich Wilhelm von Oertzen's early work on the German Freikorps is more valuable for factual details than secondary analysis. However, published at the same time as many of these early analyses of the Freikorps movement, a host of memoirs from prominent officers and commanders who served in *freiwillige* units appeared throughout the 1920s and 1930s providing insight into the mentality of the Freikorps movement, but containing few reliable details for historians seeking to build accurate narratives of events. Therefore, many of these primary accounts were marginalized in early historical studies because of their factual inaccuracies, rather than integrated into a cultural analysis of the social implications of the Freikorps movement. This was in many ways a by-product of the questions that historians asked of these documents as scholars seeking to author a purely political or military history generally disfavored works by self-promoting Freikorps celebrities such as Ihno Meyer, Hermann Ehrhardt and Gerhard Roßbach for distorting facts and statistics.[5] However, for historians seeking to explore the Freikorps movement as a

[5] See Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik, 1918-1920* (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt Verlag),1969.

social and cultural development, these memoirs provide a penetrating glimpse into the world of the violent revolutionary fighter.

A second wave of Freikorps research, written in the decades following World War II, authored by historians such as Hagen Schulze, Peter Merkl and James Diehl, has most significantly shaped current interpretations of the Freikorps movement and its role in the collapse of the Weimar Republic.[6] Scholars such as Schulze and Merkl stressed the fascist connections of the Freikorps movement, viewing it as a dangerous precursor or incubator for the nascent NSDAP. Rather than analyzing the development of the Freikorps system as a unique product of the violence of the First World War and events in postwar Germany, authors belonging to this school of thought instead viewed the *freiwillige* units primarily for their role in the weakening of the Weimar Republic and its eventual collapse, choosing to consistently project forwards to the Nazi seizure of power in January 1933, rather than treating the events of the immediate postwar period as their own specific moment in the republican era. Diehl's study of para-militaries after the war provided some of the most balanced and nuanced analysis of the Freikorps and their evolution throughout the republic, but in an attempt to clarify the murky and chaotic world of violent organizations, Diehl over emphasized the differences between the main combat forces of the Freikorps movement and their supporting units like the

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[6] James Diehl, "Germany: Veterans' Politics under Three Flags" in *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War*, ed. James Diehl and Stephen R Ward (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975); James Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik*, *1918-1920* (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1969); Peter Merkl, *The Making of a Stormtrooper* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

Einwohnerwehr and the Zeitfreiwilligenkorps, which does not necessarily align with the Freikorps' own understanding of their existence, nor is it reflected by the reality of their operational history. Indeed, orders and journal entries from this precise moment, authored by Freikorps commanders and soldiers demonstrate the links between classic Freikorps units, like General Ludwig Maercker's Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps, and the plethora of supporting formations that operated alongside his main force. In Diehl's attempt to create a single volume work, analyzing the evolution of all para-military groups in the Weimar Republic, subtle yet important relationships and bonds at work within the Freikorps movement were marginalized, weakening Diehl's analysis of the immediate postwar era, even as his broader interpretation of the interplay between violence and politics remains relevant for the later half of the republican era.

In subsequent decades, research on the Freikorps movement stalled. Already armed with several substantial monographs from historians such as Michael Geyer, Detlev Peukert and Gordon Craig, assessing the broader implications of the movement for the collapse of the republic and a wealth of primary accounts, like those from Ernst von Salomon and Gerhard Roßbach, which provided colourful, if not terribly accurate, information detailing the inner workings of the *freiwillige* units, historians shifted to new topics of inquiry.[7] However, recently a new

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[7] Michael Geyer, *Military Work, Civil Order, Militant Politics: The German Military Experience, 1914-1945* (Washington: Wilson Center, International Security Studies Program, 1982); Michael Geyer, *Aufrüstung oder Sicherheit: Die Reichswehr und die Krise der Machtpolitik 1924-1936* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1980); Detlev Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik: Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987); Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).

outpouring of analysis focusing on the politics of memory and the experience of trauma has breathed new life into Freikorps research. A concurrent development of *Alltagsgeschichte*, or history of the everyday, a renewed focus on the lives of average Germans struggling to cope with the loss of the Great War and the turbulent events of the early Weimar Republic has produced a series of works examining this period with a bottom-up approach, rather than the previous focus on institutions and traditional sources of power and authority. Typified by historians such as Benjamin Ziemann and Richard Bessel,[8] the most recent research into the republican era has been less concerned with institutions and great power diplomacy and has instead delved into the social patterns and cultural practices of 'ordinary Germans' in this period.

In the past few decades, historians, such as Dirk Schumann, Rosemarie Sammartino, and Andreas Wirsching, have written new studies focusing on the role of violence in German society during and directly after the First World War.[9] Wirsching's study advanced the theory that the war "brutalized" European society and has argued that this was a primary cause of political violence between the world wars. His examination of violence focuses on the actions and attitudes of front soldiers, who he believed had a lowered "inhibitory threshold" to use violence after their experiences in the war. However, as Scott Stephenson's work on Great War

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[8] Benjamin Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
[9] Dirk Schumann, *Political Violence in the Weimar Republic, 1918-1933: Fight for the Streets and Fear of Civil War* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009); Andreas Wirsching, *Violence and Society after the First World War* (München: Beck, 2003); Rosemarie Sammartino, *Impossible Border: Germany and the East, 1914-1922* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2014).

veterans has demonstrated, front line soldiers were only one demographic in the wider community of men committing violent acts. Instead, like Schumann, this work will seek to examine violence in general, not just the specific actions of front line soldiers. Schumann's argument that the actual levels of violence in postwar Germany were actually minimal is based on a partial examination of the types of violence present. Working from a narrow definition of violence, which restricts violence only to "the physical act of violence as the impact upon the body, as the sensation of pleasure and pain," Schumann contends that examining "the emotions connected with violence" was too problematic for his study due to the limited sources that could establish the emotional impact of violence in German society.[10]

While Schumann's evaluation of the available source material to demonstrate the emotional *reception* of violence reflects the archival records at our disposal, there are nonetheless significant sources of information, written by Freikorps officers and supporters, that can be used to convincingly illustrate that these units were not only aware of the emotional aspects of their violent actions but that they also sought to specifically accentuate the psychological impact on their enemies, as well as any potential future opponents. In this work not only direct physical violence but also the threat of violence will be discussed to establish that the Freikorps sought the creation of an atmosphere of fear and anxiety in the minds of their potential enemies. Although incidents of violence were infrequent and resultant casualties were low, especially compared to the carnage of the First World War, the Freikorps movement sought to promote an atmosphere of violence, where the

[10] Schumann, *Political Violence*, xvi.

threat of bodily harm could be unleashed at any moment. Sound military tactics were often deliberately eschewed to increase the potential psychological impact of their actions. Indeed, reading the accounts of Freikorps operations it becomes clear that while these units were comfortable unleashing the violent means at their disposal, doing so was not necessarily the goal of their existence or even the desired outcome. The maintenance of public "order" was the central political goal of the Freikorps movement. Actions to preserve order, or *Ordnung*, a politically defined concept rooted in anti-Bolshevism, were often the stated objective of Freikorps operations; achieving this through the threat of violence rather than the actual physical destruction appears to have made little difference to the majority of Freikorps supporters. Therefore Schumann's assertion that the postwar era was not particularly violent can be effectively challenged. Only by omitting the psychological or emotional aspects of violence and the threat of violence, and narrowly focusing on the purely physical use of violence can his conclusions be valid. However this study of the immediate postwar era, from the conclusion of the armistice until November 1923, will demonstrate that the Freikorps movement, playing a broader social, political, and military role sought to create a pervasive atmosphere of violence to achieve their political objectives.

Therefore, rather than focus on implications of the legacy of the Freikorps movement for the collapse of the republic, by examining only those years of turmoil directly after the end of the First World War, this work highlights the ubiquitous presence of violence, real or threatened, in everyday German life. Previous works by historians like Harold Gordon, Gordon Craig, and even to some extent Eberhard

Kolb, concentrated on the prominent military and political leaders of this era and national political events and ignored the development of an atmosphere of violence that influenced *all* levels of political discourse in the republic. This study seeks to balance the narrative of average Germans with decisions made at the highest levels of the German government and army to expose the breakdown in the distinctions between civilian and military life, as well as political and military institutions. By placing violence, and the attempts to control its use, at the centre of a narrative of the first turbulent years of the republic, the fragility of the relationship between political and military authority is highlighted.

The first part of this work will closely examine the weakening of the military and political authority of the Hohenzollern dynasty and the destabilization of centralized institutions in the immediate postwar era, arguing that even though the lapse of centralized political and military authority was quite brief, it was nonetheless one of the crucial components contributing to the outbreak of violence in Germany that persisted over the next four years, hampering the smooth foundation and legitimacy of the new republic. However the degradation of civilian political authority began before the outbreak of revolution in 1918. Ceding control of the political functions of the state to the military during mobilization for the First World War, the organs of imperial authority were politically bankrupt well before the abdication of the Kaiser. With the defeat of the German field armies in fall 1918, the sole remaining pillar buttressing the failing imperial regime abruptly collapsed. The resulting situation was anything but a power vacuum. Instead of an absence of interested contenders, a destructive plethora of organizations each attempted to

assume control over the political functions of the state, effectively negating each other form November 1918 until January 1919, as Germany suffered through an overabundance of political bodies. How did this critical failure of any organization to immediately assert control over the direction of the affairs of the Reich impact the fragmentation of the military sphere and the outpouring of violence witnessed during the following years of the Bürgerkrieg?

General political instability and the absence of a broadly legitimated government, either represented by the Hohenzollern dynasty or a firmly established republican system, produced an existential crisis for the military leadership and the German army in general. No longer the physical extension of the authority of the Kaiser and the Hohenzollern dynasty in the wake of Wilhelm II's abdication, the army faced any uncertain future in the new republic despite the promises made by Ebert through his pact with Groener. However, absence of the sympathetic monarchy was not the only issue facing military elites as 1918 drew to a close. The haphazard and uneven demobilization of the field armies broke the military's hegemony over the means of violence as the new host of politicized militant organizations developed in the fertile breeding ground of postwar revolutionary Germany. How did the elimination of the controlling influence of the army, restricting access to the means of violence, influence the development of a radical and deadly political discourse? Most importantly, this study will explore the rise of a violent political atmosphere, produced by diverse segments of society as rifles, machineguns and flamethrowers were given political value alongside speeches, newspaper editorials and campaign rallies in the revolutionary days of the Weimar

Republic. In other words, what happened when the death and destruction of the war returned to Germany?

Part Two explores the most potent representation of the violent militant culture that developed in Germany after the First World War: the Freikorps movement. Defying simplistic mono-causal explanations to explain their creation, development and nature, Freikorps units were an enigmatic expression of a multitude of political, social, cultural, and military phenomena. Indeed, even as they were created, there were many questions concerning their precise nature and potential uses. Were they an important component of republican power, or passionate dissidents committed to overthrowing the Social Democrat government in Berlin, or extra-state militants pursuing their own nationalist agenda in response to a perceived crisis of 'Germandom?' Given their diverse political sentiments and ambitions, this work will argue that the Freikorps movement was only every loosely ideologically unified, but instead was brought together by its military characteristics and preoccupation with violence, either threatened or real. Furthermore the amorphous "spirit of the Freikorps" as Hans von Seeckt referred to it, was negotiated through various enclaves in German society, as well the expansive network of militant and civilian support organizations around the Freikorps movement. This examination will highlight the creation of an atmosphere of potential violence in German society and culture that was carefully and deliberately inculcated by the Freikorps movement, well beyond its relationship to the actual amount of physical violence that occurred, in an attempt to control and influence

their opponents and discourage any potential future attempts to disrupt "peace and order" (*Ruhe und Ordnung*) in the first fours years of the Weimar Republic.

How, then, did it all end? What became of the powerful, flamboyant Freikorps units and their host of civilian supporters? How did a stable German Army re-establish itself in the early 1920s? Part Three analyzes the climactic clash between the resurgent central military authorities under the leadership of Hans von Seeckt and the independent Freikorps movement, contending that although the key members of the army leadership would be drawn into intrigues against the Weimar Republic during its collapse in the early 1930s, after March 1920, the Reichswehr was more or less successfully reformed into a reliable military institution that could and did defend Ebert's government in Berlin. As was often the case in the early years of the Weimar Republic, the struggle for supremacy over the future shape of Germany's armed forces only came to an end through a trial of will power and the apparent readiness to shed further blood. But most importantly for the re-establishment of centralize military authority and the future of the former imperial officer corps, this study will examine which factions within the military sphere were legitimized by political authorities to use violence and for what purposes. This was an important issue during the *Bürgerkrieg,* from November 1918 until the end of 1923, as the sentiments of the military realm were still not clear in this period. Would the bulk of the soldiers of the new republican army support the dashing, charismatic rebel Freikorps commanders or the experienced, professional officers molded in the traditions of the Prussian and German Army dating back to Frederick

the Great? The answer to these questions would dictate the nature of military and political authority for the rest of the duration of the Weimar Republic.

Ultimately, this work seeks to examine the nature of daily political and social life in Weimar Germany to highlight the conscious attempt by the Freikorps movement and their allies to create and exploit an atmosphere of violence to intimidate their political opponents into submission, with or without the use of physical violence. Rather than focusing solely on *physical* acts of violence, like Schumann or Hagen Schulze, by incorporating the psychological activities of the Freikorps movement into this narrative, it is possible to demonstrate that Germany developed its first republican government under a pervasive threat of violent action, which influenced political discourse at the national, regional, and local levels. For at least four years after the end of the First World War, the paraphernalia of death lingered in the streets and squares of German cities and villages, as radical and revolutionary citizens waged war on each other for political and military supremacy. The invasive presence of the symbols of military material culture had a marked impact on the daily lives of German citizens as they participated in the foundation of a new democratic state. Regardless of the actual number of people killed, postwar militant groups consciously created an atmosphere of violence, even if actual bloodshed was only threatened, as a tactic to influence political and social trends in the first four years after the First World War. Therefore, this study will question the relationship between political authority and military power, and highlight the use of violence, physical and psychological, in the political and social discourse during chaotic first four years of the Weimar Republic.

PART I: Gewaltpolitik

> "A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon — authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionists. Would the Paris Commune have lasted a single day if it had not made use of this authority of the armed people against the bourgeoisie? Should we not, on the contrary, reproach it for not having used it freely enough?"
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> Friedrich Engels, *On Authority,* 1872.

Initially, the events of November 1918 bore little resemblance to Friedrich Engels' view of revolutionary nature. On 9 November the majority of shots fired in anger by German troops were on the Western Front against Entente forces. Having considered the possibility of using front troops to re-establish order in the *Heimat* in the wake of the Kiel and Wilhelmshaven mutinies that had spread across northern Germany, the Hohenzollern Monarchy ultimately concluded that a military foray of such a nature would not be successful and would likely lead to an undesirable civil war. Heeding the advice of the last imperial chancellor, Prince Max von Baden, and his generals, Kaiser Wilhelm II chose to abdicate, seemingly securing a peaceful transition from monarchy to democracy for Germany.

However, five years later, following the failed Nazi Beer Hall Putsch in Munich, the beleaguered Weimar Republic and its leadership had learned the truth of Engels' statement. There was an intimate connection between political authority and the ability to employ organized violence in the first years of the Weimar era. Politically reliable military formations were just as important to local, regional, and national political discourse as mass rallies, elections and rousing public speakers.

Yet awareness of this vital relationship between the means of violence and political authority only developed gradually for the leaders of the Majority Social Democrats who would eventually consolidate their rule over the political institutions of the new republic between 1918 and 1923. Friedrich Ebert, Philipp Scheidemann, and Otto Landsberg initially favoured compromise, negotiation, and power sharing agreements rather than the violent suppression of their political opponents. However, the determination of their rivals, particularly the Spartacus League, the Independent Social Democrats and to some extent the workers and soldiers council movement, not only to claim political authority, but also control of the military sphere, spurred a discernible evolution of Social Democrat political and military policy toward violent resolutions.

Tracing the development of the Majority Social Democrats' appreciation of the relationship between organized violence and political authority highlights the turmoil that had engulfed the armed forces after the end of the First World War. Even though Prussian military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz did not envision the possibility of civil-military relations with multiple competing domestic political authorities, his conception of the relationship between the political decision-making sphere and the military realm is nonetheless applicable for the turmoil following the Great War. In his posthumous work, *On War*, Clausewitz described the ideal structure for interaction between the political authorities and the military commanders. The generals were charged with drafting military strategy that would

conform to political objectives as determined by the civilian cabinet.[1] However, Clausewitz's idealized political and military institutions were envisioned to operate within a monarchical state, with supreme authority clearly and irrevocably fixed within the person of the king. In the first few fateful months after the collapse of the old regime, there was no sole heir to the supreme political authority of the German state. No less than six political institutions sought to dictate the political direction of Germany from November 1918 to February 1919, including the Ebert and the SPD controlled cabinet, the Executive Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Berlin, the Congress of Councils, the Spartacus League, the plotters of the Foreign Office Putsch from 6 December, and the radical council republic in Bavaria. Therefore we may expand, carefully, on Clausewitz's original model to suit circumstances in revolutionary Weimar. Taking a more generalized view of Clausewitz's national political-military hierarchy, originally established as the king, the political cabinet, and the official military, can be effectively relabeled Political Authority/Political Institution/Military Institution to be applied to various historical examples.[2] In November 1918, as centralized political authority collapsed, the army's control over the means of violence broke down as well, and the tools of war, rifles, pistols, machine guns and grenades, followed demobilizing soldiers from the

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[1] This relationship was subtly altered in the 1851 Prussian General Staff edition of Clausewitz's work. Instead of subordinating the head of the armed forces to the will of the political cabinet, to merely attending cabinet meetings to advise on the practical limits of the capabilities of army and navy so as to ensure national policy reflecting practical military realities, the editors of the 1851 edition elevated the role of the commander of the armed forces to a role more akin to a director or producer of policy. See Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

[2] However there may not necessarily be such a sharp division between the leader or leaders and the rest of the political cohort.

Heimat garrisons and found their ways into the hands of revolutionary organizations operating outside of the authority of the former imperial armed forces. Through this process revolutionary Germany effectively developed several competing political-military structures simultaneously attempting to establish hegemony over the political functions of the state and over the military sphere. Numerous political movements and institutions, ranging from the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) to the Spartacus League (*Spartakusbund*) or the *Vollzugsrat* (Executive Committee) of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Greater Berlin, attempted to mobilize their own militant organizations. Joined by their respective civilian supporters, each group sought to create their own version of a Clausewitzian structure of civil-military relations, whereby the party leaders played the role of the "government" for their trinity and the militant and civilian supporters assumed their obvious positions.

For the military sphere, the revolution meant decentralization and fragmentation. As front troops returned to the *Heimat* and haphazardly demobilized, the former imperial army was a shell of its former self, leaving officers without dependable formations under their control, and an unclear future for the once powerful officer corps. Throughout November and December 1918, and into the following year, a process of political realignment occurred within the military sphere. The shattered imperial military attempted to reorganize itself, and re-establish normalized civil-military relations through the Ebert-Groener Pact, whereby the Ebert and the cabinet promised to support the autonomy and authority of the officer corps in return for the OHL's loyalty to the republic. However, despite

this attempt to normalize the relationship between political and military authorities, the chaotic nature of demobilization meant that new sources of military power multiplied through the country.[3] Former soldiers and young men began to swell the ranks of a wide variety of political causes and movements as the firm grasp of the army leadership over the military realm weakened quickly. Each unit of Freikorps or leftwing revolutionaries supported its own chosen political creed or ideology, whether it was fighting to preserve "peace and order" for the Majority Social Democrats, combating bourgeois capitalism for the Spartacus League and the Independent Socialists, or preserving "order" in Germany from the threat of Bolshevism for the right-wing *Freiwilligenformationen* or Freikorps movement. Thus the military sphere quickly came to reflect the political divisions and fluid political relationships of revolutionary Weimar. In light of this fragmentation, it is perhaps unsurprising that re-establishing effective monopoly control over the means of violence did not occur rapidly. Indeed, once the military sphere[4] splintered and produced a broad spectrum of politicized armies, many of these organizations fought on for years in various forms, hampering efforts to establish centralized control over the means of violence. Therefore the collapse of centralized political and military authority created through the German Revolution of November 1918 produced different realities for each sphere. Although nominally stabilized before

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[3] The broader implications of the Ebert-Groener Pact, see Chapter IV.
[4] For the remainder of this work, the term "military sphere" or realm refers broadly to all militant organizations, including the Reichswehr, Freikorps, and all other militant groups, that existed primarily as an instrument of violence, both physical and psychological.

the military realm, political authority could not be fully re-established until the Weimar Republic created reliable military forces to guarantee its physical security.

CHAPTER I: COLLAPSE

Just as the battlefields of central and eastern Europe served as the cradle of the Hohenzollern monarchy and Prussia-Germany, the industrial killing fields of northern France proved to be the grave of the German Empire. Despite the tactical prowess of the German Army demonstrated during Ludendorff's 1918 Spring Offensives, a lack of clearly defined strategic objectives resulted in only limited territorial gains and failed to create a decisive breakthrough while costing hundreds of thousands of casualties the German Army could not afford. Momentum swung irreversibly in favour of the Entente Powers after the final major German offensive ground to a halt on 6 August at the Second Battle of the Marne. Two days later the Allies counterattacked through the Battle of Amiens, which saw more than ten Allied divisions, comprised of Australian, Canadian, British, French, and American forces break through German lines, tearing open a 24 km wide gap, and inflicting an estimated 30,000 casualties on the German Army.[1] Although the gap in the lines would be closed and the German Army would continue to provide resistance in the face of a relentless Allied assault, 8 August had a significant psychological impact on First Quartermaster General Erich Ludendorff. Although he would refer to this moment as the "black day of the German Army," it did not immediately end the war, although it did convince Ludendorff that Germany would not be the victor.[2]

The intensity of the Allied campaign, bolstered by the overwhelming number of troops available to General Ferdinand Foch, achieved decisive results through the

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[1] See Michael Neiberg, *The Second Battle of the Marne* (Indiana University Press, 2008).
[2] Erich Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen, 1914-1918: Mit zahlreichen skizzen und pläne.* (Berlin: ES Mittler und Sohn, 1919).

late summer and early fall of 1918. Faced with a rapidly deteriorating military situation, Austria-Hungary sent a peace note to the Allies on 14 September, occurring alongside the collapse of the war effort in Bulgaria, which accepted armistice terms on 30 September.[3] Ludendorff, who had risked everything on the Spring Offensives and a return to unrestricted submarine warfare to achieve victory before fresh American troops would arrive in Europe in large numbers, now recognized that defeat was imminent. On the night of 28/29 September, the OHL held a General Headquarters conference at Spa in Belgium, attended by numerous leading figures of the imperial regime. At this conference, the Supreme Command directed the government to immediately pursue armistice and peace negotiations with American President Woodrow Wilson on the basis of his Fourteen Points.[4] Additionally, the conference approved the formation of a new cabinet under Prince Max von Baden, who was directed to establish a government "in full consultation with the parties of the Reichstag majority."[5] While Eberhard Kolb argued that this transition towards parliamentary monarchy was primarily an attempt to improve

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[3] Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*,(Routledge: New York, 2005), 4.

[4] For reasons that remain unclear, civilian and military leaders, both imperial and the later republicans, maintained a naïve optimism concerning American intentions and good will towards Germany. Right up until peace negotiations began to dominate republican affairs in May 1919, German politicians consistently gave into self-indulgent fantasies that Wilson and the Americans would restrain the French and get Germany a "just peace." Focused more on abstract calculations of "moral guilt," built upon highly favourable interpretations of various treaties and pacts, Germany's leaders failed to comprehend the dire material circumstances the war had created for the Entente Powers. Financial commitments, not bizarre notions of one nations' right to attack another, would largely determine Germany's fate at the Paris peace conference; a fact that was only fully understood when the cabinet was handed the final terms.

[5] Prince Mox von Baden, *Erinnerungen und dokumente* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-anstalt, 1927).

Germany's position in peace negotiations, particularly with the Americans, other scholars such as Scott Stephenson and Detlev Peukert viewed this as the key moment in the birth of the "Stab-in-the-Back" Legend (*Dolchstoßlegende*). These historians contend that Ludendorff proposed the transition to a parliamentary monarchy in order to shift blame for defeat in the war from the conservative military hierarchy onto a new civilian government.

Indeed there is ample evidence to expose the falsehood of Ludendorff's *Dolchstoß* legend, that the home front led by socialists and communists betrayed the unbeaten army in the field. Ludendorff's had already acknowledged the bleak military situation as early as 3 October, stating "the army cannot wait 48 hours," in an omission of military defeat to the new government as he renewed his mid-September efforts to secure an immediate armistice. No amount of bureaucratic efforts could comb out more men from rear areas to meet the army's minimum requirement for 200,000 new recruits per month. The entire cohort of 1900 would have only sustained the army for six weeks, given the rate of casualties in late 1918.[6] Therefore in full awareness of the military situation, Ludendorff and the Army Supreme Command, not Prince Max and his new cabinet of Social Democrat deputies, made the fateful demand for peace. However, Lieutenant General Wilhelm Groener, Ludendorff's successor as First Quartermaster-General after 26 October, continued to promote the "Stab-in-the-Back" myth to distance the officer corps from any responsibility for Germany's defeat and the anticipated calamity that would

[6] The military draft class of 1900 was expected to yield around 400,000 new soldiers, of which only 300,000 were expected to be suitable for combat. Holger Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918*,(London: Arnold Publishing, 1977), 422.

follow. In his memoirs, Groener wrote, "I could only be pleased if the army and the High Command remained as little burdened as possible with these negotiations from which nothing good was to be expected."[7] Complicit in Ludendorff's political schemes, Groener later provided additional evidence that the Army Supreme Command (*Oberste Heeresleitung*, or OHL) sought to avoid potential future political consequences. "The High Command deliberately adopted the position of refuting the responsibility for the armistice and all later steps," wrote Groener. "Strictly viewed legally, it did so without justification, but for me and my associates it was necessary to maintain the shining armour and the general staff free of burdens for the future."[8] While the army's involvement in originating the "Stab-in-the-Back" legend has been previously established by other historians, including Gerhard Müller and Joachim Petzold, for this study it is important to emphasize the destructive effect it had on the political authority of the new republican government.[9] Already faced with significant legitimacy concerns due to the revolutionary nature of the republic's inception, the *Dolchstoßlegende* continued to haunt Ebert's administration for several years as the military attempted to lay the responsibility for ending a lost war at the feet of the leaders of the Weimar Republic.

However, Ludendorff's assessment that the war had been lost was indeed correct. By late October 1918, the German Army was defeated. The well-trained and

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[7] Wilhelm Groener, *Lebenserinnerungen*, ed. Friedrich Freiherr Hiller von Gaertringen (*Göttingen,* 1957), 449.
[8] Ibid., 466.
[9] Gerhard Müller, *Novemberrevolution 1918: Dolchstoß oder Dolchstoßlegende* (Pähl: Verlag Hohe Warte, 1978); Joachim Petzold, *Die Dolchstoßlegende: eine Geschichtsfalschung im Dienst des deutschen Imperialismus und Militarismus* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1963).

disciplined regular troops that had made the German Army the envy of Europe in 1914 had long since ceased to provide the backbone of the army. Instead, a hastily trained and under-equipped force[10] composed of conscript farmers, miners, and tradesmen stood in their place, desperately trying to hold back what was becoming an irresistible wave of fresh American troops, British tanks, and French artillery. The right wing of the army was in open flight after 27 October, only seeking temporary refuge in poorly constructed and incomplete defensive lines anchored around Antwerp. By late October, the fighting strength of a battalion of the Army Group Kronprinz Rupprecht had been reduced to less than 150 men.[11] Additionally, internal army reports indicated that there were no available troops for any counterattacking opportunities in three of the main retreating army groups, Kronprinz Rupprecht, Deutscher Kronprinz, and Gallwitz.[12] International pressure to end the war was also mounting as Wilson sent another peace note to Germany on 24 October, demanding both Ludendorff's dismissal and civilian control over the army, as pre-conditions to any armistice in western Europe.[13] However, despite the

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[10] Although the German army did not lack for artillery, and many of the *Stoßtrupp* or "Storm Trooper" units were well-equipped, the Germans failed to provide an effective anti-tank gun in anywhere near sufficient numbers, nor did German administrators and industrialists have plans to field adequate numbers of tanks to counter the Allied dominance.
[11] Kluge, *Soldatenräte,* 127.
[12] Ibid., 127.
[13] Wilson's demands were presented at a conference of the state secretaries on 24 October. Erzberger and Scheidemann had no issues with dismissing Ludendorff, but recognized that asserting civilian control over the military would be very difficult at this point. Anticipating the army's rejection of Wilson's terms, the ministers debated the possibility of continuing the war and raising new troops through a *levée en masse*. Scheidemann was quick to douse any such hopes for fresh recruits, reminding the cabinet that "the people who would be summoned from the factories are under Bolshevik influence and would not have a favourable effect."

significant loss of life and series of retreats, after reviewing reports of troop conditions, Groener remarked at a meeting of the army leadership at the War Ministry that it was not the state of the war that was a great concern, but rather he feared for the "spirit of the Army."[14] With mounting casualties, equipment shortages, and failing leadership and morale, the German Army was thoroughly defeated by late October 1918. Therefore, one thing was increasingly clear for both political elites in Berlin and the men still fighting in the trenches, the time had come to end the war.

Rumours of a coup d'état at the Kaiser's headquarters in Spa and a possible last desperate sortie against the British Grand Fleet in the North Sea swirled around the German High Seas Fleet in the early days of November 1918, raising tensions between crews and officers. Matters came to head early on 31 October, when orders to make ready for sea were issued to the First Squadron. Less than a year removed from Kiel's first experience with organized mass protest during the January 1918 strike led by the Independent Social Democrats, once again the military governor of Kiel faced an open revolt.[15] However this time, sailors from the naval base and crews from the fleet initiated the unrest. Ordered to ready to put the ships to sea, only half of the crew of the SMS *Ostfriedland* reported for muster call, prompting the Chief of the First Squadron to address his crews to reminding them "it would be a

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[14] Kuno von Westarp, *Das Ende der Monarchie am 9. November 1918: Abschliessender Bericht nach den Aussagen der Beteiligten* (Oldenburg: Rauschenbusch, 1952), 42-48.
[15] In January 1918, led by the Independent Socialists, 400,000 workers went on strike in major industrial centres throughout Germany, including Kiel, Hamburg, and Mannheim.

sad affair, if all squadrons had crews that would refuse to show obedience."[16] As orders were given to take the squadron out to sea, crews activated the emergency fire extinguisher apparatus, dousing the boilers, and effectively immobilizing each ship of the squadron, until the entire fleet came to a halt, as word of the mutiny spread. While some commanders, like the captain of the SMS *Thüringen*, wanted to take the fight to the British before surrendering their "beautiful Fleet," the majority of the ships' crews did not share such romantic fatalism.[17] One sailor, after being interrogated by his superior officer, stated that the sailors would "refuse no order, but also under no circumstances set sail. … They would not participate in the desperation battle [*Verzweiflungskampf*] of the German Fleet."[18]

After the sailors succeeded in capturing several deck guns on the *Helgoland* and raising barricades across the *Thüringen*, torpedo boats were ordered to "restore order." Bloodshed was initially avoided when the captured vessels agreed to return to port and allow the torpedo boat crews on board, which resulted in the arrest of most of the sailors involved in the mutiny. However after several days of meetings involving soldiers and sailors in Kiel at the local Trade Union House, workers and members of the Independent Social Democrats prepared a demonstration on Sunday, 3 November, to protest the continued detention of the sailors from the

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[16] Marinesoldaten, "Die Vorgänge in Kiel am 31.10.1918," *Bergische Arbeiterstimme,* Nr 266, 12.11.1918, in *Die Deutsche Revolution, 1918-1919: Dokumente*, ed. Gerhard A. Ritter, (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1975), 38.
[17] The Commandant of the SMS *Thüringen* reportedly said "We want to use up our last 2000 rounds and go down with flags blowing!" To which the crew responded that he should "take off alone and go off with his own bang." Wilhelm Deist, "Die Politik der Seekriegsleitung und die Rebellion der Flotte ende Oktober 1918," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Vol 14, Nr 4 (October 1966), 358-9.
[18] Ibid, 39.

Third Squadron. While imperial military and civilian elites did not resist the rapidly spreading revolutionary movement, the Governor of Kiel showed no such reluctance, arming troops and deploying them to defend the military prison against any possible attempt by revolutionaries to liberate sailors arrested during the initial mutinies aboard the ships of the fleet.[19] Meanwhile, naval troops assembled in a large exercise square in the afternoon, listening to speeches from local labour leaders and the head of the Kiel Independent Social Democrats (USPD) before they marched through the city's streets with the goal of freeing the imprisoned sailors. When the crowd refused to disperse, officers first fired warning shots and then gave the order to fire on the demonstrators. By the time order had been restored in the early evening, the Kaiser's troops had killed eight of his subjects and wounded another twenty-nine.[20]

The next day, 4 November, the first Soldiers' Council was created in the Trade Union House. Within hours, several smaller garrisons had joined the sailors, providing a significant source of arms and manpower. Despite ordering machine guns to be deployed at major intersections in Kiel, the Governor, Admiral Wilhelm von Souchon, sent messengers to the new Soldiers' Council, to seek negotiations to prevent further bloodshed. Faced with preparing a list of demands, the sailors met

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[19] Additionally the commanders of the High Seas Fleet on 4 November released a set of guidelines for troops confronting demonstrators. The document stated, "resistance against orders of superiors and therefore the government must be broken with all means, so that the will of the government can be enforced." Kluge, *Soldatenräte*, 36.

[20] Michael Epkenhans, "'Red Sailors' and the Demise of the German Empire, 1918," in *Naval Mutinies of the Twentieth Century: An International Perspective*, ed. Christopher Bell and Bruce Elleman (London: Frank Cass, 2003). See also, Bernhard Rausch, "An Account of the Revolutionary Days" *Am Springquell der Revolution* (Kiel: Haase, 1921), 40-48.

with several representatives (*Vertrauensleute*) of the Kiel working class and delegates from the two social democratic parties. This alliance between "self-liberating" sailors and soldiers and the representatives of the organized working class transformed a sailors' mutiny over military affairs into a political revolution. From the very inception of the revolutionary council movement, military politics and control over the means of violence were intertwined with political developments.

The list of demands from the Kiel Soldiers' Council illustrates the initial military focus of the "revolutionary" organ. The council demanded:

1. Release of all arrested persons and political prisoners.
2. Complete freedom of speech and the press.
3. Removal of all censorship of the mail.
4. Appropriate treatment of the troops by superiors.
5. Return of all comrades (*Kameraden*) arrested on board [the ships] and from the barracks with impunity.
6. No sortie of the High Seas Fleet under any circumstances.
7. Any defensive measures that could lead to bloodshed are to be stopped.
8. Withdrawal of all troops not assigned to the local garrison.
9. All issues concerning the defense of private property will be settled by the Soldiers' Council.
10. There are no more superior officers off duty.
11. Unconditional personal freedom of every man from the end of his service until the start of his next.
12. Officers who declare their agreement with the measures of the Soldiers' Council, will be welcomed. All others will quit the service without claim to further provisions.
13. Every member of the Soldiers' Council is released from all duties.
14. In the future, all measures must be approved by the Soldiers' Council.[21]

Initially, this was a far cry from a Leninist manifesto extolling the virtues of a socialist utopia. The Soldiers' Councils' demands hardly amounted to a declaration of a new system of government or a political revolution. They did not call for the

[21] Ritter, *deutsche Revolution*, 44.

abdication of the Kaiser, or the meeting of a new National Assembly, or even the end of the war. Instead, they demonstrate that at its very core, the Kiel Revolt and the creation of the Kiel soldiers' council were fundamentally a military affair that only later became the origin of a revolutionary movement with wider political aspirations.

Following the alliance between the organized working class and the newly formed Soldiers' Council, the Kiel Mutiny began to spread across northern Germany and took on new political overtones. As 5 November dawned, red revolutionary flags hung from the masts of the imperial German fleet, from the Kiel Council Chambers and from barracks across town. On the same day, the first signs of a growing political awareness and agenda were seen in the pages of the *Schleswig-Holsteinische Volks Zeitung*. "The Revolution is on the march," wrote the newly retitled Workers' and Soldiers' Council. "What happened yesterday in Kiel will grow in the next few days and give impulse to a movement, which will spread throughout Germany. What the workers and soldiers want, is not chaos, but rather a new order, not anarchy, but rather a social Republic. … Long live Freedom! Hail the Social Republic!"[22] Despite pleas for restraint, the new movement continued to gain

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[22] "Die Revolution am Marsch," *Schleswig-Holsteinische Volks Zeitung*, in *Am Spingquell der Revolution*, Bernhard Rausch, 47. Concerning the outbreak and rise of the revolution in Germany also see, Wolfram Wette, *Gustav Noske und die Revolution in Kiel 1918/19*,(Heide: Boyens, 2010); Jürgen Elvert, Jürgen Jensen, and Michael Salewski, *Kiel, die Deutschen und die See* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992); Gabriel Kuhn, *All Power to the Councils!: A Documentary History of the German Revolution of 1918-19* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012); Henry Friedlander, *The German Revolution of 1918* (New York: London Garland, 1992); Alexander Gallus, *Die vergessene Revolution von 1918/19* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010); S. Miles Bouton, *And the Kaiser Abdicates: The German Revolution, November 1918 – August 1919* (Tennessee: Kessinger Publishing, 2010); Robert Habeck, Andrea

followers leading to violent actions, as more clashes in the streets occurred later in the afternoon leaving another eight dead and twelve wounded. Furthermore, violence broke out between officers loyal to the Kaiser and revolutionary sailors on the capital ship *König*, when sailors attempted to lower the imperial war flag and replace it with revolutionary colours. Two officers were killed and several others wounded before the revolutionaries succeeded in hoisting the red flag. Further violence was only avoided through the restraining influence of Social Democrat Reichstag Deputy Gustav Noske, who called for peace and order in the streets and the collection of all arms and ammunition at Soldiers' Council controlled military posts.[23] On 6 November the revolutionary movement spread to Lübeck, Hamburg, Bremen, Wilhelmshaven, Cuxhaven and several other towns along the North Sea coast. The next day it had reached Hanover and Braunschweig.[24] In Bavaria, Kurt Eisner declared the creation of an independent republic on the night of 7/8 November, under the direction of a provisional Workers', Soldiers' and Farmers' Council. By 8 November, councils were established in Cologne, Brunswick, Düsseldorf, Leipzig, and Frankfurt.[25] The next day the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Greater Berlin called for a general strike in the capital, while Majority Social Democrat Philipp Scheidemann proclaimed a new socialist Republic.[26] The

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Paluch, Frank Trende, *1918, Revolution in Kiel* (Heide: Boyens, 2008); Helga Grebrin, Peter Brandt, *Die deutsche Revolution 1918/19: eine Analyse* (Berlin: Vorwärts Buch, 2008).

[23] Gustav Noske, *Vom Kiel bis Kapp: Zur Geschichte der deutschen Revolution* (Berlin: Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft, 1920), 29.

[24] "Das Ende des Herzogtums Braunschweig, 7.11.1918," *Weser-Zeitung* 8 November 1918, in Ritter, *deutsche Revolution,* 55.

[25] Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, 7.

[26] Max von Baden, *Erinnerungen*, 640, in Ritter, *Die deutsche Revolution*, 73.

political authority of the imperial regime collapsed quickly as tide of new revolutionary bodies swept across Germany.

In response to the wave of revolutionary council bodies appearing throughout the Reich, imperial civilian and military authorities failed to take a centralized response. While there are numerous cases of individual army commanders, city commandants, or local administrators resisting the development of revolutionary organizations in their respective jurisdictions by occupying offices, blocking protest march routes and closing public squares,[27] a coordinated, well-planned and well-equipped counteraction never matured past preliminary discussions among the officers of the OHL and the Kaiser. However this should not imply unwillingness to confront the dire political situation developing within Germany's borders. The Kaiser and his leadership coterie of generals and civilian administrators were not stunned into what Eberhard Kolb termed a "paralysis of the will to maintain order."[28] Instead, a variety of options were explored over a series of conferences held at General Headquarters in Spa. On 6 November, Groener and the army leadership debated the viability of several potential schemes to deploy army to preserve the monarchy. Despite Groener's insistence that a penal expedition against the regions affected by the uprisings was unfeasible, the OHL decided to send an observer to various front line units "in order to determine the sentiment of the populace, rear echelon, and troops."[29] While a Major Jahreis was dispatched to Cologne on this reconnaissance mission, on 7 November, Groener met

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[27] Sixt von Arnim, "Von Arnims," *Die Rote Fahne*. 25 November 1918.
[28] Kolb, *The Weimar Republic,* 7.
[29] Kluge, *Soldatenräte*, 129.

again with the Kaiser to discuss the political situation in Berlin, and the possibility of a counterrevolutionary march across Germany. Wilhelm ordered Groener to prepare a military operation against revolutionary regions, so the Kaiser could set himself "at the top of his army, and to turn about, to secure the Rhine Line, and recapture Berlin and the *Heimat*."[30] Groener refused to plan such an operation stating that the position of the Field Army was already precarious, trapped between the advancing Entente troops and the increasingly powerful revolutionary soldier formations drawn from the rapidly disintegrating home armies. Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and Colonel General Hans von Plessen supported Groener's assessment, informing the Kaiser that the monarch's plan was "unfeasible." Additionally, Chief of the Field Railroads, General Martin von Oldershausen, provided a detailed map demonstrating the progress of the revolutionary movement and how this directly impeded the supply and mobility of any such march back into Germany. Oldershausen informed the assembled generals and the Kaiser that his staff estimated current supplies for the Field Army would last approximately eight days if no further supplies were received from revolutionary controlled areas. The march back to the Rhine alone would take a period of almost twenty days.[31]

Material considerations aside, Groener feared greatly for the morale and cohesion of front troops after contact with revolutionary forces. To preserve the political reliability and discipline of the Field Armies, Colonel Albrecht von Thaer proposed deploying small detachments behind the combat zone to prevent a Rhine crossing by revolutionaries. This plan was later rejected by Groener, who argued

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[30] Groener, *Lebenserinnungen*, 645.
[31] Kluge, *Soldatenräte*, 129.

that it was the new government's responsibility, not the army's, to provide such a "border guard."[32] Groener's concerns for the political reliability of the troops were confirmed by Major Jahreis' report on circumstances in Cologne on 8 November. Jahreis reported that a "restoration of the old regime through violence was impossible" and that a "battle against terror (*Kampf gegen Terror*) to secure order would only guarantee new violence."[33] Furthermore the operational report of Army Group Herzog Albrecht in Strassburg made abundantly clear the lack of means available to the OHL. The Chief of Staff of the Army Group, General Major Fritz von Loßberg described personally to Groener the "ruinous relationship with the Soldiers' Councils" and that nothing could be done to bring society back into order.[34]

On the evening of 8 November, the Kaiser and his generals assembled once more to assess the political and military circumstances, which by this point were inseparably connected. With Hindenburg, Plessen, and Groener present, intelligence was presented reporting the creation of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in the larger cities on the coast, in the West, and in the South, which had "torn apart the effective authority [of the imperial regime]."[35] Rations and ammunition supplies for the army had dwindled to critical levels, because revolutionaries had seized control of key railheads preventing any further supplies from reaching the front. Furthermore, troops dispatched to restore order in the *Heimat* had reportedly "almost everywhere gone over to the Revolution … even those troops deemed entirely reliable by the Command Authorities succumbed almost immediately to the

[32] Kluge, *Soldatenräte*, 130.
[33] Ibid., 131.
[34] Kluge, *Soldatenräte*, 131.
[35] Westarp, *Das Ende der Monarchie*, 42-48.

evil influences." The report's final warning could not be ignored: "The staging formations are completely infested and the Field Army is showing traces of the subversion."[36] The generals and the Kaiser did not have an instrument available to achieve their military-political goals. While Groener did state several times in his memoirs that he hoped to avoid a civil war, or *Bürgerkrieg*, the primary objections he presented in November 1918 against the Kaiser's proposed invasions were all based on military rationale. The will to take action against the revolutionaries was present in Spa, but not the means to translate it into action. Hindenburg and Groener begrudgingly accepted the realities of the military and political situation, but Plessen remained an advocate of a hardline position. He stated that it was "impossible for the Kaiser and his army to submit to a handful of revolutionaries. The Fatherland would not comprehend that the same army, which had been a wonder to the whole world for four years, could now be overcome by a band of nefarious sailors."[37] Although the officer corps remained committed to the Kaiser and the Hohenzollern dynasty, the rank and file of the army was no longer the politically reliable instrument of domestic stability that once stood so firmly behind the monarchy.

On 9 November, the pragmatic realities of the deteriorated military-political situation superseded the Kaiser's desires to violently crush the revolution. At 10 o'clock in the morning at the General Headquarters in Spa, a conference was held to discuss the abdication of the Kaiser. After a military presentation concerning the current situation at the front and the military circumstances within Germany,

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[36] Westarp, *Das Ende der Monarchie*, 63.
[37] Ibid., 64.

familiar battle lines once again divided the meeting. Several figures, including Plessen and General Graf Friedrich von der Schulenburg, argued that a military operation against the revolutionary *Heimat* was preferable to surrender. Although initially inclined to agree with those advocating a violent solution, the Kaiser eventually sided with Hindenburg and Groener, renouncing the use of military force to restore of the monarchy's position.[38] The Kaiser still hoped to retain his seat at the head of the Front Armies; however, Groener stated that this too would be impossible and informed Wilhelm that the army "would march home to the *Heimat* in peace and order under its commanding officers but not under the order of Your Majesty, as it no longer stands behind Your Majesty."[39] Indeed the weakness of the Kaiser's position as Supreme Warlord was made abundantly clear through the results of an informal survey of military personnel conducted the OHL, overseen by Colonel Wilhelm Heye. Heye informed the Kaiser and the army leadership that following a meeting with thirty-nine generals and regimental commanders of the Army Groups Kronprinz Rupprecht, Deutscher Kronprinz and Gallwitz, he was forced to report that not only would the troops refuse to support the Kaiser, but they would also most likely prove useless in any campaign against domestic "bolshevism." Heye posed two questions to the leaders of the three army groups. First, do the troops support the Kaiser and would it be feasible for the Kaiser to lead the troops on a campaign to recapture the *Heimat*? Second, are the troops in favour of Bolshevism and would they fight against the Bolsheviks? In response to the first question, one officer maintained that his troops stood behind the Kaiser, while

[38] Ritter, *deutsche Revolution*, 65. *Der Weltkrieg, 1914 bis 1918*, vol 14, p 316-17.
[39] Ibid.,65.

fifteen thought their forces would be doubtful and twenty-three commanders completely rejected the idea. For the second question, eight officers believed their troops would not fight against Bolshevism, twelve believed that retraining and education was necessary before deploying troops for such a battle, and the remaining nineteen said that it was doubtful that their troops would prove to be of any value in a campaign against left-wing revolutionaries.[40] With questionable empirical evidence, Heye informed the Kaiser that "the troops of Your Majesty are still faithful," but added more accurately, that "they are tired and indifferent and only want to have peace and freedom. They will not march against the *Heimat*, not with Your Majesty at the helm. They will not march against Bolshevism; they want solely to have a quick armistice, every hour is therefore important." Without any means to reassert his political authority through military force, and with the strong urging of a majority of his advisors, Wilhelm abdicated as German Kaiser.[41] Saying he was no longer responsible for the cohesion of the army, Wilhelm wrote in his final orders that above all he wished to avoid bloodshed and a destructive *Bürgerkrieg*.

Within ten days, imperial military and political authority collapsed, ending centuries of Hohenzollern rule throughout central Europe. While certainly there were influential men capable of commanding formations and directing the affairs of the Reich, the abdication of the Kaiser combined with the general breakdown of discipline and cohesion within the home army effectively destroyed centralized

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[40] Ritter, *deutsche Revolution,* 65.
[41] Initially Wilhelm sought to retain the title of King of Prussia, because he believed that should he surrender both thrones, the majority of the officers would leave the army, hindering a smooth and orderly demobilization.

control in both the political and military realms. Powerful bureaucrats and prominent generals, who were able to govern one of the largest economies in Europe and command millions of men in a bloody struggle spanning the entire continent, proved wholly incapable to tame and control the forces behind the revolution. Over the next five months various revolutionary bodies would attempt to unite the political arena under their control, but the military realm would take far longer to reorganize. Therefore as the early revolutionary events show, political events were fundamentally connected to military affairs and physical violence. There was no neat division between political and military acts, and as one authority collapsed the ripples were keenly felt in the other.

The German Army found itself in an unprecedented situation in November 1918. Not since Prussia's defeat at the hands of Napoleon in 1806 had the fate of the army been so uncertain. With the abdication of the Kaiser and the chaotic competition between the new leftwing political bodies attempting to consolidate political authority over the government bureaucracy in Berlin, the army leadership had no stable partner with which to work, despite the early attempts to forge an alliance between Groener and Ebert. Neither the army, nor the new SPD-led cabinet were able to effectively dominate the respective realm over which they claimed to be masters. Just as the council movement and the Spartacus League challenged Ebert's authority within the political world, so to did armed revolutionaries and groups of politicized veterans signify the weaknesses of the army leadership under Hindenburg and Groener to control military power within the new republic.

CHAPTER II: DIVIDED POLITICAL AUTHORITY

By the official start of the revolutionary period in Germany, 9 November 1918, the imperial regime had already ceased to effectively function as a military and political authority. The most significant factor preventing the firm foundation of a new political system to succeed the Hohenzollern monarchy was not the existence of anti-Republican elites as some historians have argued,[1] but rather the initial splintering of political authority by competing left-wing revolutionary institutions and organizations. Despite numerous attempts to produce a lasting power sharing arrangement between the Majority Social Democrats (SPD), the Independent Socialists (USPD), the Spartacus League, and the various local and regional councils, effective governance did not materialize until well into 1919, once the SPD leadership was firmly resolved to employ armed violence to secure centralized monopoly political authority for their social democracy. Ultimately, the solution to these political disputes and tensions was not found through conventions or board-

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[1] There is a well-established historiography on the foundation of the Weimar Republic, although only recently have scholars found their way out from Karl Dietrich Erdmann's 1955 statement that "all research into the history of the Weimar Republic is necessarily governed, whether expressly or otherwise, by the question as to the causes of its collapse." For more on the foundation of the republican government in Germany, see: Richard Bessel, *Germany After the First World War* (Oxford: OUP, 1993); Dirk Blasius, *Weimars Ende* (Göttingen, 2005); H. Boldt, "Der Artikel 48 der Weimarer Reichsverfassung," in *Die Weimarer Republik: Belagerte Civitas*, ed. M Stürmer (Königstein, 1980); FL Carsten, *Revolution in Central Europe, 1918-1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Alexander Gallus, *Die vergessene Revolution von 1918/19* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010); Eberhard Kolb, *Vom Kaiserreich zur Weimarer Republik* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1972); Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987); Heinrich August Winkler, *Die Sozialdemokratie und die Revolution 1918/19* (Berlin: Dietz, 1979); Winkler, *Von der Revolution zur Stabilisierung. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1918-1924* (Berlin: Dietz, 1984).

room negotiations, but instead through the use of organized violence to enforce one group's political will on others. The historian Detlev Peukert described the fateful months from November 1918 to January 1919, as a "period of decisions," and while the actions taken during this time proved to be significant for the future development of the Weimar Republic, it was also a period of crisis, failed compromises, and divergence. Initially used as a term of derision by USPD critics to describe the SPD-led Cabinet's suppression of leftwing organizations in the aftermath of the 6 December Foreign Office Putsch, Ebert would soon adopt this concept as his guiding principle in response to domestic unrest. This was the birth of *Gewaltpolitik*, the politics of violence and the violence of politics.

Revolutions and Declarations

At noon on 9 November the last imperial chancellor, Prince Max von Baden, announced the abdication of the Kaiser, technically before the last Hohenzollern monarch had officially renounced the throne, to growing crowds on the streets of Berlin. He also transferred power to the leader of the SPD, Friedrich Ebert, after Ebert appeared at the chancellery building and declared himself ready to govern in accordance with the Reich constitution and promised to call elections for a new national assembly. Ebert's haste to secure his access to the functions of the state was a direct reaction to the growing power of the grassroots political movement that spread across Germany through the formation of workers' and soldiers' councils. Ebert desperately wanted to preserve "peace and order" in Germany and to consolidate the significant constitutional gains made through the Max von Baden

government, including new civil liberties and Reichstag authority over the position of chancellor. Declaring in a widely republished newspaper article that "human life is sacred" and "property is to be protected from arbitrary seizures" in his announcement of the new Reich government on 9 November, Ebert labeled anyone who dared to "defile this wonderful movement" an enemy of the people.[2] However, he was not the only leading Social Democrat who recognized the need for quick and decisive action. Philipp Scheidemann declared a German Republic from the Reichstag building to an on-looking crowd, before Ebert had fully implemented his arrangements for the immediate future.

Scheidemann rightly saw that the SPD government needed to assume some form of control over revolutionary events as new challengers emerged supported by masses of workers and demonstrators. Karl Liebknecht had already laid claim to political authority throughout the Reich, declaring a Socialist Republic earlier on 9 November at a Spartacus rally in Berlin. A body pre-emptively calling itself the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Berlin already called for a general strike and a meeting to organize all council bodies in the capital. The Revolutionary Shop Stewards (*revolutionäre Obleute*), who were associated with the left wing of the USPD, met and adopted a resolution to elect workers' and soldiers' councils the next day in the Circus Busch, who should then proceed to form a new provisional government. The soldiers' councils in the greater Berlin region also noted that "a good part" of the local garrisons had placed themselves and their ample quantities of machine guns at the disposal of the workers and soldiers.

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[2] "Die neue Reichsregeriung, 9 November 1918," in Ritter, *deutsche Revolution*, 75.

Thus political authority in Berlin was immediately divided following the abdication of the Kaiser. The divisions between the chaotic jumble of revolutionary political institutions and organizations would only become more entrenched in the following weeks, as each body appeared determined to cling to any claim they might have to direct the political affairs of the Reich. This plurality within the political realm had a significant impact on the initial development of the republican government. While this seems to echo the structuralist arguments once used to explain the collapse of the republic in 1933,[3] this study does not hold with the determinism of this earlier school of thought, as it minimizes the significant and agency of key political figures and movements that developed in the final few years of the republican era. Although the council movement and revolutionaries, on both the left and right wing of the political spectrum, prevented the smooth and peaceful establishment of the republic, this did not somehow predestine failure for the first modern democratic regime in German history. Throughout this chapter the various competing bodies will be examined, illustrating the divisive effect they had on political authority, which in turned had a significant impact on military affairs, decentralizing control over the means of violence.

The Executive Committee of the Greater Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Councils

[3] This view of the collapse of the Weimar Republic held that there were significant issues in the initial foundation and constitutional structure of the republic that eventually directly contributed to the rise of the National Socialists in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Perhaps no institution of the revolutionary Weimar era has generated more diverse interpretations of its nature and implications than the council movement. While some scholars, like Ulrich Kluge have viewed the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils as failed revolutionaries trying to mimic Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky and the Bolsheviks in Russia, others, such as Scott Stephenson advanced the argument that they were as an expression of war weariness rather than political ambition. A smaller and older group of authors typified by Axel Schild contended that these early revolutionary bodies were a potential democratizing force in German society, politics, and economic life that failed to come to fruition.[4] While these interpretations all have some basis in historical events, they are nonetheless intentionalist analyses, rather than examinations of the council movement's function and impact on political authority in late 1918 and early 1919. Given Lenin and the Bolshevik's criticism of German socialists at the September 1915 meeting in Zimmerwald, Switzerland, citing their lack of revolutionary zeal, arguments that view the council movement as the German equivalent of the Soviet movement in

[4] For more on the foundation of the republic and the impact of the revolutionary organizations, see Eberhard Kolb, *Die Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Innenpolitik, 1918-1933* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1978); Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992); Scott Stephenson, *The Final Battle: Soldiers of the Western Front and the German Revolution of 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Ulrich Kluge, *Soldatenräte und Revolution: Studien zum Militärpolitik in Deutschland 1918/19* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975); Gerhard A. Ritter, *Die deutsche Revolution 1918-19: Dokumente* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1975); Eric Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton University Press, 2008); Peter von Oerzten, *Betriebsräte in der Novemberrevolution: Eine politikwissenschaftliche Untersuchung über Ideengehalt und Struktur der betrieblichen und wirtschaftlichen Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Revolution 1918/19* (Göttingen, 1962).

Russia are not supported by the view of key figures at the time.[5] While historian Scott Stephenson expertly traces expression of exhaustion, fatigue, and war weariness in German troop formations and the *Heimat* at the end of the war, his work does not explore the aggressive political and military policies of workers' and soldiers' councils across Germany, which partially challenges attempts to view the council movement as largely a war-weary response to the events of November 1918. However, in the decrees and actions of the Executive Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Berlin, the nature of the council movement can be fruitfully explored to establish the damaging role the institution played in the re-establishment of political authority in early revolutionary Weimar.

The first large-scale organization of revolutionaries into council organs in Berlin occurred at a meeting at the Circus Busch on 10 November. Approximately 3000 workers and soldiers attended the assembly and elected Emil Barth (USPD) and Richard Müller (USPD) as chairmen. The assembly confirmed the newly created joint SPD/USPD Council of People's Commissars (*Rat der Volksbeaufragten*) as a provisional government; however, far left-wing members in attendance also appointed an Executive Committee (*Vollzugsrat*) for the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Berlin.[6] The radical left, led by the Spartacus League and the Independent

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[5] For more details on the Zimmerwald meeting in September 1915, and the Second International Conference in Kienthal, Switzerland in April 1916 which saw Liebknecht's further alignment with Lenin and the Bolsheviks, see Charles Burdick and Ralph Lutz, *The Political Institutions of the German Revolution, 1918-1919* (New York: The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, 1966); David Marples, *Motherland: Russia in the 20th Century* (London: Longman, 2002).

[6] "Die erste Sitzung der A. und S. Rat am 10 November, 1918" *Vorwärts*, Nr 311, 11 November, 1918.

Socialists, intended to use the Circus Busch meeting to consolidate their grip on political authority in Berlin and declare themselves the only legitimate source of power in the country, owing to their support from the organized workers demonstrating in the streets. Soldiers' council representatives and Majority Social Democrats were only permitted entry into the new council bodies after a long passionate negotiation with Executive Council Chairman Richard Müller.[7] The creation of the Executive Committee was a direct reaction and a challenge by leftwing radicals to the influence Ebert and the Majority Social Democrats had within the government bureaucracy.

Although the two socialist parties agreed to cooperate within the council movement structure, the pre-existing divisions that caused the German socialist movement to split apart during the war continued to exist and influence events in the early Weimar Republic. At the centre of the divide was differing opinions on the importance of revolution in socialist ideology. While Marx had characterized the seizure of power as a revolution, German successors in the SPD had downplayed the violent connotations of the term "revolution" and instead saw the role of the party as to act as a guide, educator, and organizer of the proletariat, rather than as the

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[7] Establishing the right to equal representation in the Executive Council was the express goal of Social Democrat Otto Wels, then serving as a member of the *Vorwärts* editorial staff. Wels organized the distribution of over 40,000 leaflets before the Circus Busch meeting and attempted to pack the assembly with as many SPD loyal members as possible. The Independent Socialists viewed his actions as a direct attempt to dilute their control over the council movement, and to prevent the Executive Council from operating as a revolutionary 'counter-government.' "Die erste Sitzung der A. und S. Rat am 10 November, 1918" *Vorwärts*, Nr 311, 11 November, 1918. Effectively, over the next few months, USPD fears were proven justified. Due to leadership issues and above all divided membership, the Executive Council was not a model of smooth and effective administration.

perpetrator of a violent and bloody overthrow of the capitalist bourgeois state.[8] In contrast, radical socialists saw mass action as a crucial component to any campaign to lead the workers on a path to a socialist utopia. Eventually, this ideological difference and the decision to continue to support of the war effort caused a schism, and the German socialist movement split on 6 April 1917, when dissident SPD delegates broke away from the main party and founded the "German Independent Social Democratic Party." Although less than a quarter of the size of the wartime membership of the Majority Socialists, the new USPD was very active in certain regions, particularly in Berlin, Leipzig, Halle and Stuttgart.[9] While many of the leaders of the new party, including Eduard Bernstein, Karl Kautsky, and Kurt Eisner, initially believed that the split was only temporary and unification of the leftwing would happen in the future, the events of the immediate postwar revolution cemented the divide between the two groups.

After its creation, the Executive Committee of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council wasted no time in declaring itself the supreme authority in Germany, even though they already had conceded that the Council of People's Commissars would serve as the acting provisional government. In a declaration of 10 November, the Executive Committee announced the end of "old Germany," and that "the much vaunted power of militarism is broken all over the world." After trumpeting the success of the Kiel revolutionaries, the declaration stated, "the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils are now the holders of political power," and called

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[8] David W. Morgan, *The Socialist Left and the German Revolution: A History of the German Independent Social Democratic Party, 1917-1922* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 25.
[9] Ibid., 68.

for the creation of council bodies in all military garrisons and rural communities throughout Germany, although no specific plan for this process was ever drafted or implemented.[10] The council movement also took this moment to send a "declaration of sympathy" to their revolutionary brothers in Soviet Russia, possibly as an initial attempt to open official relations with Lenin's regime. These types of declarations would become a pattern for the Executive Council: assertion, or re-assertion, of their right to supreme authority in political affairs, followed by delegation of administration matters to others, like Ebert and Scheidemann, or the civilian bureaucrats still left in the government ministries from the imperial regime. This reluctance to directly handle the daily affairs of running the country was a significant factor in the eventual marginalization and ultimate termination of the revolutionary institution in early 1919 at the hands of Ebert's cabinet. The Executive Committee's haphazard operation produced considerable confusion within the political sphere making the stability of the Majority Social Democrats even more attractive to the German populace still reeling from the end of the war and the collapse of the imperial regime.

Although not particularly effective as a replacement of the political authority and stability of the Hohenzollern monarchy due to internal organization issues and conflicts between key figures within the leadership, as well as a failure to produce a party-state relationship that mirrored the situation in Soviet Russia, the Executive Committee certainly did not lack for activity. The *Vollzugsrat* was principally concerned with overseeing three main issues that they felt were pressing. First, the

[10] "Berliner Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte– 10 November, 1918" *Reichsanzeiger*, Nr 268, 12 November 1918.

so-called Jurisdiction Question (*Kompetenzfrage*), or the long running power struggle with the Council of People's Commissars for political hegemony. Second establishing the command authority (*Kommandogewalt*) of the council movement over all military formations. Finally, the Executive Committee wanted to guide and regulate the development of council institutions across Germany to establish control over local and regional politics.

The question of political jurisdiction between the People's Commissars and the Executive Committee stretched throughout the majority of November and December 1918, and into the following year, despite the provisional settlement of the Jurisdiction Question at the First Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils held in Berlin in mid-December. Much of the confusion concerning each organization's particular area of responsibility stemmed from the prolonged existential debates within the Executive Council over its own functions and the broader implications and role of the council movement in general. Erich Däumig, the intellectual leader of the Executive Council, proposed guiding principles for the councils on 13 November, which sparked a lengthy debate in a full plenary sitting of the *Vollzugsrat* on 16 November, although twenty-one appointed members failed to attend the meeting.[11] Däumig argued that the revolution had destroyed all legitimacy of the political institutions established under the monarchy, and thus the system of Workers' and Soldier's Councils must take its place. Seeking to bring Marxist theory into reality, Däumig proposed a "socialist Republic" that would operate as the transition vehicle to the socialist state form (*Sozialistische*

[11] Barch-Licht R201-23, "Sitzung der Vollzugsrat der A. und S. Räte, 16 November 1918," page 5.

Staatsform).[12] He went on to insist that the councils should assume governmental authority as the legislative and administration body in Germany, and this could only be accomplished through the continued union between workers and soldiers.[13] Further cooperation with the Council of People's Commissars would lead to a bourgeois subversion of the accomplishments of the revolution, declared Däumig.

Therefore he envisioned a "conversion" of the army, so that soldiers' councils "can become an important factor in the military question."[14] However, for all of Däumig's rhetoric demanding action and authority, he was forced to admit that the revolutionaries were not in a position to overthrow all institutions and fill those positions with new personnel. Above all, Däumig recognized that the weakness of the Executive Council lay in its inability to enforce its will. He argued:

> The mass of the Soldiers only converted to us because they have grievances through the long war. They only have one jet of steam to vent. Again and again the soldiers have turned against the workers. We need to start thinking about the question of the Red Army. The soldiers in their great mass are not politically intelligent, only able to determine which side is right. … We must now focus our attention on members of the army. … With all available means, these declarations must encompass the soldiers so they are aware of their rights. The world revolution is still not completed.[15]

Däumig, and his supporters within the Independent Socialist party, were deeply opposed to evolutionary socialist policies advocated by the Majority Socialists. He argued that the revolution could never be safeguarded by converting of the old German political system into a bourgeois democratic republic. Instead, it could only

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[12] Barch-Licht R201-23, "Sitzung der Vollzugsrat der A. und S. Räte, 16 November 1918," page 5.
[13] Ibid. 5.
[14] Ibid., page 6.
[15] Barch-Licht R201-23, "Sitzung der Vollzugsrat der A. und S. Räte, 16 November 1918," page 8.

take place "in a proletariat republic built upon socialist economic principles." Däumig's proposals demonstrate the sharp ideological divisions that existed within the Executive Council, but also between the *Vollzugsrat* and the Council of People's Commissars. These differences on policy often frustrated attempts to reconcile the two institutions in the following months. Committed radical socialist revolutionaries, like Däumig and Georg Ledebour, repeatedly sought "clarification" of political jurisdiction precisely because they ideologically chaffed under their cooperation with the evolutionary policies of the Majority Social Democrats. Debates over areas of responsibility regularly erupted in Executive Council meetings throughout November and December.[16] The continual renegotiation of boundaries and duties effectively undermined political authority in Berlin and greater Germany.

The political disputes between the Executive Committee and the People's Commissars spilled over into debates concerning military command authority. Distrusting the imperial army leadership, the *Vollzugsrat* issued a declaration to create a new military institution as early as 12 November. Two thousand "socialist qualified and politically organized comrades and workers with military training" were called upon to join a new Red Guard to defend the revolution in Berlin.[17] Although formation of the Red Guard was suspended the next day due to a lack of support from the Soldiers' Councils, this was only the first foray into military politics

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[16] Lengthy debates occurred in the 26 and 29 November plenary sittings of the Executive Council. Additional concerns about jurisdiction were expressed by Oskar Rusch on the eve of the First Congress of Councils on 12 December. "Threads are converging" in "individual [government] departments," warned Rusch, "and we are not able to control them." Barch Licht R201-24, "Sitzung der Vollzugsrat der A. und S. Räte, 12 December 1918"

[17] "Aufruf des Vollzugsrats zur Bildung einer Roten Garde vom 12.11.1918," in Ritter,*deutsche Revolution*, 95-96.

by the Executive Council. Throughout their meetings in November and December, there were numerous calls for new military institutions to be created, ranging from a Red Army to a Praetorian Army (*Prätojanerarmee*), as well as debates over conversion of existing military formations along socialist principles to give greater influence to the Soldiers' Councils.[18] While these new organizations never progressed past the planning phase, the records of the Executive Council assemblies demonstrate a hostile attitude towards the military in general. Specific dealings with the former imperial army leadership also served to sow confusion in military affairs. Although the Council of People's Commissars was acknowledged by the Executive Council as a provisional government for the state, and numerous *Vollzugsrat* members expressed awareness of their inability to oversee day-to-day affairs, the Executive Council repeatedly encroached into military affairs. On 15 November, the *Vollzugsrat* sent an order to the Supreme Army Command, informing them that a new command relationship was necessary to smoothly execute demobilization over the following weeks.[19] The independent general commands, the General Staff and the OHL were to be subordinated under the War Ministry, which in turn was subject to control by the *Vollzugsrat* of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Greater Berlin, according to Executive Committee members Brutus Molkenbuhr and Richard Müller. This decree is indicative of two trends. First, it demonstrates the Executive Council's ongoing intrusions in military politics and civil-military relations. Second, the vulnerable position of the *Vollzugsrat* within the Reich administration is

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[18] Barch-Licht R201-24, "Protokoll der Plenarsitzung des Vollzugsrat am 11. Dezember 1919."
[19] "Der Vollzugsrat verkündet die Unterstellung der Obersten Heeresleitung unter Das Kriegsministerium, 15.11.1918" in Ritter,*deutsche Revolution,* 98-99.

apparent. The Executive Council could not rely upon the Soldiers' Councils acting as a new ersatz revolutionary officer corps to direct military affairs according to the dictates of the *Vollzugsrat*, nor was the *Vollzugsrat's* authority recognized nationally, particularly in western Germany.[20] Effectively, the Executive Council did not have the means to actually enforce their military policy, and could only issue confusing declarations that contradicted decrees from the People's Commissars. Unable to dominate military affairs, instead the *Vollzugsrat* only served to obfuscate matters.

Given the optimism of the 10 November declaration of "sympathy," the failure to develop and nurture a relationship with Lenin and Bolsheviks appears to have been a missed opportunity for pan-socialist cooperation. However, this initial olive branch to the Soviets was only ever offered due to the insistence of Liebknecht, and reflected neither the desires of the majority of the council movement leadership, nor the desires of the SPD and USDP. Once Liebknecht, Luxemburg, and the Spartacus League - the only German socialists endorsed by Lenin and Trotsky – were excluded from the leadership circles of the council movement, the main impetus for closer cooperation with the Russians subsided substantially, even as the *Vollzugsrat* slowly made preparations to send a delegation to Russia. Indeed, attitudes towards the Russian revolution and the Bolsheviks were divided within German socialist political circles in November 1918 and had been since before the

[20] The Executive Council in Berlin periodically sought to expand its jurisdiction, most notably on 29 November in response to fears of a possible French occupation of the entire left bank of the Rhine and potential dissolution of all Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. The Berlin based *Vollzugsrat* was never recognized as the commanding authority in the Rhineland, angering several delegates from western Germany, who were present at the plenary debates on the matter at the end of November 1918. For the full text of the debate, see Barch-Licht R201-23, "29 November 1918 Protokoll der Plenarsitzung des Vollzugsrat."

end of the First World War. Even before the Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917, the USPD was split in their view of Lenin and his party. Some German socialists, like Ernst Däumig, viewed the events in Russia as an example to be followed and replicated in Germany. "We are not mere spectators of events in Russia," Däumig argued. "We participate in them with full fervor. We mean to learn from what happens there and then apply the lessons fruitfully to the coming struggles for the salvation of humanity from the claws of capitalism."[21] However, while many socialists, both independent and majority, talked about learning from Lenin and the Russian example, there was little thought of copying their methods. Indeed the only clearly Russian practices reproduced in Germany were the creation of the workers' and soldiers' councils and a less militarily powerful version of Red Guard units. Generally, moderate and conservative socialists disapproved of harsh measures adopted by the Bolsheviks like the suppression of opposition parties and their newspapers, as well as the harassment of rival socialist groups, even as they argued that the Russian Revolution was a positive sign of the potential oncoming of the world wide socialist revolution.[22]

Direct contact with the Bolshevik regime in Russia was deliberately kept to a minimum during the first few months after the war, even by the more sympathetic USPD. Worried about the Entente reaction to closer ties between revolutionary Germany and Russia, both the USPD and SPD decided to reject significant deliveries of Russian flour, so as to not raise fears of German support for a world wide socialist revolution. Further dampening relations, the two German socialist parties could not

[21] Morgan, *Socialist Left,* 99.
[22] Ibid., 102.

overlook the Soviet government's desire to work directly with the workers' and soldiers' councils and by pass the cabinet altogether. As a result, both the SPD and USPD chose to "proceed in a dilatory manner" when it came to Soviet Russia.[23] This seemed to confirm for the Russians that Ebert's cabinet was a "Kerensky regime" or precursor to a true socialist government, and they ceased to make friendly approaches, instead focusing on improving their relationship with the council movement.[24]

Therefore the leaders of the council movement found themselves in a difficult position. If the Executive Committee sought closer cooperation with Lenin's Bolsheviks, this would have necessitated an undesirable rapprochement with Liebknecht, potentially altering the council movement's leadership and role in German domestic politics. Furthermore, the SPD and USPD members of the council bodies were keenly aware that their respective party leadership did not seek closer ties with Soviet Russia. Additionally, fearing the consequences for peace negotiations with the Entente, the Council of People's Commissars urged the *Vollzugsrat* and all Workers' and Soldiers' Councils to delay any open communication or formal relationships with Soviet Russia in order to avoid antagonizing the Entente Powers, who were engaged with military operations against Lenin's Bolsheviks. Therefore an awkward stalemate ensued throughout the life of the *Vollzugsrat*, whereby association with Soviet Russia was never outwardly condemned, but neither was it aggressively sought out.

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[23] Morgan, *Socialist Left,* 146.
[24] Ibid., 147.

Thus, in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, the Russian Revolution had a limited and mixed impact on events in revolutionary Germany. While the March and October revolutions in St Petersburg and Moscow certainly provided an emotional boost to socialists in Germany during the war, offering hope that a revolution could be possible in central and western Europe, few tangible connections or material links were developed in Germany. Indeed, most German socialists were wary of events in Russia being mimicked in Germany. The harsh measures enacted by the Bolsheviks were dutifully defended by German socialists, particularly by the USPD, but there was no desire to see such tactics used in Germany.[25] The editors of the socialist newspaper, the *Volksstimme,* insisted they wanted nothing to do with Russian methods: as Germany "was not a Tartar state, but a European one."[26] The leadership of the SPD and USPD generally viewed the Russian revolution encouraging sign that revolution was a possibility in the near future, but it was also a cautionary example filled with policies and characteristics that needed to be avoided when German workers mobilized to overthrow the bourgeois capitalist state.

Overall, the Executive Committee was a clear failure. Although it produced a whole host of policies and objectives, it was not adept at organizing effective means to achieve their goals. Preferring debate and negotiation to action, the committee only ever served as a forum for declarations of protest, outrage, and indignation that other institutions were not complying with their edicts. Most significantly, the committee failed to guide Germany to a socialist state as a precursor to a Marxist

[25] Schumann, xxxiii.
[26] Ibid., xxxiii.

utopia. Instead, it only managed to fragment political and military authority in Berlin and across Germany, critically delaying the re-centralization of political power and providing the conditions for the further development of unrest in the streets and countryside.

Soldiers' Councils

Representing the intersection between politics and violence, soldiers' councils were quite heterogeneous. They differed based on location, from the eastern to western front, by type of deployment, home or battlefront, as well as through human factors at work in each formation of soldiers, such as combat fatigue, lingering patriotism, and unit cohesion. Like the majority of their civilian counterparts, most soldiers who supported the council movement did so out of a fervent desire for peace at any cost. However, given the bloated size of the deteriorating German Army in late 1918, even if 90 percent of soldiers expressed no political ambitions apart from a wish to end the war, this still leaves a potential body of nearly half a million well-armed, military trained personnel seeking to influence political affairs in Germany through the means available at their disposal: organized military violence.[27] And yet, no

[27] There are no precise statistics for political veterans active from November 1918 to late 1923 due to the fluid membership of such formations. However, several authors have proposed estimates based on documented sizes of Freikorps units that worked with the Reichswehr at various times, as well as reviewing the anecdotal, and often inflated, records of the Freikorps themselves. James Diehl estimated that 1.5 million men participated in volunteer organizations of some kind during this period, with approximately one-third of those men enlisting in Freikorps formations for at least some period of service. Alternatively, Robert Waite set the number of Freikorps troops around 200,000 to 400,000. Harold Gordon accepted the latter number as generally accurate, while Hagen Schulze argued that there were no more than 250,000 recorded volunteers in volunteer units. When incorporating the work

grand "Army of German Soldiers' Councils" was ever created. Soldiers' councils were largely disbanded by mid-1919, forcibly broken by Freikorps troops, operating at the behest of Ebert's government. The power of the Soldiers' Councils proved fleeting for three main reasons. First, the form of the soldiers' council movement was tied inextricably to the structure of the imperial army. As armies, army corps, and divisions demobilized, the physical home for the soldiers' councils similarly dissipated. Second, there was no effective centralized leadership of the movement to coordinate council bodies in various military formations. And finally, due to leadership deficiencies in both organizations, an effective partnership between the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council in Berlin and soldiers' councils established in army units failed to materialize.

The revolution spread unevenly through the units of the imperial army. Soldiers stationed in barracks within Germany were the first formations to elect councils and assume control over their own affairs. After 9 November formations in the east began to appoint and then elect soldiers' councils as well. Soldiers based in Grodno formed a soldiers' council on 10 November and assumed military command

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of Erwin Könnemann on *Zeitfreiwilligenverbände* and the *Einwohnerwehren*, the 200,000 figure appears quite low. Thus an average composite of these studies yields the 300,000 to 500,000 figure used in this work for the Freikorps. James Diehl, "Germany: Veterans' Politics under Three Flags" *in The War Generation: Veterans of The First World War*, ed. Stephen R Ward (Port Washington, NY: National University Publications, 1975), 162. Robert Waite, *The Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Post-War Germany, 1918-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952); Harold Gordon, *The Reichswehr and the German Republic, 1919-1926*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Erwin Könnemann, *Einwohnerwehren und Zeitfreiwilligenverbände: Ihre Funktion beim Aufbau eines neuen imperialistischen Militärsystem* (*November 1918 bis 1920*) (Berlin: Deutscher Militärverlag, 1971), Appendix - Document 23 "Reich Zentrale für Einwohnerwehren, Nr 11/Feb 1920."

from the Military Government of Lithuania-South. Army Group Kyiv elected representatives on 12 November and formed an official "Great Soldiers' Council of Kyiv" on 15 November along with a 15 point programme outlining changes to the existing command structure and social status of the troops. From Kyiv, the revolution spread to other command centres of the German occupation forces in Kowel, Luzk, Rowno, Bjelaja, Zerkow, Shitomir, Odessa, and Sevastopol.[28] After soldiers formed a supreme Council Committee to represent smaller bodies spread through units of the 10th Army based in Minsk, the commander of the army, General Erich von Falkenhayn, complied with an OHL directive and ordered the creation of soldiers' councils for all formations. Falkenhayn went further however, hoping to co-opt the strength of the council movement. He drafted a plan for the central construction of an Organization of Councils in his command region, which would have retained the authority of the officer corps.[29] Although revolutionary soldiers ignored Falkenhayn's proposals, his plans to work with the councils rather than eliminate them, nonetheless demonstrate more pragmatism and less hostility towards the revolutionaries than typically associated with the army leadership. Soldiers' councils spread quickly along the Baltic coast, aided by revolutionary sailors traveling from port to port, and major centres of military operations like Riga and Kowno soon were affected as well. The Central Soldiers' Council of the 8th Army stationed in Riga issued an extensive list of demands on 11 November that was typical of soldiers' requests. While the soldiers demanded personal freedoms, better provisions and rations, they primarily focused on securing command authority for

[28] Kluge, *Soldatenräte*, 95.
[29] Ibid., 96.

the Soldiers' Councils and restricting the powers of the officer corps along the Russian model.[30] Only once their authority over the officers was established, did most soldiers' councils in the east begin to focus on returning home and demobilization, although many formations were kept in the field in eastern Europe for several months until Entente troops could be deployed to relieve them.

While the OHL proved ineffective in controlling the spread of soldiers' councils in the east, they were far more successful in the *Westheer*. Although there were some isolated cases of soldiers' councils briefly forming in occupied Belgium near Antwerp, Louvain, and Namur, the western armies largely remained free of soldiers' councils until late November and early December.[31] Scott Stephenson has argued that soldiers in the western field armies did not succumb to revolutionary movements until they had direct contact with such organizations when they returned to the *Heimat*, because of six factors: exhaustion, isolation, alienation, selection, cohesion, and management.[32] He states that battle fatigue experienced by front troops resisting the Allies' advance precluded extra-circular political activities. Additionally, Stephenson contends that western front soldiers were more isolated than their eastern counterparts during the final months of the war, as the army canceled mail service and leaves, and therefore were less exposed to anti-war and

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[30] Kluge, *Soldatenräte,* 97.
[31] At Wilhelmshöhe, near Kassel, nine "front delegates" from the *Westheer* gave testimony concerning the conditions in the army. Additionally, representatives from a mobile troop unit, calling themselves the Soldiers' Council of Bad Ems, demanded the election of soldiers' councils in every company of their formation, although there was still no recorded central organization at this time. For more information, see Kluge, *Soldatenräte*, 95-107.
[32] Scott Stephenson, *The Final Battle: Soldiers of the Western Front and the German Revolution of 1918* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8.

anti-military revolutionary propaganda. Finally, Stephenson credits the OHL and the officer corps' efforts to manage the outlook and political perceptions of the rank and file troops under their command, and prevent any "subversion" of their most vital combat component, the front-line soldier.[33] As long as the Supreme Command of the Army was able to preserve a separate battle-front community somewhat differentiated from the revolutionary home front, Stephenson's analysis of the western front soldiers is amply supported by the available documents. Once this temporary space began to deteriorate through contact with revolutionaries and demobilization, the western front soldiers proved just as supportive of the council movement as troops in other theatres. Thus, western front soldiers' councils generally did not play a prominent role in the development of domestic soldiers' councils during the first days of the revolution. Usually soldiers' councils as a military-political movement were better organized and more engaged in political affairs within the Reich borders.

Due to the initial lack of guidelines governing the creation of soldiers' councils, several models existed in the first few months. Many councils were largely homogenous, excluding civilian members and forming without influence from local party organizations, and usually in units where the imperial army structure had not fully disintegrated. However, there are also examples of heterogeneous soldiers' councils, usually built on an alliance between the representatives of the organized working class and mutinous sailors, soldiers and striking workers.[34] When electing representatives, votes commonly divided between three types of members:

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[33] Stephenson, *Final Battle,* 9-13.
[34] Kluge, *Soldatenräte*, 108-109.

prominent leaders without political affiliations, members of socialist political parties and labour unions, and men who performed specialized functions within the military hierarchy.[35] While there were soldiers' councils members from all ranks of the army, including officers and enlisted men, the backbone of the council movement came from the 'middle leadership', the non-commissioned officers. An analysis of membership figures of 25 soldiers' councils between 8/9 and 15 November gives a rough ratio of 5 non-commissioned officers to 3 enlisted men, to 1 officer involved in the soldiers' councils.

Table 1: Soldiers' Councils Composition Statistics, 8/9-15 November, 1918[36]

Garrison[37]	Soldiers	Non-Commissioned Officers	Officers
Onsabrück	3	3	1
Detmold	4	4	2
Mülheim/Ruhr	12	8	1
Recklinghausen	5	-	-
Emmerich	1	2	3
Bingen	4	1	2
Wiesbaden	1	1	1
Hammelburg	-	2	1
Nürnberg	3	13	3
Erlangen	1	2	1
Regensburg	1	2	-
Ingolstadt	5	8	-
Weißenfels	1	6	1
Quedlinburg	1	3	1
Nordhausen	1	5	-
Weimar	1	2	-
Gera	6	10	-
Dresden	2	2	1
Zeithain	2	1	-

[35] Kluge, *Soldatenräte,* 112.
[36] Original figures published in Kluge, *Soldatenräte*, 108.
[37] Ibid., 109. Unfortunately, due to incomplete membership figures, it is very difficult to make further claims about changes in soldiers' council composition.

Görlitz	7	3	-
Stendal	3	2	-
Eberswalde	2	3	-
Braunschweig	8	6	1
Celle	2	2	-
Coburg	7	8	-

Soldiers' councils generally operated in one, or several of the following three ways. They could be elected with a mandate to act as a political leadership entity, representing the revolutionary soldiers. Soldiers' councils also posed a challenge to the imperial officer corps' command authority and often inserted themselves into military decision making. Finally, they took on the role of a revolutionary bureaucracy, overseeing administrational issues for soldiers such as pension payments, demobilization papers, and rations. Naturally, not all soldiers' councils neatly aligned themselves in these distinctions and numerous hybrid forms developed in November and early December 1918.[38]

By mid-November, soldiers' councils were established in the majority of barracks across Germany; however, consolidation and centralized leadership by army corps soldiers' councils developed unevenly. While central organs to govern smaller councils successfully formed in VII Army Corps near Münster, soldiers' refused to elect representatives to a corps-level body in I Army Corps near Tilsit. In III Army Corps' region around Berlin, military supporters of the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Greater Berlin succeeding in blocking a corps-level council, which they believed would act to lessen the *Vollzugsrat*'s influence in

[38] For more on the forms of Soldiers' Councils, see Kluge, *Soldatenräte und Revolution*; James Diehl, *Paramilitary Violence and the Weimar Republic*; Hans Beyer, *Die Revolution in Bayern, 1918-1919*; Eberhard Kolb, *Die Arbeiterräte.*

military affairs. National concerns also hampered the creation of effective leadership for some councils, as creation of the Soldiers' Council of V Army Corps in Posen was delayed until 15 December, only occurring after a power sharing agreement was reached dividing the leadership council between eight German and eight Polish representatives.[39] In numerous instances where corps-level soldiers' councils were created, they often proved inefficient administrators due to an abundance of redundant sub-committees and councils. VIII Army Corps (Onsabrück), IX Army Corps (Altona-Hamburg), and X Army Corps (Hannover) all developed substantial bureaucracies ensuring ample representation for each sub-region of the corps, but proved cumbersome and unwieldy to handle day-to-day affairs. While some army corps councils became bloated with over-representation, others were forced to merge to find sufficient supporters and delegates, as in the case of XI Army Corps (Kassel) and XV Army Corps.[40] Possibly motivated by an acute sense of isolation from the rest of Germany, army corps along the eastern front did manage to come together to form an overarching Central Council of the Eastern Front and Eastern Provinces, composed of representatives of the Soldiers' Council of the Eastern Front (Kowno), and two members from each of I, XVII, and XX Army Corps, although such cooperation was generally rare.

Regional particularism also hampered the consolidation of the soldiers' council movement. Army corps in Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden and Saxony not only had to negotiate with council bodies and revolutionary groups from Berlin proclaiming their authority over all military formations in Germany, but also with

[39] Kluge, *Soldatenräte*, 149-150.
[40] Ibid., 151.

regional council movements declaring autonomy over their particular state or even outright independence. The unfortunate soldiers' representatives seeking to establish a council body for XIV Army Corps had to negotiate with council movements in four *Kreise* (Mannheim, Karlsruhe, Freiburg, and Konstanz) as well as representatives for greater Baden, in addition to the sub-councils within the army corps regions, ranging from Company Councils, Battalion Councils, Regimental Councils, Garrison Councils, to a Soldiers' Council for each of the four *Kreise*. Saxony was similarly overburdened by regional council bodies. The formation of the Central Soldiers' Council of Saxony was delayed from 19 November until 27 December as the representatives of XIX Army Corps (Leipzig, Döbeln, Chemnitz, Zwickau, Riesa, Plauen, etc.) and XII Army Corps (Dresden, Bautzen, Annaberg, Zittau, Kamenz, Großenhain, etc.) held protracted negotiations concerning the exact number of delegates each sub-council would be allotted.[41] The bureaucracy surrounding the soldiers' council movement proved thick and nearly impenetrable.

Despite their initial cooperation in Kiel and the early days of the revolution, the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, particularly the Executive Council in Berlin, remained wary of soldiers in political roles and an effective partnership did not fully develop. The *Vollzugsrat* demonstrated a keen awareness of the potential political power of the returning front soldiers to drastically alter the military-political situation in the capital and across Germany. Leaflet campaigns, supervised by SPD soldiers' delegate Alfred Bergmann, targeted demobilizing troops arriving in Berlin at the major train stations in order to "enlighten" the soldiers about the

[41] Kluge, *Soldatenräte*, 155.

achievements and progress of the revolution.[42] Further attempts to entice soldiers to support the council movement were made on 3 December, when the Executive Committee voted in favour of creating an additional allowance for military personnel. Although the *Vollzugsrat* never acquired the funds to implement the new pay scheme, it would have reduced the salary differential between officers and rank and file troops from 30:300 Marks to 240:345 Marks.[43] Yet, despite targeted propaganda and proposed financial incentives, the revolutionary left, particularly USPD dominated Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, remained suspicious of any military formation that they did not directly control.[44] More significant actions were also taken at the 3 December meeting of the *Vollzugsrat*, as reports of a possible counterrevolution began to circulate; the Executive Committee voted to place all military formations stationed in and around the capital which were not under direct Workers' and Soldiers' Council control under observation.

Tensions between revolutionary soldiers and the Executive Committee erupted at the end of December. Soldiers demonstrated their unhappiness with their lack of representation in political affairs and the presence of non-soldier members in soldiers' councils leadership circles by holding snap elections in soldiers' councils on 26 December all across Germany, and voting to expel most of

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[42] Barch Licht R201-24, "Protokoll der Sitzung des Vollzugsrat am 3. Dezember 1918."
[43] Ibid., All soldiers, except for officers, would have received 120 Marks as "family support," regardless of martial status. Rank and file troops would have been paid an additional allowance of 90 Marks, while non-commissioned officers would have been eligible for another 45-60 Marks compensation for their services.
[44] Barch-Licht R201-24, December meetings of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Councils repeatedly demonstrate the suspicious attitude of the council movement leadership towards OHL loyal troops in particular.

the former delegates who had formal connections with organized working class institutions.[45] Disenchanted with protracted debates concerning military command authority, soldiers' councils across Germany declared themselves as the supreme military decision making institution in local military affairs.[46] Shocked by such an antagonistic move, the Executive Council attempted to mediate the situation, granting equal representation for soldiers' delegates within a newly expanded *Vollzugsrat*, which was to encompass eight representatives from each of the USPD, SPD and Soldiers' Councils, but reiterated that command authority lay in the hands of the local Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. Further negotiations with garrison soldiers' councils could still occur on a case-by-case basis. Although the official relationship was somewhat repaired through the new representation structure, soldiers' council delegates were still displeased with the fractured military command authority produced by the activities of the *Vollzugsrat*. With the new compromise in place, Soldiers' Council Representative Otto Ege promised that the soldiers would not seek to create new representative bodies again, but defended the Soldiers' Councils' actions, arguing that the current uncertainty and divisions within the military sphere required them to "consolidate everything under one *Kommandogewalt*."[47]

The leaders of the Executive Council were keenly aware of the importance of this deteriorating relationship. Ernst Däumig acknowledged the growing strain between the soldiers and workers, confessing that several garrisons, such as

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[45] Barch Licht R201-25, page 38, "Protokoll der Sitzung des Vollzugsrat am 26. Dezember 1918"
[46] Ibid., Page 43, "Protokoll der Sitzung des Vollzugsrat am 26. Dezember 1918"
[47] Ibid., Page 45, "Protokoll der Sitzung des Vollzugsrat am 26. Dezember 1918"

Potsdam and Spandau, had severed ties with the *Vollzugsrat* completely. "It was the great defect of the old *Vollzugsrat*," he stated on 26 December, "that the connection with the soldiers was so completely lost." Stressing the importance of close cooperation with the soldiers, Däumig advocated sweeping reforms to give greater representation and agency to revolutionary soldiers. He declared:

> I think that the soldierly *Vollzugsrat* members with their troop units and regiments could create much closer contact through sub-commissions and organizations. … They must create a type of system for representatives [*Vertrauensmänner*], who have close contact with the soldiers again. It would probably be preferable if we could detail all the garrisons, which are in the administration region of the *Gardekorps*. We must expand very far to be apparent to them. Will that be possible? It would be preferable if Workers' and Soldiers' Councils would work hand-in-hand: they would be able to overcome serious difficulties, but it would still be an advantage. We must not confine ourselves to be a *Vollzugsrat* of just Berlin [*klein Berlin*].[48]

Despite Däumig's calls for reform and for re-establishing a strong connection between workers and soldiers, there was no renaissance of the revolutionary energy among soldiers. Generally more concerned with debates on military reforms concerning conduct of officers, provisions, and the future structure of the army rather than political events, the soldiers' councils did not develop into a revolutionary political movement. Due to organizational deficiencies, the Executive Council and the Soldiers' Councils never became an effective institution, governing the political and military affairs of the Reich. Instead, the council movement increasingly found itself responding to the actions and decrees of Ebert's Council of People's Commissars.

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[48] Barch Licht, R201-25, "Protokoll der Sitzung des Vollzugsrat am 26. Dezember 1918," Page 46.

The Council of People's Commissars

While many workers, socialists, and war-weary Germans greeted the revolution on 9 November with open arms, for Friedrich Ebert and the leadership of the Majority Social Democrats, revolutionary fervor threatened to disrupt the significant policy gains made under Max von Baden's brief chancellorship. Over a little more than four weeks the desperate imperial government had granted significant policy concessions to the SPD that had eluded them since Otto von Bismarck had been chancellor including universal suffrage, new civic liberties like freedom of the press and assembly, and the promise of future welfare measures. The October 1918 reforms would have succeeding in making Germany a constitutional monarchy had revolutionary events and the end of the war not changed the political landscape completely.[49] Therefore, an ideological tension between reform and revolution was deeply entrenched within leftwing politics from November 1918 until mid-1919, and ultimately proved irreconcilable.

Initially on 9 November, Scheidemann, more so that Ebert, better appreciated the effect of the revolution on the political options available to the SDP. After the mutinies in Kiel and the demonstrations in Berlin and across Germany, Scheidemann was convinced that a continuation of the Kaiser's government, even with different masters, was unfeasible given the contemporary political climate.[50] Although Ebert was surprised by Scheidemann's unilateral declaration of a republic,

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[49] Two bills to amend the Reich constitution were created on 28 October. Although they did not amount to a complete reconfiguration of Bismarck's constitution they did serve to produce a functional parliamentary monarchy. In the future the chancellor had to possess the confidence of the Reichstag, and both he and the deputy chancellor were responsible to the Bundesrat and the Reichstag.
[50] Morgan, *Socialist Left,* 127.

before Ebert had determined on what basis he hoped to reconstitute the Reich government,[51] he was soon forced to reconcile himself to the political realities confronting the Majority Socialists. Faced with the power of the revolutionary masses, Ebert and his coterie of advisors abandoned their original plans for a cabinet including bourgeois parties and sought a direct alliance with the Independent Socialists, simultaneously hoping to head off the political aspirations of the council assembly scheduled to convene the next day in the Circus Busch. As negotiations began in the afternoon of 9 November between the USPD and Majority Socialists, Independent Socialist Oskar Cohen pushed for even broader socialist unity. "How do you stand concerning the entrance of still further left wing socialists in the cabinet?" Cohen queried. "What do you think about Karl Liebknecht entering the cabinet?" In reply Ebert, aware of the current power of the revolutionaries, stated that he was open to Liebknecht's cooperation in the new government, but no formal offer was ever made.[52] For Ebert and the SPD, it was critical that the new body should become an institution of reform, not revolution desired by Liebknecht and the Spartacus League.

Therefore as Ebert desperately attempted to maintain their grip over the mechanisms of state, a series of letters was exchanged between the Majority Socialist leadership and the board of the Independents aiming to solidify the alliance. The Majority Socialists agreed that Germany should become a socialist

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[51] At this point Ebert favoured a cabinet armed with dictatorial powers and composed of SPD and USPD members, working alongside representatives from the Centre Party and Progressive Party,

[52] Eduard Bernstein, *Die deutsche Revolution: Ihr Ursprung, ihr Verlauf und ihr Werk* (Berlin: Verlag Gesellschaft und erziehung, 1921), 32-35.

Republic, that all ministers would be ultimately responsible to the cabinet, and that the new body should be created along the principle of equal representation between the two parties. However, Ebert, still wary of creating a fully revolutionary institution of class conflict, rejected the USPD demands that all bourgeois members be expelled from the government and that "complete legislative and jurisdictional power be placed exclusively in the hands of the representatives of the working populace and the soldiers."[53] A compromise was nonetheless achieved: only socialists would be allowed in the new cabinet, operating with the new title "Council of People's Commissars" (*Rat der Volksbeauftragten*), and the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils were recognized as the source of supreme political authority. On this basis, the two sets of leaders formed a new government consisting of three SPD members (Ebert, Scheidemann, and Landsberg) and three USPD representatives (Haase, Dittmann, and Barth).

Whatever temporary solace Ebert and the SPD gained from their attempts to bring the Reich's domestic affairs into order quickly dissipated as the strains of managing Germany's foreign affairs mounted in the weeks following the armistice. While the cabinet was content to await further instructions from the Entente Powers concerning the terms of the peace treaty, the details of the ceasefire continued to cause German leaders difficulties, especially in Eastern Europe. Under the terms of the November armistice, the German Army was forced to continue to provide necessary troops to maintain peace and security in a sprawling stretch of territories while Entente decision makers in Paris determined the future shape of

[53] "Schreiben des Vorstandes der SPD an den Vorstand der USPD, vom 9.11.1918" *Vorwärts*, Nr 310, 10 November 1918.

eastern Europe. Denied any possibility of returning sizeable formations of troops to Germany, despite the government and the rank-and-file's desire to immediately begin demobilization of the Field Armies, the army found itself in an unenviable position under foreign – usually, French, British, or American – administration, garrisoning significant territories with local populations hostile to the continued presence of German soldiers in any capacity. Forced to maintain their role as occupier throughout Eastern Europe, Germany was brought into conflict with Russia, as the two new socialist states clashed throughout contested border regions. Faced with no possibility of withdrawal and therefore continued hostilities with Soviet Russia, the Council of People's Commissars chose to postpone any definitive action until after the conclusion of the peace treaty and seek to avoid provoking either the Entente or the Russians in the meantime.[54] After all mused Landsberg, "the Soviet government is not likely to stay in power for long; in a few weeks it would all be over."[55] Patience, therefore, became the guiding principle of Ebert's foreign policy until either the Entente or the Soviets forced a German response. Characterizing the early actions of the Council of People's Commissars, historian Detlev Peukert argued that there was an "obsession with order." Peukert contends that confronted by the "truly shattering spectacle" of events in Russia, and the potentially destabilizing effects of demobilization, Ebert and his supporters focused on preserving social and political order during the revolutionary period. Peukert's argument that events in Soviet Russia preyed heavily on the minds of German

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[54] "Cabinet Meeting of 18 November, 1918," in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz, 70-71.
[55] Ibid., 71.

politicians, and the return of millions of soldiers threatened to disrupt social, economic and political life within the Reich if not handled properly is important to understanding Ebert and the SPD's conception of "order" (*Ordnung*) as more than just an attempt to avoid bloodshed or ruffles in the administration of the affairs of the Reich. "The preservation of peace and order" became the watchwords of the new regime under Ebert. It was a reaffirmation of moderate German socialist policy since Bernstein and was a fundamental rejection of a violent socialist revolution envisioned by Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, and their Russian comrades like Lenin and Leon Trotsky. The SPD's obsession with "order" extended to the bureaucratic foundation of the republic. Rather than a full-scale overhaul of the state administration, socialists worked with the fragments of social, economic, political and military institutions from the defunct imperial regime, in an effort to create a smooth transition from monarchy to republic.

Initially, Majority Socialists like Scheidemann believed their superior moral position would secure their political authority and protect them from physical attacks. At a meeting on 9 November with War Minister Heinrich Scheüch and Ebert, Scheidemann rejected Scheüch's petition to issue instructions to the troops to use arms to protect "life, property, and possessions." Instead, Scheidemann argued that as the representatives of the people, the government had no need for protection from the masses in Berlin, and therefore issued orders prohibiting use of firearms by soldiers in the capital. Many within the Majority Socialist leadership initially felt that democracy would confer legitimacy to the SPD regime, shielding it from violent outburst by the general public. Principally concerned with further revolutionary

actions from the left, but still wary of a possible counterrevolution from the disgruntled right, Ebert recognized that physical violent might be required to defend his regime, but in the first few days after the revolution he was not yet convinced he would need to use it.[56] Indeed, despite the activities of the Spartacus League and revolutionary shop stewards on 10 and 11 November, workers in Berlin appeared to show little signs of continued unrest and holding demonstrations. As historian David Morgan notes,

> In the next few weeks the red flags and cockades slowly disappeared from the streets of the city. The ferment was still there beneath the surface … but at first the city was quiet. Even the Spartacists were unable to do much more than give speeches. The inclination to violence did not show itself again until December.[57]

Indeed, Ebert had reason to believe that he had taken sufficient steps to secure powerful allies to defend the republic. By 10 November, First Quartermaster General Wilhelm Groener concluded an agreement with Ebert, whereby the OHL and the army pledged to defend the new republican government in return for the Council of People's Representatives' support for the high command's attempts to maintain discipline among the troops and preserve the authority of the officer corps. Neither side entered this pact from a position of strength: Ebert's weak position amidst the confusion of the early days of the revolution prompted him to agree to this pact, while the army similarly viewed this agreement as a crucial means to secure its future survival. "The overthrow of the monarchy deprived the officer of the root of their existence and viewpoint," Groener wrote in his memoirs. "Therefore it had to be the task of the Army leadership to bring the remainder of the

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[56] Morgan, *Socialist Left,* 128.
[57] Ibid,, 127.

Army promptly to the *Heimat* in good order, but above all internally healthy."[58] However, these goals were merely the immediate pragmatic terms that brought the two institutions together. On a philosophical or ideological level, both Ebert and the SPD as well as Groener and the military wholeheartedly believed in their particular conception of *Ordnung*. Preserving the "rule of law" and "discipline," while opposing further left-wing revolution, formed the basis for all cooperation between the new republican leadership and the former imperial officer corps, despite their overt political differences.

In light of this agreement, Ebert issued a proclamation to the German *Heimatheer* on 10 November, seeking to preserve peace and order (*Ruhe und Ordnung*).[59] Stressing the need to preserve domestic rule of law in order for the peaceful return of the Field Armies, Ebert pleaded with the troops stationed within Germany to assist the government and avoid a costly *Bürgerkrieg*. Co-signed by Prussian War Minister Schëuch and Reichstag deputy Paul Göhre, it represented a critical early attempt to preserve the government's political authority over the troops and provided assurance to the OHL that the SPD would uphold their end of the agreement. The significance of Ebert's order is only outweighed by its clear failure. Instead of becoming a crucial pillar in the government's attempts to uphold order, the *Heimatheer* quickly disintegrated, supplying the revolutionary Workers' and Soldiers' Councils with a deep pool of manpower, and operated as a destabilizing and radicalizing force in both political and military life.

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[58] Groener, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 467.
[59] "Aufruf Eberts an das Deutsche Heimatheer vom 10.11.1918," Ritter, *Die deutsche Revolution*, 77.

By 15 November, the first signs of an acceptance that the SPD may need to deploy violence to safeguard the republic were beginning to appear. After less than a week of threats of further agitation and revolution from the Spartacus League and their revolutionary supporters, Ebert informed the Council of People's Commissars that a "centralized organization of the security services is lacking," and that use of violence might be necessary to "reestablish order."[60] This was the first indication of an awareness that would grow within the SPD leadership, and particularly with Ebert, that physical violence deployed by representatives of the state was a crucial component for the socialist *Ordnung* they hoped to establish throughout the Reich.

In the wake of the Kaiser's abdication, the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils were prepared to accept the Council of People's Commissars as a provisional government, handling the daily affairs of the Reich, while the *Vollzugsrat* retained supreme political authority. However, as early as 18 November tensions developed in the increasingly dysfunctional relationship between the Executive Committee and Ebert's fledgling administration, prompting the creation of a five-man committee, three representatives from the *Vollzugsrat* and two People's Commissars, specifically to resolve the jurisdictional problems raised by the workers' and soldiers' representatives.[61] The Executive Committee sought to retain the ability to recall the members of the Council of People's Commissars, while Ebert's government argued that in order to properly administer the affairs of the Reich, full executive power would have to reside with the five *Volksbeauftragten*. Although

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[60] Cabinet Meeting, 15 November, 1918, in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz, 68.
[61] Reich Chancellery Meeting, 18 November 1918, in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz, 69.

Ebert proposed the creation of the committee to resolve the "Jurisdiction Question," it was increasingly evident that he did not want to share power with the leaders of the council movement. At a conference in the Reich Chancellery later on 18 November, Ebert vented his frustrations with the council movement leadership and anticipated a conflict with the Executive Council. "We cannot countenance such meddling," Ebert argued. "The *Vollzugsrat* is trying to take all authority in its hands. The People's Commissars cannot let the *Vollzugsrat* manipulate them like puppets." Despite Ebert's opposition to sharing political authority with the *Räte* movement, in a clear recognition of the power of the workers and soldiers in revolutionary politics, an agreement between the Executive Council and the People's Commissars was nonetheless struck on 22 November, renegotiating the legal relationship between the two institutions. The co-signed decree clearly stipulated that political authority lay in the hands of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of the German Socialist Republic. It was their task to "expand the achievements of the revolution, so as to prevent a counterrevolution."[62] The Executive Council was formally recognized as the representative of all German Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, until a congress of delegates from councils across Germany could be convened. The joint decree also acknowledged the creation of the Council of People's Commissars by the Executive Council and the transfer of executive power to Ebert's government. However, power to appoint and dismiss cabinet members and handle constitutional questions remained in the hands of the Executive Council.[63]

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[62] "Vereinbarung zwischen dem Rat der Volksbeauftragten und dem Vollzugsrat vom 22.11.1918," Ritter, *deutsche Revolution,* 110.
[63] Ibid., 110.

Both sides believed they had scored an important victory through the 22 November agreement. For the Executive Council, its supreme political authority, derived from the physical strength of its supporters in the streets, appeared to be established in a clear resolution of the jurisdictional boundaries. In a declaration to workers and soldiers in Berlin, issued on the same day, the Executive Council, led by Richard Müller, Brutus Molkenbuhr, Ernst Däumig, and Georg Ledebour, triumphantly stated that the People's Commissars had been confined to their "administrative tasks."[64] For the *Vollzugsrat* recognition of their moral right to lead the revolution in Germany meant victory. For Ebert and the Council of People's Commissars, victory lay in direct access to the means of power. Executive control over the functions of the state granted the People's Commissars authority over the former imperial bureaucracy, overseeing public food distribution, demobilization, all transportation, and significantly Germany's communication networks. Subsequent decrees issued by the *Vollzugsrat* specifically forbade any further disruption of the remaining bureaucracy by revolutionary organizations, stating, "all disruptive interventions in the administrative process must be suspended," effectively safeguarding the former imperial state apparatus that was now under the control of Ebert and the People's Commissars.[65] With both sides viewing this agreement as a means to dominate revolutionary politics, the 23 November joint resolution did not produce harmony within the political sphere, it merely established the pathways to further conflict.

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[64] "To the Workers and Soldiers of Berlin!" Dated, 23 November 1918, in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz, 58-60.
[65] Ibid., 58-60.

And indeed more infighting over political authority was forthcoming. In the aftermath of the counterrevolutionary "Foreign Office Putsch" attempt on 6 December in Berlin, a joint meeting between the *Vollzugsrat* and the Council of People's Commissars was held in which numerous charges of jurisdictional violations were levied against Ebert's government. After a petty dispute over who would be allowed to chair the meeting and open proceedings, Executive Council member Däumig denounced the People's Commissars for being "imbued with the atmosphere of the old government," and stated "that [Ebert and the SPD] no longer identify themselves with a revolutionary government but with an old-style government."[66] Alarmed by what he saw as the gathering forces of counterrevolution, Däumig feared street battles and bloodshed. However, he argued:

> They can be avoided if the Cabinet recognizes the position of the *Vollzugsrat*. The arrest of the Executive Council [during the Foreign Office Putsch] has contributed to the discrediting of the Cabinet. For that reason a joint declaration should be made by the *Vollzugsrat* and the government [Council of People's Commissars], wherein the Cabinet explicitly recognizes the authority of the *Vollzugsrat*. Our right to exercise control is disputed everywhere in the government. This disregard for the Executive Council must come to an end, because it influences the feelings of the workers who put their trust in us.[67]

While Däumig saw possibilities for reconciliation between the two "children of the revolution" as he called them, other Executive Council members did not share his sense of brotherly cooperation. Ledebour and Richard Müller argued that the People's Commissars were not doing enough to control 'counterrevolutionary'

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[66] 7 December Joint Meeting between the Executive Council and the Council of People's Commissars, in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz, 83.
[67] Ibid., 85. For more detail on the Foreign Office Putsch, see Chapter III.

soldiers in the streets and scolded Scheidemann, who stormed out of the meeting after being "treated like a school boy." *Vollzugsrat* member Gerhard Obuch continued the charges by the Executive Council, accusing Ebert and the government of courting soldiers' loyalties for a counterrevolution. "Ebert should have given the soldiers who offered him the presidency [a clear no]," declared Obuch. "Creating a presidency amounts to slighting the workers' and soldiers' councils. The masses will not countenance Ebert's continued presence in the Cabinet. Consequently, Ebert should resign."[68] Temporary peace between the People's Commissars and the Executive Council was only restored by Hermann Müller's proposal that both bodies agree that no changes to the constitution would be made until the congress of councils met later in December and that members of the government would not encourage "reactionary trends" in military circles. The threat of physical destruction, through the actions of sailors and soldiers on 6 December, had deepened and renewed the old philosophical battle lines that had led to the formation of the USPD during the war, as past debates on evolutionary or revolutionary progress towards Marx's socialist utopia were once again rehashed. The Independent Socialist dominated Executive Council decried Ebert's government as reactionary and counterrevolutionary for its continued operation with the former imperial bureaucratic apparatus. In turn, Ebert and the Majority Socialists were determined to limit the further development of radical revolutionary movements in Germany and establish their socialist *Ordnung*.

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[68] Burdick and Lutz, 86.

By 13 December, just before the congress of councils was set to be held in Berlin to determine the new constitution and government shape for the socialist republic, Ebert's opinion of the relationship between the Executive Council and the Council of People's Commissars grew increasingly negative. Commenting on the activities of the *Vollzugsrat*, Ebert said:

> Things cannot go on this way any longer. We are making ourselves ridiculous in the eyes of history and the whole world. We must propose the following to the Reich conference: The affairs of the Reich must be exclusively in the hands of the government. … But the lines must be drawn sharply; we bear the responsibility. This constant taking of matters into their own hands by the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils must stop. They have only advisory status – that is all. If this is not acceptable, we must withdraw from the Cabinet. We cannot assume responsibility for insane pranks.[69]

Ebert would not be dissuaded from his desire to assume direct political authority. "There is nothing wrong with the right to control," he informed Dittmann. Scheidemann shared Ebert's negative appraisal of the Executive Council. "We must control whatever there is to control," Scheidemann declared, "[the council movement] does not have the least sense of responsibility."[70] Landsberg similarly condemned the revolutionaries. "The institution of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils amounts to the organization of chaos. … The *Vollzugsrat* includes numerous unqualified persons. It is doubtful whether the *Zentralrat* will be any different, and there too, the temptations of power may do much harm."[71] Thus the

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[69] Cabinet Meeting, 13 December 1918, 4:30 PM, in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz, 96.
[70] Ibid., 98.
[71] The *Zentralrat* was created by the First Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in Berlin on 16 December 1918. This new body was supposed to operate as the guiding organ of the council movement in all administration and policy matters, but was never firmly established before the USPD/SPD split at the end of December.

divide between the Majority Socialist and Independent Socialist representatives in the cabinet was growing by the time of this meeting on 13 December. Reflecting on the power sharing between the USPD and SPD, Gustav Noske would later comment, "'unity' was never the watchword of the alliance."[72]

For Ebert, the creation of the Council of People's Commissars represented a compromise solution to a variety of problems in November and December 1918. The SPD leadership overwhelmingly wanted to continue with the string of successful political reforms achieved by the October government under Prince Max von Baden. In the midst of revolutionary events, the Council of People's Commissars initially seemed to provide a mechanism to simultaneously retain direct access to the reins of political power and continue the evolutionary development of socialist policy, while also containing the political aspirations of the revolutionary movement. The effectiveness of the power sharing revolutionary political apparatus proved temporary. The Independent Socialists and the *Vollzugsrat* did not make productive coalition partners as mutual recriminations clouded the relationship between the two organizations. Additionally, a series of minor disputes and arguments occurring throughout December and January served to significantly strain the weak bond between the SPD and USPD. Nonetheless, the Council of People's Commissars was an important step in the evolution of Ebert's conception of political authority. Although he did not want to share power with the council movement, this body and the compromises and agreements he signed demonstrated an awareness of the power of the council movement in politics in the revolutionary

[72] Noske, *Kiel bis Kapp*, 59.

period. However, once it was clear that the representatives of the far left were either unwilling or unable to form a stable coalition power-sharing apparatus, Ebert and the SPD leadership began to pursue the reestablishment of a strong centralized political administration through a National Assembly without the influence of revolutionary institutions.

The First Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany

Held in Berlin, from 16 to 20 December, the Congress of Councils marked the high point of revolutionary political power. Around 500 delegates from the SPD, USPD, and a smattering of Spartacists attended meetings over four days aiming to establish a lasting constitutional basis for a new socialist state apparatus. With a near two-thirds majority in delegates, the SPD was able to accomplish its primary goal, determining the date for elections for a National Assembly in mid-January, while also blocking a proposal to adopt the system of council bodies as the "basis of the constitution of the socialist republic."[73]

Despite the numerical dominance of the Majority Socialists, several resolutions were passed, indicating that the revolutionary delegates had not yet given up hopes of dictating policy in Germany. The Central Council, or *Zentralrat*,

[73] "Volksbeauftragter Dittmann über die Kompetenzverteilung zwischen Regierung und Räten – Bericht auf dem Rätekongreß am 16.12.1918," in Ritter, *deutsche Revolution,* 135. For more information on the First Congress of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany, see, Holger Herwig, "The First Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils and the Problem of Military Reforms," *Central European History* 1 (1968), 150-165; Eberhard Kolb, *Die Weimarer Republik* (Munich: Oldenburg, 1984); Detlev Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik: Krisenjahre der klassischen Morderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987); Gabriel Kuhn, *All Power to the Councils!: A Documentary History of the German Revolution of 1918-1919* (Chicago: PM Press, 2012).

was created to replace the Executive Council as the supreme political authority in the Reich, and was directed to work with the Council of People's Commissars to form a new dual chamber government. However, composed of both USPD and SPD members, the new body promised to be no more functional than its predecessor. And indeed it was not. The very next day following the conclusion of the Congress of Councils, the Independent Socialists declared that a new "Jurisdictional Question" had emerged over the definition of "parliamentary oversight," the role of the *Zentralrat* as the supreme political authority, and the relationship between the new Central Council and the Council of People's Commissars.[74]

The congress-approved resolution to pursue an aggressive policy of social, economic, and military socialization proved even more damaging to relationships within the political left. The Seven Hamburg Points, officially adopted by the Congress of Councils, were created to "destroy militarism" and bring the army in line with socialist revolutionary ideals. This posed a significant threat to a major pillar of support for Ebert and the Majority Socialists. The Hamburg Points placed the army, navy, and all security forces under the control of the People's Commissars, and therefore in turn under the new *Zentralrat*, while granting command authority in all garrisons to local soldiers' councils. The War Ministry was instructed to issue orders to proceed with demobilization, abolish the old army institutions and replace it with a socialist 'People's Militia' (*Volkswehr*), which would then be placed at the disposal of the People's Commissars and the Central Council. Commanding generals were to be replaced by five-man soldiers' councils, elected by the troops at the corps

[74] "Der Konflikt über die Befugnisse des Zentralrat auf dem Rätekongreß am 19/20.12.1918," Ritter, *deutsche Revolution,* 142.

level, and would exercise complete control over the general command of each corps in question. Finally, the position of the officer corps was downgraded. All rank badges and insignia were prohibited, as well as wearing uniforms off-duty, and regimental and battalion commanders who did not possess the full confidence of their troops were to be removed from their posts. All commanders below the regimental level were to be directly elected by the troops.[75]

As expected, the army expressed its displeasure with the new proposals. Wilhelm Groener feared that they would lead to the collapse of the German army. He stated at a 20 December joint meeting between the cabinet and the *Zentralrat*, "the decisions of the Congress of Councils will sever the ties between soldiers and officers. In one blow they wish to introduce a new system by the election of officers. The officers will not stand for this, and the men will not be able to elect competent leaders. You will be faced with a completely disrupted army, of that you may be sure."[76] The general's final comments struck at the very heart of the crisis of establishing political authority for the new regime.

> I am firmly convinced that no army can possibly be created on the basis of the Seven Hamburg Points. In Russia, they are returning to the old discipline because all of these things which you now condemn are not outer appearances, but have certain moral value. … This resolution states that the Soldiers' Councils should maintain discipline. This may work for the transition period, but they will never become a useful weapon in your hands, if the Soldiers' Councils are in charge of discipline. … They will transfer circumstances from their party and trade union organizations into the Army. I warn you about this![77]

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[75] "The Seven Hamburg Points," in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz, 176-177.
[76] "Die Auseinandersetzung über die Sieben Hamburger Punkte – Sitzung von Kabinett und Zentralrat mit General Groener und dem Staatssekretär des Reichsmarineamts am 20.12.1918," in Ritter, *deutsche Revolution,*146.
[77] Ibid., 147.

The Congress of Councils failed to produce a lasting political structure. Despite achieving their major policy objective, securing January elections for a new National Assembly, the Congress of Councils only exacerbated the political crisis facing Ebert and the Majority Socialists. The formal adoption of revolutionary policy through the socialization of industry[78] and the Seven Hamburg Points was a potential death sentence for the old imperial army. Groener's fears cast doubt on the army's ability to smoothly demobilize the millions of front soldiers along the western front and to act as physical protector for the Council of People's Commissars from domestic political enemies. Additionally, the balance of military power seemed to be moving in favour of the council movement, if the soldiers' councils successfully positioned themselves at the centre of the new *Volkswehr*. Far from reconciling the various revolutionary organizations and institutions into one harmonized political apparatus, the Congress of Councils bolstered the prestige of revolutionaries within revolutionary politics and exacerbating the sense of crisis within the leadership of the Majority Socialists.

This chapter has paid particularly close attention to the myriad of organizations and institutions vying for political authority in November and December 1918 to highlight the dysfunctional state of affairs in the political realm. The contested political sphere failed to regulate itself through a series of

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[78] The revolutionaries decided to defer the most aggressive objectives of the proposed "socialization" policy until the new National Assembly could be convened. These goals included the nationalization of heavy industry, particularly the mining industry, as well as the dissolution of the large East Elbian estates, the back bone of the powerful Junker class.

negotiations, meetings and agreements over two months. This created a lasting pattern of conflict and aggression in German political and military life in the early Weimar Republic. The rise of the republic, as the hegemonic institution in the German political sphere, occurred as a result of reactions by Ebert and the SPD to a series of military-political crises that developed alongside with political disputes which will be described in the following two chapters. Stability through boardroom negotiations failed to materialize. Instead, political *Ordnung* was found through a balance between democratic impulses and more primal ones, embodied by the rifle, hand grenade, and flamethrower.

CHAPTER III: CRISIS

Throughout December 1918 and early January 1919 a series of revolts and uprisings underscored the connection between physical violence and the political authority of the fledging republic. Within a period spanning just longer than thirty days, three different attempts were made to overthrow Ebert and Scheidemann's government, forever shattering Scheidemann's naïve belief that the people of Germany would never support acts of violence against a regime claiming to represent them. Instead, this period of crisis demonstrated that the deep political divisions within German society had survived the war, despite the imperial government's rhetoric of a political truce during the conflict. Not only did the old social and political disputes survive the war, but they were radicalized in their expression; the violence of the war transferred from the battlefield to the *Heimat*, shaping political life in revolutionary Germany.

The Foreign Office Putsch

"The 6th of December 1918," Hermann Müller later wrote in his diary, "belongs to a bloody day of the German Revolution. Not only a tragedy, but a comedy ruled the afternoon hours of this day."[1] While Müller found the multiple claims to political authority over the Reich quite comical, they represented the first significant military threat to the government. Although People's Representatives Haase and Dittmann attempted to downplay the importance of 6 December, stating that the government received five reports per day of counterrevolutionary threats, the so-called "Foreign

[1] Hermann Müller, *Die Novemberrevolution: Erinnerungen*, (Berlin: Verlag Der Bücherkreis, 1931), p 144.

Office Putsch" went far beyond boastful propaganda and political bravado in the streets of Berlin and Munich. This putsch, initiated by influential men in the Foreign Office, exposed the divisions and tensions between the Council of People's Commissars and the *Vollzugsrat*, and ultimately the military and political weaknesses of the revolutionary government apparatus.

On Friday, 6 December, three assemblies of revolutionary veterans from the First World War gathered as the "Council of Soldiers on Leave and Deserters" met around 4 o'clock in the afternoon in northern Berlin. The participants, angered by their perceived marginalization in council politics, took to the streets to voice their displeasure. The Commandant's Office responded to the demonstrators by closing off streets around the Maikäfer Barracks located on the Chausseestraße. Trying to keep protestors out of the government quarter, the police forced back one group of unruly soldiers, but eventually resorted to violence to prevent a second wave from reaching the barracks. Sixteen rioting soldiers were killed. Another 12 were severely wounded. The action lasted less than ten minutes.[2] This bloodshed was a direct result of the divided political and military authority in Berlin. The Independent Socialist Police President Emil Eichhorn had granted permission to the Council of Soldiers on Leave and Deserters to march through the streets, but had failed to inform the Social Democrat Police Commandant, Otto Wels. With no warning of several thousand soldiers marching through Berlin, the Commandant's Office took action to secure the government.

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[2] Müller, *Novemberrevolution*, 145.

As soldiers and police clashed in the north of Berlin, troops from the Franzer-Regiment stormed the House of Representatives around 5 o'clock, claiming they had been ordered by government officials to arrest the *Vollzugsrat*. Only once People's Commissar Emil Barth arrived and demanded to see an arrest order signed by the government, did the commander of the regiment realize his lack of authority and jurisdiction to execute such an action, and removed his troops from the building.[3] As news of the *Vollzugsrat*'s abortive arrest spread across the city, new uprisings erupted and the Reich Chancellery was occupied by troops from the Franzer-Regiment. Joined by units of politically active students and recruits, operating under the banner of the Studentenwehr and a group of marines from the *Graf Metternich*, the leader of the demonstration, a Sergeant Spiro, met with Ebert seeking to offer him the presidency of a new republic, to be created without the influence of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. Angered by the "mismanagement" of the *Vollzugsrat*, Spiro urged Ebert to accept the office of president "for the good of the entire nation."[4] Ebert deferred, saying he would have to speak with his friends in the Reich government to decide such an important question. With no support from Ebert, the demonstrators eventually dispersed over the course of the rest of the night.

These three events, collectively and somewhat misleadingly known as the Foreign Office Putsch were the beginning of the evolution in Social Democratic views on violence and politics. The demonstration of the Council of Soldiers on Leave and Deserters should have been another peaceful march of politicized troops

[3] Müller, *Novemberrevolution*, 146-7.
[4] Ibid., 147.

through the capital; however, the division of military authority between the Majority Social Democrats and the Independents created the pre-conditions for the outbreak of violence that led to the killing of sixteen people and wounding of another dozen. The arrest of the *Vollzugsrat*, which later was determined to be the result of amateur intrigues by two officials within the Foreign Office, Count Michael von Matuschka and Georg von Rheinbaben, exasperated tensions between the Executive Council and the People's Commissars. In order to simply continue the volatile partnership extant for the next few weeks, two meetings between the two organizations were required to reestablish peaceful relations along with three joint declarations, reaffirming the previous political relationship among them. Finally, even though Ebert rejected the Franzer-Regiment's offer of the presidency, Independent Socialists in the *Vollzugsrat* viewed this event as clear confirmation that Ebert was actively seeking to consolidate power solely within the cabinet. Preserving the dual authority revolutionary political apparatus was becoming increasingly taxing for Ebert and the Social Democrats.[5]

Groener and the army wanted to take decisive action against all left wing demonstrators in the aftermath of the Foreign Office Putsch. In a letter sent to Groener, dated 8 December 1918, Field Marshal von Hindenburg argued that the authority of the officer corps could only be re-established if Ebert's new government

[5] At a meeting of the Executive Committee in the presence of the cabinet on 7 December 1918, the strains of preserving this relationship were becoming increasingly apparent. Landsberg dismissed many of the Independent Socialists' claims as preposterous and Scheidemann was so offended by Ledebour's comments that he stormed out of the meeting altogether.

was strengthened and threat of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils was eliminated.[6] Accordingly, Groener, Kriegsminister Schëuch, Major Bock von Harbour and General Arnold Lequis drafted detailed plans for the insertion of 10 divisions into the Greater Berlin area from 10 to 15 December. In typical military bluntness, Groener clearly laid out the political implications of the proposed troop deployment. "First of all it concerns wresting authority away from the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils," he explained on 10 December. "We have a troop deployment for this, which should have the opportunity to once again firmly establish a government in Berlin."[7] General Lequis wasted no time in establishing a five-day invasion timetable that would accomplish the "cleansing (*Säuberung*) of Berlin from the Spartacus, etc."[8] Occupation of all central public buildings would occur on the first day through the Garde-Kavallerie-(Schützen) Divison, with the Deutsche Jäger-Division and I. Garde-Division standing ready in reserve. The following day, any person in Berlin found in possession of a firearm without express military permission would be shot, and anyone found transporting war materiel by automobile would be arrested and court-martialed. The final three days of the action would witness further deployment of "reliable" troops in the suburbs of Berlin, expelling all "non-local" soldiers, dissolving "*Ersatztruppen*" (roving bands of armed veterans), and security within the capital taken over by a new National Guard.[9] However, once the troops arrived around Berlin on the eve of the operation, discipline collapsed as

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[6] "Vereinbarung des Rats der Volksbeauftragten und der Arbeiter- und Soldantenräte vom 9.12.1918," Ritter, 121.
[7] Herzfeld, *Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, 385.
[8] Germany, Oberkommando des Heeres. *Wirren in der Reichshauptstadt und im nördlichen Deutschland, 1918-1920* (Berlin: ES Mittler, 1940), 28.
[9] Herzfeld, 385.

revolutionaries mixed with former front troops. The army's grand plan to re-establish political and military authority in the capital, which was at least tacitly supported by Ebert, faltered due to a lack of politically reliable troops. Although the plan failed to come to fruition, it nonetheless remained an important experience for Ebert, who began to appreciate just how physically fragile his regime was, and the importance of the support of the military to provide reliable troops and security.

The End of the Revolutionary Government

As 1918 came to a close, the threat of a second socialist revolution grew increasingly likely as the uneasy alliance between the USPD and the SPD unraveled. Dissatisfied with the results of the First Congress of Councils, the Council of Revolutionary Shop Stewards formally withdrew their support for continued USPD cooperation in the Council of People's Commissars on 21 December. With significant influence among revolutionaries in Berlin, the Council of Revolutionary Shop Stewards had the potential to destabilize the USPD's support base in the capital. This triggered the onset of a combined political and military crisis that would not only end the revolutionary power sharing apparatus between the Independent and Majority Socialists, but would prompt Ebert to support a hard-line policy against armed opponents of his regime.

Two days after the Revolutionary Shop Stewards demanded the Independents withdraw from the cabinet and expel Emil Barth from the party, yet another revolt threatened Ebert's government. Over the course of 23/24 December sailors from the Volksmarinedivision mutinied in Berlin, occupying the Reich

Chancellery and arresting SPD Police Commandant Otto Wels. In a series of negotiations throughout the day, Ebert became increasingly aware of the vulnerability of his position and regime. After four hours of discussions to secure his own release after being detained by revolutionary sailors, and the liberation of the Reich Chancellery, Ebert faced the difficult task of retrieving his police commandant. While the Republican Soldatenwehr announced that it was ready to storm the Volksmarinedivision's stronghold on Unter den Linden, Ebert was keen to limit the bloodshed. Asserting that the sailors had no legal authority to arrest Wels, Ebert attempted to find a diplomatic resolution to the conflict. The sailors' response clearly exposed the futility of his attempt. "Might is right," declared their representative, Schulze-Bromberg, "we have the men under arrest and will not release them."[10] Powerless to command the sailors' surrender, Ebert turned to Kriegsminister Schëuch to end the embarrassing display of government weakness. After an ultimatum of only ten minutes the few remaining troops loyal to the government bombarded the sailors' position at the Marstall with concentrated artillery and machine-gun fire, crushing the rebel's resistance. For the second time in less than a month, armed revolutionaries had significantly threatened the physical security and political authority of Ebert's new government. Even though the actual destruction was minimal and the casualties few, these putsch attempts and the government's inability to prevent them kept questioning the legitimacy of Ebert's regime. Justifiably skeptical of the reliability of sailors and workers to protect the SPD and the Council of People's Commissars, Ebert had twice turned to

[10] "Resolutionen der Revolutionären Obleute gegen ein Verbleiben der USPD in der Regierung und gegen Emil Barth vom 21.12.1918," Ritter, *deutsche Revolution,* 151.

the army for military support, but with significant political repercussions. Independent Socialist People's Commissar Dittmann denounced Lequis' abortive operation, and the army's deployment against the revolutionary Volksmarinedivision as cooperation with the "old generals of the old army … on the principle of blind obedience," a damning charge that spread quickly throughout the far left.[11]

Thus, Ebert and the SPD were in a difficult position by Christmas 1918. They had secured access to political power through control of the Council of People's Commissars, but efforts to enact policy reform were consistently hampered by their coalition partners, the Independent Socialists. Physical security and control over the means of violence were becoming increasingly pressing concerns as the former imperial army continued to melt away, providing a crucial manpower supply for armed revolutionary groups across the Reich. Working with the remnants of the General Staff and the remnants of the imperial army that could still be mustered had weakened Ebert and the SPD's standing within the wider socialist and revolutionary circles, which questioned their suitability to lead a socialist revolutionary government. Increased prestige and influence for the USPD and the Spartacus League with revolutionary workers, soldiers, and sailors emboldened their policy demands, making further cooperation in the government even more quarrelsome and contested. The solution to this problem was becoming increasingly clear to Ebert: monopoly control over substantial, politically reliable military forces. Although Ebert recognized the need to physically secure his regime from military

[11] "Joint Meeting of the Cabinet and Zentralrat in the Reich Chancellery, 28 December, 1918," in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz, 138.

threats through the Foreign Office Putsch, the Volksmarinedivision mutiny on 23/24 December hardened his resolve to reform civil-military relations in Germany as would be increasingly clear throughout the following weeks.

Ebert's first step in building a pro-government military authority - bringing Gustav Noske back to Berlin from his temporary appointment in Kiel - occurred just as the Independent Socialists trigged a crisis that would end the tumultuous power sharing apparatus in revolutionary Weimar. While Ebert saw the revolt of the Volkzmarinedivision as a stark indication that military force was needed to safeguard the government, the Independent Socialists, led by Dittmann, Haase, and Ledebour, viewed the army's attack on revolutionary sailors and soldiers at the behest of Ebert and the SPD as an act of betrayal and a dangerous dependency on a monarchial institution. The divisions between the USPD and the SPD erupted at a joint meeting between the Council of People's Commissars and the *Vollzugsrat* of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Berlin. While historically there were ideological differences within the Social Democratic Party over the adoption of an evolutionary or revolutionary path to achieve Marx's socialist utopia, in the Reich Chancellery, in December 1918, the use of violence, particularly against leftwing revolutionaries, was the single most divisive issue between the two socialist parties. USPD Party Chairman Haase condemned the OHL's operations actions against the revolutionary soldiers, arguing that "… we cannot rely on the old military organizations. The military is rebelling against the Workers' Congress, just as we saw it rebel against the Bethmann government." He added specifically to Ebert, "you should have known that [Lequis and Schëuch] would have rolled up with cannons, fired gas grenades,

and used the same methods they used for four years in butchering people."[12] Dittmann declared that all "dependence on the old-time generals and Army Corps" must be immediately ended and once again urged the creation of a new revolutionary *Volkswehr* to replace the imperial army.[13] Growing confident in their new resolve to use violence to secure state authority, Landsberg refused to back down to the USPD's pressure, arguing:

> I have repeatedly declared in the Cabinet, [that] a government without authority is no government. I do not envision a government which rattles the sabre. I saw a government which faced an illegal attack and which was not capable to repel it. Such a government is not a government at all, and from this view I feel shame about the capitulation [to demands from the sailors]. That was something shameful.[14]

In response to Haase's condemnation of SPD directed violence against revolutionaries, Landsberg responded:

> So you will not answer the question, Herr Colleague Haase? If one faces the facts that continually illegal encroachments occur from all conceivable interests, what will you do against it? [The USPD] merely says to us that we should not use what we have, but wait until something new is created. Should we wait until this something new is created? Are you willing to refuse to help instead of using what we have in the fight against unquestioned acts of violence (*Gewaltakte*)?[15]

Haase answered, "I would deploy the proletariat." He met only derision from Landsberg, who concluded, "Nothing much can be done with them."

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[12] "Joint Meeting of the Cabinet and Zentralrat in the Reich Chancellery, 28 December, 1918," in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz, 144.
[13] Ibid., 137.
[14] "Die Auseinandersetzung über die Sieben Hamburger Punkte – Sitzung von Kabinett und Zentralrat mit General Groener und dem Staatssekretär des Reichsmarineamts am 20.12.1918," Ritter, *deutsche Revolution,* 147.
[15] Ibid., 148.

Following the pivotal 28 December meetings between the Executive Council and the People's Commissars, the USPD leadership sent a series of questions to the newly established *Zentralrat*, which theoretically had been empowered by the Congress of Councils to act as the supreme political authority in the Reich. Focused on the events of the mutiny of the Volksmarinedivision, these points of contention with the SPD placed military politics at the centre of the dispute. The seventh point from the USPD's first set of questions asked: "Does the *Zentralrat* agree with our view that the government of the socialist Republic cannot militarily support and allow the generals to recreate the old blind obedience of the old standing army, but rather a new volunteer *Volkswehr* should be built on a democratic basis?"[16] The *Zentralrat* refused to answer the question without first consulting the People's Commissars, creating a political impasse. In response to this and increasing pressure to walk out of the government from left-wing Independents and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, Haase, Dittmann, and Barth all quit the Council of People's Representatives on 29 December. Citing the "shameful bloodbath" on 24 December, the three men wrote that they "could not be representatives of the old system of violence (*Gewaltsystem*)."[17] The Independents declared that they would under no circumstances participate in the "*Gewaltpolitik* of the SPD."[18] The split between the two parties finalized with the resignation of the USPD deputies in the Prussian government on 3 January 1919. The only significant attempt at left wing

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[16] Kolb, Rürup, *Der Zentralrat*, 89.
[17] *Die Freiheit*, Nr 79, 29 December 1918.
[18] Noske, *Kiel bis Kapp*, 62.

unity throughout the course of the Weimar Republic had failed after less than two months.

Wasting little time, Ebert, Scheidemann and Landsberg added Gustav Noske and Rudolf Wissell to the Council of People's Commissars, placing the Reich government almost entirely in the hands of the Majority Socialists. The new government recognized that this was a key moment to solidify itself as the ruling party of the republic and quickly established a short-term agenda. The Cabinet aimed to prepare for elections to the National Assembly, continue to supply food and provisions across the Reich, guide the process of "socialization" agreed upon at the Congress of Councils, and to disarm all unauthorized persons.[19] The immediate set of objectives for the government sought to simultaneously make some ideological concessions in an attempt to soothe divisions within the increasingly fractured left wing, implement a new democratic system for all Germans, while establishing control over the means of violence. Ebert may have presented the breakdown in the USPD/SPD relationship as a mutual parting of the ways, but Noske was less conciliatory, charging the Independents with responsibility for a "criminal *Bruderkampf*" and with betraying the confidence of the proletariat.[20]

The end of the revolutionary government, and the shift by the Independents from coalition partner to opposition group, had lasting political consequences for the Weimar Republic and the left wing of the political spectrum. While this split between the two largest socialist parties did not somehow foretell the future

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[19] "Aufruf der Reichsregierung nach dem Ausscheiden der USPD vom 29.12.1918," *Vorwärts*, Nr 238, 30 December 1918.
[20] Noske, 63.

collapse of the Republic, it did prevent the effective consolidation of political authority before the January 1919 Reichstag elections. The USPD/SPD split exacerbated the political and military command issues plaguing the new republic. In many ways the Independents' decision to leave the government and end the power sharing apparatus reflected their vulnerable position in revolutionary politics. They lacked the support of the Bolsheviks enjoyed by Liebknecht, Luxemburg and the Spartacus League. Although the Independents sought to achieve a socialist utopia through a workers' revolution, which brought them ideologically closer to the Spartacists, the USPD still did not favour a 'Leninist' directed revolution led by a small revolutionary vanguard. This more moderate approach brought them back towards the Majority Socialists, but their ineffectiveness in the council movement leadership clearly demonstrated that the Independents were ill-suited to be a legitimate alternative ruling party in government. Finally, the Independents' major source of support, the revolutionary soldiers, sailors, and workers in Berlin, were politically fluid and did not have a well-established formal relationship with the Independents, although the working class had supported the unified Social Democratic Party before the world war. Thus, sitting on a shifting basis of popular support and ideologically hemmed in by the Spartacus League and the Majority Socialists, but lacking the expansive organizational support of the latter and the Avant-garde appeal of the former, the Independent Socialists were at an existential crossroads by the final days of 1918. Ultimately, radical elements began to dominate party leadership meetings and chose the path to revolution and cooperation with Liebknecht and the Spartacus League. This decision was a significant blow to the

political authority of revolutionary institutions, as well as to attempts to normalize military affairs within Germany.

The Spartacus Revolt

On New Year's Day, 1919, the far left formally organized itself as an independent party. The *Spartakusbund* and the "Bremen left-wing radicals" along with some dissident Independent Socialists merged together to form the German Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* or KPD). Holding its inaugural congress in Berlin, the KPD, under the leadership of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, aimed to pursue a Leninist strategy to achieve a socialist revolution through a well-organized revolutionary vanguard to direct the proletariat in their journey to Marx's communist utopia. The first shots were fired less than a week later as open conflict with the moderate SPD spilled into the streets of Berlin.

Although the ideological differences and the practical difficulties of managing the daily affairs of the Reich alongside each other caused tension between the two socialist parties, the immediate cause of the breakdown in the relationship between the SPD and the USPD was once again a protest over control over the means of violence. The key moment came in the early hours of 5 January, when Ebert and Scheidemann dismissed the Independent Socialist Emil Eichhorn from the Police Presidium as part of their programme aimed at consolidating the Berlin police forces under their control. Liebknecht's reaction reveals just how important this action was. His editorial in *Die Rote Fahne* argued that Ebert's move was a significant blow to the radical left's potential to engage in violence-based politics.

Headlines in the Spartacus newspaper decried the act as a "new surprise attack by Ebert and Scheidemann against the Revolution," as the KPD and Revolutionary Shop Stewards organized and launched armed militant action against Ebert's government.[21]

On Sunday, 5 January 1919, the Spartacus Revolt struck Berlin. Armed workers and soldiers occupied newspaper offices, appointed a new revolutionary committee, and issued a declaration to remove Ebert and Scheidemann from power. While the offices of *Vorwärts*, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the *Wolffische Telegraphenbüro* and various printing presses were seized, crowds of armed revolutionaries packed the Alexanderplatz for a demonstration of support for Eichhorn, the KPD and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards. Bolstered by supporters marching in the streets, the revolutionaries also aimed to gather military forces under their control. Once again the Volksmarinedivision sought to spur further revolution, as their leader Heinrich Dorrenbach placed his troops at Liebknecht's disposal. The sailors reported that they had forces in nearby Spandau, ready with 2,000 machine guns and 20 artillery pieces to violently overthrow Ebert and Scheidemann's regime.[22] Despite these military preparations, the revolutionaries were never able to agree on a specific programme or set of objectives. Concerning the critical command meeting on 5 January, Richard Müller later recalled:

> No objective opinion could be created based on the reports [available]. Individual speakers surpassed each other with strong words and demands.

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[21] "Eichhorn entlassen – Ein neuer Handstreich Ebert-Scheidemanns gegen die Revolution," *Die Rote Fahne*, Nr 5, 5 January 1919.
[22] Richard Müller, *Der Bürgerkrieg*, 34.

> However, it still did not come to a resolution because no one proposed clearly defined measures.[23]

The assembled leaders split on a vote concerning the use of violence to overthrow Ebert's regime, although a slim majority approved the decision. After the resolution passed, a provisional "*Revolutions-Ausschuß*" was elected with 53 members, directed by three chairmen, Ledebour, Liebknecht, and Paul Scholze.[24] Although he was a skilled orator, and heralded as the "priest of the revolution,"[25] Liebknecht failed to organize the support from these varied revolutionary groups into anything resembling an effective leadership group for Berlin, let alone the entire Reich.

Ebert's government, however, was not immediately able to take measures to oppose the waves of Spartacus and armed revolutionaries parading up and down the government quarter in Berlin. People's Commissar Gustav Noske later wrote that while trying to enforce the political authority of the Cabinet, he "stood there with no instrument of power to utilize."[26] He was not wrong; the government had few politically reliable options at its disposal. The Eichhorn-loyal Sicherheitswehr was naturally unsuited to be deployed against its commander and creator. Otto Wels and the Commandant's Office declared that they did not have the resources to assist the republican Soldatenwehr to restore order in Berlin.[27] The political loyalty of soldiers still stationed in the various barracks in and around Berlin was so fluid that

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[23] Richard Müller, *Der Bürgerkrieg,* 35.
[24] Ibid., 36.
[25] Graf Kessler, *Tagebücher*, 92.
[26] Noske, *Kiel bis Kapp*, 66.
[27] Ibid., 68.

only the most desperate political movements ever attempted to deploy these units, often with disappointing results. While the officer corps declared their readiness to once again invade Berlin, the political ramifications from the last troop deployment still loomed large in Ebert's mind. Fearing the potential backlash from another military operation against revolutionary workers, on 6 January Gustav Noske, a socialist and civilian, was named supreme military commander by the Cabinet.[28] Noske had no illusions concerning the nature of his task. He would later write," I did not shy away from the responsibility! Someone must be the bloodhound."[29]

While the decision to appoint Noske as supreme commander was a recognition of the role violence played in revolutionary politics, the new "bloodhound" of the revolution still lacked reliable forces at his disposal. This necessitated government support for the creation of *Freiwilligenregimente*, or so-called "Volunteer regiments," on 6 January.[30] Although their loyalty and subordination to Ebert's regime was questionable, the Freikorps used to suppress the Spartacus Revolt were at least generally consistent in their anti-communist sentiment. Many of these units, like the Freiwilligenregiment Reinhard, were already in the process of forming before January 1919 with the assistance of leading generals like Lequis and War Minister Schëuch.[31] Often composed of "old comrades" from the war, these units exhibited a continuity with the imperial army, from

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[28] Now composed solely of SPD members, the *Zentralrat* declared its opposition to the Spartacus League's "reign of violence," and transferred all authority to the Reich Cabinet. *Reichsanzeiger*, Nr 5, 7 January, 1919.
[29] Noske, *Kiel bis Kapp,* 68.
[30] For more on the creation of the Freikorps, and the government's involvement in this process, see Chapter 5.
[31] Reinhard, *1918-1919*, page 59.

patterns of deployment, to equipment and tactical deployment. Most importantly for Noske, they did not hesitate to unleash the violence from the First World War against their countrymen. Field reports from the Freikorps Reinhard do not shy away from describing the destruction:

> As the crowds began to storm our position around 3 o'clock, Captain Plath let the riflemen fire and use hand grenades. A complete panic developed within the attackers. Everyone fled as women and children howled. … A few machine guns blew up a cluster of people. As I entered the barracks, the crew stood laughing with their weapons. … The artillery fire from Moabit had done wonders. Never again was our barracks harassed. … From the balcony of the Leopold Palace the machine guns hammered the U-Bahn train station as attack columns simultaneously slid down the Wilhelmstraße. In a few moments 60 dead and wounded lay on the asphalt.[32]

In the aftermath of deadly force against protestors and bystanders, Ebert's government justified its actions to the people of Germany, stating, "violence can only be fought with violence … The hour of reckoning is drawing near!"[33] And indeed the genie was out of the bottle. Violence continued to play an increasing role in political life for all sides. Just before the January elections to the new National Assembly, members of the Horse Guards Division assassinated Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Martyrs to their cause, their bodies were later found in the Landwehr canal.

The Spartacus Revolt was a critical moment in the early Weimar Republic. It was not the beginning of the end of the cycle of violence, but rather the end of the beginning. The failed January uprising established a pattern of conflict that would persist throughout the early years of the Weimar Republic. The Communists and

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[32] Reinhard, *1918-1919*, 67-68.
[33] *Reichsanzeiger*, Nr 7, 9 January 1919.

Independent Socialists were now firmly cast as critics and rivals, all attempts at cooperation with the Majority Social Democrats would prove temporary and localized. The USPD and KPD not only distanced themselves from the more moderate SPD in practical organizational matters, but ideologically as well, as their involvement in increasingly radical revolutionary programs and leadership committees continued. However, radicalism was not localized within the left wing of the political spectrum. With the use of the Freikorps to put down the Spartacus Revolt, the rightwing forces made their first major foray to violence-based politics. Although the nature of the antagonism between the right and left would go through several phases, it would come to fundamentally shape all political discourse in the republican era. By January 1919, almost all major political organizations and cultures turned to violence as a legitimate way to enact policy.

Throughout the month of uprisings in Berlin, marked by the Foreign Office Putsch, the Sailors' Revolt on Christmas Eve, and finally the Spartacus Revolt, Ebert's government and the SPD leadership had been forced to respond to violent provocations against their regime. By the end of this short period, Ebert, Scheidemann, and particularly Gustav Noske, shifted their views on the use of violence to achieve political objectives from a reactionary policy to an active incorporation of military force against political opponents. There was also a fuller appreciation of the scope of the threats confronting the new republic. Noske was aware that following the Spartacus Putsch, "the Berlin Government of People's Commissars did not have considerable authority across the Reich."[34] Reestablishing

[34] Noske, *Kiel bis Kapp,* 78.

political and military authority, not only in the capital but throughout all regions of Germany, had become the top priority for the Social Democrats and their cabinet. The next several months of the Republic would be dedicated to normalizing and monopolizing the means of violence under their control. This period, heavily influenced by Noske, demonstrated the primacy of *Gewaltpolitik* for the new republican government.

CHAPTER IV: *GEWALTPOLITIK*

Following the January uprising by the Spartacus League and their sympathetic leftwing supporters, Ebert and the leadership of the Social Democratic Party of Germany embarked on a concentrated programme aimed at consolidating all means of violence in the hands of the government. Over the previous month, from roughly 6 December until Liebknecht's murder on 15 January, the Council of People's Commissars, effectively operating as the post-imperial era Cabinet, recognized that their position as leaders of the Reich could not be secured solely through democratic idealism, but also with the controlled use of physical violence. Over the next several months, until roughly mid-1919, Gustav Noske, playing his role as the "Bloodhound" of the revolution sought to re-establish normalized relations between the civilian political realm and the highly fragmented military sphere. Before examining the results of Ebert, Scheidemann, and Noske's campaign, it is necessary to briefly retrace events within the army leading up to Noske's appointment as supreme commander to fully demonstrate the divisive and destructive effects the contested political authority had on military affairs.

Before we examine the nature of Ebert's policy towards physical violence, a few words are necessary concerning terminology and translation. The German word "*Gewalt*" has several definitions in English. Most sources list "authority" as the primary translation, however, "violence" and "power" are also possible depending on the context and the word's usage. In this specific historical context, members of Ebert's political cabinet, himself included, often did not clarify which precise meaning they intended, at times clearly discussing all three potential translations of

"*Gewaltpolitik:"* "power politics," "the politics of authority," and "politics of violence." *Independent Social Democrats first used Gewaltpolitik as a derogatory term* in January 1919 to describe Ebert's militant response to the Spartacus Revolt in Berlin during the same month. While Ebert and his cabinet did not use this term themselves, the following chapter will nevertheless demonstrate that *Gewaltpolitik* did eventually come to characterize the Majority Social Democrats' policy towards any leftwing revolution aimed at overthrowing the authority of the republican government. Although its application to Ebert's policies is my description rather than their own self-characterization, the concept of *Gewaltpolitik* accurately depicts the pattern of behaviour by the SPD Cabinet during this critical period.

Contested Control: The Imperial Army after the Armistice

The Army Supreme Command established a very clear set of objectives for the partnership with Ebert's new revolutionary government. The OHL wasted little time responding and adapting to the new political realities of revolutionary Germany. Hindenburg's order from 10 November to the troops still stationed along the western front reflected an acute awareness of the existential crisis facing the officer corps.[1] After stressing the need to retain the position and authority of military commanders in order to return the Field Armies to the *Heimat* in "cohesiveness and order," Hindenburg begrudgingly conceded to the creation of representative councils in all companies, batteries and squadrons of the German armed forces.

[1] Gerhard A. Ritter, *Die deutsche Revolution, 1918-1919: Dokumente* (Hamburg: Fischer Bücherei, 1971), 92.

Although he consented to soldiers' councils and even elected officers, the field marshal demanded that leadership of all troops remain firmly in the hands of the established command authorities. The army also took steps to limit outside influence within the Field Armies. Hindenburg issued a set of guidelines on 16 November aimed at curbing the growing influence of domestic Soldiers' Councils within the front-line units. The need to root out and remove undesirable political elements from the front was clear to Hindenburg and the High Command. "The agents on the Front are not dispatched by the current government, but rather by agitators, who want to spread unrest in the country in order to overthrow the current government and bring the country into a state of rape, murder, and plundering," wrote the Chief of Staff of the Field Armies.[2] Although Scott Stephenson has demonstrated that the actual influence of revolutionaries within the Field Armies was extremely low, the fear of such political agitation within the ranks front-line troops motivated the army leadership to take action. Therefore, Hindenburg requested that Soldiers' Councils be limited to an advisory role with no command authority over the troops.[3] In a letter to Groener, Hindenburg put the matter in clear terms: "If the army is to remain a useful instrument of power in the hands of [Ebert's] government, the authority of the officers must immediately be re-established with all powers, and the [revolutionary] politics of the army be

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[2] "Richtlinien für die Einwirkung auf die Truppe, herausgegeben vom Chef des Generalstabes des Feldheeres am 16.11.1918," in Erich Otto Volkmann, *Der Marxismus und das deutsche Heer im Weltkriege* (Berlin: Hobbing, 1925), page 317.
[3] Ibid., 317.

removed."[4] Ebert and the Council of People's Commissars also supported the army's attempts to preserve the authority of the officer corps over the rank and file. The government issued a directive to the front troops to this effect on 12 November, demanding that "military discipline and order must be preserved under all circumstances."[5] A series of declarations issued to the troops urged the comradely (*kameradschaftliche*) treatment of officers, supported the authority of the officer corps, and outlined an advisory role for the Soldiers' Councils in alignment with Hindenburg's later order. Both government and army leadership appeared united in their desire to preserve the authority of the officer corps and control the means of violence following the revolution.

The Council of People's Commissars and the OHL were not the only institutions seeking greater influence over the Field Armies. As the divisions stationed within Germany's borders quickly disintegrated during the early days of the revolution, commanding the loyalties of the Field Armies took on even greater importance for all political players. The large formations of well-trained and fully equipped veterans of the Great War offered significant political potential to any group or organization that could guide and direct their demobilization within the borders of the Reich. For the Army High Command, preserving control over the troops during their return march to Germany would help preserve the existence and power of the officer corps, while further demonstrating their usefulness to their new coalition partner, Ebert and the SPD. To the various political parties of the left,

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[4] "Brief Hindenburgs an Ebert vom 8.12.1918" in Ritter, *deutsche Revolution*, 121-124.
[5] Ritter, *deutsche Revolution*, 77.

demobilizing soldiers offered a variety of options. In the right hands, the return of the Field Armies could either cement the political authority of the Council of People's Commissars, or become an instrument of further socialist revolution under the Independent Socialists or the Spartacus League. Therefore, the question of command authority, or *Kommandogewalt,* over the former imperial army became intricately connected to political debates in Berlin and throughout the Reich.

As early as 12 November, the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Greater Berlin mounted their first substantial attempt to reform Germany's military sphere to conform with revolutionary ideals. Announcing the need for 2,000 "socialist qualified and politically organized comrades and workers with military training to assume the defense of the Revolution," the Berlin based *Vollzugsrat* declared the creation of a revolutionary Red Guard.[6] All interested young men were to report to their local trade union houses by the following day. However, on 13 November the order, originally signed by Richard Müller and Brutus Molkenbuhr, was quickly rescinded. The first and only attempt by the Executive Committee to create their own "instrument of power" (*Machtinstrument*) collapsed amid suspicions of the revolutionary commitment of soldiers reporting for service in the Red Guards. In light of the failure of their attempt to produce a new revolutionary military institution, the Executive Council began a new campaign on 15 November to assume control over the former imperial army and adapt it to the revolutionaries' needs. The *Vollzugsrat* sent a message to the Army Supreme Command informing them that the creation of soldiers' councils had eroded the

[6] "Aufruf des Vollzugsrat zur Bildung einer Roten Garde vom 12.11.1918," 12 November 1918, in Ritter, *deutsche Revolution*, 95.

authority of the officer corps over the rank and file, necessitating a new command structure to smoothly transport the troops back to Germany. All independent General Commands, the General Staff and the OHL would now be subordinated to the War Ministry, which like all Reich authorities had been brought under the direction of the *Vollzugsrat* of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council.[7] While the Executive Council succeeded in creating this new command structure, the only tangible result was to transfer the locus of the conflict between the revolutionaries and the army leadership from the OHL to the War Ministry. Asserting control over the entire military apparatus could not be accomplished through a simple memorandum; a lesson the *Vollzugsrat* never fully realized during its short time in power.

Liebknecht and the Spartacus League were also quick to make appeals to veterans. Open association between left-wing political groups and soldiers had developed alongside revolutionary events in November 1918. As early as 10 November, *Die Rote Fahne*, reporting on the creation of Workers' Councils in Berlin and across Germany, instructed soldiers in barracks and field armies throughout the imperial army to follow this example and begin electing representatives. Additionally, Liebknecht and Luxemburg set clear tasks for the "reorganization of authority." To create a "proletariat socialist peace," soldiers were instructed to:

1. Disarm the police and all officers and soldiers who did not accept the revolution.
2. Assume authority in all command posts through local workers' and soldiers' councils.

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[7] "Der Vollzugsrat verkündet die Unterstellung der Obersten Heeresleitung unter das Kriegsministerium, 15.11.1918," in Ritter, *deutsche Revolution*, 98-99.

3. Take control over the direction of returning soldiers to the *Heimat* through regional Workers' and Soldiers' Councils.

The communists were quick to extend their influence in garrisons to Berlin and across Germany, even offering free copies of *Die Rote Fahne* for distribution in barracks. Focus on re-mobilizing soldiers for the radical left was clear. Every single edition of the Spartacus newspaper in November and December 1918 contained articles specifically addressed to soldiers, urging them to support the Soldiers' Councils, to attend congresses and council meetings, and most importantly to extoll the revolutionary and socialist spirit of the German soldier. On 24 November the Spartacus League refined its appeals to left-wing soldiers, publishing a newspaper, "*Rote Soldaten*," heralded as the "first newspaper of the Revolution for our *Feldgrauen*." For a mere five pfennig, soldiers of the former Kaiser's army could read critiques of the Soldiers' Council's proceedings, articles discussing the progress of Soldiers' Councils throughout Germany, as well as editorials seeking to "bring together the soldierly masses with the socialist ideals."[8]

Within the general communist propaganda directed to soldiers, there was also a clear recognition that the soldiers serving at the front were on some level distinguished from troops in the *Heimatheer,* granting them with particular political value. Addresses to soldiers began immediately after the declaration of the Republic in Berlin on 9 November, with a specific focus on the '*Frontkämpfer*' evident less than two weeks later. In an article titled "The New *Burgfrieden,"* Luxemburg called for solidarity between the exploited victims of the "Social Imperialist war," namely the workers and soldiers who were united by the common goals of peace and

[8] "Die Roten Soldaten,"*Die Rote Fahne,* 24 November 1918.

demobilization.[9] The communists repeatedly referred to Front Soldiers as "proletariat in *Feldgrau,*" praising the council movement as a sign of a growing class-consciousness within the rank and file of the army. Most importantly, the Spartacus League stressed the bond between *Frontkämpfer* and revolutionary workers through the mutual glorification of action. Just as active participation in the war at the front distinguished a Front Soldier from a *Heimat* Soldier in the eyes of the veterans, the Spartacists declared that the true socialist revolutionary was similarly defined by his active efforts rebelling against the bourgeois capitalist order.

Efforts to organize the *Frontkämpfer* through the Spartacus League were first evident through the declaration of a specific Front Soldier Assembly, held on 22 November in Berlin, with Karl Liebknecht acting as "advisor." Several key resolutions were passed; including a decree to establish a formal and permanent Soldiers' Council of Front Soldiers, which would then seek incorporation into the Great Berlin Soldiers' Council; and a declaration specifying that all officers and counterrevolutionary elements should immediately be removed from the councils.[10] While it is unlikely that Liebknecht was able to assemble the desired hundreds of delegates for a specific *Frontkämpfer* Assembly by late November, especially considering that there is no evidence of such a meeting actually taking place, it is

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[9],*"Der neue Burgfrieden,"*19 November 1918, *Die Rote Fahne.*

[10] Barch-Licht R 201- 27, "*Richtlinien für Soldatenräte*." While exact numbers of representatives at the first two meetings of the specific Front Soldiers' Assembly in Berlin are unavailable, if the election regulations governing the structure of the Soldiers' Council elections in front line formations are used as a model for the Front Soldiers' Assembly, there would be 43 delegates from armies, army divisions and army groups, with additional delegates from each unit over 1000 men, potentially generating a body of several hundred men.

nonetheless clear that the communists recognized that the Front Soldiers had political capital in revolutionary Germany, in addition to their military value.

However, the adoption of the so-called "Seven Hamburg Points" at the First Congress of Councils represented the most direct attempt by the revolutionary powers to seize control of the military apparatus.[11] As previously discussed, the Seven Hamburg Points outlined a vague programme aimed at the "democratization" of the army, but were primarily concerned with establishing the council movement's claim to *Kommandogewalt*. According to the decree, military command authority was to be exerted only by the People's Commissars, yet under the control of the *Vollzugsrat*. Naturally, this did nothing to provide clarity concerning military affairs, and merely perpetuated the duality of command for several more weeks. Ultimately the full implementation of these revolutionary reforms was never accomplished as the sailors' mutiny on Christmas eve and the breakdown of the relationship between the USPD and SPD halted progress on the program of revolutionary "democratization" of the armed forces. Nonetheless, the resolution to approve the Seven Hamburg Points represents the closest the radical left ever came to enacting a significant reform of the German military sphere.

Failure: Early Social Democrat Attempts to Reform the Military Sphere

During a lengthy debate on military affairs on 31 December 1918, Ebert, in the presence of his SPD-controlled Cabinet and a handful of leading officers, summarized the task ahead for the government and the military. "Our military

[11] "Proposals of the Supreme Soldiers' Council for Hamburg-Altona and Vicinity: The Seven Hamburg Points," in Burdick and Lutz, *Political Institutions*, 176-77.

administration still represents a cumbersome organism. Over the next six months a great deal of responsible work will have to be undertaken to overhaul it," he stated. "Our primary concern must be to rebuild. All of the achievements of the revolution are on shaky ground if we do not succeed in creating a stable government guaranteed by a democratically structured military organization."[12] Ebert's conviction would only be strengthened by the events of the Spartacus-led January uprisings that erupted less than a week after this meeting. However, the SPD's plan for the military sphere was only one of many potential options proposed by various political groups. The debate over the future shape the military, which had preoccupied the political left wing for decades before the war, moved to the forefront of political discourse.

Chief among these alternatives was the creation of an entirely new military institution, but on a "democratic basis." Under Hohenzollern rule, the Prussian, and later German Army, had not only protected the state from its external foes in France, Russia and elsewhere in Europe, it had also defended the regime from domestic, internal political opposition, which protested the restrictive social, economic, and constitutional policies of the monarchy. Involved in numerous harsh repressive policing actions against the left-wing since the rule of Otto von Bismarck, the army held little love in the hearts of socialists and communists. After the war, there were numerous demands to re-establish military authority in Germany through the

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[12] "Join Meeting of the Cabinet and the Zentralrat, 31 December 1918," in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz,168.

creation of a "People's Militia," or *Volkswehr.*[13] The Council for People's Commissars passed issued a decree authorizing its formation on 12 December, four days before the First Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils would meet and alter the SPD's conception of the *Volkswehr.*[14] Initially established to "preserve the public order and security," the new force was to be composed entirely of volunteers and exist completely independent from the structure of the imperial army. Led by self-elected commanders, each recruit was required to be over the age of 24, physically fit, and with a record of "faultless front-line service" during the war, which seemingly would have created continuity between the new and old armies. These conditions and requirements were quite typical and were found in numerous announcements for postwar military formations, like the Einwohnerwehr or the Sicherheitswehr. However, the third point of the Law for the Creation of a Volunteer *Volkswehr*[15] demonstrates its importance for the evolution towards greater violence within SPD *Gewaltpolitik*. The new *Volkswehr* was to be "subject exclusively to the Council of People's Commissars," and honour bound to the SPD government by oath.[16] Although authority over the *Volkswehr* would later be re-allocated through the Congress of Councils and integrated into the power sharing apparatus between the *Vollzugsrat* and the Council of People's Commissars, in its original conception, the "People's Militia" was designed as a powerful instrument in the hands of the

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[13] The Social Democrats had sought the reform of the military since before the declaration of the German Reich. As per the Eisenach Programme of 1869, the SPD wanted to convert the existing army into some form of "People's Militia," which would only be an instrument of self-defense rather than aggressive nationalist expansion.
[14] "Gesetz für die Bildung einer freiwillige Volkswehr," *Reich Gesetzblatt 1918*, 1424.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

Social Democrats, to be used against opponents from any end of the political spectrum. Debate concerning the final shape and political loyalties of the *Volkswehr* would stretch well into the new year and would continue to hound Ebert's government for most of 1919, even dominating the majority of the proceedings to nominate a new war minister throughout early January.[17] Directed by the USPD and the council movement leaders, the quarrelsome revolutionary bureaucracy effectively strangled Ebert's early attempt to create a wholly independent, SPD-loyal military institution through the *Volkswehr*.

In the shadow of the protracted *Volkswehr* debate, the SPD began evaluating its options to control the use of violence in both the political and military spheres. Even before the military weakness of the government was demonstrated through the Spartacus Revolt, Ebert, Noske and the Cabinet had a low opinion of the troops available to the government, both revolutionary and republican alike. The "Republican *Soldatenwehr*," created by SPD Berlin City Commandant Otto Wels was thoroughly discredited as a viable force by their poor performance in the 23/24 December Sailor's Mutiny in the capital. Despite having 14 depots around Berlin, with a potential 600 to 1500 men in each post, the Republican Soldatenwehr proved powerless to assist the government against the Volksmarinedivision, and would be quietly disbanded by order of the Reichswehr Minister on 3 May 1919.[18] Noske may have praised their desire to secure "*Ordnung und Sicherheit,"* but questioned their combat potential and relegated the Soldatenwehr troops to guard duty and garrison

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[17] Burdick and Lutz, *Political Institutions,* 45-50, 56.
[18] Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik*, *1918-1920* (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1969), 16.

patrols.[19] The "pro-republican" troops lacked combat effectiveness, and questionable political reliability discredited revolutionary troops in Noske's estimation. "The old Berlin regiments had been secured on 9 November and agreed to stand behind the government," he wrote in his memoirs, "however the elected leaders did not have the soldiers in their hands. Nothing could be done with these troops. If they were needed they did not arrive. The police was just as unreliable."[20] The presence of an overwhelming, but unspecified, number of "red" sergeants in former imperial units presented similar obstacles for Noske and the SPD.[21]

Following the departure of the Independents from the government at the end of December 1918, Noske sought to resurrect the concept of the *Volkswehr* as a useful mechanism for a drastic reform of the military sphere, despite the initial weak de-centralized organization and poor quality of the *Volkswehr* troops.[22] Noske believed that the government could be relatively flexible concerning the structure of the military force, as long as it had consistent pro-republican political loyalties. This became a guiding principle of SPD military policy in the coming year. In a joint meeting between the *Zentralrat* and the Cabinet, now dominated by the Majority Socialists, the new political leaders of Germany advocated for wide-spread reforms of the current state of military affairs within the Reich. SPD *Zentralrat* member Max Cohen believed that a new army, a "People's Army," or *Volksheer*, needed to be quickly established before the January elections to the National Assembly. Cohen and his supporters in the *Zentralrat* favoured a clean break with the old army and

[19] Noske, *Kiel bis Kapp,* 61.
[20] Ibid., 62.
[21] Ibid., 52.
[22] Ibid., 113.

establishing strong centralized government control through the War Ministry. "The present field army is useless," Cohen declared. "The men think of nothing but returning home as soon as possible. We will be lucky if we can extract a few building blocks for the new army. The militias which have sprung up around us do nothing but clash with each other and are completely useless."[23] Despite yet another articulation of the problems facing the Social Democrat controlled government, no new proposals were adopted or agreed upon to alter the current state of military affairs. Only after the upheaval of the Spartacus Revolt in January 1919 did the government finally have the *casus belli* to enact a substantial campaign to reform the deployment of the means of violence within Germany.

Seizing *Kommandogewalt*: The SPD Campaign to Control Military Affairs

Confronted with the violence of the January uprisings, led by the newly formed KPD and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards of Berlin, the government used force to put down the revolt. The number of government troops were greatly supplemented by the inclusion of nationalist Freikorps units, or *Freiwilligenkorps*, which had been assembling under the loose support of the army throughout the previous months. While they proved useful in putting down the left-wing attempts to overthrow the republican administration, it would be a far cry to label them "pro-government" troops. As will be examined in the second part of this study, the Freikorps usually set their own agenda, often without specific reference to political institutions or organizations. Furthermore, the former imperial army had almost completely

[23] "Joint Meeting of the Cabinet and the Zentralrat, 31 December 1918," in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz, 173.

disintegrated by January 1919, as there were few reliable formations left in the hands of the officer corps to fulfill their promised role as defender of the republican government. Groener confessed on 21 January to the Cabinet that "the army in the west has vanished. We have only two contingents left in the barracks, and one of them will be demobilized in February."[24] Combined with the clear impotence of the republican *Soldatenwehr*, the military options for the SPD were limited at best.

While the military options confronting the Social Democrats remained underwhelming, their control over political authority in the Reich was substantially bolstered by the elections for the National Assembly held on 19 January. The SPD polled 37.9 percent of the votes and won 165 seats, the highest share of the vote in a national election that the SPD or any political party would achieve during the Weimar Republic. The USPD obtained only 7.6 percent and 22 seats. In light of the strong showing by the bourgeois parties (the Centre won 91 seats, the German Democratic Party 75 seats, and the German National People's Party 44 seats), the Majority Socialists, the Centre and the Democrats forged the "Weimar Coalition" to govern the country. Although this meant that the new constitution would be a mixture of socialist and bourgeois ideals, it nonetheless conferred legitimacy to Ebert's political leadership of the country.

On the same day, 19 January, Ebert and Noske, with the support of Under State Secretary Paul Göhre, and Max Cohen and Hermann Müller from the *Zentralrat* of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, issued an order entitled "The Provisional Regulation of the Command Authority and Position of the Soldiers' Councils in the

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[24] "Cabinet Meeting of 21 January 1919," in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz, 197.

Peace Army."[25] It was the first of a series of laws that would seek to establish centralized civilian authority over the military realm along the lines of a theoretical Clausewitzian civil-military relationship. The 19 January regulation concerning the authority of the Soldiers' Councils in military affairs claimed the sole right to command authority for the Reich Cabinet. The war minister, directly subordinated to the cabinet, was now positioned as head of the armed forces and all service posts in Prussia and the entire country were responsible to him. Soldiers' councils were not eliminated, however. They were instructed to "monitor the activities of the commanders and ensure that they do not use their authority to abuse the existing government," focusing their efforts primarily on "the welfare of the troops, social and economic questions, and [on] leave and disciplinary affairs."[26] Purely military orders concerning training, leadership, and deployment of the troops were only to be issued through the commander and no longer required a countersignature by a soldiers' council. The regulations specifically stated that Soldiers' Councils "have no capacity to issue guidelines or orders" to the troops. By removing the councils from all command decisions, and relegating their influence solely to soldiers' grievances, the government and the army leadership sought to re-establish control over the standing army, while avoiding political repercussions from the outright elimination of soldiers' councils.

Nevertheless, the reaction to the reduced role of the soldiers' councils was swift and substantial. The General Soldiers' Council in Münster rejected the new regulations and maintained that command authority for VII Army Corps lay solely in

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[25] Armee Verordnungsblatt *1919*, 54.
[26] Ibid., 54.

the hands of the soldiers' council, which would continue to operate on the basis of the Seven Hamburg Points.[27] Although the 19 January regulation concerning command authority (*Kommandogewalt*) announced the government's intentions to assume control over military affairs, it was clear that the council movement would not meekly submit without a show of force.

As a result, Noske, as the Social Democrat cabinet member responsible for leading the government's drive to centralize the means of violence throughout the Reich, was armed with the political resolve to reform the military realm, but lacked a permanent military instrument to enact such a change. At the same cabinet meeting where Groener acknowledged the physical weakness of the former imperial army on 21 January and was unable to give clear figures for reliable troops still under the OHL's control, Noske outlined the military needs of the new republican government and his plans to use the assembled volunteer forces. "The government must be assured its authority by securing a power backing. During the course of one week we have rallied a military force of 22,000 men," declared Noske. "In two or three weeks we hope to have 50,000 men at our disposal. Then we will be in a position to restore a certain amount of order."[28] The new ability of the government to marshal its own forces had changed the cabinet's relationship to their political rivals in Berlin, according to Noske. "Our dealings with the Soldiers' Councils have, therefore, taken on a slightly different tone," he argued. "Hitherto, the soldiers'

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[27] Noske, *Kiel bis Kapp,* 95.
[28] "Cabinet Meeting of 21 January 1919," in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz,198.

councils had force on their side; now force militates in our favour."[29] Noske then allocated his forces to respond to the most serious threats, both to domestic order and from international provocation.[30] Ten thousand troops were to remain in Berlin to protect the government, while 1,000 men were dispatched to Upper Silesia to reinforce Freikorps units engaged in shooting actions along the Polish border. Heavily reliant on Freikorps support, Noske also sent the independent Baumeister Regiment to defend threatened areas in Posen, while using General Georg Maercker's Freikorps regiment to secure Weimar, and re-establish order in Halle and Braunschweig along its route. Finally, Noske hoped to "restore order" to Bremen and Schleswig by the end of the month, although he conceded that Hamburg, Altona and Cuxhaven would remain problematic for the foreseeable future.

While Noske outlined his plans to deploy Freikorps troops to handle the most immediate challenges to centralized military authority - and ignoring the threat that the Freikorps similarly posed to this goal - the Social Democrats continued to debate a long-term solution to the government's military dilemma. Given the threat presented by an aggressive Poland on Germany's eastern borders, some cabinet members like Eduard David favoured reform rather than revolution in the military realm. "We should not create the new army under the mantra of a new army," he said on 21 January, "but must refer to it as a 'democratization' of the old army."[31] The new War Minister, Colonel (later general) Walther Reinhardt, agreed that

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[29] "Cabinet Meeting of 21 January 1919," in *Political Institutions*, ed. Burdick and Lutz,199.
[30] Ibid., 198.
[31] Ibid., 199.

preservation of the old army was preferable to the alternatives presented by the Congress of Councils, but did not want to return to the old dual role under the monarchy, guaranteeing protection from both foreign and domestic enemies. Reinhardt believed that the army should be deployed to protect Silesia from further Polish attacks, and from Czech or Bolshevik intrigues, but urged the government to leave domestic security to another force. "The maintenance of order at home is not a proper task for the Army; it demoralizes the Army and puts the Army and the people into conflict," he informed the Social Democrat Cabinet. "The government should deploy an adequate police force for this purpose. A much larger number of security divisions will be needed. We need a police force; then the new army can draw on a newly invigorated youth."[32] Matthias Erzberger, of the Centre Party, initially seemed intrigued by the idea, noting that while the disarmament provisions, not yet finalized by the Entente Powers, would limit the size of the army, he believed it was unlikely that the size and strength of Germany's police forces would be subject to restrictions as well.[33] However, Groener was once again forced to remind the Cabinet that before any discussion of building a new army, or even reforming the old one, could proceed, they still had to deal with lingering problems from the war. Groener estimated that there were still 130,000 men stationed in Ukraine that needed to be returned to Germany, which would require another four to six weeks.

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[32] Burdick and Lutz, *Political Institutions*, 199.
[33] Although Part V of the Treaty of Versailles would not specifically mention police forces, Article 177 prohibited all clubs, societies, and institutions from "any connection with the Ministry of War or any other military authority." The Inter-Allied Control Council used Article 177 to curb the size and ordnance of police departments across Germany; however, the Munich Police Department's combat aviation wing did last for several months before the Entente Powers disbanded it.

The 10th Army still listed 10,000 men on active service, but the 8th Army had completely demobilized, largely without orders. Re-mobilizing troops to secure the eastern border was not a simple matter, Groener argued. "At present troop reinforcements are obtainable only through the personal influence of the officers involved," Groener stated, a process mirrored by Freikorps recruitment practices. Otto Landsberg's suggestion that soldiers under the command of the council movement might be suitable for border defense met with a typical frosty response from Groener. "The Supreme Command has always urged the officers to collaborate with the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils," he retorted, "However, often the delusions of grandeur on the part of the soldiers' councils have stood in the way."[34]

While Landsberg may have still naively believed that the council movement could be used to bolster the government's political and military authority, Noske recognized that the various workers' and soldiers' councils spread across the Reich effectively obstructed the national authority of the Berlin-based Council of People's Commissars. Therefore, Noske embarked on a national campaign beginning at the end of January nominally to "re-establish peace and order," but in effect to crush the political and military autonomy of the council movement throughout Germany. Throughout late January and early February 1919, often appearing in the Social Democrats' official newspaper, *Vorwärts*, Noske and the government actively recruited Freikorps formations to assist the republic in its campaign against the council movement. Recruitment posters and advertisements for the Freiwilligen Regiment Reinhard, the Landesschützenkorps Detachement Werthen, Freikorps

[34] "Cabinet Meeting, 21 January, 1919," in Burdick and Lutz, *Political Institutions*, 201.

Lützow, the Schwarz Korps, and the Freiwilligen Eskadron 2 Garde Dragoons Regiment, mobilized young men, students, and particularly veterans of the First World War to fight in a political war that would stretch across Germany for the next several months.[35] Urging "such German men who have their heart in the right spot" to apply, the early Freikorps, operating in the service of the government, frequently deployed cavalry, machine-gun units, mine throwers, and artillery to "protect the violated eastern provinces, protect the people from Bolshevism and Terror, and secure the National Assembly."[36] With these nationalistic troops loosely under his command, Noske felt finally ready to move against the opponents of the government's authority.

His first target was Bremen. Citing acts of robbery and violation of the freedoms of the press and the right to assemble, Noske sought to root out KPD and USPD sympathetic workers' and soldiers' councils on 4 February, 1919. The march on Bremen proved to be a complicated affair, however. The Soldiers' Council for IX Army Corps stationed in Altona protested against any troop movements through their corps region, which they argued included Bremen. They declared to the government:

> The Soldiers' Councils are determined to defend themselves with all available means. We see that in the intended plan of the government a declaration of war on IX Army Corps, has been prepared. The Soldiers' Councils of IX Army Corps are determined to defend the achievements of the revolution against all attacks, and are confident that the majority of the Soldiers' Councils of Germany are behind us.[37]

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[35] *Vorwärts*, 26 January, 4,5 February 1919.
[36] "Landesschützenkorps Detachement Werthen," *Vorwärts,* Nr 47, 26 January, 1919.
[37] Noske, 79.

Finally, the council demanded that all troops sent into the region of IX Army Corps be immediately withdrawn. As could be expected, Noske rejected the council's implication that they exercised command authority over all troops within their corps region and continued his preparations to seize Bremen. The issue came to a head in early February when a member of the corps' soldiers' council declared the willingness of the soldiers' council to fight to defend its authority. "In Hamburg, 40,000 Workers have been armed," the spokesman said. "If the Gerstenberg Division wants to conscript any person in Hamburg, they should be aware that along with the first canon fire, all bridges will be blown and all ships with provisions will be sunk. In the region of IX Army Corps, 100,000 men stand ready to defend the corps' soldiers' council."[38] The soldiers' council in Cuxhaven saw Noske's manouvres as an indication of a wider counterrevolution. "The hour draws near! The Capitalists and the Officers have disclosed their shameful plans!" decried the Soldiers' Council of Cuxhaven.

> If one is robbed of the achievements of the revolution one will be placed under the old system of absolute authority of the officers (*Offiziersgewalt*)! The battle against Bremen will be decisive should the working class and those soldiers freed from militarism be doomed to complete defeat. … Bremen falls and then they will choke off the soldiers' councils in all cities in the entire Reich. … Strong support troops from the entire region of IX Army Corps are already marching towards Bremen. Further *Kampftruppen* of soldiers and workers will be created. Rapidly, 30,000 workers are arming! A battle ready, well-equipped army of determined revolutionaries will stand ready in a very short time and dash off to defeat the White Guard mercenaries under counterrevolutionary orders![39]

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[38] Noske,*Kiel bis Kapp,* 80.
[39] *Die Neue Zeit*, 5 February, 1919.

Government reports received on 5 February detailed the soldiers' councils' preparations for combat throughout the IX Army Corps region. In Bremen, Bremerhaven, Kiel, Hamburg, and Düsseldorf, soldiers' councils readied troops and stockpiled ammunition and supplies in anticipation of Noske's advance into the army corps region. After brief and inconclusive negotiations, the government troops moved into place around Bremen for what all observers expected to be a significant battle with forces loyal to the council movement. The strength of the council movement was a mirage. Despite the mobilization decrees by the Soldiers' Council of IX Army Corps and the Hamburg-Altona Corps Soldiers' Council, less than 100 disorganized men braved the battlefield against the government-led Freikorps troops and their significant artillery advantage. After a single day of fighting, Bremen fell to Noske's forces. The impressive oratory skills of the leaders of the soldiers' councils were not supported by complementary abilities in planning and mobilization. One communist observer from Hamburg described the defenders of Bremen as a mixture of "flaws, incompetence, amateurism, and *Putschismus* of all kinds."[40]

The Independent Socialists and the Communists reacted quickly to the government's clear victory over the soldiers' councils. *Die Rote Fahne* wrote on 6 February that "Ebert, Scheidemann, and Noske wanted to put their foot on the neck of the proletariat," and that "with blood and iron, they wanted to secure the triumph of capitalism."[41] The gap between the far left and the Majority Socialists stretched even further in light of the government's decision to resort to force to establish its

[40] Noske, *Kiel bis Kapp,* 83.
[41] *Die Rote Fahne*, 6 February, 1919.

political and military authority over the council movement. In a sitting of the Reichstag, USPD Chairman Hugo Haase delivered a passionate speech, demonstrating the growing divisions in the political left, which were fundamentally rooted in the politics of violence. He stated:

> The complete destruction of militarism was the first command of the revolution, and the Majority Socialists have abandoned it. The Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils demanded the elimination of the old *Kommandogewalt* after the immediate start of the programme of socialization, and they have disregarded that too. Like the governments of the old state, Ebert, Scheidemann, Noske, and Landsberg now defend the 'Socialists People's Republic' only through the authority of weapons. Violence was their only means to bring striking workers and revolutionary fighters to peace. In the name of 'order, peace, and security' (*Ordnung, Ruhe, und Sicherheit*) they refused negotiations and amicable settlements, armed officers and students, armed the bourgeoisie against the workers in Berlin and Bremen during the terrible days of brotherly murder, with which they now threaten other towns.[42]

With the experiences of Berlin and Bremen already behind him, Noske continued to direct his mixture of troops directly under the control of the army and thus the government, as well as the more independent Freikorps troops against the remaining locations refusing to submit to the Cabinet's central political authority. General Maercker's troops were deployed three times in February against Erfurt, Halle, and as a part of a mixed formation to secure the National Assembly in Weimar, while other Freikorps units marched on Gotha, and Mannheim in March, and Magdeburg in early April 1919.[43] According Noske's estimates, 1,200 "hostiles" were wounded or killed during his four month campaign against the radical left.

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[42] Noske, *Kiel bis Kapp,* 90.
[43] Ibid., 91-93.

Despite the government's victories on the battlefield, there was still a sense that the legal basis for crushing Bolshevism was lacking. Reich Commissar for East and West Prussia, August Winning stressed the need for new legislation to combat the strength of the radical left. "Everything for the further destruction of internal Bolshevism and the Spartacus League is in the details," Winning wrote to Groener.

> The current law is outdated, an application is difficult and is frequently maddening. We needed firm legal foundations for this battle against the Spartacists, Bolshevism, and Anarchism. Without this basis we cannot lead the battle, our weapons are edgeless. Our laws fail like our judges and State Attorney for this application. … A state, which is inactive and defenseless to fight its most ardent enemies, gives itself up. It lacks the state will for self-preservation. We are in a battle for life and death. That is still not perceived clearly enough. It does not just concern the future form of the state, but the nature of the state itself. In this battle a unified front from the right most wing to the left of the Majority Socialists must be created.[44]

Therefore throughout February and March 1919 several crucial pieces of legislation were produced in order to secure the Cabinet's control over the political functions of the Reich. Having already temporarily delegated extraordinary authority to the Reich government on 6 January to deal with the Spartacus Revolt, the *Zentralrat* officially transferred its authority to the National Assembly on 4 February, ending the last challenge posed by revolutionary political institutions. On 10 February the German National Assembly passed The Law for the Provisional Reich Authority, which established the future basis for the Weimar Constitution, while provisionally creating the office of the president to serve as leader of the national government, and enshrining the National Assembly as the main constituent representative of the

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[44] "Denkschrift des Ersten Generalquartiermeisters, Generalleutnant Groener, über die Gefahrdung der Ostprovinzen," Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (Freiburg) (BA-MA) N42-14.

people.[45] The 4 March Transition Law smoothed the administrative and legal chaos produced by three different national governments issuing legislation within five months of each other.[46] All previous laws and directives from both the imperial government and Council of People's Commissars remained in effect, as long as they did not contradict the new Transition Law or the Law for the Provisional Reich Authority. The Transition Law also cemented the "ersatz Kaiser" role for the president, specifying that the Reich President would replace the Kaiser in all laws created before November 1918. Finally, the Provisional Reichswehr Law, passed on 6 March, brought an end to the protracted debate concerning the shape of the republic's armed forces.[47] Co-signed by Ebert, now formally installed as Reich President, Noske, who became Reichswehr Minister, and War Minister Reinhardt, the new law formally dissolved the remnants of the imperial German Army and created the Reichswehr in its place. The new armed forces were tasked with "defending the Reich's borders, the ability of the government to produce laws, and preservation of domestic *Ruhe und Ordnung*," overriding Reinhardt's desire to see the army removed from policing activities.[48]

The creation of the new Reichswehr was intended to be the corner stone of the Cabinet's attempts to re-impose order on the military sphere. The Provisional Reichswehr Law sought to establish a clear command relationship between officers and men in the new army, but also to assert the official army's dominance within the fractured military realm. Provided they swore an oath of loyalty to the republic, all

[45] Reichs Gesetzblatt, *1919*, 169.
[46] Ibid., 285.
[47] Ibid., 295-296.
[48] Ibid., 295.

existing Freikorps were welcomed into the Reichswehr. Perhaps somewhat naively, government legislators also hoped that *Volkswehr* units could be incorporated alongside the Freikorps troops to promote "democratic principles" in the new army, although there is no evidence of this ever occurring.[49] The new Reichswehr also marked the end of soldiers' councils in the armed forces as no new formations in the army or navy permitted elected officers or soldiers' representatives in any capacity. Thus the creation of the new army marked a significant victory for both the "forces of order" within the country, those individuals and organizations who sought to curb the influence and power of the revolutionaries, as well as the Army Supreme Command and the SPD-led Cabinet. The USPD and KPD lost their battle to reform the army along revolutionary socialist principles based on the model of the Soviet Red Army. Instead, the leaders of the former imperial army had secured the power and authority of the officer corps both within the Reich administration and over the rank and file of the army. Ebert, Scheidemann and Noske likewise counted themselves as clear winners with the new Reichswehr seemingly at their command. Although a shadow of its former strength the army had made a remarkable turn around. Gathering together available Great War veterans who had been deemed "politically reliable" by junior officers, the reconstituted army appeared well-suited to defend the republican government and secure the Cabinet's political and military authority throughout the Reich.

And yet, there were still serious problems with the republic's new military apparatus. Even before its numbers were significantly restricted by the provisions

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[49] Reichs Gesetzblatt, *1919*, 295.

of the Treaty of Versailles, the Reichswehr was not able to fully replace the old imperial army as hegemon of the military sphere. Although it was the best equipped and provisioned of all the military forces during the revolutionary period, the army was not able to fully establish control over all of its rivals until late 1923. While the government's forces had proven effective against Communists, Independent Socialists and other revolutionary organizations throughout the early part of 1919, the political reliability of the army, now partially composed of nationalistic Freikorps formations, remained far from decided. Therefore, Noske had only achieved a limited victory in his campaign to secure the political and military authority of the republic. Elections and bureaucratic maneuvers, directed by Ebert and Scheidemann, had given the Social Democrats access to the political functions of the state and equipped them with popular legitimacy. Noske and the Freikorps had succeeded in dismantling the most obstinate resistance from the council movement and the radical left, but had failed to produce a republican-loyal military institution. The republic's military authority was far from solidified. Indeed, the growing power of the Freikorps and the rise of social militancy through various organizations in the following months would demonstrate just how limited the republic's control over the means of violence truly was.

Conclusion

This study of the early days of the Weimar Republic does not rest on some new, previously undiscovered piece of evidence that drastically alters the understanding of the period. Instead, it placed violence at the heart of political activity in Germany

following the First World War. Control over the means of violence, and its use as a viable political tool, shaped revolutionary politics for the first several years of the Weimar era. Following mobilization for war in 1914, German politicians willfully ceded control over the political functions of the state to the commanders of the armed forces. With the military defeat of the German Field Armies in late 1918, both the political and military authority of the Hohenzollern monarchy was exhausted. The resultant collapse created a political deadlock as too many new institutions, organizations and bodies sought to assert their claims to take over the direction of the state. Paralysis ensued. At the precise moment when Germany required expert political leadership to navigate the extensive list of crises facing the nation, the battle for control over the mechanisms of the state prevented the effective establishment of a popularly legitimated political authority within the Reich until after the January federal elections had been held. Ebert and the Majority Social Democrats would first attempt negotiation and then bureaucratic maneuvers to re-establish centralized political control. In the face of determined opposition from his rivals and a month of damaging uprisings and revolts, Ebert, along with most of the SPD leadership, slowly accepted that only through the use of violence could they stabilize their political authority. However, the months of divided and contested political rule had delayed the re-organization and monopoly control of the military sphere. As a result, a proliferation of armed organizations, many drawing upon the support of world war veterans, occurred across the Reich. Although Ebert and Scheidemann's provisional government in Berlin succeeded in reducing the influence and power of the council movement as a political and military authority,

by the spring of 1919 they had fallen short of their goal to fully establish *Ruhe und Ordnung* throughout the Reich. The crucial moment for a broad demobilization of German society was not exploited. Instead, the following years would be dominated by segments of society that remained fundamentally shaped by their experiences during the First World War and saw violence as a legitimate means to enact political, social and cultural change. Thus November 1918 did not end the violence for German society. Instead, it merely witnessed the inversion of the carnage from beyond the Reich's borders to its very core.

PART II: THE PEOPLE AT WAR

> We were the God of War incarnate; like other Germans who had made their periodic mark on history, we rose up with a Germanic fury that brooked no resistance. Only terror could counter the hatred of the men we confronted, yet allow us to retain our dignity. And so we stand here today as the terrible executors of an absolute justice – a justice that follows its own laws, a justice asserted against even the strongest will in a hostile world.
>
> - Ernst Jünger, 1921[1]

Although the "fury" and "hatred" Jünger discussed described the First World War battlefield, he could have just as easily have applied these terms to the actions and campaigns waged by the militant culture that arose within German society following the end of the Great War. The expression of this segment of Germans through an expansive collection of organizations and units shaped and informed the pathways of violence for the early Weimar Republic.

While historians, such as Friedrich Wilhelm von Oertzen and Hagen Schulze, have offered detailed analysis of the rise and fall of the Freikorps movement, the Freikorps, or *Freiwilligenkorps*, must be understood as a broader postwar social-cultural development within Germany. However, just as the Freikorps cannot be examined solely by their combat record, neither should their substantial literary legacy hold sway over the importance of their actions both domestically and abroad. Instead, the two predominant methodological approaches to understanding the Freikorps movement must be reconciled. The culture and world view of the Freikorps members should, and will be, explored alongside the military operations and specific tactical philosophy employed by the majority of

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[1] Ernst Jünger, *Feuer und Blut*, 156. Trans. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Volume 2 Male Bodies: Psycholoanalyzing the White Terror* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 368.

Freiwilligenformationen. The culture and spirit, of the Freikorps movement consistently guided and dictated the specific manner of their deployment and engagement with their enemies. Reciprocally, Freikorps members were molded and influenced by the nature of the campaigns in which they fought, as their behaviour became more radicalized and violent.

Generally, historians have chosen to view the multitude of militant organizations which proliferated after the war as distinct institutions and formations, and divided the Freikorps from the Einwohnerwehr, or Sicherheitswehr, and so on.[2] However, to focus almost exclusively on the Freikorps formations misses the significant and broad social network that produced, supplied, financed, and aligned with the Freikorps. This does not diminish the Freikorps' importance to understanding violence in the early Weimar Republic, as indeed the Freikorps are the central focus of this part of this work. However, when these colourful, often flamboyant, units are examined alongside the myriad of military-civilian hybrid organizations with which the Freikorps had intimate connections, the presence and function of a broad spectrum of militant groups, operating in diverse segments of German society is exposed. Therefore the Freikorps represented just one of a

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[2] Friedrich Wilhelm von Oertzen, *Die Deutschen Freikorps, 1918-1923* (München: F Bruckmann, 1936); Ernst von Salomon, *Das Buch vom deutschen Freikorpskämpfer* (Berlin: W Limpert, 1938); James Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik, 1918-1920* (Boppard am Rhein: H Boldt Verlag, 1969); Erwin Könnemann, *Einwohnerwehren und Zeitfreiwilligenverbände: Ihre Funktion beim Aufbau eines neuen imperialistischen Militärsystem* (*November 1918 bis 1920*) (Berlin: Deutscher Militärverlag, 1971); Heinz Oeckel, *Die revolutionäre Volkswehr, 1918/19: die deutsche Arbeiterklasse im Kampf um die revolutionäre Volkswehr (November 1918 bis Mai 1919)* (Berlin, Deutscher Militär-Verlag, 1968).

multitude of mechanisms for 'average Germans' to participate in militarized, violent politics after the First World War.

As Part I demonstrated, political turmoil and lack of centralized authority throughout Germany produced conditions conducive to repeated putsch attempts and internal revolts. It was this political instability of the early postwar era during the demobilization and dissolution of the former imperial armed forces, coupled with a succession of perceived existential crises, that prompted the creation of new militant units, loosely under the control of the Reich government in Berlin. However the splintering and fragmentation of central military control also affected the nature and loyalty of those troops who marched under the banner of peace and order *(Ruhe und Ordnung*). Veterans, students, and self-described patriots swelled the ranks of units assembled in early 1919 to defend the Fatherland from the vaguely articulated external and internal threat of "Bolshevism." A result of the weakening of the imperial army's monopoly over the means of violence, a broad proliferation units with diverse combat capabilities, dubious political sentiments, and varying degrees of independence from the OHL's command authority occurred throughout the former army and German society. Instead of a powerful, centralized, and republican-loyal military institution asserting absolute hegemony over the military sphere and the use of deadly violence, the rise of the Freikorps movement and the highly diverse consortium of ancillary units that developed around the *Freiwilligenkorps* throughout 1919 illustrate the breakdown of the neat, orderly division between the civilian populace and the practitioners of professional military violence. Combat training and battlefield experiences of millions of young men in the First World War

brought military life into German society with a new intensity and penetration. Thus, through a particular set of historical circumstances, specifically four years of industrial warfare involving millions of participants, as well as the simultaneous collapse of military and political authority during the November Revolution, the de-centralization of the German military sphere occurred on an extensive scale. The once distinct Clausewitzian trinity, commonly understood as the government, the military, and the people, dissolved and obfuscated into a brackish mixture with unclear boundaries, responsibilities, and relationships among the former constituents. Therefore, in what can be labeled an unforeseen hyper-extension of the *levée en masse*, the German people were still very much at war in 1919, even as their professional military dissolved around them.

CHAPTER V: THE CREATION OF THE FREIKORPS

Formation and Composition

"After crossing the borders I recognized with horror that turmoil ruled in Germany," General Ludwig Maercker[1] wrote in his memoir concerning his experiences leading Freikorps formations during the months of revolution. "The hostile masses of workers were in the cities on the one hand, the bourgeoisie and farmers facing them on the other, and the deficiencies of all state authority had delivered them up entirely to rape and plundering."[2] For Maercker, the solution was simple: the creation of new volunteer units, composed of war-experienced, highly-trained combat troops, who would act swiftly to restore *Ordnung*, or order, to Germany and crush any further advance of 'Bolshevism.' While Maercker's account represents only one of many different mechanisms that produced Freikorps units, it highlights the single largest unifying characteristic: reaction to a perceived national or spiritual crisis.

Although Maercker and Lieutenant Herbert Volck[3] would compete for the title of the first Freikorps created after the revolution, they actually joined a well-

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[1] General Ludwig Rudolf Georg Maercker was born on 21 September 1865 in Baldenburg. Maercker served with distinction during the war and was promoted to Major General in August 1917. At the end of the First World War Maercker served as the commanding general of the 214th Infantry Division. Before his death on 31 December 1924, Maercker joined the Stahlhelm Bund and was the president of the Saxon chapter.

[2] Ludwig Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer zur Reichswehr: Eine Beitrag zur Geschicte der Deutschen Revolution* (Leipzig: KF Koehler Verlag, 1921), 42.

[3] Herbert Volck volunteered for military service in late 1913, and joined the 16th Dragoon Regiment in Lüneberg. Serving in the infantry in the First World War, Volck participated in the First Battle of the Marne. Later trained as a pilot, Volck was promoted to the rank of lieutenant and served on the eastern front. His plane was shot down over Russian territory on 29 October 1915. Volck eventually escaped

established tradition in German military history.[4] In his 1755 treatise on military theory, *Gedanken und allgemeine Regeln für den Krieg*, Frederick the Great foresaw a role for "volunteer formations," which would fight alongside regular troops and be arranged in "*Freikompagnien*."[5] Faced with enemies on a variety of fronts, Frederick turned to "*Freitruppen"* or "Freikorps" in a moment of national crisis. During the Seven Years' War, Freikorps units fought for the Prussian monarch in combat he would later describe as "a running battle against the enemy ordnance and Austrian units … [they] fought alone in the enemy hinterland."[6] Freikorps troops also assembled as a part of the Landwehr reforms initiated during the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon. The Lützow Freikorps would serve with some distinction against the French in 1813 even though many of their members were under no legal obligation to assist Landwehr troops, as many were foreign born farmers.[7] The legend of Freikorps soldiers serving as the vanguard of a populist nationalist movement to overthrow French oppressors would have a significant impact on the philosophy of the postwar re-incarnation of the Freikorps, as numerous references would be made to Lützow, Yorck, and the "Spirit of 1813."[8]

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from a Prisoner of War camp in Mongolia and made his way to the Caucasus region by the end of the war, serving as an intelligence officer until November 1918.

[4] Maercker's Freiwilligen Landesjägerkorps was certainly one of the largest and most significant Freikorps units created, however Volck's smaller formation pre-dated the Landesjäger by a full 5 days. Herbert Volck, *Rebellen um Ehre: Mein Kampf für die nationale Erhebung, 1918-1933* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1932), 12.

[5] Frederick the Great, *Ausgewählte Werke,* Vol 1, Berlin 1917, 286.

[6] Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik*, *1918-1920* (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1969), 22.

[7] Ibid., 22.

[8] Ludwig Adolf Wilhelm von Lützow and Ludwig Yorck von Wartenburg were prominent Prussian military commanders who fought against Napoleon and achieved folk hero status by the early 20th century. Lützow created one of the first

Despite a clear sense that Germany faced a significant crisis after the loss of the war in 1918 and the outbreak of the revolution in Kiel and its spread across Germany, Freikorps formations were not created as an immediate response. Of the hundreds of Freikorps units with reliably documented deployment dates and locations, only seven were created by the end of November 1918, almost a full month after the outbreak of the revolution.[9] Six of the seven formations were designated for external assignment along the threatened eastern border with Poland, or for service in the occupied regions of Eastern Europe, which Germany remained legally obligated to garrison until Entente troops could relieve them in the coming months. Only the 1st Marine Brigade was designated by the OHL for domestic operations. Through an act of considerable foreshadowing to the events of January 1919, it was Gustav Noske, then acting as a government representative in Kiel, who ordered the newly formed Freikorps unit to take action against Spartacus supporters throughout the city to prevent further unrest and revolution.[10]

However the pace and scope of Freikorps creation dramatically changed during the turmoil of December 1918. By the middle of the month, an additional 12 units were established under the loose supervisor of Colonel Albrecht von Thaer and General Walther von Lüttwitz, and new recruitment locations were created throughout the Reich, although Berlin and Westphalia would remain the largest centres of activity. Due to the rapidly deteriorating condition and political reliability

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Prussian Freikorps units, known as the *Freikorps Lützow*, or alternative the "Black Troopers" after their all black uniforms. Yorck was instrumental in pushing the French troops out of Prussia. He also commanded forces during the Battle of the Nations and the storming of Paris in 1814.

[9] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 27.

[10] Ibid., 26.

of the few remaining field formations the *Oberste Heeresleitung* (OHL or Army Supreme Command) had little choice but to support the creation of further Freikorps units. Therefore, in direct response to the continued putsch attempts and unrest across Germany, on 16 December the Prussian War Ministry significantly expanded the active region for Freikorps recruitment and operation. Initially restricted to a few scattered regions, the establishment of *Freiwilligen* units across the entire country found favour with Groener Lüttwitz, Thaier, Schleicher, and Prince Leopold von Bayern and set out to accomplish three central tasks: provide manpower for security forces (*Sicherheitstruppen*), protect the threatened national borders as *Grenzschutz* troops, and bolster the remaining field formations returning from the front.[11]

Continued putsch activity in late December once again motivated further Freikorps development. By 1 January 1919, there were 103 documented Freikorps units of a "significant" size, including some of the most important organizations, such as the Freiwilligen Landesjägerkorps (FLK), the Landesschützenkorps, the Deutsche Schutzdivision, and the Freikorps Küntzel.[12] Underscoring the relationship between revolutionary putsch attempts and Freikorps creation, the Council of Peoples' Representatives issued a decree on 9 January in direct response to the Spartacus Uprising, urging volunteers to enlist in the new formations. "*Kameraden!* Germany is in significant danger!" Friedrich Ebert proclaimed. "Protests alone do nothing … We must defend ourselves." However, Ebert recognized that many soldiers were not interested in more combat after a long and bloody war. "We do

[11] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 28.
[12] Ibid. 31.

not want to lead you in new wars," stated the decree. "You should halt the advance of violators of the peace." Deftly, the call to arms appealed to soldiers' nostalgia and sense of duty to protect the *Heimat* while avoiding the patriotic slogans used to justify wartime sacrifices. "You should prevent defenseless cities and towns from being caught unaware," continued the order. "You should prevent the enemies of Germany from entering [our country] like an abandoned house and settling in … The Republic calls to you, cares for you, but also needs you. Volunteer!"[13] By the end of the month, an additional 28 Freikorps formations came into existence. Berlin and Westphalia continued to dominate the new movement, but were now joined by significant centres of Freikorps recruitment in Bavaria and the eastern border regions, particularly in Posen and Upper Silesia.

Even though the formation of Freikorps units proceeded at considerable pace in the first few months after the revolution, particular care and attention was paid to naming these units, crafting a distinctive brand for each formation. Some units chose to retain some legacy of their former designation within the imperial army structure, like the Freiwilligenregiment 12, formerly the Grenadierregiment 12, or the 2nd Freiwilligen-Batterie pulled together from elements of the 2nd Hanoverian Artillery Regiment 26. Some formations chose to highlight the regional affiliation of their troops. Any list of Freikorps units will be filled with dozens of units named for any number of regions across Germany: the Freikorps Schlesien, Sudetenland, Schwaben, Bamberg, or Hessen-Nassau.[14] Other organizations attempted to connect with the historical legacy of the Freikorps, particularly those units from the Wars of

[13] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 30.
[14] Ibid., 38.

Liberation against the French in the early nineteenth century. Units of the Schwarze Jäger and the Eiserne Division (or Iron Division) once again marched to battle alongside Freikorps named after Lützow and Yorck von Wartenburg. Ihno Meyer, commander of the *Jägerbatallion* of the Iron Division, made repeated references in his memoirs to the "*Yorksche* spirit" of his troops as they "wrote a new chapter in their battalion's history" fighting against the "spectre of Bolshevism."[15] Finally, unit commanders who had managed to attain a degree of celebrity through the war, or by their actions afterwards, often named their formations after themselves. In a movement that placed such a significant importance on the role and attributes of the commander, it is perhaps natural that so many units would take the name of their leaders. Freikorps named after Roßbach, Heydebreck, Aulock, von Brandnis, Pfeffer, or Faupel only added to the mystique around Freikorps commanders and cemented their pivotal place in the philosophy of the movement. This trend also extended to naval units like the Brigade Ehrhardt (Marinebrigade II) and the Brigade von Loewenfeld (Marinebrigade III).[16]

Due to the fluid nature of their membership and incomplete or inaccurate records, estimating the size and therefore the social influence of the movement has been one of the most contentious issues for historians examining the Freikorps. During the haphazard demobilization of the former imperial army it was almost impossible to estimate the number of troops still willing to submit to the old military command structure with any degree of certainty. As many of these imperial

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[15] Ihno Meyer, *Das Jägerbataillon der Eisernen Division im Kampfe gegen den Bolschewismus* (Leipzig: Hillmann, 1920), 5.
[16] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 38.

army units were the incubators for Freikorps formations, the statistical weaknesses of the former impacted the latter. At the outbreak of the revolution, First Quartermaster General Wilhelm Groener estimated that between 200,000 and 1.5 million soldiers were either 'missing' or had deserted; he was unable to be more precise. However, by March 1919 Groener felt more certain of the forces at his disposal, believing that around 660,000 men comprised the total strength of the German armed forces, including approximately 250,000 Freikorps troops, although the latter units were generally only as loyal to the OHL as their commanding officer chose to be.[17] Following a meeting with "a Colonel Conger" on 19 March 1919, Groener listed 150,000 men assigned to the *Ostschutz*, 60,000 *Freiwillige* serving within the Reich borders, 150,000 men in hospital or unable to report for medical reasons, 150,000 troops assigned for "general defense" of the domestic conditions, and 150,000 men who were officially dismissed but had not left their barracks.[18] However, many of the larger Freikorps formations kept better records concerning force strength and were able to maintain the approximate strength equivalent to a full division in the Great War. The Landesschützenkorps, Maercker's Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps, and the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps (GKSK) generally maintained around 40,000 men between them.[19]

Based on the information available, historians have been unable to arrive at a consensus number for Freikorps troops in the early revolutionary period. A conservative estimate from Robert Waite claimed no more than 200,000 to 400,000

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[17] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 36.
[18] Ibid., 36.
[19] See Ludwig Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer zur Reichswehr,* 289, and Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik*, 210.

men served in *freiwillige* units. Harold Gordon accepted the 400,000 figure as largely accurate, while Schulze held to Groener's March 1919 estimate of approximately 250,000 volunteers. However, when the work of Erwin Könnemann is incorporated into the calculation it is clear that the 200,000 figure is far too low and is based on a narrow interpretation of the definition of a "Freikorps" unit.[20] Many units which were created by, fought alongside, shared a similar recruitment base, and operated in complimentary battlefield roles as the Freikorps must be included in any estimate of the size of the broader Freikorps movement. Official Freikorps units were certainly the vanguard of this movement, but by no means appeared isolated on the field of war. Therefore a more holistic approach is required to assess the operation and influence of the overall Freikorps movement. In this light, James Diehl has argued that more than 1.5 million men participated in volunteer organizations of some form between November 1918 and December 1923, with approximately one-third, or 500,000, serving in Freikorps formations for at least a brief period of service.[21] When attempting to understand the broader expression of social militancy after the First World War, those men and women who

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[20] For more on this see Chapter II. Also see, James Diehl, "Germany: Veterans' Politics under Three Flags" *in The War Generation: Veterans of The First World War*, ed. Stephen R Ward (Port Washington, NY: National University Publications, 1975), 162. Robert Waite, *The Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Post-War Germany, 1918-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952); Harold Gordon, *The Reichswehr and the German Republic, 1919-1926*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Erwin Könnemann, *Einwohnerwehren und Zeitfreiwilligenverbände: Ihre Funktion beim Aufbau eines neuen imperialistischen Militärsystem* (*November 1918 bis 1920*) (Berlin: Deutscher Militärverlag, 1971), Appendix - Document 23 "Reich Zentrale für Einwohnerwehren, Nr 11/Feb 1920."
[21] James Diehl, "Germany: Veterans' Politics under Three Flags" in *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War*, ed, James Diehl and Stephen R Ward, (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975).

supported a re-mobilization of German society for a new campaign against the enemies of the Fatherland, Diehl's figures best reflect the militant sub-culture that provided the core of the Freikorps movement, because they include not only the main Freikorps combat troops but their supporting formations as well.

Despite the degree of variance between estimates of the total Freikorps membership, what records survive suffice to allow some general conclusions about the composition of units during the era of large scale, professionalized Freikorps formations existing directly after the outbreak of the revolution. The members of the former imperial officer corps provided the bulk of the leadership and even rank and file manpower for the Freikorps movement. Over the course of the war the German officer corps had lost its social and political unity. In August 1914, 22,112 active and 29,230 reserve officers led the Kaiser's armies into battle.[22] Four years of industrial war had a devastating effect on the composition of the officer corps with junior officers, lieutenants and captains, bearing the heaviest casualties. By November 1918, 270,000 officers served in the armed forces, diluting the number of the prewar officers to only one-twelfth of the total cadre. More than half of the prewar officers died during the war. Nearly 200,000 volunteers formed the dominant demographic within the officer corps by the end of the war. These young officers, and officers with social and political backgrounds that would have been unacceptable before the war, particularly any individual with working class

[22] Holger Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary*, *1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1997), 75.

connections, would provide the backbone of the Freikorps in late 1918 and early 1919.[23]

Faced with poor prospects of promotion, continued salary, or even retention in a postwar republican army, the junior officer corps flocked to the Freikorps seeking advancement through a movement more suited to their world view. A sample of 114 Freikorps units reveals 78.9 percent of officers held a wartime rank of major or below. Including naval Freikorps, only 13 generals and 11 colonels or *Kapitäne zur See* commanded the new formations. Within the same sample group, known ranks included one non-commissioned officer, six lieutenants, eight *Oberleutnante*, 28 captains and *Kapitänleutnante*, and 38 Majors and *Korvettenkapitäne*.[24] These statistics reflect the diversity of the size and force strength of Freikorps formations, but also illustrate the relative youthfulness of the movement and the leadership cadre in particular.

More than just providing crucial leadership for Freikorps units, junior officers were often the most decisive social element within their formations. Reports from Grenzschutz Ost[25] consistently mention an extraordinarily high percentage of officers in Freikorps formations, reaching as high as 18 or even 40 percent as in the case of Freikorps von Epp in April 1919.[26] By the summer of the same year

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[23] Schulze,*Freikorps,* 222.
[24] Ibid., 222.
[25] Grenzschutz Ost was tasked with defending crucial sectors of Germany's threatened eastern border with Poland and was a joint command composed of former imperial army units, Freikorps formations, and a vast collection of other militant groups. For more on the Grenzschutz, see Chapter VII.
[26] Freikorps Epp arrived in Breslau on 10 April 1919 with 200 officers for only 500 men in the unit. For more see Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik*; Ernst von Hesterberg,

companies composed entirely of officers began to appear as the Freikorps marched across central Germany fighting "red troops" and revolutionary garrisons. Despite their youthfulness, the Freikorps commanders often proved reliable and competent. Indeed young officers and non-commissioned officers from the front frequently received high praise from fellow members and commanders for their actions under combat and general reliability during domestic actions.

Indeed, more than merely providing replacement troops later in the revolutionary period, students were a consistent demographic within Freikorps formations throughout the period. The first Studentenwehr came into existence by early December 1918, assembling concurrently with many of the largest Freikorps units that did not lack for recruits. As such the influx of students into militant groups, either in general Freikorps or specific student units, was a characteristic of the overall movement. The presence of large numbers of students is also a sign of the vertical nature of the trauma of the war. The horrors and trials of combat in the Great War influenced not only the generation directly engaged in the war, but also those who matured with the possibility of such violence looming before them. As a result, students were quick to organize themselves alongside individuals who had shared similar experiences. The *Berliner Tagespresse* reported on 30 November 1918 that 1500 students had created a guard unit to help secure the government and prevent further socialist revolution. In the threatened eastern provinces, Ernst von Hesterberg, Chief of Staff of VI Army Corps stationed in Breslau, Upper Silesia, recorded in his diary a meeting in early December 1918 with Graf Friedrich von der

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Alle Macht den A.- und S.-Räten; Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer zur Reichswehr*; Ihno Meyer, *Das Jägerbataillon der Eisernen Division im Kampfe gegen den Bolschewismus*.

Schulenburg and a university professor who informed Hesterberg that he had "brought the entire university with me and with these men the Berlin government could chase down the Devil himself."[27] Student support of the Freikorps remained strong throughout spring 1919. A Congress of the Representatives of the Senate and Student League of 37 German high schools met on 29 April 1919 to determine guidelines to facilitate student enlistment specifically in Freikorps units. Several universities canceled classes for over a month as so many of their pupils had joined Freikorps troops.[28] Several of the largest Freikorps units, like the Yorcksche Jägerkorps and the Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps, created their own specific Studentenkompanien to operate under their command structure.[29]

Through these numbers and recollections a clearer image of the Freikorps movement is possible. In their earliest incarnation, Freikorps units were not the street fighters and brawlers that historians of the Nazi era often portray them to be. Instead, directly after the war, the Freikorps movement came into existence as an expression of a generation of young officers and students, all deeply impacted either directly by the war or by its considerable shadow, organizing themselves to find some avenue of advancement, of war-like camaraderie, and loosely articulated morale values. However, like many organizations in 1918 and 1919, the social composition and command structure would rapidly evolve and change throughout the revolutionary period.

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[27] Hesterberg, *Alle Macht den A.- und S.-Räten*, 150.
[28] Günter Paulus, "Die soziale Struktur der Freikorps in den ersten Monaten nach der Novemberrevolution," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 1955, Vol 3, 697.
[29] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer zur Reichswehr*, 59.

Mechanisms of Creation

Although the main source of documents concerning specific ways in which Freikorps units came into existence comes largely from prominent politicians and military commanders, careful attention must be paid to the wider variety of mechanisms that developed the Freikorps movement as a broader expression of militancy in German society. Over reliance on the most intact and verifiable sources, generally documentation from the largest and best funded units created with Reichswehr and government support, has skewed the perception of the birth of the Freikorps as merely an expression of the will to re-establish central political and military authority or an anti-Bolshevik crusade. Instead, accounts from smaller, regional, and short-lived Freikorps units provide an important expansion of the mechanisms used to establish *freiwillige* formations. Not solely the creation of central authorities, Freikorps units were also formed by local individuals and organizations, as an expression of regional identity and politics. Additionally, and perhaps most often, Freikorps units were created on the initiative of young commanding officers rallying former wartime comrades and politically sympathetic individuals to their personal authority. This diversity underscores the nature of the Freikorps as a social movement, not merely a re-shuffle or re-organization of the same military units and personnel from the war.

A. Conversion: Adapted Imperial Army Units

Reminiscing on the turmoil of the immediate postwar era, Wilhelm Groener remarked in his memoirs that "if we had ordered and created *Freiwilligenkorps* in

August, we would have had no revolution."[30] Groener's faith in the suitability of the Freikorps system as an instrument to re-establish government authority was shared by a number of leading military figures. Colonel Albrecht von Thaer, Chief of the Staff of the General Quartermaster II, had supported the idea of creating "*Freiwilligentruppen*" (Freikorps) in the event of an outbreak of a domestic revolution.[31] Future chancellor Major Kurt von Schleicher, serving as Chief of the Political Office of the General Quartermaster in November 1918, echoed Thaer and Groener when he advocated that "new volunteer units should be established. Young officers should command them. The volunteers should be honoured with high daily rations and it should be made clear that they have to fight for the republic and against Bolshevism."[32] The Prussian War Minister and Prince Leopold von Bayern quickly accepted the use of Freikorps troops when they proposed to deploy them as escort troops for the return transport of troops from the eastern front, even though these formations were still not in existence on 15 November.[33] The fantasy of politically reliable troops, specifically designed to handle the unsettled conditions in the *Heimat*, was warmly received by the upper branches of the German military.[34]

By the middle of December 1918, the potential value of the Freikorps troops only increased for the military commanders of Germany in light of the complete

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[30] Groener, *Lebenserinnerungen,* 452.
[31] Albrecht von Thaer, *Generalstabsdienst an der Front und in der OHL. Aus Briefen und Tagebuchaufzeichnungen 1915-1919* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958),
[32] Hans Rudolf Berndorff, *General zwischen Ost und West* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1951), 44.
[33] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 24.
[34] Gerhard A. Ritter, *Die deutsche Revolution 1918-1919*, *Dokumente* (Berlin: Fischer Bücherei, 1968), 124.

failure for returning front line units to obey orders when in contact with revolutionary units. Groener's report to the Reich leadership on 14 December highlights the crisis mentality now spreading through the army commanders. "The influence of the homeland Workers' and Soldiers' Councils causes problems for the whole body of troops," Groener stated. This was only the start of Groener's concerns however. He continued:

> All authority of the officers and non-commissioned officers will be undermined by the USPD and Spartacus propaganda. The OHL is powerless, since the government does nothing about this. If the state's authority is not established, the entire army will fall into ruin. The Soldiers' Councils *must* be dissolved … Support of professional officers and non-commissioned officers is necessary. If an army on the old basis of domestic political circumstances is impossible then a new army of volunteers (*Freiwillige*) must be created![35]

With the clear support of Groener and the OHL, the Prussian War Ministry officially sanctioned the expansion of Freikorps formation and recruitment on 16 December 1918. Initially only approved in a few select regions, Freikorps formation was now permitted throughout the Reich and for new operations all designed to "restore *Ruhe und Ordnung*." Lacking other instruments of reliable military force, the OHL had no other viable option but to strengthen the Freikorps.

Although aware of the creation of Freikorps units outside of the authority of the former imperial command structure, the army leadership pressed on with their attempt to mold and the shape the new organizations to suit their goals. The majority of the largest Freikorps formations around Berlin were created with significant guidance and support, both in terms of personnel and finances, from the OHL. On 4 January 1919, the commander of the 231st Infantry Division, General

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[35] Germany, Oberkommando des Heeres, *Wirren in der Reichshauptstadt und im nördlichen Deutschland, 1918-1920*, (Berlin: Verlag E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1940), 10.

Bernhard von Hülsen, issued a divisional order in which he announced that "the division will be demobilized, but will provide the root for the 'Freikorps Hülsen.'" Appealing to his soldiers' sense of duty and patriotism, Hülsen continued: "*Kameraden*! Help me in my endeavors in these difficult times and remain voluntarily under my command. Give us this duty, and weather this last threat together, for our beloved German Fatherland."[36] A similar manner was used for a large number of Freikorps, such as the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützendivision,[37] the 31st Infantry Division which became the Deutsche Schutzdivision, or the 17th Infantry Division whose soldiers provided the manpower for the Freikorps von Held. Numerous smaller regiments and battalions were selected as ideal candidates for Freikorps conversion by the OHL and divisional staffs.

Berlin was important to the Freikorps movement, but it was not the only centre of imperial unit conversion to supply Freikorps formations with troops. Throughout eastern Europe, German troops once used to garrison conquered territories now provided significant manpower for Freikorps units engaged in border skirmishes with hastily organized enemy formations seeking to defend their newly-won independence. Speaking to his fellow government leaders on 3 January 1919, Gustav Noske concluded that in the wake of increased skirmishes with Polish forces, "we can only avoid catastrophe through the formation of a new army. We must direct an appeal to those who sympathize with the emergency of our country;

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[36] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 37.
[37] The Garde-Kavallerie-Schützendivision was later renamed the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps when the term "Freikorps" became more popular.

with all forcefulness, we must bring volunteers (*Freiwilligen*) to their feet."[38] Therefore, as East Prussian officials estimated that approximately 6,000 troops would be needed to secure Upper Silesia, Noske responded to the threat of a border war with Poland, urging the OHL to order the vast majority of the 9th Infantry Division to be converted into Freikorps units at the battalion level and be immediately dispatched to Breslau.[39] By 22 January Noske estimated that he had 22,000 men ready to be deployed in the east, and by the end of the week that number could be raised to 50,000.[40]

The creation of the Detachement Lierau is indicative of a fairly common experience for imperial units as they were converted into Freikorps formations.[41] Established in December 1918 in around the town of Fulda, northeast of Frankfurt am Main, the detachment avoided the name "*Freicorps,"* because the founding officer found the term too pretentious. Transforming a front line radio unit into a *Freiwillige* formation directly after its return march from France, its commander, Dr. Heinrich Lierau, a colonel in the reserves, was ordered to deploy his troop along Germany's contested eastern border, and thereby defend Upper Silesia. Amidst the usual appeals to patriotism, honour, and masculine duty to protect women and children, service in the Freikorps was presented to soldiers as a vital act of heroism

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[38] BA-MA R 43 I/1326. "Besprechung des Kabinetts und des Zentralrats über die Ostfragen," 3 January 1919.
[39] BA-MA R 43 I/1326. Cabinet Meetings 21 and 22 January 1919. See also, T. Hunt Tooley, *National Identity and Weimar Germany* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); Ernst von Hesterberg, *Alle Macht den A.- und S.-Räten* (Breslau: Wilhelm Gottlieb Korn, 1932).
[40] T. Hunt Tooley, 37.
[41] For the complete diary of Dr Lierau, commander of the Detachement Lierau, see, BA-MA PH 26-12.

to save what remained of German territory and culture. Despite the lofty ideals and principles that outlined their recruitment propaganda, the threat of overwhelming violence lay at the centre of Freikorps tactics. Like most Freikorps with strong ties to former imperial army units, the Detachement Lierau was quick to secure ample artillery pieces, mortars, machine-guns, and hand grenades to be able to clearly display their deadly potential, even though it was only rarely used. As a result machinegun companies tended to comprise the bulk of infantry units as a strong visual reminder of the deadly power of the Freikorps. Sniper or sharp shooter units were also used in urban operations for precisely the opposite reason: to provide invisible killers. The civilian populace had no idea if sniper units were perched above them, waiting to shoot at any sign of agitation or unrest. The occasional crack of gunfire from a sniper rifle would remind the local populace that Freikorps sharp shooters were watching from above, even though their presence was rarely seen. Trucks, armoured cars, and even a few "*Panzerwagen"* were gradually added as much for their destructive capabilities as their potential to intimidate potential hostile civilians.

Due to the rapid deployment timetable for most of these units, preference for recruits was usually given to combat veterans, although a probationary period was also customary to comb out soldiers lacking discipline or without sufficient military professionalism. For Lierau, and many commanders trying to build Freikorps formations within Germany, reliability was a primary concern when accepting new volunteers. "Many people reported, pledged their true love to the *Heimat*, to fight for their beautiful Silesia, only to disappear the next day," wrote Lierau. "For all of these

people, I organized them in a depot. Bad elements were sent there in an unfriendly manner without uniforms to rouse their indignation [and thus compelling them to quit]." Deception did not just come from the lower ranks seeking a warm meal and new uniforms, however. "A particular category of trickster was created, presenting themselves as officers," Lierau warned his fellow commanders. "They have good sounding names, award themselves high honours and brave deeds, and state that they were in the leadership of the war right behind Hindenburg and Ludendorff."[42] Despite the influx of opportunistic men seeking material benefit from mobilizing Freikorps units, generally formations with strong imperial connections did not lack for reliable recruits and relied on personal connections within the former command structure to pull together sympathetic units. Whenever possible, smaller Freikorps under 1000 men, like the Detachement Lierau, preferred to adopt fully or partially intact former imperial units under their command structure, rather than attempting to recruit and train entirely new formations. Thus it was not uncommon to see a quite diverse collection of troops, as in the case of Lierau's unit where Hamburg infantry fought alongside machine gunners from Fulda, supported by Ulaner artillery and fed by a Field Kitchen from Wilhelmbrück in Upper Silesia! Three key principles dominated the top-down process of Freikorps mobilization: speed, firepower, and reliability.

However, even through the more orderly, centrally controlled process of establishing Freikorps units there was still a degree of diversity in both type of formation created and their eventual role in Germany's rebuilt armed forces.

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[42] BA-MA PH 26-12, "Das Detachement Lierau," page 5.

Formations changed their unit designation and battlefield role several times in rapid succession based on the regional situation as interpreted by military leadership. The diary of Major E. Merkel, former commander of the 5th Infantry Company of the 83rd Regiment based in Kassel, details the variety of re-incarnations that many Freikorps underwent in short succession. Merkel was directed by *Oberost* (Supreme Command East) to assess his unit for potential volunteers for Freikorps service on 22 January 1919, and prepare for deployment as a Grenzschutz formation on the Polish border.[43] Along with his recruits, the major transferred to the Reserve-Jäger-Batallion 11 in Upper Silesia, where they engaged in several weeks of small shooting actions against Polish irregular units. On 4 March, the Reserve-Jäger Batallion 11 directly became a part of the Freiwilliges Jägerkorps von Chappuis, as the titular commander required more operational independence to pursue actions in the Upper Silesian plebiscite region against Polish troops that were strictly forbidden under the terms of the armistice agreement. Later that summer, in response to Entente demands that para-military forces be reduced throughout Germany, the Provisional Reichswehr command re-designated the Freiwilliges Jägerkorps von Chappuis as II Battalion, 63rd Reichswehr Infantry Regiment.

These moves demonstrate a more responsive and flexible relationship between the former imperial general staff officers and Freikorps commanders than would have been expected before the war. Instead of a rigid, doctrinal approach, army commanders proved adaptive and highly pragmatic. Military elites were quite comfortable redefining their command relationship to Freikorps formations

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[43] BA-MA PH 26-3. "Diary of Major E. Merkel," January 1919.

depending on the requirements of the immediate political and military circumstances. Despite the flexibility of army commanders, many Freikorps, established through official orders from Berlin, slowly moved outside the authority of the newly formed Reichswehr, largely due to the initiative of individual unit commanders and the consistently independent nature of many Freikorps formations. This pattern became quite common. The Freischützenkorps Meyn was created outside Berlin from the ranks of the Bataillon Suppe, but eventually sought greater independence from Reich officials, joining the Freikorps von Hülsen in spring 1919.[44] The Iron Brigade in the Baltic States was created by government loyal troops from the Soldiers' Councils in Mitau and Riga, but as discussed in Chapter VII, the unit would become one of the most significant dissident Freikorps formations pursing a wholly independent agenda by 1920. This was to become a common trend for Baltic Freikorps units, as several of the largest organizations operating in Latvia, Lithuania, and along the Estonian border would choose to value their loosely defined political values more than their connection to the Reich authorities in Berlin.

Despite the difficulties of working with the Freikorps system, including disregard for orders, discipline problems and criminal actions, Germany's leading military commanders continued to support the creation and maintenance of Freikorps units well into 1919. In their view, a Bolshevik takeover of the state needed to be prevented at any cost. A meeting of OHL staff officers on 5 May 1919 demonstrates the persistent crisis mentality that gripped Germany's top military

[44] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 27.

figures. While Groener fretted over worsening conditions in Posen and Upper Silesia, General Fritz von Loßberg continued to fear the "subversive powers" of communism to affect both troops and civilians.[45] The solution was clear: further support of Freikorps formations, and their associated organizations like the Einwohnerwehr and Sicherheitswehr, to ruthlessly crush any "Bolshevik activity." For the men of the OHL, the potential catastrophic results of a Communist or Spartacus revolution, or another significant defeat at the hands of Polish forces, similar to the loss of the Province of Posen, outweighed the minor issues and rebelliousness of the Freikorps system. Freikorps commanders and troops often proved brutal in their actions to crush the council movement and restore central military and political authority in spring 1919, yet fundamentally the OHL agreed with the objective of the campaign. Germany's military leadership, men such as Groener, Thaer, Schleicher, Loßberg, Epp, and Lüttwitz chose to view the Freikorps as an isolated military solution to a series of crises and not as the expression of a broader movement into the public sphere that it represented. Financial and material for the Freikorps movement the OHL also resulted in a strengthening of the overall Freikorps system, which included and required a sprawling network of civilian militia organizations. The OHL's narrow interpretation of the value and nature of the Freikorps movement guided their continued support for the development of the Freikorps system, even as it became more violent, unruly, and increasingly independent from their authority.

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[45] BA-MA N46-131, "Protokoll einer Besprechung der Obersten Heeresleitung mit Stabsoffizieren der am Grenzschutz Ost beteiligten Kommandobehörden under Beteiligung des preußischen Ministeriums des Innern über die innere Sicherheit und die militärische Lage." Grenzschutz Ost – 5 May 1919.

B. Officer Created Freikorps

Although the largest *Freiwillige* formations were generally created with explicit ties to the old imperial military command structure, numerically, the majority of Freikorps units were created through the initiative of middle or junior ranking officers, reflecting the independent nature of the movement. While many of these formations were created with the consent or awareness of superior officers, it was the Freikorps commander who shaped, influenced and guided the foundation of their unit. Most importantly this de-centralized process allowed for the development of the Freikorps system as a militant social movement rather than merely as a re-organization of army units by a centrally commanded military institution. Furthermore, the initiative demonstrated by the middle and junior-ranking officers exposes the limited central authority within the military sphere and the open access to the means of violence in the early Weimar Republic.

General Ludwig Maercker's Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps (FLK) is possibly the most well-known example of such an officer-created Freikorps unit. Despite Maercker's relatively senior rank, the FLK nonetheless serves as a model for the majority of officer-organized units, particularly because of the unit's extensive combat record throughout the period, as well as the comparatively reliable records available to historians for the troop. In the wake of a 6 December 1918 meeting with "higher leaders and general staff officers" attached to General Friedrich Sixt von Arnim's army group, in which the details of revolutionary events were presented, Maercker drafted his own plan to "defend the national borders, and to protect

domestic peace. … My division would create a *freiwillige Truppe*, which would be used for the battles within the Reich, and also be obligated to protect the national borders."[46] Although approved by Sixt von Arnim, the self-proclaimed "executioner of the revolution,"[47] Maercker's unit was his own conception, and a notion pursued almost entirely independently from his former commander. Working quickly on 6 December, Maercker asked his divisional staff if they would join his new unit. Receiving unanimous consent, Maercker and his "*Kameraden*" began converting the 214th Infantry Division into a Freikorps formation. On the surface this appears quite close to the creation mechanism previously described. However, the crucial difference between Maercker's conversion of the 214th Infantry Division and other Freikorps formed from the shell of former imperial army units lies in the impetus for formation. Maercker, on his authority as a German officer, declared the creation of the Landesjägerkorps. Other commanders, like Merkel, Meyn, or Chappuis relied on the gravitas of the military command structure to establish their respective units.

On 14 December Maercker released Order No 1 for the Creation of the Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps. Including several regulations to ensure rigid discipline, and to prevent against instances of plundering, the primary task of the FLK were to "preserve *Ruhe und Ordnung* domestically and the security of the Reich borders."[48] All recruits were to be volunteers. Interestingly, and demonstrating a willingness to accept some revolutionary demands, Maercker accepted Soldiers' Representatives in the FLK, as long as they had no command authority and only

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[46] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer*, 42.
[47] *Die Rote Fahne*, 25 November 1918.
[48] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer*, 45.

served as a way to bring grievances of the rank-and-file to the attention of the officers and thereby enhance unit morale. Maercker was clearly aware of the extraordinary circumstances that allowed for his creation of the FLK. "That a single commander could undertake this," Maercker wrote, "to issue such important decrees, like the alteration of the military court decree, is an indication that direct leadership from the army is completely absent."[49]

Maercker understood that the FLK's new domestic role in the middle of the developing *Bürgerkrieg* would require special requirements for his unit. The general was quick to create a distinctive unit insignia, a silver oak branch, which would be worn on the upper arm in English regimental style, specifically to distinguish Landesjäger during urban occupations and street battles. The image and presentation of the Freikorps had direct military value for Maercker. The name and symbols associated with the FLK became a trademark, or brand name, carried throughout Germany to project power, strength, and military professionalism. From the very conception and formation of the FLK, the unit was designed to engage in propaganda, or psychological warfare, just as much as a physical force.[50]

Similar to Freikorps under the authority of the army leadership, Maercker, and other officer-created units, tried to adopt intact former imperial formations

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[49] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 45. Without official approval from the OHL, Maercker personally ordered the alteration of the military court system, creating new avenues for soldiers to air grievances to commanders through their elected Soldiers' Councils delegates, without official charges being pursued. Maercker's changes represented a noticeable softening of the once harsh military justice system of the German Army.

[50] Ibid., 70. Maercker frequently described importance of the "*Geist*" of his troops. Concerning their training, Maercker wrote, "physical training of the soldiers must go hand in hand with the spiritual education."

whenever possible. Although hampered by the demobilization of the 363rd Infantry Regiment and the 44th Field Artillery Regiment from his divisional command, the majority of the 214th Infantry Division followed their wartime commanders' call to enlist in the Landesjägerkorps. Within days, Maercker was able to form his first *Abteilung* under the command of reserve Captain Anders. Consisting of three companies of infantry and a battery of artillery, I Abtlg owed a considerable debt to the former imperial army, and demonstrated the Freikorps' high esteem for firepower, regardless of who drove the creation of the formation. Drawn from the 50th Infantry Regiment, the 358th Regiment, the 1st Mortar Battalion, the 90th Field Artillery Regiment, and the 23rd and 119th Foot Artillery Regiments, I Abtlg mirrored the mosaic image presented by 'top-down' created formations.[51] However, for Maercker, the crucial characteristic that determined if any unit would be accepted or rejected was not strict compliance with a central command structure, but rather the abilities and merits of that unit's commander, and just as important, the bond between that commander and his troops. Officer-created Freikorps units generally emphasized the importance and independence of individual commanders far more than unquestioning obedience.

However, as Maercker and the FLK gained considerable combat experience, fighting against the council movement and Spartacus League in the winter and spring of 1919, the general's opinion of new recruits grew increasingly negative and he introduced tighter regulations governing replacement troops. By summer 1919, "only serviceable people with good behaviour will be enlisted, particularly those

[51] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer*, 54.

who stood on the *Kampffront*. Anyone guilty of property offenses will not be enlisted, likewise for those who do not have their papers in order."[52] The probationary period was extended to four weeks, during which recruits were not allowed to wear the oak branch insignia of the FLK. Men released from other Freikorps units would no longer be accepted in the Landesjägerkorps. Recruitment officers were instructed to focus on men from the older cohorts, rather than the "hedonistic, unfaithful, and work-shy" younger generations.[53] Finally, in attempt to keep out revolutionary officers, lieutenants who had not served in the imperial army before August 1916 were generally no longer to be accepted, although exceptions were periodically made.[54]

Recruitment had become such a central issue to maintaining the high standard of the FLK that Maercker assembled a new staff solely dedicated to the task. Captain Essich, a former General Staff officer, oversaw western recruitment in Niedermarsberg, Westphalia, while reserve Captain Rummel continued operations in Berlin. Later Maercker would also appoint Captain Wiegand to direct recruitment efforts in southern Germany. Despite interference from quarrelsome socialist provincial governments, particularly in Weimar, Gotha and Braunschweig, and soldiers' councils throughout Germany, the FLK's recruitment officers succeeded in providing a steady stream of fresh recruits that met Maercker's stipulations. New volunteers rose from 15 men daily in January to 120 per day in February, with as many as 150 in a single day.

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[52] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 168.
[53] Ibid., 172.
[54] Ibid., 169.

The formation of the Landesjägerkorps underscores the Freikorps' focus on firepower. Heavy field howitzers, mortar squads and flamethrower units were prized possessions for any Freikorps, and the FLK was no exception. However, due to its size and prestige, the FLK attracted other advanced and specialized units. In February 1919 an Armour Car Division joined an Intelligence Troop and Aviation Wing as new additions to Maercker's command.[55] Additionally a specific "Technical Troop" was recruited in Berlin to handle communications, railway transport, and a signal service. This stands in contrast to the view of many critics and opponents of the Freikorps. Often cast as a reactionary or "counter-revolutionary" force, this can only be partially accepted for the political goals of the Freikorps movement, and fully rejected for their military operation. In many ways the Freikorps eagerly adopted innovative and futuristic approaches to warfare. The political nature of the Freikorps movement will be explored in the following chapter, but judged solely through their creation, the Freikorps were a dynamic, flexible force that wholly embraced modern technology.

Although the FLK was unquestionably the product of Maercker's efforts, existing outside of the control of the OHL, and comfortable fighting a parallel war alongside many former imperial and newly created Reichswehr units, other officer-created troops chose a more independent course. The notorious Ehrhardt Brigade, formed from the demobilized II Marine Brigade, built itself around a particularly aggressive officer corps under the direction of its namesake, *Korvettenkapitän* Hermann Ehrhardt. Established later than other prominent units, the brigade only

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[55] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 176.

began operation on 17 February 1919 with only 367 men and ten officers from a "Storm Company," who would remain central to the operation and combat performance of the formation throughout its existence.[56] Ehrhardt stressed that each one of his successive companies in the brigade had to be built with the conception of the original storm company in mind. By mid-March, the brigade had two regiments, each with six companies of infantry, a machine-gun unit and a pioneer company, supported by a Field Artillery *Abteilung* of three batteries, a specific *Sturmkompanie*, an intelligence detachment, a fleet of transport trucks, an ordinance unit in Wilhelmshaven, and a Central Recruitment Post. Joined by Major Carl Ullerich's Bataillon Nordsee, the total fighting strength of the Ehrhardt brigade grew to 4,500 men by late March. [57] Although half the size of Maercker's Landesjägerkorps, Ehrhardt created a highly effective combat unit that often proved more capable and effective than larger, but more heterogeneous formations. The personal influence of the commander could shape and mold their Freikorps as they saw fit. Ehrhardt valued the "storm company" core of his initial brigade and imposed this structure on all successive recruits, producing a highly violent, aggressive formation, keen to take to the offensive.

Personal celebrity often significantly aided officers seeking to create Freikorps units. Captain Cordt von Brandis achieved some notoriety during the war, winning the *Pour le Mérite* at Verdun for allegedly storming and then defending Fort Douaumont. His former wartime comrades formed the vast majority of his

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[56] Ernst von Salomon, "Brigade Ehrhardt," in *Deutsche Soldaten vom Frontheer und Freikorps über die Reichswehr zur neuen Wehrmacht,* ed. Hans Roden (Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1935), 119.
[57] Salomon 120.

Freikorps von Brandis, which was established on 1 January 1919. Like other units, Brandis' force was quick to assemble. Within a few weeks Brandis commanded an over-strength battalion complete with machine-gun squadrons and a battery of 105mm field howitzers.[58] No mention of the Freikorps von Brandis fails to mention the personal prestige and fame of its commander. Other popular commanders found themselves leading Freikorps that they did not actively initiate. Major General Otto Haas, former commander of the 44th Reserve Division, received overwhelming support for the creation of a *Freiwilligen Division Haas* without directly calling for it. Eager to avoid dissolution of their imperial unit, and fearful of the implications of the USPD's Volkswehr decree on 12 December 1918,[59] soldiers from Haas' unit began to assemble before their popular commander had agreed to lead the new Freikorps unit.[60]

However, some officer-created units did not rely on the popular support of the rank-and-file, but rather the respect of other officers. Particularly common within long-serving formations from the Great War, subordinate officers periodically elected to join the cause of a highly-esteemed colleague who sought to establish a Freikorps. The officers of the 19th Ulanen Regiment chose to follow their former commander, Rittmeister Thomas Weyrauch, into the Freiwillige Ulanen Regiment Schlesien, which had loose connections to the Freikorps Roßbach and

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[58] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 36.
[59] For more on this decree see Chapter IV: *Gewaltpolitik*.
[60] "Denkschrift des Generalmajors Otto Haas (Kommandeur der 44 Reserve-Division) über die politische Lage und die Bildung von Freiwilligenverbänden)," in Heinz Hürten, *Zwischen Revolution und Kapp-Putsch* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1977), 29.

later Freikorps Aulock.[61] Through Weyrauch's personal authority, officers throughout the Ulanen regiments flocked to his new command, which understandably had a very high percentage of officers compared to enlisted men. Despite a strong personal following, Weyrauch and his aptly named second in command, Rittmeister Krieg, proved too independent for army leaders seeking to re-establish centralized military authority and were unable to secure employment in the reformed Reichswehr under Hans von Seeckt.[62] Personal prestige may have been an asset within the Freikorps system, however, as will be further explored in Part III, it was a desired attribute for officers in Seeckt's reformed professional Reichswehr, as he preferred officers who were loyal to the chain of command, rather than attention-seeking celebrities who followed their own agendas.

Finally, prominent Freikorps officers often assisted with the creation of other officer-led Freikorps units. Particularly common when larger formations had completed the bulk of combat operations in a region and were preparing to move to a new theatre, smaller Freikorps units were often created at the behest of other *freiwillige* officers to handle mop-up operations. These units tended to be short-lived but also very disconnected from any central military authority. The Regiment Magdeburg was established by Maercker's Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps on 9 April 1919 to maintain the occupation of that city after the FLK departed for Braunschweig.[63] Working alongside three divisions of Einwohnerwehren and the local police presidium, there were few instances of combat after the departure of the

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[61] BA-MA PH26-34, "Das Freiwillige Ulanen Regiment Schlesien," page 1-3.
[62] Ibid, 3.
[63] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer*, 190.

FLK. Bored, and lacking a determined enemy to fight, the troops of the Regiment Magdeburg disbanded quietly as the Prussian government re-established control over the city through SPD Workers' Secretary and city delegate Krüger.

Other branches of the FLK similarly created small Freikorps to fill auxiliary battlefield roles, while riflemen and machine gun units provided the bulk of the combat and urban occupation forces. V Abteilung, under Major Meyn, established several Freikorps/Einwohnerwehren hybrid units in Braunschweig to hold key logistical positions and strategic transportation corridors well behind the combat units of the FLK.[64] Likewise, II and IV Abteilungen founded small Freikorps formations to assist in urban occupations in and around Magdeburg in May 1919.[65] Although a minor trend within the overall development of the movement, as Freikorps created Freikorps, the system of *freiwillige* formations became increasingly de-centralized, strongly reflecting regional particularism and tensions that the Kaiser's General Staff had worked so long to stamp out.

C. Regional Crisis

After surveying the terrain surrounding his native region of Filehne, Posen, Major Karl Beutler concluded, "without artillery, the defense of the main line and the city itself was impossible."[66] Brief consultations with the regional Commissar, Provincial Council, the Regional Committee, and a junior lieutenant from the staff of VI Army

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[64] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 192.
[65] Ibid, 192.
[66] For the complete history of the Grenzschutz battery, see "Die Entstehung einer Grenschutzbatterie von Major a.D. Karl Beutler" in Ernst von Salomon, *Das Buch vom deutschen Freikorpskämpfer*, 232-234.

Corps in Breslau, saw Major Beutler approved to create an artillery unit to aid in the defense of the region against the anticipated wave of Polish attackers. One large problem loomed: where to get the guns? Beutler sent a short telegram to his regiment, the 2nd Foot Artillery, from which he was on 'excused leave', and requested two 10 cm cannons with one thousand rounds of ammunition. Following approval of the Soldiers' Council of the 2nd Foot Artillery Regiment and their regional committee, the guns were promptly dispatched. Unfortunately, the pieces were ruined in a train derailment, leaving Beutler once again with the task of procuring artillery. A new solution soon presented itself. After a clandestine meeting with a fellow artilleryman, a lieutenant now tasked to assist the Demobilization Commission,[67] Beutler was sent three Field Guns with two thousand rounds of ammunition from Stettin. Assisted by the Filehne Train Administration from 10 to 12 January 1919, Beutler acquired and assembled the artillery pieces on the grounds of the local manor and in the nearby wood. After using several rounds to sight the guns and train his gun crews, and after selecting a Polish speaking farmland auctioneer's house for target practice, Beutler pronounced his *Freikorps Grenzschutz Batterie* ready for combat. The local populace celebrated the new unit with a small fest, including several noteworthy pies.

Major Beutler's unit illustrates the most independent and disorganized mechanism for Freikorps creation: a perceived local crisis. Units established in this fashion tended to leave few records, were short-lived, and did not have a presence on a national level. And yet despite a paucity of firsthand accounts from within these

[67] Salomon, *Freikorpskämpfer*, 233.

groups, their existence dots the records of larger formations as well as numerous accounts from observers in crisis regions throughout Germany after the revolution.[68] Whether it was in response to French incursions in the Rhineland or Saar valley, revolution in Bavaria, or the threat of Polish annexation in Posen and Upper Silesia, 'crisis Freikorps' appeared with consistent regularity. They also demonstrate the often warm reception Freikorps units received from local German populations, and therefore the potential social support of the Freikorps movement.

Although 'crisis Freikorps' would be established in numerous locations throughout the country, the single largest concentration occurred along Germany's threatened eastern border with Poland. Even after the Entente-observed plebiscite in March 1921 to determine the fate of Upper Silesia, tensions between ethnic Germans and Poles remained high in this region, resulting in several periods of skirmishes and clashes between militant organizations from both sides of the border as they attempted to suppress the propaganda activities of their rivals. After Polish forces seized the province of Posen in January 1919 by a *coup de main*, German Freikorps units assembled in a climate rife with fear, hostility and aggression. The Grenzschutz Abschnitt Kattowitz was founded in such an atmosphere. Citing the need for "a strict military power in Upper Silesia," reserve Lieutenant Diesing, a civilian engineer, was elected battalion commander and immediately began forming his Freikorps unit to defend his threatened city. Later a key component of the Oberschlesische Freiwilligen-Korps (OFK), Diesing's Grenzschutz formation was initially created without any reference to the former

[68] Many accounts of smaller, regional Freikorps units can be found in Ernst von Salomon, *Das Buch von deutschen Freikorpskämpfer*.

imperial army command structure. It received no orders to deploy along the border, but it did not remain idyll waiting for any to arrive. Financially supported by 50,000 Marks from the Upper Silesian Mining and Metallurgy Union, the Grenzschutz Abschnitt Kattowitz initially lacked discipline and heavy weapons until it was formally integrated into the Grenzschutz network in January 1919. What Diesing did have in great supply were young, patriotic-minded Upper Silesians returning to their home region, angered by reports of Polish agitation and the threat of annexation. While certainly not all Grenzschutz recruits shared such a romantic sense of duty and indeed many joined for material benefits offered by military service, reports from many units, particularly in November 1918, reference a clear crisis mentality along the German-Polish border.[69]

Despite patriotism and eagerness of the troops that flocked to such hastily mobilized 'crisis Freikorps,' their military value was severely limited. Unlike 'top-down' and 'officer-created' formations with artillery, mortars, flamethrowers, and armoured cars, units responding to local and regional threats tended to lack heavy equipment and the technological superiority enjoyed by their Freikorps cousins. Faced with a significant enemy attack, these units degenerated into little more than armed observers. The once proud Volkswehr Rawitsch suffered such a fate in February 1919. Ernst von Salomon published an account of their combat experience

[69] While the patriotism and heroism of the Freikorps and Grenzschutz troops has been dramatically (over-)emphasized by authors working during the Third Reich, particularly Ernst von Salomon, unpublished archival accounts, written well before the rise of the Nazified vision of the Freikorpskämpfer, consistently note the sense of national and regional duty among recruits. See BA-MA PH 26-22, "Grenzschutzabschnitt Kattowitz"; BA-MA PH 26-12, "Das Detachement Lierau"; or for the Ruhr region, BA-MA PH 26-11, "Das Freikorps-Lichtschlag mit der Batterie Hansenclever 1919 und 1920 gegen Bolshevismus im Ruhrgebiet."

that highlights their fragile state and reliance on more powerful and professional Freikorps units to handle combat operations. After battle with Polish troops their former commander, Dr Schmitz recorded the experience:

> The late afternoon of the 6th of February remains unforgettable. This time the Poles attacked in the late afternoon. It is 4 in the afternoon. The Poles moved against Friedrichsweiler. On the northern promenade of the city in the region of the seminary, a pair of Polish shells exploded, certainly causing damage. The signal lookout sounded the alarm, and the bell rang for an attack. Trembling, women and children stood before the tower. Bold citizens rushed to grab weapons, the fearful and defeatists huddle together in groups during, and faces pale with terror, as well with all kinds of horrors. Some fled with swiftly snatched property in the direction of the city of Königsdorf, to find their way to Silesia. There, back from the train station, came a Jäger Battalion into the city, in every way appeared with immaculate conduct, like in the good old times. The promised help from General Command V in Glogau arrived. It was Goslar Jäger, pure volunteers (*lauter freiwilige*), under the authority of Major Kirchheim. Their arrival this fateful moment, appeared to the citizens like a sign from the heavens. Men felt saved, women wept with joy. However a further help arrived at the right time. The Foot Artillery Regiment Nr 5 [now under Freikorps command], which had garrisoned Posen, just now arrived and had received reports of the battle conditions. Therefore they deployed at the train station and directed their guns [against the enemy]. Now the guns roared, so that all of the windows in Rawitsch jingled. Howling and gurgling flew the 15 cm shells over the city and exploded on the invading Poles devastating, their attacking spirit was considerably dampened.[70]

In this account it is difficult to discern the troops of the Freikorps-loyal Volkswehr unit from the frightened civilians when Polish shells began to strike the city. Lacking a strong and skilled officer corps, many of these units suffered from chronic poor discipline, a situation that only grew worse under fire. Captain Carl August von Gablenz reported on the detailed the questionable reliability and discipline of Freikorps troops in Bavaria assembled to respond to leftwing revolts and in March

[70] Salomon, *Freikorpskämpfer*, 227-228.

1919 noted the paucity of "any ready-to-use *freiwillige* units."[71] Gablenz concluded his report with the admission that he had thus far been unable to execute his orders and re-establish *Ordnung* in Bamberg.[72] At the same time, Major Otto von Seisser, Chief of Staff of II Corps, tasked with crushing the rebellious soldiers' councils in his region, also stated his inability to perform his assignment owing to "the complete unreliability of the [Freikorps] troops; they are neither in the hands of their commanders nor their soldiers' councils."[73] This was not an isolated incident in Bavaria. Colonel Franz Ritter von Epp also noted in April 1919 that Bavarian Freikorps could in general only be relied upon in specific regional circumstances and should never be deployed outside of their home garrison area.[74]

Therefore, with limited military value and combat capabilities, many Freikorps units who were created in response to an immediate or localized crisis were not suited for large-scale military operations. Instead, they served as pathways for civilians to support the Freikorps movement and to re-affirm regional or national identities. These Freikorps represented the far end of a spectrum of units created after outbreak of revolution in November 1918. Many of the 'top-down' and 'officer-created' Freikorps were established through communities of soldiers formed by shared experiences during the First World War. They often represented the most professional articulation of the Freikorps movement. On the other hand, the 'crisis-Freikorps' frequently lacked discipline, heavy weapons, and effective

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[71] "Meldung des Hauptmann Frhr. v. Gablenz über die militärpolitische Lage in Bayern," in *Zwischen Revolution und Kapp-Putsch*, ed. Heinz Hürten, 79
[72] Ibid, 79.
[73] Ibid., 80.
[74] Schulze, 95.

officers. They were an expression of the populist and independent characteristics that were embedded in the very core of the Freikorps system. Although distinguishable from their more professional cousins like the Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps of the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps, these small, short-lived units responding to a local or regional crisis were an expression of the same motivating principles and military-political circumstances that produced the rest of the Freikorps system.

Conclusion

Although this survey of the pathways to create Freikorps units has generally held to three main mechanisms, top-down, officer-led, and crisis-created, it must be acknowledged that these distinctions have been drawn solely to produce greater understanding of the driving force behind the establishment of different Freikorps formations. However, many of these units do not neatly fit into just one of the three categories. Freikorps often exhibited one or even all of the creation mechanisms. A great number of formations had strong and prominent officers in their ranks, while owing substantially to a former imperial army unit for their creation in response to a perceived threat to Germany after the war. For this study, however, the most important, or central, factor behind the creation of the unit in question has been used to describe that particular Freikorps. Maercker's FLK was created from the 214th Infantry Division, officially sanctioned by General Sixt von Arnim, and deployed quickly to respond to the Spartacus Uprising in Berlin, occurring mere weeks after the first Landesjäger reported for duty. However, it was Maercker's

personal authority and charisma that drove the creation and function of the FLK for the course of its existence, which in turn led to its characterization as an 'officer-created' Freikorps, although certainly a case could be made for the other two mechanisms. This only serves to highlight the difficulties faced by historians attempting to draw conclusions about this diverse movement. Particular attention must be paid to the specific history of each unit to avoid superficial generalizations that fail to understand each unit's individual narrative during this time period.

As heterogeneous as the Freikorps system became, and is evident just through the various mechanisms used to create *freiwillige* units, the movement as a whole was nonetheless tied together by a mutual desire to respond to Germany's defeat in the Great War, the uncertainty produced through domestic revolution, and the fear of further reduction of territory and humiliation at the hands of their enemies. Clearly, many different reactions were possible and were exhibited through the creation of a wide variety of Freikorps units. However, they all were made possible only through the support of a highly militarized segment of German society that viewed violence as their only mechanism to respond to and over come the challenges they felt faced their nation and specific region.

CHAPTER VI: THE *FREIKORPSGEIST*

The title of this chapter is perhaps somewhat misleading. Although numerous members of the Freikorps during the revolutionary era wrote lengthy articles and even entire books dedicated solely to the subject of the spirit of the Freikorps movement, historians are more reticent to use the term. The highly diverse and nebulous nature of the Freikorps system inhibits the identification of a short, concise list of attributes that sufficiently characterize the volunteer formations that campaigned across Germany and Eastern Europe after the war. The term *Freikorpsgeist*, or Freikorps spirit, which was used by Hans von Seeckt to describe unruly elements that he did not want in his new professional Reichswehr after March 1920, serves to imply that there was a well-understood definition or set of core values that the majority of Freikorps troops would have recognized and accepted. Indeed, the heterogeneity of the movement described in the previous chapter should effectively counter any notion of a unified, monolithic movement with consistent goals and objectives.

However, to discard the thoughts, arguments and ardent beliefs of the men who founded, propagated and supported the Freikorps movement would run contrary to a wealth of historical evidence that does provide insight into what can be called the worldview or *Weltanschauung* of the Freikorps. Therefore, as long as careful attention is paid to recognize and acknowledge that not all Freikorps units and members believed in, or were strongly motivated by all of the possible characteristics described in the following analysis, one can speak of a Freikorps

spirit, but one with significant differentiation and greatly varying expressions of these attributes.

In general there were five prominent characteristics of the Freikorps movement that are most commonly represented in the literature and actions of the units and members. First and most ubiquitous, was the centrality of the experience of the Great War. No other single event can compare to the importance of the First World War for the Freikorps movement. It was instrumental to their training, operation and entire outlook on life. As George Mosse argued in *Fallen Soldiers*, the continuation of wartime attitudes into the postwar era allowed for a brutalization of politics and an indifference to loss of human life that was central to the Freikorps.[1] As a site of trauma, either directly experienced or as an inherited trauma that shaped an individual's youth, the industrial killing fields of western and eastern Europe served as a foundational moment for the vast majority of Freikorps soldiers. Within the overarching category of the war experience, reviving the so-called 'Spirit of 1914' and the mythical unity it supposedly produced throughout German society was a major undercurrent in discourse on the meaning of the war. Additionally, adopting and contesting the narrative of the Front Fighter, or *Frontkämpfer*, constituted a central political and cultural activity of the Freikorps movement and a battle ground with socialist and communist veterans who similarly sought to present themselves as war heroes, imbued with new value owing to their wartime experiences.

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[1] George L Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 159.

Second, Freikorps members often described themselves as leaders in a great brotherhood of soldiers from the war, united in a league of comrades or *Kameradschaft*. Born through combat experiences in the war, but radically altered by the political and social circumstances after the First World War, *Kameradschaft* was an imagined community with no clear delineating boundaries or values, and therefore could serve as a critical mechanism for marginalizing politically and socially unacceptable elements from the Freikorps movement. Reminiscent of political philosopher Carl Schmitt's theory of a friend/foe dichotomy at work in political and social organizations, *Kameradschaft,* and *Frontkameradschaft* as a subset of the overarching community, was the dominant method by which Freikorps members both distinguished themselves and defined their social and political opponents. However, despite the notions of equality that a community of brothers seemed to indicate, *Kameradschaft* was not a democratic brotherhood, and particular importance was attached to the role of the Freikorps commander, acting as a source of military, political and spiritual guidance and authority for his particular unit.

Third, a loosely defined, yet remarkably persistent, belief in a notion of Germandom or *Deutschtum* is discernable in numerous Freikorps accounts and constituted a significant characteristic of the wider beliefs of Freikorps troops. Often included in memoirs and diaries describing the heroic acts of bravery performed by "proper German" officers and troops, praising the 'Germanness' of a soldier became one of the highest honours one could bestow upon a comrade. Establishing a vague concept of a re-imagined set of values that were collectively understood by

Freikorps members under the banner of *Deutschtum* created a philosophic rallying point for similarly inspired Germans after the war. This radicalized postwar interpretation of German values provided the core of an aggressive, expansionist nationalism, determined to defend threatened outposts of Germandom. Perhaps somewhat expectedly, the most radical and vehement expressions of this new patriotism were commonly found along Germany's threatened eastern border with Poland. Gone was the confidence of the imperial Germans of the *Kaiserreich*, confidently demanding their share of colonial spoils, comfortable in their mastery of Europe. In their place, Freikorps troops talked of sacrifices needed to defend a threatened fatherland, and the rousing of a deep "Germanic fury" required to crush their spiritual enemies.[2]

Fourth, given the heterogeneous social, cultural, generational, and regional composition of the various Freikorps units in operation after the war, it is difficult to identify one particularly ideology or set of political objectives for the movement. Most commonly historians, such as Peter Merkl and George Waite, have cast the Freikorps movement as a precursor or incubator for the fledgling Nazi party.[3] Although there are clear elements of what Klaus Theweleit termed a "proto-fascist" culture within the Freikorps movement, attempting to portray all Freikorps units and members as the "vanguard of Nazism," to borrow Waite's phrase, is both overly

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[2] Ernst Jünger used the term "Germanic fury" to describe the patriotic passions of his troops in combat during the First World War against French troops around Verdun. Although Jünger did not apply this term directly to the Freikorps, the parallels are evident. See Ernst Jünger, *Feuer und Blut*.

[3] See George Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Post-War Germany, 1918-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952; Peter Merkl, *The Making of a Stormtrooper* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

simplistic and tautological.[4] The evidence left by these troops and their supporters does demonstrate a particularly wide-spread dislike of communist or Bolshevik organizations and philosophy, and was the single most common unifying political element exhibited across the Freikorps movement. Regime building and thoughts of a military-backed dictatorship were rare or localized to individual cases of disorder. Many speakers and writers did not acknowledge the clear political implications of their anti-Bolshevik activity, instead arguing that they were "apolitical" organizations performing a moral duty to save Germandom. Generally violent political actions, including assassinations and large-scale military operations, were sanctioned under the favourite phrase of Freikorps commanders, "re-establishment of peace and order" (*wiederherstellung von Ruhe und Ordnung*).

Fifth, and finally, the Freikorps spirit was an expression of masculine aggression. The attack, the advance, and the storm assault were all forms of military operations, but also characterized the mentality of the troops that fought in these engagements. Here again the shadow of the First World War looms large in the spirit of the average Freikorps soldier. Conditioned by years of military culture to honour the aggressive spirit enshrined in the traditions of the German-Prussian army, the late-war German army recruits and conscripts were specifically trained in storm trooper tactics (*Stoßtruppentaktik*) to perpetrate a violent penetration of the

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[4] Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume 2: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis, 1989); George Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Post-War Germany, 1918-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952).

enemy's front lines and to disrupt and bewilder their foes.[5] This left a significant impact on the Freikorps formations directly after the war. As will be demonstrated in Chapter IX, while the number of Great War combat veterans decreased after 1920, so too did the hyper-aggressive nature of the Freikorps. Subsumed within this fixation on aggression, German masculinity was re-conceptualized through several Freikorps narratives. Service, duty, honour, and sacrifice were not just German ideals but manly attributes that all Freikorps soldiers required for participation in the *Frontkameradschaft*.

Throughout this work, and particularly in this chapter, I have made extensive use of Freikorps memoirs. While the great majority of published accounts from the 1920s are sensational and self-serving, they are nonetheless useful to demonstrate how the Freikorps troops perceived themselves. These memoirs illustrate that the Freikorps' identity, while in a state of flux, had a few relatively persistent characteristics that were consistently present in a variety of sources. While many of these memoirs have been analyzed by scholars such as Robert Waite, Hagen Schulze, Klaus Theweleit, and most recently Matthias Sprenger, they can be re-evaluated as evidence of the political and cultural beliefs of a segment of German society in the immediate postwar era. Together these memoirs highlight some key elements within the worldview of a highly politically active network within Germany in the early Weimar Republic. These memoirs provide valuable information concerning the activities of the Freikorps as well as the broader goals and ambitions of some of the men within the Freikorps system, which can offer some insight into the

[5] Robert Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg: Doctrine and Training in the German Army, 1920-39,* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1999), 16-18.

intentions behind the movement. With no one ideologue at the centre of the Freikorps, the collection of memoirs and diaries is the closest the movement has to a political creed or set of beliefs. Hermann Ehrhardt's book, *Kapitän Ehrhardt, Abenteuer und Schicksale*, provides a critical perspective from one of the most popular Freikorps commanders, and the founder of both the Ehrhardt Brigade and Organization Consul. Two officers in Ehrhardt's unit, Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz and Manfred Freiherr von Killinger, both served in naval Freikorps formations and participated in the Kapp Putsch, providing crucial narratives on key events in the immediate postwar era. Gerhard Roßbach's book, *Mein Weg durch die Zeit: Erinnerungen und Bekenntnisse*, while often prone to self-promotion, details events throughout the Baltic campaign and describes the activities of many Freikorps units in Munich. Other well-known accounts by Edgar von Schmidt-Pauli, Otto Strasser, Ernst Röhm, Karl Radek, Friedrich von Oertzen, Ludwig Maercker, Franz Schauwecker, Gabriele Krüger, Harry Kessler, and Curt Hotzel have been used in this section of this work to analyze the subtle differentiations and nuances within the overall *Freikorpsgeist*.[6]

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[6] Ludwig Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer zur Reichswehr: Eine Beitrag zur Geschichte der Deutschen Revolution* (Leipzig: KF Koehler Verlag, 1921); Friedrich Oertzen, *Kamerad reich mir die Hände: Freikorps und Grenzschutz Baltikum und Heimat* (Berlin: Verlag Ullstein, 1933); Ernst Röhm, *Die Geschicht eines Hochverräters* (Munich: Verlag Frz Eher and Son, 1934); Edgar von Schmidt-Pauli, *Geschichte der Freikorps, 1918-1924; nach amtlichen quellen, zeitberichten, tagebüchern und persönlichen mitteilunger hervorragender Freikorpsführer, dargestellt* (Stuttgart: R Lutz, 1936); Gerhard Roßbach, *Mein Weg durch die Zeit: Erinnerungen und Bekenntnisse* (Weilburg: Vereingte Weilburger Buchdruckerein, 1950); Otto Strasser, *History of my Time* (London: J Cape, 1941); Franz Schauwecker, *Im Todesrachen: Die deutsche Seele im Weltkriege* (Halle: H Diekmann, 1919); Manfred von Killinger, *Das waren Kerle* (Munich: Eher nachf., 1944); Harry Kessler, *Tagebücher 1918-1937* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1972); Gabriele Krüger, *Die Brigade*

The Great War

No other single event was more important to the spirit and mentality of the Freikorps movement than the First World War. Not only did combat experience during the war provide the necessary skills and training for enlistment in the Freikorps, especially as many units forming in early 1919 insisted on a minimum of six months service in the front trenches, but the concept or symbolic understanding of "the war" became a central organizing principle within the community of Freikorps fighters. Grappling with their intense wartime experiences and attempting to find new value and meaning following years of disillusioning warfare was a common component of many Freikorps accounts. For these men, the war became a source of self-evident justification and morality. Honouring the sacrifice of fallen comrades rationalized all manner of violent actions performed after the war.

But more than just a foundational collective experience, the persistent references and obsessive fixation with the construct of 'the war' and trench combat expose a segment of German society that refused to transition back to peacetime norms. Although politically, economically and largely militarily demobilized, Germany had no comparable mechanism to return to peacetime social patterns. Elements of the population continued to support and enlist for new campaigns and battles, while deploying the same ideals and narratives used during the First World War to mobilize the civilian populace and veterans to wage 'total war.' Not only did

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Ehrhardt (Hamburg: Leibniz-Verlag, 1971); Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz, *Sprengstoff* (Berlin: Frundsberg-verlag, 1930).

Germany fail to undergo a meaningful process of social demobilization, but a second re-mobilization of the *Heimat* occurred in late 1918 and early 1919, as demonstrated through the continuity in propaganda between the late First World War and the early Freikorps movement.

Late in the war, official military and civilian propaganda activity sought to re-invigorate morale to continue the war by re-enforcing the status of the Great War as a pivotal cultural and spiritual moment in German history, a notion that was eagerly championed by various postwar militant organizations like the Freikorps. As the war stretched into 1915 and 1916, and showed no indication of ending, German military and political elites became more concerned with sculpting public opinion, or in the words of historian Élie Halévy, the "organization of enthusiasm."[7] With the ascendancy of the Third Supreme Command, under the direction of Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, re-mobilization of the German home front replaced legitimization of the war as the major function of German propaganda. Launched by Ludendorff in August 1917 as a part of the Hindenburg Programme, the system of "patriotic instruction" (*vaterländischer Unterricht*) sought to mobilize both those already serving in field grey as well as the civilian populace to make further sacrifices for the war effort. Despite the careful wording of its guidelines, so as to give the impression of an apolitical "information activity," the blunt objectives of the "patriotic instruction" programme nonetheless revealed its function and intention as a tool to re-mobilize soldiers and civilians to continue supporting the war. Aiming to influence the soldiers to "continue fighting until our enemies'

[7] Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914*, 149.

destructive will has been broken,"[8] the programme ushered in new themes stressing the need for combat, while still urging pan-German unity and additional sacrifices.

Ludendorff and the OHL were keenly aware of lagging support for the war by 1917. While the initial war loans were all over-subscribed, the worsening participation in the final bond drives highlights the increasing levels of war-weariness felt by German civilians. Each of the last five war loans, from June 1916 until the end of the war, were under-subscribed to a greater extent than the previous one. 5.2 million Germans had supported the Fourth War Loan in March 1916, but following the bloody battles at the Somme and around Verdun, support for the war began to erode, and in September 1916 the Fifth War Loan was only supported by 3.8 million contributors. Civilian administrators in Rüdesheim, for example, directly equated war loan subscription with "patriotic feelings," noting that by November 1917 they were "declining more and more."[9] Even the possibility of victory late in the war did not improve the situation. The Eighth and Ninth War Loans, both launched during Ludendorff's 1918 Spring Offensives were under-subscribed by 23.9 and 39.0 percent, respectively.

Painfully aware of sagging morale on the home front, Hindenburg and Ludendorff approved the launch of the most resonant expression of their campaign of "patriotic instruction;" the creation of the *Vaterlandspartei* in August 1917. Organized with significant support from military elites upon its creation by

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[8] See Ludendorff's order from 15 September 1917, Document no 337, in *Militär und Innenpolitik* ed. Wilhelm Deist, vol. II, 860-864.
[9] Richard Bessel, "Mobilization and Demobilization in Germany, 1916-1919," in *State, Society, and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, ed. John Horn (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), 217.

Wolfgang Kapp, the party quickly gathered a sizeable membership base, with 1.25 million supporters organized into 2,500 local groups.[10] Although Kapp was unable to convince former Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow to lead the organization, he did manage to persuade former head of the German Navy Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz to help found the new party.[11] No conservative, monarchial association would be complete without a royal connection, and the Fatherland Party was no exception; Duke Johann Albrecht zu Mecklenburg consented to be the titular head. The initial brochure asserted that the "German Fatherland Party is the unification of all German men and women on the basis of the Kaiser's words: 'I no longer recognize any parties, I see only Germans!'"[12] Claiming to be above party politics and only interested in creating a will to final victory, the Fatherland Party trumpeted messages similar to several other associations during the war, stressing German exceptionalism and demanding vast territorial annexations at the war's end. Despite the support from branches of the Hohenzollern monarchy, Kapp's party differed in the source of its legitimacy. It sought to show support for a Pan-German ideology through the size of its membership and a direct appeal to the German masses, rather than solely through the support of prominent social, political and military elites.

Despite its impressive membership numbers, the organization ultimately faltered and collapsed by early 1918 as increasing war-weariness and discontent

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[10] Bessel, "Mobilization," 215. The 1.25 million figure has been exposed as a gross exaggeration by Jeffrey Verhey, however. Once duplicate and fraudulent memberships are discounted, active participants dwindled to 445,345 in September 1917. Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914*, 181.
[11] For more on this topic, see, Roger Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1984).
[12] Verhey, 180.

frequently led to protests at their meetings. And yet, Ludendorff's poorly received 'instructions' and Kapp's brief foray into party administration managed to leave a noticeable impact on German propaganda. In the eyes of the supporters of the Fatherland Party and others who shared sympathies with that organization, the 'nation', '*Volk*', or Fatherland became a source of self-evident legitimacy and were elevated above "party-political" squabbles. Although the leadership of the new party was adopting prewar sentiments that had existed for decades before 1917, their use in this context was to justify new social policies to support the military and the war effort. Defense of 'Germandom' and the Fatherland became powerful political narratives, simultaneously permitting clear political actions against enemies of the Fatherland, both domestic and foreign, while still maintaining the illusion of Pan-German unity. Furthermore, the extraordinary social, economic and political wartime interventions into the German public and private sphere, required to conduct four years of industrial warfare, created a precedent for expansive propaganda activity that the new radical political right sought to exploit after the war.

Attempting to speak for the *Frontkämpfer* generation, Ernst Jünger wrote in 1922 that "the war was the revaluation of value, the great destroyer of meaning and the father of the future direction."[13] Engaged in a discourse frequently found in narratives written by veterans of the Great War, Jünger sought to cope with the trauma of industrial warfare by discussing a loss of meaning, of value, and a subsequent search for new understanding and purpose after the war. The end of

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[13] Ernst Jünger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, 6.

four years of brutal industrial warfare brought many mixed emotions to the survivors. "I would like to never return home," wrote Private Friedrich Siebung in his war diary.[14] "My entire life I wanted to go on the highway, search out new horizons, to measure the world outside of grid squares and divisional regions and not spend the day estimating the strength of artillery fire … my Germany began where the signal flare rises, and stops here, where the unit disbanded in Cologne." Return to the *Heimat* was often met with anxiety. "I cannot go back home and resume my old life," Siebung continued. "Germany will once again be like it was previously, so arbitrary, so convenient … I wept and cried with anger that we had lost the war." Siebung's account stresses two key distinctions from the British and American narrative concerning post First World War traumatized veterans. In place of the "shell-shocked boy" narrative described in Fiona Reid's work on trauma in postwar Britain, the Freikorps soldier represented a traumatized male, but one rather than suffering from paralysis of incapacity was filled with vengeful anger, wounded pride, and an outraged sense of injustice.[15] Additionally, with the loss of the war, Germany's future was far more uncertain than that of Britain, France, or America. Many soldiers expressed significant anxiety over the social, political and cultural future of the country.

Freikorps members often spoke about the transformative powers of combat experience after the war. After witnessing combat and life in the trenches, Private

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[14] Friedrich Sieburg, *Es werde Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Societätsverlag, 1933) 20.
[15] For more on the British response to trauma from the First World War, see Fiona Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain, 1914-1930* (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2010).

Heinrich Oehlke argued that "the *Feldgraue* do not really represent their civilian selves. For the *Kamerad* is not a miner, lawyer, fabric worker, or teacher, but rather he is only a soldier, no more, no less."[16] Although too young to have participated in the war, the ever loquacious chronicler of the Freikorps, Ernst von Salomon, was struck by the changes in the men returning from the front in November 1918. Salomon wrote:

> Suddenly I realized that these were no workmen, farmers, students, they were not labourers, clerks, shopkeepers, or officials. They were soldiers: they were men who had heard the call. Here were no fakers, no conscripts. They had a vocation, they came of their own free will, and their home was in the war-zone. Home – Country – People – Nation – they were imposing words when we said them, but they were shams. That was why these men would have nothing to do with us.
> They were the Nation. What we had blazoned about the world they understood in a deeper sense – it was that which had urged them to do what we smugly called their duty. Their faith was not in words, it was in themselves, and they never talked about it. War had taken hold of them and would never let them go. They would never really belong to us and to their homes again. This attempted fusion of them with the peaceful ordered life of ordinary citizens was a ridiculous adulteration which could never succeed. The war was over, but the armies were still in being.[17]

This perceived transformation led to a sense of isolation, both initially in the trenches, and later within civilian society. Self-identifying *Frontkämpfer* expressed considerable hostility to the "placid, unassuming, industrious, trusting democratic *Bürger*," especially for his "*Bierschaumpatriotismus*"[18] and reliance on others to defend the threatened Fatherland.[19] Distrustful of the bourgeois "sham system,"

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[16] BA-MA PH 2-458, "Feldgraue Blätter aus dem Schützengraben," June 1916.
[17] Ernst von Salomon, *Die Geächteten*, 28-31. Trans. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* Vol 2, 79.
[18] Patriotism that evaporates quickly like the foam on top of a pint of beer.
[19] Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik,* 57-58.

many Front Fighters argued that they only found acceptance and belonging among other combat veterans.

Indeed, thoughts of leaving the community of brothers could create significant anxiety. In an article entitled, "Der Mann von der Front," Private Heinrich Oehlke recounts his feelings after a brief leave behind the front lines. Where once he was filled with excitement and longing to visit the "red roofs and cathedral" of the small town that was only just visible from his position in the trench, Oehlke confesses upon his return to his unit that now "the *Heimat* was completely disconnected from my realities. My thoughts were filled of the events and things around me. … Now sometimes, when the *Kameraden* speak to each other in the dugouts or trenches about the *Heimat* and their family, their sweethearts, their loves and upcoming leave, I do not want to join in. Instead I tightly grip my shovel and work on the trench."[20] As bewildering experiences in trench combat became reality, life outside of the battlefield seemingly ceased to exist. "My thoughts are engaged with the things that surround me," another private told Oehlke. "I think about the rifle and its barrel, the smashing of grenades and shrapnel, think of the howl of mines, the pilots flying above us. My thoughts are filled with these things all day, so that my mind remains filled with everything my eyes see."[21]

Writing after the war, Salomon was keen to underscore the Freikorps movement's connection to the world war. In 1938 Salomon declared that:

> the *Frontkämpfer* is generally recognized as the only possible reflection of the character of the World War. Neither the war profiteer, nor the inflation profiteer, nor the revolutionary, nor the parliamentary People's

[20] BA-MA PH 2-458, "Der Mann von der Front," June 1916.
[21] Ibid.

> Representative, nor the opportunist, can be held as the symbol of our time in the post war era, but rather the *Freikorpskämpfer*.[22]

Although there often was a gap between the end of the war and service in a Freikorps unit, Salomon and many other Freikorps authors obscured their chronologies, making the postwar conflicts appear to be an immediate extension of the First World War. Indeed, Salomon was always very specific about the connection between the war and the Freikorps. "The Freikorps originated under the force of the war," he wrote in an essay entitled "The Character of the German Freikorpskämpfer."[23] "Therefore the war was the origin of the Freikorps, … the time that gave them their warrior character."

And yet, while Freikorps members were eager to portray themselves as the only true embodiment of the *Frontkämpfer* identity in postwar social, cultural, political and military life, other groups and organizations contested this narrative. The Nazi narritive of a unified community of *Frontkämpfer* is challenged through an examination of the prolific outpouring of communist and socialist discourse on soldiers and the military after the war.[24] Open association between left-wing political groups and soldiers developed throughout the revolutionary events in November 1918. The Spartacus League under Karl Liebknecht's direction was quick to extend their influence in garrisons in Berlin and across Germany's largest cities. to "bring together the soldierly masses with [communist] ideals."[25]

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[22] Ernst von Salomon, *Das Buch vom deutschen Freikorpskämpfer*, (Berlin: Deutscher Militär Verlag, 1938), 11.
[23] Ibid., 11.
[24] See Ernst von Salomon, *Das Buch vom deutschen Freikorpskämpfer;* FW Oerzten, *Die deutschen Freikorps*.
[25] *Die Rote Fahne*, 24 November 1918, "Die Roten Soldaten."

Amidst the broader communist appeals to soldiers, there was also a clear recognition that the Front Soldier was on some level distinguished from soldiers of the Home Army directly owing to their combat experience. First-hand exposure to war imbued the *Frontkämpfer* particular political value in revolutionary Weimar.[26] While general Spartacus League addresses to politically mobilize soldiers began immediately after the declaration of the Republic in Berlin on 9 November, specific appeals to the *Frontkämpfer* were evident less than two weeks later. Front Soldier-specific content appeared in leaflets, magazines and particularly in *Die Rote Fahne*. In an article entitled "The New *Burgfrieden,"* Rosa Luxemburg called for solidarity between the exploited victims of the "Social Imperialist war," namely workers and soldiers, who she argued were united by the common goals of peace and demobilization.[27] Seeking to nurture connections between the organized working class and Great War veterans, Communist terminology repeatedly recast the Front Soldiers as "proletariat in *Feldgrau,*" and revolutionary organizers praised the soldiers' council movement as a sign of a growing class-consciousness within the rank and file of the army.

The Spartacus League also stressed the bond between *Frontkämpfer* and revolutionary workers through a mutual glorification of action. Just as active participation in the war at the front distinguished a Front Soldier from a Home Soldier in the eyes of the *Frontkämpfer*, the Spartacists declared that the true

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[26] Both the political Left and the Right recognized the potential political value of *Frontkämpfer*. Former Artillery officer Dr Ulrich Trautmann wrote in the *Kreuzzeitung* on 4 February 1934 that "if a position in the community of the Volk deserves to be heard before all others, this is the position of the Frontkämpfer." BA-B R72-1174

[27] *Die Rote Fahne*, 19 November 1918, "Der neue Burgfrieden."

socialist revolutionary was similarly defined by his active efforts rebelling against the bourgeois capitalist order.

Efforts to organize the *Frontkämpfer* through the Spartacus League were first evident through the declaration of a specific Front Soldier Assembly, held on 22 November in Berlin, with Liebknecht acting as 'advisor.'[28] Several resolutions were passed including a petition for the creation of a formal and permanent Soldiers' Council of Front Soldiers, which should then seek incorporation into the Greater Berlin Soldiers' Council. Liebknecht and the new Front Soldiers' Assembly decreed that all officers and counterrevolutionary elements should immediately be removed from the councils and protested the efforts of the National Assembly under Friedrich Ebert and Hugo Haase to 'hinder' the revolution.[29] Following the creation of specific Front Soldier Councils, the *Frontkämpfer* began to demand a greater say in the future shape of the Reich, issuing a press statement in *Die Rote Fahne* on 25 November, demanding the "democratization and Socialization of our land."[30]

The *Frontkämpfer* identity was in a state of flux after November 1918. Spartacus attempts to mobilize Front Fighters occurred alongside concerted attempts by the Social Democrat-led government to raise new, politically reliable

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[28] *Die Rote Fahne*, 20 November 1918, "Frontsoldaten."
[29] *Die Rote Fahne*, 19 November 1918, "Der neue Burgfrieden."
[30] While exact numbers of representatives at the first two meetings of the specific Front Soldiers' Assembly in Berlin are unavailable, if the election regulations governing the structure of the Soldiers' Council elections in front line formations are used as a model for the Front Soldiers' Assembly, there would be 43 delegates from Armies, Army Divisions and Army Groups, with additional delegates from each unit over 1000 men, potentially generating a body of several hundred men. While it is unlikely that Liebknecht was able to assemble hundreds of delegates for a specific *Frontkämpfer* Assembly so rapidly, the creation of this body nevertheless demonstrates the Front Soldiers' political capital in revolutionary politics.

formations of Front Soldiers to serve the Republic, as well as rallying calls from Freikorps leaders to assemble volunteer formations for a war against all foreign and domestic enemies of the Reich. While narratives from Great War veterans, penned years later, stressing unity among Front Soldiers may have been accurate *during* the war, as Scott Stephenson argues in his work on soldiers on the Western Front in 1918, after the war this unity rapidly broke down.[31]

Despite such deep divisions within the community of combat veterans, Freikorps organizers continued to praise and promote a mythical vision of unity, rooted in the wartime construction of the "Spirit of 1914." Stemming from Kaiser Wilhelm II's speech on the eve of the First World War, the mythical image of wartime unity was later adopted by the Freikorps and remained a consistent reference in their propaganda and their worldview after 1918. "In the battle now lying ahead of us, I see no more parties in my people," the Kaiser declared on 1 August 1914. "Among us there are only Germans … All that now matters is that we stand together like brothers, and then God will help the German sword to victory."[32] Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg echoed the importance of the "wonderful decision," stating in the Reichstag that "the fourth of August 1914 will, for all time, remain one of Germany's greatest days."[33] Newspapers spread the concept of unity through the "Spirit of 1914" narrative to all corners of German society. "With one blow all our internal differences, all the party struggles, all the many, often painfully stupid everyday differences have vanished," trumpeted the

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[31] Scott Stephenson, *The Final Battle: Soldiers of the Western Front and the German Revolution of 1918*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6.
[32] *Vorwärts*, 2 August 1914, no 208, "Eine Ansprache des Kaisers."
[33] Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914*, 3.

Darmstädter Zeitung on 8 August 1914. "A united people in arms – so Germany goes to war."[34] However, more than just stressing unity, the "Spirit of 1914" incorporated pan-German nationalism and a sense of joyful celebration in the face of the approaching war. A journalist for the *Deutsche Zeitung* wrote after the declaration of mobilization that "now the enthusiasm of the youth has become the joy of men … The deeper bonds of all that is German broke through all the layers of class, ideological, and party differences. Kaiser and people, government and citizens – all were one."[35]

References to pan-German unity and even more directly to the "Spirit of 1914" were common in Freikorps literature and public speeches. Often the concept of "1914" was employed in a casual reference to a nostalgic illusion of German greatness and military might before the war. "The German Soldier from 1914 was invincible against the vast numerical superiority of the enemy!" declared the former State Minister Dr. Karl Helfferich in Kolberg on 28 October 1919 in a speech celebrating a visit from Hindenburg, entitled "*Das Vaterland in Not!*" "And the German Soldier who came home? He had been instilled with the feeling from all sides: you had fought for a bad affair, you fought for the delusional insanity of the imperial regime."[36] "1914" became short-hand for order, strength, unity, and power, contrasted to the postwar era, filled with doubts, accusations and thoughts of betrayal. Violent actions, specifically against political opponents, were legitimized and de-politicized through references to the "Spirit of 1914." One government

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[34] *Darmstädter Zeitung*, 8 August 1914, "Politische Wochenschau."
[35] Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914*, 66-67.
[36] BA-MA PH 26-15, "Das Vaterland in Not!"

report, written in the aftermath of Reichswehr-Freikorps operations against communist demonstrations in March 1920, praised the virtues of the Freikorps troops as they cleansed the Berlin suburbs and workers' quarters of the "Red Battalions," noting that "the [Freikorps] troops had fought like the Infantry of 1914."[37] A recruitment poster for the Freiwilligen-Verband 'von Aulock,' formerly 8 Jäger Battalion of the Provisional Reichswehr, referenced not only the nationalist sentiments of August 1914, but even urged young men to display the "Spirit of 1813" in the "sense of Arndt, Jahn, Stein, and Yorck" to defend the threatened *Heimat*.[38] For the Freikorps, to embrace the "Spirit of 1914" or to honour those who had made sacrifices in August 1914 was a method of aligning themselves in a longer German nationalist tradition.

Thus, the concept of "the War" occupied a central place in the worldview of the Freikorps movement. Significant numbers of Great War veterans, many of whom were instrumental in the earliest days of the Freikorps system, credited their combat experiences during the war as crucial formative events in their postwar lives. But most importantly for the broader understanding of the Freikorps as a social-cultural phenomenon, the highly malleable conception of "the war" created after November 1918 served as a source of unending rationalization and justification for the existence and actions of the Freikorps. All manner of political actions were sanitized through references to "honouring fallen comrades" and "defending the legacy of the generation of 1914." Fighting for new value and meaning for wartime sacrifices was a common mantra for Freikorps troops seeking

[37] Schulze, *Freikorps*, 287.
[38] BA-MA RH 37-5064, "Freiwilligen-Verband 'von Aulock.'"

to justify and normalize violent political actions against their fellow Germans, and even their former fellow Front Fighters from the Great War. Indeed, despite their rhetoric appealing to a mythical moment of pan-German unity in August 1914, the Freikorps did not successfully bring together all *Frontkämpfer* from the war. Instead, even as Freikorps authors attempted to build upon a "*Frontkämpfer* into *Freikorpskämpfer*" narrative, socialist and communist claims to the Front Fighter identity demonstrate a persistent degree of variation within the community of Great War veterans. Unity, therefore, was never fully achieved, but this did not deter Freikorps propaganda activities from stressing pan-German solidarity throughout its existence.

Kameradschaft

Belief in a community of comrades, forged by collective experiences during combat, was not a new concept at the end of the First World War. Throughout the history of warfare men have often expressed feelings of brotherhood and kinship after serving together in the same squad, company or army. Germans proved no different in this regard. Indeed, this very sense of belonging to a group of comrades, a *Kameradschaft*, underscored the existence of many of the pre-war German veterans' organizations. However, the dramatic expansion of the army during the Great War put unforeseen strain on the underlying notions of unity and solidarity within the *Kameradschaft*. Within the increasingly fragmented and divided world of veterans' associations, the Freikorps movement attempted to establish a very strict

understanding of a 'community of comrades' in response to the politicization of wartime notions of soldierly unity during the *Bürgerkrieg*.

Before the First World War, veterans' organizations proliferated across Germany. In August 1914 there were already 3 million members in Germany's various veterans' associations.[39] Developing into mass-based organizations after the conclusion of the Wars of Unification in 1871, veterans' assemblies had a long tradition in Germany, stretching back into the eighteenth century. Although regionally divided before the war, they underwent a massive expansion after membership restrictions were relaxed and all men who had completed military service, not just those who had served in the front lines, were accepted.

Despite this established legacy of organized veterans affairs, a national veterans association was only created in 1900 through the Kyffhäuser League of German State Veterans' Organizations (*Kyffäuser-Bund der Deutschen Landeskriegerverbände*). Under the direction of Dr. Alfred Westphal, the Kyffhäuser League established clear mechanisms for political action by veterans. According to Westphal, the primary objective of the veterans' organizations was to cultivate "monarchistic and patriotic feelings" and to counter "the revolutionary and traitorous Social Democratic movement with a monarchistic and nationalistic mass movement of former soldiers."[40] Politicization of veterans' organizations accelerated in the years leading up to the war, as Social Democrat members were excluded, and

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[39] James Diehl, "Germany: Veterans' Politics under Three Flags," in *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War,* ed. Stephen R Ward (Port Washington: National University Publications, 1975), 137.
[40] Ibid., 138.

government officials increasingly saw veterans' groups as an effective means of propagating "the spirit of the army" in the ranks of civilian society.

However, as might be expected, the war drastically altered the close-knit, relatively politically homogeneous *Kameradschaft* of German veterans that had existed before August 1914. As soon as significant numbers of Great War veterans returned to German civilian life, at least by mid-1916, veterans' associations began to increase their political advocacy. The pre-war unity of the veterans' *Kameradschaft* was shattered by the appearance of new veterans with socialist and communist sympathies. Chief among them was Erich Kuttner, a prominent Social Democrat, and former soldier, who was wounded in 1916 and later returned to Berlin and joined the *Vorwärts* editorial staff. Writing about the new problems facing veterans, Kuttner was very open about the new realities of veterans' affairs. "The disabled will not only make economic demands," he wrote in an article entitled, "The Return Home," "but also *political* demands on the state."[41] Kuttner was also involved in the creation of the Confederation of the War-Disabled and War Veterans (*Bund der Kriegbeschädigten und ehemaligen Kriegsteilnehmer*) in May 1917. Although the organization claimed no official connection to the SPD, the agenda of the association laid bare its political affiliations. The Confederation made significant demands for increased war pensions, public welfare benefits for disabled veterans and a fundamental reorganization of the military pension system.[42] Continuing to

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[41] Diehl, "Veterans' Politics," 143.
[42] Throughout 1917 and 1918, the SPD sympathetic National Confederation and the monarchial Kyffhäuser League continued to fight for the loyalty of Great War veterans. The Confederation denounced the Kyffhäuser League's connections to the

make political demands for suffrage and taxation reform until the end of the war, Kuttner and the Confederation provided agency and advocacy for thousands of socialist and communist Great War veterans, who rejected the pro-imperial ties of the old pre-war organizations.

After the war, veterans groups continued to proliferate as millions of former soldiers constituted a new and powerful social and political demographic with inadequate representation. The socialist National Confederation continued to operate after the war, working closely with Friedrich Ebert's Social Democrats in the Reichstag, and achieved many of its goals. The outdated military pension system was improved and wounded veterans were legally guaranteed a minimum level of medical care. By 1920, the National Confederation, included more than 500,000 members spread across Germany. In addition to the National Confederation there were four other major organizations. The United Association of German War-Disabled and Next of Kin (*Einheitsverband der Kriegsbeschädigten und Kriegshinterbliebenen Deutschlands*), the League of German War-Disabled (*Bund Deutscher Kriegsbeschädigten*), the Central Association of German War-Disabled and Next of Kin (*Zentralverband Deutscher Kriegsbeschädigten und Kriegshinterbliebenen*), and finally the International League (*Internationaler Bund*), all aimed to represent the growing community of veterans in Weimar politics and society.

Rather than working together to represent the demands of Germany's veterans, the deep political and social divisions within the country produced a

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Fatherland Party, the Pan-German League and their support of annexationist war aims.

fragmented landscape of organizations, who challenged each other for influence among the former *Feldgraue*. Whether it was the Berlin-based communist International League, or the Central Association founded by Christian trade unions, no clear unifying force existed within the world of veterans' affairs after the war. In addition to these associations focused on the rank-and-file of the Kaiser's former army, another new type of veterans' organization came into existence after the war: officer leagues. Before 1918 there were no officer leagues as historically there had been little demand for them. Most of the German officer corps had traditionally been recruited from the nobility and upper level of society and were provided with pensions upon retirement. Joining veterans' associations therefore had been treated with a degree of disdain and a general feeling that they were too plebeian.[43] However, revolution and defeat had changed the social, economic and political position of the German officer corps, necessitating new forms of representation to defend their common interests. Many officers faced unemployment and a new republic run by the SPD, their prewar enemies. Despite these commonalities, officer organizations were also divided, generally along social, political and professional lines.[44]

In many ways the Freikorps discourse on the *Kameradschaft* was a reaction to the postwar fragmentation and division within the world of veterans' organizations. There was a relationship between wartime expressions of

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[43] CJ Elliott, "The Kriegervereine and the Weimar Republic," in *Journal of Contemporary History,* Vol. 10, No. 1, (January 1975), 109-129.
[44] For more information on veterans' organizations, see Diehl, "Veterans' Politics under Three Flags," and James Diehl, *Para-Military Politics in Weimar Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

comradeship and unity and similar themes present in the Freikorps' articulation of the concept of the community of comrades in the first few years after the war. Promoted as a potentially unifying banner for all combat veterans from the Great War, Freikorps *kameradschaft* was rooted in a nostalgic vision of trench life that had rapidly disappeared after the armistice in November 1918.

During the war, soldiers' publications of diaries, letters and articles in trench newspapers illustrate an increasing fixation on principles that underpinned notions of comradeship. Especially in the later years as the numerical superiority of the Entente and American forces increasingly threatened to overwhelm Germany's troops, soldiers began speaking of a new collective identity, and professed to take solace in the bonds offered by *Kameradschaft*. Historian Robert Nelson has argued that an abstract form of comradeship was a desirable legitimizing force for German soldiers fighting a "war of defense" in occupied enemy lands.[45] In his work on German soldier newspapers during the First World War, Nelson highlights a narrative of "gentlemanly warriors fighting a just war" in soldiers' publications, consistently invoking a "powerful feeling of comradeship" that served as a major force of unity and loyalty in the German army.[46] Although there was some editorial influence exercised by the officer corps, many of these soldier newspapers still managed to reflect the prevailing sentiment of their readership, especially when linking the concepts of duty and loyalty to notions of masculinity and comradeship in the trenches.

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[45] Robert L Nelson, *German Soldier Newspapers of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 90.
[46] Ibid., 91.

Describing the unifying power of the collective experience of combat and trench life, Private Heinrich Oehlke argued that soldiers lost all individual identity. The newly reborn soldier has but one purpose argued Oehlke. "The millions and millions of field grey men feel like brothers of one family, as sons from the mother Germania," he wrote, "coming together to protect the hearth."[47] Soldier and author Max Weinberg echoed Oehlke's thoughts on the communal good will of the *Kameradschaft* and solidarity in the face of death, when he wrote:

> The last cigarette went round, the last piece of bread was parceled out; the *Kameradschaft* does not break in the hour of utmost emergency and danger, in the volley of grenades, in the spring rain of shrapnel, with the *Sturmangriff*, or with bold patrols. The history of this war is so full with glowing examples of noble German comradely (*kameradschaftlichen*) self-sacrifice! They must create a special chapter for them![48]

Weinberg also praised the informal speech of soldiers as a sign of the disintegration of prewar, peacetime class divisions. "The beautiful comradely 'du' (*Das schöne kameradschaftliche 'du'*) is the bridge for all the many *Kameraden*, who [otherwise] would never have come together in civilian life," Weinberg argued.[49] Universalized through their field grey tunics, all *Kameraden* were bonded together in appearance, thought and outlook. "The *Kameraden* Head Master and Inspector are just men like we are," Weinberg wrote. "[They] are the same friends sending a letter to the *Heimat*, have the same wife and kids, have the same longing for his house. Whoever has this insight understands the *Kameradschaft*."[50] Frequently referred to as an "iron hard cement" bonding young men together, *Kameradschaft* and its attributes

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[47] BA-MA PH 2-458. "Feldgraue Blätter aus dem Schützengraben," June 1916, page 25.
[48] BA-MA PH 2-458, "Etwas über Kameradschaft im Felde," June 1916.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

offered German soldiers a weapon in the battle for morale against the numerical dominance increasingly possessed by their enemies in the final years of the war.

However, while the concept of an all-inclusive *Kameradschaft* offered the vision of a unified world of field grey brothers during the war, following the armistice and demobilization, the "community of comrades" became a highly politicized tool to simultaneously mobilize sympathetic men for the Freikorps movement and clearly identify sources of resistance and hostility. Ludwig Maercker, commander of the influential Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps, stressed the importance of maintaining *Kameradschaft* within his new Freikorps after the war. To inculcate the desired atmosphere, Maercker urged the creation of large sport organizations in order to "encourage community spirit, *Kameradschaft*, and discipline."[51] Supported by an 8 December 1918 War Ministry Decree, Maercker published further guidelines to encourage the creation of a "community of comrades" that sought to directly correlate to wartime experiences from the First World War.[52] Every *Abteilung* within the FLK was assigned a specific 'Sport Officer' to coordinate the sport activities of the unit to promote comradeship through a "*Frisch, fromm, fröhlich, und frei*" program of physical education that should stress fights and contests between individual soldiers.[53] Maercker foresaw sport organizations fulfilling a critical role as a "Volksschule" and a prime cultural institution of the nation. The new sport associations were to replace the prewar army providing "an

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[51] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer*, 311.
[52] Ibid., 312.
[53] Ibid., 312. "*Frisch, fromm, fröhlich, und frei,*" can be translated as "Fresh, upright, cheerful, and free."

education of physical training, an upbringing to develop obedience, order and loyalty."[54] In other words, the corner stones of the wartime *Kameradschaft*.

While Maercker was one of the most direct advocates seeking to extend wartime *Kameradschaft* into postwar Germany through the Freikorps movement, other inferences to a "community of brothers" were more subtle. The most common politicization of the term "comrade" was rooted in the prewar terms *Kamerad* and *Genosse*, although during the war all active combatants in the army were white-washed with the universalizing *Kamerad* label, and pre-war political affiliations were temporarily marginalized. After the war both of these terms were applied to German veterans for the first time in significant numbers. The existence of the trench *Genosse* contested the mythical unity of the field grey brothers narrative, which was a critical component of the postwar *Kameradschaft*. In postwar Germany, Freikorps members re-politicized the term *Kamerad* and only applied it to politically and socially acceptable individuals.[55] Writing about defeating the revolutionary forces in Braunschweig, Maercker carefully avoided ever addressing any of the city's defenders as *Kameraden*, many of whom had served in the Kaiser's army during the Great War, and instead labeled them *Volksgenossen* despite having no intelligence reports concerning the political affiliations of troops representing the council movement in that region.[56] This example is indicative of a larger process of politicization of the military sphere occurring during the collapse of the imperial

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[54] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 307.
[55] Such politicized use of the terms "*Kamerad"* and "Genosse" is apparent in several Freikorps memoirs, including Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer zur Reichswehr*; Ihno Meyer, *Das Jägerbataillon der Eisernen Division im Kampfe gegen den Bolschewismus*; Gerhard Roßbach, *Mein Weg durch die Zeit; Erinnerungen und Bekenntnisse.*
[56] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 209.

German army and the mythical community of *Frontkämpfer*. The re-emergence of the *Kamerad*/*Genosse* distinction was driven by the Freikorps specifically to exclude socialist and communist sympathetic veterans from a new postwar *Kameradschaft* that was grounded in highly plastic and abstract notions of duty, honour and loyalty.

Thoman Kühne's work on the postwar *Kameradschaft* has highlighted subtle political differences in the articulation of this brotherhood as it was expressed in the first few years after the war. While right-wing veterans tended to see comradeship as an expression of continued solidarity among all front fighters, regardless of class, left-wing veterans argued that *Kameradschaft* was most clearly expressed by the common soldier against their officers and thereby incorporating an element of class conflict into the concept of comradeship.[57] Both left- and right-wing veterans believed in the myth of *Kameradschaft*, although their political differences produced two distinct strands, which remained at odds with one another throughout the course of the Weimar Republic, although according to Kühne, they were later brought together and reconciled through the Nazi people's community (*Volksgemeinschaft*).[58]

Despite the rhetoric of brotherhood stressing the bonds between the army rank-and-file, the Freikorps' conception of *Kameradschaft* should not be mistaken for containing underlying socialist or communist tendencies. These were not the men that Karl Marx was looking for. Instead, the role of the commander within the Freikorps movement demonstrates the clear distinction between the more

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[57] Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistichen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 58-64.
[58] Ibid., 140-153.

egalitarian and utopian communist conception of brotherhood, and the structured, hierarchical *Kameradschaft* favoured by Freikorps participants. The relationship between an officer and the rank-and-file Freikorps soldier was particularly important to maintaining the strong unit cohesion found in many formations. The concept of the *Führergedanke* was a crucial component of *Kameradschaft* and the nature of the spirit of the Freikorps in general.[59] Although a fixation on the bond between officers and men had developed during the later years of the First World War, for the Freikorps this relationship was a formative characteristic. After the war, the self-imposed isolation of the Freikorps movement only served to strengthen the personal connection many volunteers felt towards their commanders. Mistrusting outside sources of authority, Freikorps soldiers became deeply bonded to a particular leader. Musing on the authority and central role of 'the commander,' one Freikorps officer wrote: "In the beginning it was the Commander. His *Führertum* did not stem from bestowed service grades, but rather in the actions taken in the spirit of the front (*frontgeleisteten Tat*)."[60] These actions forged a bond between officer and man, the author argued: "Everything to the Commander was blood and instinct, nothing was political consciousness. This Commander grew from the war, embracing the rest of the troops and endorsed by the government as 'Freikorps.'"[61]

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[59] BA-MA PH 26-12, "Das Detachement Lierau." Discipline and mutual trust between officers and men was considered "the most important pillar" in the creation of Freikorps units.
[60] Schulze, *Freikorps*, 36.
[61] Ibid., 36.

Although united together through the bonds of *Kameradschaft*, some brothers were destined to lead, and others to follow. Maercker chose to stress the close relationship between commander and the rank-and-file in his inaugural address to the new recruits of I Abtlg of the FLK. "Nothing but good things will happen," declared Maercker, "if we both, Command and troops, firmly come together, loyally close ranks and remain bonded to each other; as I am pledged to you, then likewise everyone of you is sworn to me."[62] The general also had a specific morality code envisioned for the new Freikorps formation, stressing honour, discipline and above all loyalty. Concluding his speech, Maercker stressed his key values:

> I want to command a troop ruled by discipline, not because insubordination will be punished, but rather because every individual is genuine. Troops can only be led, if a will exists within them.
> I want to command a troop in which the commanders are saluted, not because it is ordered, but rather because the soldiers freely give their respect to officers who care for their troops' welfare and understand it is their responsibility.[63]

Finally, Maercker highlighted the connection between the *Kameradschaft* and the place of the commander:

> I want to command a troop in which true *Kameradschaft* reigns; *Kameradschaft* from man to man and between officer and man. Loyalty for loyalty should be our slogan – we want to be firmly cohesive – one for all, all for one. Given the tasks that lie ahead of us, it must be this way.[64]

Therefore in the eyes of the supporters of the Freikorps movement, building the *Kameradschaft* among the rank-and-file was the necessary pre-condition in the creation of a strong, useful body of troops. Once this community of comrades

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[62] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 57.
[63] Ibid., 58.
[64] Ibid., 59.

existed, the conscious, willful submission to the benevolent authority of the commander, and his staff of officers, would establish a cohesive unit capable of handling the difficult actions they would be forced to carry out, particularly against their fellow Germans.[65]

This submission to the authority of the Freikorps officers was in part a specific rejection of any democratic implications of a close relationship between officers and men. "All experiences from the French National Guard of 1789 to the Russian Red Army of 1917 teaches that elected leaders enjoy no respect," Maercker argued in his memoirs. "They lost their independence and are no longer in a situation to appear energetic," he insisted. The commander must wholly devote himself to the care of his Freikorps, Maercker declared. "Each commander, who considers himself a professional must abandon everything else, in order to build a Freikorps troop … [the officers] will create order and thanks to them, the old spirit of the Prussian-German army will remain vivid."[66] Other Freikorps echoed Maercker's sentiments. Rather than principles of self-representation, discipline and

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[65] As Klaus Theweleit's imaginative work on gender, sexuality and proto-fascist culture has argued, the early Freikorps movement correlated quite smoothly with Nazi propaganda and philosophical treatises, expounding on the relationship between the Führer and the Volk. Indeed, there are clear parallels between the Freikorps' *Kameradschaft* and the Nazi re-conception of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, as well as the central role for the 'commander' and the 'leader' in both movements, although very few Freikorps accounts specifically discuss a pseudo-biological conception of race as a necessary pre-condition for acceptance into their selective community. Actions, deeds and performance, specifically in combat, were the keys to *Kameradschaft*, rather than a genetic birth right. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Volume 2: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), xiv-xv.

[66] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer*, 41.

mutual trust between officers and men was considered "the most important pillar" in the foundation of the Freikorps "Detachement Lierau" in January 1919.[67]

While the strong bond between soldier and commander motivated the troops and produced reliable units, it also tended to reduce flexibility and increase the Freikorps reliance on their commanders. In the event of injury or absence of their commander, Freikorps units became unruly and occasionally disbanded altogether. Following the death of the titular commander of the Batterie Hasenclever at the hands of "deceitful" communist "tricksters" in a railway station in the Ruhr in March 1920, the unit chose to dissolve itself rather than carry on without their beloved captain, even though they had fought together in February 1919.[68] After the signing of the Versailles Treaty a *Sturmsoldat* of the Ehrhardt Brigade wrote in his diary: "As long as the Commander remains, nothing is lost. ... A battle has been lost; the war still goes well as long as the Brigade remains true. There now lies the task for the *Sturmsoldat.* A new march begins. It will be, as it always has been, the *Sturmsoldaten* strike now for their Commander!"[69]

However, the noticeable streak of independence, emblematic of many Freikorps officers, could also have negative consequences. General Bernhard von Hülsen, commander of the prominent Freikorps von Hülsen noted that "it is a side effect of the revolution that several commanders of Freikorps units command as though they are independent officers … for which the chain of command is

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[67] BA-MA PH 26-12, "Das Detachement Lierau."
[68] BA-MA PH26-11, "Das Freikorps-Lichtschlag mit der Batterie Hansenclever 1919 und 1920 gegen den Bolschewismus im Ruhrgebiet."
[69] Plaas, "Das Kapp-Unternehmen," in Jünger, *Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, (Berlin: ES Mittler, 1922), 169.

inconvenient." According to Hülsen this could reduce the effectiveness of the Freikorps system. "The thought, that [the Freikorps commander] with his troop is a part of the old army, and that absolute submission is urgently required is not within him. It will therefore lead to unnecessary experimenting and organizing, missing the concentrated development of power, and a splintering of the actual available instrument of power."[70]

It is essential for any analysis of the Freikorps spirit or worldview to place *Kameradschaft* at its core. The "community of comrades," brothers united through the violence and destruction of the First World War battlefield, was one of the central organizing concepts of the entire Freikorps movement. With its broad, loosely articulated claims to unity and belonging for all veterans, Freikorps recruits were generally receptive to the notion of *Kameradschaft*. It not only functioned as a rallying point for like-minded veterans and militant Germans, but also served as a mechanism to identify and marginalize former soldiers who did not fit the social and political criteria for membership in Freikorps units. The influx of vast numbers of new recruits with previously unacceptable social and political backgrounds made a specific unified political agenda on behalf of all veterans untenable during the war. However, demobilization and the political fragmentation of the military sphere during the revolutionary era offered the opportunity for the rebirth of a politicized *Kameradschaft* conception through the Freikorps movement. The hierarchical structure of Freikorps *Kameradschaft*, with an intense focus on the relationship between the commanding officer and his men, dominated Freikorps units and

[70] Schulze, *Freikorps*, 45.

served to weaken any significant attempts to infuse socialist, communist or even democratic rhetoric of equality within the movement.

Deutschtum

Far from establishing themselves merely as a counterrevolutionary reaction to internal and external developments, the Freikorps movement was connected to a postwar expression of German nationalism rooted in notions of loyalty, populism and space. By adopting and perpetuating a form of radical "Germanness," Freikorps members simultaneously situated themselves in a domestic struggle against internationalist Bolshevism and externally in contested border regions with Polish nationalists in Upper Silesia, Posen and West Prussia. Defending *Deutschtum* became a unifying battle cry that justified military actions against unpatriotic German Bolsheviks or treacherous Polish insurgents and was a part of a larger effort to claim moral superiority for the Freikorps movement and thereby re-cast their anti-communist actions as apolitical in nature. Before turning to the moral crusade launched by the Freikorps under a banner of "non-political" activity, the radical, trans-spacial nationalism of the movement will be analyzed.

German nationalism was quite flexible following the First World War. Indeed, some authors within the Freikorps movement reconceived of the locus of *Deutschtum*, moving beyond a particular government institution or monarch and instead arguing that Germandom resided in the particular individual who embodied true German values, such as loyalty, duty and discipline. "Where they stood was the

state," Ernst von Salomon wrote, describing the character of the Freikorps fighter. Continuing, he stated:

> [The Freikorps] stood in the focal point of danger, there, where the state accentuated itself the strongest. … No border of the Germans is conceivable that is not built through the consciousness of the Germans: so far and no further.[71]

In Salomon's view, the Freikorps replaced the state as the personification of Germandom. "They were *Gewalt*, because the state is *Gewalt*," Salomon argued. "They dealt in justice, because the state deals in justice."[72] Created in a specific moment in time, the Freikorps brought together violence, authority and "Germanness" in a new nationalist movement. "They were the state in a stateless time," he wrote. "They were the warriors, and the State, carried forth in their consciousness, which was therefore a martial essence."[73] Malleable, freed from the influence of institutions and officialdom, the Freikorps' radical nationalist expression of *Deutschtum* proved to be the perfectly tailored ideological framework for their aggressive agenda and operations. Once again, Salomon's poetic phrasing aims to sanitize and legitimate the actions of the Freikorps: "They fought along the borders in the East, they charged as the German vanguard in a forgotten land."[74]

While the intensity and ubiquity of calls to defend *Deutschtum* varied by region and the intensity of the Freikorps military operations, in the threatened eastern border provinces, 'Germanness' served as a crucial characteristic of the Freikorps soldiers. "The troops must always bear in mind," urged a pamphlet

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[71] Salomon, *Freikorpskämpfer*, 12.
[72] Ibid., 12.
[73] Ibid., 13.
[74] Ibid., 10.

distributed to Grenzschutz commanders in V and VI Army Corps regions, "that they are the foundation of Germanness."[75] The newsletter went on to urge Grenzschutz troops to "be polite, having a pleasing character, helpfulness," and offer "absolute loyal service to the affection of the Volk," while eliminating all "rowdiness or uppity behaviour."[76] Members from other units similarly engaged in a national discourse concerning threatened "Germandom." The Detachement Lierau, operating in Upper Silesia throughout the majority of 1919 fought to defend what they termed "a piece of real German land" from the new Polish state.[77] After months of small-arms clashes and aggressive posturing with "Polish irregulars," Major Walther von Lierau's unit was dissolved at the behest of the Entente military observers in the region. Embittered by the forced expulsion of "crucial representatives of Germandom" (*Deutschtum*), Lierau bemoaned the fate of the citizens of Kempen. "The people of Kempen were German to their core (*kerndeutsch*)," wrote Lierau in his unit history. "They thought and felt German. And now these Germans are members of the Polish state! What right to self-determination of the People – what a blow!"[78] Civilian representatives from Kempen also engaged in this nationalist rhetoric, writing a fond farewell to the Detachement Lierau that praised the "German men with warm German hearts," who "firmly and loyally had stood here together on the *Ostmarkgrenze* for Germany and the *deutsche Volkstum*, holding a loyal watch against the enemy and standing victorious after a hard struggle."[79] The

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[75] "Merkblatt – Für Führer im Grenzschutz," in Salomon, *Freikorpskämpfer*, 249.
[76] Ibid, 250.
[77] BA-MA PH 26-12, "Das Detachement Lierau," September 1919.
[78] Ibid.
[79] BA-MA PH26-12, *Kempener Wochenblatt*, 3 August 1919.

Upper Silesian Freikorps, stationed in nearby Kattowitz viewed its purpose in a similar manner. Although the overarching purpose of the unit was already defined as "the preservation of the Upper Silesian *Heimat* and the protection of the German Fatherland from devastation by all foreign and domestic enemies," the commander of the Freikorps, reserve Lieutenant Diesing, felt it was necessary to further state that the specific military task of the unit was to "implement the strengthening of *Deutschtum*," in a communiqué to his fellow regimental commanders serving in the Kattowitz Grenzschutz.[80] Nationalism and patriotic sentiments were redefined as military assets in the defense of threatened German provinces.

Colonel Wilhelm Heye drafted a series of new tasks and responsibilities for the Grenzschutz in July 1919 that subtly connected military strength and national identity, while also questioning the permanence of Germandom. Concluding his orders, Heye wrote, "I am and remain a German and so must remain loyal to my Fatherland," alluding to a personal choice that he and all other German soldiers had to make to re-affirm their German values and loyalties in the postwar era.[81] Other units had already made their decision and were presented as the embodiment of German values. An article in the *Deutsche Zukunft* described the triumphant invasion of Berlin by pro-government Freikorps troops in January 1919:

> Masculine discipline and impeccable German tautness and upright, robust, attitude. How superb was their sanitized order, in their radiant discipline, blood crisp (*Blutfrische*) form: the Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps! A model

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[80] BA-MA PH 26-22, "Grenzschutzabschnitt Kattowitz."
[81] "Befehl des Oberkommando Nord über die Aufklärung unter der Truppe hinsichtlich der bevorstehenden Räumung der abzutretenden Ostgebiete," in *Zwischen Revolution und Kapp Putsch*, ed. Heinz Hürten,166.

> troop! The eyes sparkle. Infantry with shouldered rifles, sometimes with flashing bayonets, machine-guns teams, artillery with heavy guns …[82]

Thus Freikorps units sought to present themselves as symbols Germanness. Accounts like Maercker's continued to injected military values and attributes into a narrative on German nationality after the war.

Actions against domestic political enemies also served to bolster notions of '*Deutschtum*' within Freikorps narratives, despite the presence of German citizens on both sides of the conflict. Freikorps officers, such as Helmut Franke, who served in the Ehrhardt Brigade in 1919, believed that the Freikorps system could be a useful mechanism to bring military values into broader social conceptions of 'Germanness.' "[The Freikorps] must be considered a possibility to bridge the Wehrmacht and the Volk," wrote Franke in a letter to Ehrhardt, "because the commander of the Freikorps in the revolutionary years had completely different contact with large numbers of the Volk than [Reichswehr] officers." Concluding, Franke saw the possibility of the creation of a new generation of Germans, benefiting from the lessons of the Great War, transmitted through the Freikorps system.

> The Soldier had the courage to act, but lacks the political instinct. The politician has the instinct, but lacks the courage and the dedication of life. We must go into politics and attempt to create a *Führergeneration*, with the courage to act (*Einsatzmut*), character, strength, spirit and coolness of the soldiers combined with the spirit, the instinct (*Fingerspitzengefühl*) and the ability and the snake-like intelligence of the politicians. This is the task of the Generation of the Trenches (*Schützengrabengeneration*). We want it attempted in the open. National revolutionary spirit births the path to the National Dictator![83]

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[82] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 68.
[83] Helmut Franke, *Staat im Staate: Aufzeichnung eines Militäristen*, (Magdeburg: Stahlhelm, 1924), 244. The term "National Dictator" should not be read as sympathy

General Georg Maercker and the Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps applied a German/non-German construct to their domestic operations against the council movement throughout early 1919. After saving the city of Braunschweig from "rape or mutilation" by the "*Volksgenossen*," Maercker praised the local inhabitants for the warm reception of the FLK in April 1919. Comparing the festive atmosphere to the victorious homecoming the Kaiser's armies had expected if they had won the world war, Maercker bestowed his highest praise on the citizens of Braunschweig: *kerndeutsch*.[84] The divide was clear. "German" civilians supported the Freikorps and the forces of order; communists and socialists were never granted status as Germans. These types of statements had remarkable continuity during the revolutionary era when Freikorps troops clashed with armed forces of the political left. The fallen commander of the Batterie Hasenclever was praised by his troops as a "proper German officer," for successfully guiding his Freikorps artillery unit through a Red Army ambush in the Ruhr in 1920.[85] The chronicler of the unit, Machine-Gun Division Leader Otto Ahrendt, deemed re-establishing order in the Ruhr and the shooting action around Wetter an "affair of Germanness."[86] The 11th

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for the early National Socialist movement, as this document was written well before the rise of the NSDAP.

[84] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 209.

[85] BA-MA PH 26-11, "Das Freikorps-Lichtschlag mit der Batterie Hasenclever 1919 und 1920 gegen den Bolschewismus im Ruhrgebiet."

[86] BA-MA PH 26-11. Members of this Freikorps unit were particularly closely bonded. Fifteen years after the death of Captain Hasenclever, the remaining members of the artillery paid homage to their fallen commander and laid wreaths at his grave and by the train station in Wetter where he was killed. This was only possible in 1935, argued Ahrendt, because "true German men," specifically Adolf Hitler and the leaders of the Nazi Party, had "made the way free once more" to display their *Freikorpsgeist.*

Jäger Battalion of the Freikorps von Chappuis under Major E. Merkel repeatedly sang patriotic songs as they deployed for combat operations. Marching into Tichau on 28 March 1919, the unit struck up their old favourites, *Was die Welt morgen bringt*, *Heil Dir im Siegerkranz*, and of course a lively rendition of *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*.[87] While nationalistic anthems would be expected marching against foreign enemies, the soldiers of the 11th Jäger Battalion were being deployed to crush strikes led by fellow Germans in Upper Silesia.

Despite the relatively brief existence of German nationalism in 1918, members of the broader Freikorps community sought to establish their radical conception of *Deutschtum* in a broader historical context. Although his direct connections to the Freikorps movement were minimal, Ernst Jünger's works reflect the thinking of many members of the Freikorps movement. Jünger linked notions of *Kampf* or struggle with Germanness and highlighted feelings of anger or resentment felt concerning the end of the war and a new expression of German nationalism. "We were the God of War incarnate," Jünger stated. "Like other Germans who had made their periodic mark on history, we rose with a Germanic fury that brooked no resistance."[88] Although Jünger was describing soldiers in the First World War, his works were published during the turmoil of the first few years after the war and mirror authors who were directly connected to the Freikorps movement, like Ernst von Salomon, Ludwig Maercker and Ihno Meyer. Furthermore, his term "Germanic fury" accurately describes the interplay between nationalism and aggression in

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[87] BA-MA PH 26-3, "Grenzschutz Oberschlesien."
[88] Jünger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, 156. Trans. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* Vol 2, 368.

Freikorps' conceptions of "Germandom." Freikorps authors sought to situate "Germanic fury" in a larger history of German culture. Ihno Meyer, commander of the *Jägerbatallion* of the Iron Division sought to place his Freikorps in a longer history of militant civilian action.[89] Referencing the military record of another Iron Division fighting against Napoleon in the 1813 Wars of Liberation, Meyer attempted to present the Freikorps movement as merely the most recent expression of a form of populist "*Deutschtum*" that periodically arose in German culture. "There on the Windau, the strong fist of Major Bischoff brought the further advances of the Bolsheviks to a halt, and firmly established the Iron Division," Meyer wrote, "it was there that the *Yorckschen Jäger* wrote a new chapter in their battalion's history."[90] Praising the "*Yorcksche Geist*" of the new battalion, Meyer equated the Napoleonic era victories with the unit's most recent performance on the "crater fields of the west," attempting to scaffold a commonly accepted German military legend around the new highly politicized domestic war. Meyer sought to connect the postwar Freikorps movement with the popular uprisings against Napoleon and French hegemony over central Europe, the very origins of German nationalism. At their core these activities reflect an effort to present the Freikorps movement as an expression of a broader populist nationalist movement, deriving its power and influence from the numbers of its followers rather than the prestige of its loftiest patrons. Like other 'radical' rightwing organizations and movements that developed after the end of the Great War, the Freikorps were fundamentally focused on wining the support

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[89] Ihno Meyer, *Das Jägerbataillon der Eisernen Division im Kampfe gegen den Bolschewismus*, (Leipzig: Hillmann, 1920), 6.
[90] Ibid., 6.

of 'ordinary Germans,' not social, political or military elites.[91] The Freikorps movement lived and died on the streets and fields of the German *Heimat*. It rose and fell with the support of a culture of militant Germans who refused to demobilize socially, culturally and militarily after the end of the First World War. The leap from 'defenders of Germany' during the war to 'defenders of Germandom' during the Weimar era proved to be short and easily managed.

Anti-Communism

Second only to German nationalism, a visceral reaction to the rise of communist organizations, or "Bolsheviks" as the Freikorps almost universally labeled them, was the most commonly expressed ideological or political tenet of the movement. Paradoxically, however, Freikorps authors and members categorically denied the pursuit of any political agenda or aspirations. Instead, Freikorps operations against anyone they could successfully squeeze under the catch-all "Spectre of Bolshevism" designation were undertaken as a part of a moral crusade to restore "peace and order" (*Ruhe und Ordnung*) in Germany. Rooted in prewar conservative social norms and heavily influenced by nationalist rhetoric and military virtues, the Freikorps' conception of order was at once a rejection of aggressive international "Bolshevism" and an adaptation of an "apolitical" culture that pre-dated the war. Now seeking to redefine opposition to socialism and communism as a moral act rather than a political one, the Freikorps movement sought to elevate its actions above the daily squabbling of political life in the early Weimar Republic. In the eyes of many

[91] See Christopher Millington, *Fascism in France*; Christopher Millington ed., *Political Violence in Interwar Europe* (London: Palgrave Press, 2015).

Freikorps troops, campaigns to ruthlessly "restore *Ordnung*," both domestically and abroad, were not examples of a political discourse, but rather a moral crusade against a spiritual and cultural enemy.

Determined to combat the "cultural sickening of Bolshevism," General Hans von Seeckt drafted a series of guidelines in March 1919, seeking to curtail the operation of so-called "Bolshevik forces" along the German border and within the *Heimat* itself. Widely distributed to both Reichswehr and Freikorps units Seeckt's "Guidelines for Anti-Bolshevik Propaganda" outlined the organization, implementation, nature and goals of all materials to be produced and distributed by Reichswehr, Freikorps and Grenzschutz commands. The ultimate goal of the propaganda was to raise the "deeply felt high value of our German culture once again" and to undo any lasting negative influence Bolshevism may have had on German culture and society.[92] Seeckt also situated the "cultural weariness" (*Kulturüberdrüssigkeit*) caused by the "idealists and criminals united under the Bolsheviks" in broader historical terms, arguing that it was comparable to a historic cultural clash between "Mongoloids" and the "Indo-Germanic" culture that stressed a higher personal performance. But now the grand struggle had produced a new existential threat to German culture. "The Bolshevik well floods from east to west over the Continent, to one state stronger, to another weaker," warned Seeckt. "When another state is flooded, the other affected states will suffer from new convulsions.

[92] BA-MA RH 69-207, "Richtlinien für die antibolschewistische Propaganda." 25 March 1919. Oberkommando Grenzschutz Nord.

Whoever overcomes the Bolshevik flood with the best and most honourable men will be the ultimate victor of the World War."[93]

To achieve victory in this cultural warfare, Seeckt sanctioned two types of propaganda activities. First, positive propaganda would "make [the general populace] aware that we have the bird in our hand;" the virtues of German culture. Declaring Germanness "a thousand times better than Bolshevik grumbling," Seeckt urged commanders to hold speeches and information sessions, to care for the welfare of all *Kameraden* in and outside of military service, and maintain the absolute mutual confidence and trust between commanders and troops. Overlapping smoothly with the significance attached to the role of leaders in Freikorps units, Seeckt envisioned the commanding officer serving as the "main conductor" of the propaganda and the representative of all soldiers under his authority. Second, defensive propaganda was required to counter the "clever activities" of the Bolsheviks. Here, Seeckt asserted that the war against Bolshevism could not been won on the battlefield alone. "In a spiritual battle against another *Weltanschauung*, the Bolsheviks must be beaten out," wrote Seeckt. "They cannot be defeated through police measures alone."[94]

According to this document, Seeckt's notion of "spiritual battle" appears to primarily concern both matters of ideology or political rhetoric and psychological factors that could affect morale of the civilian populace. Waged generally through propaganda activities, Seeckt's determination to win the "spiritual battle" could be

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[93] BA-MA RH 69-207, "Richtlinien für die antibolschewistische Propaganda." 25 March 1919. Oberkommando Grenzschutz Nord.
[94] Ibid.

compared to later efforts by British and American commanders to win "hearts and minds" within asymmetrical warfare, seen in Kenya (1952-1960) and Vietnam (1955-1975). Seeckt's document was written specifically for distribution among the Freikorps troops included in Grenzschutz Nord and was one of the clearest articulations of the notion of the "spiritual battle" for the future of Germany. However Seeckt was not alone in his concern for the *Geist* of the civilian population. Mobile regional commissars were created in I Army Corps stationed Königsberg in March 1919, specifically to train Freikorps units for participation in the "propaganda battle" that the "current times required."[95] These soldiers were then tasked with holding small public meetings in pubs or after church services to spread "anti-Bolshevik" information to the civilian populace.[96] The notion of a "spiritual" or morale aspect to the anti-Bolshevik campaign was present throughout the country. The Central Office for the *Heimatdienst* (*Zentrale für Heimatdeinst* ZfH) distributed an order from Noske and Prussian War Minsiter Walther Reinhardt concering the training and supervision of troops during the Bürgerkrieg that placed specific emphasis on spiritual warfare.[97] "With all available means, the spiritual recovery of the country must be supported," stated Noske and Reinhardt.

> From chaos and confusion, new strengths must be created, and new units must be filled with this new spirit … Jaded people must be rejected [from the army], and recognized grievances must be completely redressed to inspire the soldiers for their duties, and partially to renew a faded sense of honour. …Zest for action, efficiency and diligence are the requirements of the hour. This cannot be achieved through orders and decrees, but rather through

[95] Heinz Hürten, *Zwischen Revolution und Kapp*, 58.
[96] Ibid., 60.
[97] BA-B R 43 I/2501. "Befehl des Reichswehrministers Noske und des preußischen Kriegsministers Reinhardt über Erziehung und Betreuung der Truppe." 12 May 1919. Berlin. N 95/5.16 Z1.

> constant sympathetic welfare. Existing suspicion must be diffused, misled spirit must be stabilized and be directed in new fertile ways. If new blood flows through the arteries, it will be the basis for new strength and allow for the creation of a new organization. Material welfare for all members of the army will go hand in hand with this spiritual education.[98]

This order was distributed to all Freikorps and Provisional Reichswehr commands throughout Germany. Along with Seeckt's guidelines for propaganda activity, there is some evidence to illustrate that the military leaders of Germany did not conceive of the Bolshevik threat as just a physical confrontation in the streets and countryside, or a political conflict in the Reichstag, but rather a larger battle involving the morale of the civilian populace and the "spirit" of Germany.

Therefore, Seeckt's propaganda guidelines declared that new themes and tactics were required, Chastising German wartime propagandists for their "exaggerations in words and images," Seeckt believed that anti-Bolshevik propaganda needed to move past the so-called "Horror Propaganda" (*"Greuelpropaganda"*) of the world war, filled with dark warnings of a destitute future, because the majority of men "were so brutalized by the long war and had become apathetic to the previous form of propaganda."[99] Variety, stressed Seeckt, was crucial to engaging the target audience. Therefore, he implemented new educational training for officers and all "politically untrained" troops, involving a public speaking course, guided reading hours, and classes on participation in political assemblies. Political education of the troops against the perils of

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[98] BA-B R 43 I/2501. "Befehl des Reichswehrministers Noske und des preußischen Kriegsministers Reinhardt über Erziehung und Betreuung der Truppe." 12 May 1919. Berlin. N 95/5.16 Z1.
[99] BA-MA RH 69-207, "Richtlinien für die antibolschewistische Propaganda." 25 March 1919. Oberkommando Grenzschutz Nord.

Bolshevism was to be accompanied by thorough searches of the barracks for any Bolshevik print materials and removal of any "agitators" from soldiers' quarters.

Possibly as a sign of the reduced strength of the military, or as recognition that propaganda materials produced by civilian firms had tended to resonate better with audiences than military generated materials during the war, Seeckt's guidelines stipulated that "defensive propaganda" should be produced by civilian agencies if they were capable of the task. All anti-Bolshevik propaganda activities were to be coordinated with a central office in the East, the Central Committee (Propaganda) of the *Aufklärungsdienst Ost*. The office was a prime example of civilian-military cooperation, which was also exploited by the Freikorps movement. Materials produced by the Central Committee (Propaganda) were distributed throughout Grenzschutz regions, including areas occupied by Freikorps units, as military, civilian and Freikorps members worked together to promote their anti-Bolshevik agenda. Staffed by civilians, the central propaganda committee for the East also included at minimum one permanent army officer on the committee, as well as another officer detailed to work in the headquarters, stationed in Königsberg.

Seeckt was not alone in his appraisal of the cultural-political circumstances facing Germany. Numerous senior commanders in the military leadership expressed significant concerns over the domestic situation in Germany, even after the successful campaign against the council movement in Spring 1919. At a command meeting in early May 1919, General Fritz von Loßberg praised the initial success of the anti-Bolshevik propaganda measures drafted by Seeckt, but feared that their

efforts had failed to penetrate the "less fertile bourgeois populace in the larger cities."[100] Retention of the Grenzschutz, and in significant numbers, was the only viable option to bolstering flagging German morale in the threatened areas, Loßberg stressed. Major Alfred Niemann, working with German nationalist organizations in Stettin in Polish occupied Posen, also recognized the valuable role played by German troops in physical and propaganda clashes with Bolsheviks. Colonel Graf Gerhard von Schwerin from XVII Army Corps noted several instances where civilian propaganda activities assisted by Grenzschutz and Freikorps troops had won local victories after combat operations had failed to achieve satisfactory results against "Polish Bolsheviks" in Danzig and the surrounding area. In agreement with his fellow commanders, Groener petitioned to Noske to authorize further joint propaganda activities as a crucial component of the military's effort to combat the spread of Bolshevism throughout the Reich. Waging a philosophical or spiritual war was a significant concern for military commanders in the early years of the Bürgerkrieg.[101] It was no longer enough to simply attack one's enemy and defend against physical incursions; the German military was now deeply involved in a war of thoughts and ideas.

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[100] BA-MA N 46 – 13, Nachlass Loßberg, "Protokoll einer Besprechung der Obersten Heeresleitung mit Stabsoffizieren der am Grenzschutz Ost beteiligten Kommandobehörden under Beteiligung des preußischen Ministeriums des Innern über die innere Sicherheit und die militärische Lage." 5 May 1919.

[101] BA-MA RH 69-207, "Richtlinien für die antibolschewistische Propaganda." 25 March 1919. Oberkommando Grenzschutz Nord; BA-B R 43 I/2501. "Befehl des Reichswehrministers Noske und des preußischen Kriegsministers Reinhardt über Erziehung und Betreuung der Truppe." 12 May 1919. Berlin. N 95/5.16 Z1; Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer*, 168.

The spearhead of the German military's campaign for the "spirit" of the German populace would be the Freikorps movement. Only the rarest Freikorps memoirs and campaign diaries fail to open with a long diatribe detailing the insidiousness and depravity of Bolshevism and Bolsheviks.[102] Often compared to a "sickness" (*eine Krankheit*), Freikorps members viewed Bolshevism as a threat to the structure of the German state, economy and national body (*Volkskörper*).[103] Focusing on Marxist rhetoric of class warfare, Freikorps articles criticized the potentially divisive effects Bolshevism could have had on German society. "The fundamental equal rights of all citizens of the state would be quashed by the Proletariat!" declared the editor of the *Mitteilungen über Ostfragen* in September 1919. Others, like Captain Arno von Moyzischewitz, formerly of the General Staff, argued in moralistic terms. Fundamentally, Bolshevism was nothing more than a new form of criminality (*Verbrechertum*), Moyzischewitz declared.[104] Communism was an attack on German values of private property and ownership. However "the military instrument of power is the greatest trump card in the hand of the Government," Moyzischewitz reminded his readers. "[The military's] value does not lie in its quantity but rather in its decisive quality."[105] As a moral vanguard, the Freikorps would lead the spiritual and military campaign against Bolshevism. The old soldierly values, "loyalty, sense of duty, discipline and *Kameradschaft* in the

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[102] The accounts that do not directly attack Bolshevism generally focus their attention on either the Entente Powers, or the new Polish state which was often viewed as the source of much Bolshevik agitation.
[103] BA-MA RH 69 – 1912, "Der Bolschewismus – eine Krankheit," *Mitteilungen über Ostfragen*, Nr 30, 3 September 1919.
[104] BA-MA RH 69 – 2313, "Propaganda von Moyzischewitz," 3 April 1919.
[105] Ibid.

Freikorps and the new Reichswehr units" would be decisive in the battles ahead, Moyzischewitz wrote.

Freikorps authors also presented a fairly consistent narrative detailing the feared potentially disastrous outcomes of a Bolshevik victory in Germany. The most common images presented by Freikorps members of a dystopian Bolshevik future raised fears of a complete "rape and plunder" of the German Fatherland. No justification of a Freikorps military operation was complete without an almost ritual mention of the sexual and material threat posed by Bolshevik hegemony. From the largest Freikorps, like Maercker and the Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps ("Domestically everything is going crazy. Everywhere there is plundering and disorder"), [106] to medium sized units like the Iron Division operating in the Baltics ("We will protect the borders of our Fatherland from unspeakable torments, which the Bolsheviks hordes want to bring to our Volk"),[107] to the smallest *Freiwillige* formations, like the Volkswehr Battalion Rawitsch ("The village of Laszczyn fell into Bolshevik hands but was retaken. Sarne remained occupied by the Poles, who now raped the city"),[108] references to rape, plundering and "disorder" consistently accompanied any mention of Bolsheviks activity.

In these ways, opposition to Bolshevism was presented as a unifying campaign for all Germans. Portraying the "Bolshevik hordes" as a clear threat to public safety, personal property, and "German morals" drew support from sympathetic portions of society. It also allowed the Freikorps to attempt to tap into

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[106] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 57.
[107] Schulze, *Freikorps*, 169.
[108] Dr Schmitz, "Kampf um Rawitsch," in Salomon, *Freikorpskämpfer*, 228.

the pre-war myth of "apolitical" public acts, which had developed in Germany before the war. Veterans associations like the Confederation of War-Disabled and War Veterans (*Bund der Kriegbeschädigten und ehemaligen Kriegsteilnehmer*) had claimed apolitical status since late 1917, asserting that they were above the petty political infighting of the late Wilhelmine era, even as it advocated for democratic reforms, a pacifistic foreign policy, and public welfare benefits.[109] Even the old monarchial *Kyffhäuser-Bund* saw some value in declaring an "*unpolitisch*" (apolitical) position, dropping all references to the Hohenzollern monarchy during the revolution, and briefly accepting SPD veterans into its ranks.[110] Freikorps units and members similarly presented themselves as above party politics and inspired by ideas of greater moral value. "The men of the Freikorps were not driven by an idea," Ernst von Salomon wrote in his characterization of the Freikorps Fighter. "Everywhere life teemed with ideas, they were offered like sour beer and were cheap like blackberries. This was the most ideal feature of the Freikorps men: they were free from all ideology. They were not in a position to express what they moved on, their actions were voiceless."[111]

This, of course, is demonstrably false. The Freikorps movement was deeply rooted in political activity and ideology as has been illustrated throughout this chapter. The "spirit of the Freikorps" drew from both prewar socialism and

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[109] James Diehl, "Veterans Politics ,"144.
[110] The admission of SPD members was short-lived, however. After 1922, the renamed *Deutscher Reichskriegerbund "Kyffhäuser* (German National Combatants League "Kyffhäuser) returned to its former policy of excluding Social Democrats and open hostility to the Republic. Interestingly, the league still maintained an official policy of "apolitical" activity.
[111] Salomon, *Freikorpskämpfer,* 11.

rightwing nationalist thought in the earliest years after the revolution. Yet their persistent claims to "apolitical" status can be reconciled with the deliberate political actions to combat socialist and communist organizations throughout Germany after the First World War by examining the Freikorps' construction of their opponent. By establishing 'Bolshevism' as a moral danger, and a threat to German property, culture and prosperity, any action against this foe could be viewed as an act of good versus evil, of right versus wrong, or "order" against chaos, rather than political squabbling. Just as Ebert and the SPD formulated a version of *Ordnung* that suited their objectives and condoned all manner of political actions, Freikorps commanders and members articulated their own particular expression of 'order' as well. At the root of the Freikorps' conception of *Ruhe und Ordnung* was a vehement rejection of socialism, communism and democracy, accompanied by an elevation of sacred "German virtues" such as loyalty, duty and discipline. In a speech entitled "*Das Vaterland in Not!,"* former state minister Karl Helfferich, speaking on behalf of the *deutschnationalen Volksverein*, argued that only re-establishing *Ordnung* could overcome the problems facing Germany. "The corruptors of the Volk (*Volksverderber*) must be condemned!! Just as the collapse occurred domestically, so must the regeneration come from within!," Helfferich declared in October 1919.

> The current government is incapable of leading this renewal! They exist in terms of the party-political spectrum for the large part as Social Democrats. Can the party of Erzberger bring our German Fatherland back to *Ordnung*? Nein! *Ordnung. Arbeit.* A sense of national identity, tradition and morality must be brought back![112]

[112] BA-MA PH 26-15, "Das Vaterland in Not!"

Helfferich's comments neatly summarize the Freikorps position: a rejection of organized party politics combined with a vague conception of German nationalism, heavily imbued with ambiguous moral values, glossed over with a thin 'apolitical' veneer.

Masculine Aggression

Works by George L Mosse, Modris Eksteins and Klaus Theweleit have focused on the particular connection between race, gender, masculinity and violence in European society in the direct aftermath of the First World War.[113] In his influential work, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the First World War*, Mosse examined the aftermath of the destruction and death of the First World War by tracing the efforts to commemorate the casualties of the war. He argued that the "Myth of the War Experience" was produced in the immediate aftermath of the war to mask the true scale of the slaughter and instead teach lessons on comradeship and manliness. Mosse also contended veterans, politicians and various members of the public worked to create a "cult of fallen soldiers" to strengthen national cohesion during the turbulence of the postwar revolution. While the Freikorps were certainly active in building these narratives directly after the war, Mosse is generally more concerned with tying these practices to the early Nazi movement and the violence of the Second World War. However, Theweleit's imaginative two-volume work

[113] George L Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the First World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 1989); Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2 volumes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

focusing on race and gender in early Weimar Germany was far more focused on the Freikorps movement.[114] His examination of the political climate of postwar Germany focused on what Theweleit termed a "proto-fascist culture," in which he included the Freikorps movement. Theweleit argued that this segment of German society brought together radicalized concepts of gender and race to fuel a political movement born out of the violence of the First World War. However, Theweleit deliberately blurred distinctions between Freikorps members, early Nazi supporters, and broader conservative voters in his analysis of this "proto-fascist culture." Instead, this section on masculinity, aggression and the Freikorps will focus solely on Theweleit's examination of Freikorps supporters, with the clear understanding that the trends discussed here are not necessarily unique to the Freikorps and could be expressed by a wide range of individuals in the immediate postwar era.

The great British war poet Siegfried Sassoon helped establish the basis of the popular perception of the veteran of the Great War in western culture through his poem *Survivors.* "No doubt they'll soon get well; the shock and strain/Have caused their stammering, disconnected talk," wrote Sassoon. "Their dreams that drip with murder; and they'll be proud/Of glorious war that shatter'd all their pride."[115] In Germany the Freikorps soldier also represented a traumatized male, but rather than suffering from debilitating paralysis, he was filled with vengeful anger, wounded pride, and an outraged sense of injustice. Although a significant number of Freikorps recruits were Great War veterans and therefore were directly traumatized by

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[114] Theweleit, *Male Fantasies,* 74.
[115] Siegfried Sassoon, "Survivors."

combat, as time progressed students, too young to have served in the army during the war, composed an important percentage of Freikorps troops, although it is still difficult to establish reliable figures for their participation. These young men who generally had not experienced the horrors of the First World War battlefield, nonetheless spent the formative years of their late childhood under the long shadow of the Great War. Never personally experienced, the death and destruction of industrial warfare nonetheless loomed large over these young men, who can be viewed as indirect trauma victims of the conflict. Therefore functioning as a site of coping for both direct, indirect and inherited trauma victims from the Great War, the Freikorps movement served as a spiritual muster point for many young men who struggled to adapt to the cultural, political, and economic realities of postwar life.

Exploring the outpouring of first-hand battlefield accounts from combat veterans published after the war, illustrates several characteristics of trauma in the First World War for German soldiers. Chief among them was the omnipresence of death. Violence, destruction and a loss of control over one's fate provided the core of the collective experience for German soldiers during the war that would continue to shape their worldview after the war. A young conscript, "Private H.," recounted the disruption and violent intensity of a French artillery barrage in March 1916:

> I raised my voice to warn the *Kameraden*, pounding and whirling off in the distance. A whirling roll thundered through the air. That is the enemy! And now pounding and hitting and agitating came the shells in the roadway before my shelter. Relentlessly they flashed and rumbled and roared before me and pelted around the forest. There is no break and no pause in the total turmoil. The shells struck like hail stones all around and wrenched the earth into the air all around me. A thick black cloud darkened my vision. Increasingly thick and violent, shells fell all around me. *Sturmangriff!* – My shelter quaked and shook under the shells. The small door and windows are sprung open. With each next shot my shelter could be destroyed, and myself

> be killed, or buried alive. I crawled in the meter deep security trench and remained under cover during the violent hurricane and once again there was silence.[116]

In moments of perceived danger, the desire to protect one's life, and the life of one's comrades, unleashed powerful emotions, which fueled violent actions. "A tremendous exasperation seized us," Corporal O. stated after a hand grenade battle on Hill 304 overlooking Verdun in May 1916.

> Strangely, [the French] came steadily. They walked in front of us where it was the hardest. Then one fights for it, fights for their life. One fights for their fallen friend, to avenge their dead *Kameraden*. I increasingly think on our young ensign and on my dead *Kamerad* Ernst. Both were young men and thought that all life was still an open question. And now both are dead. Both were destroyed by a shell. My teeth rattled against each other angrily. Soon retribution will come. [117]

These collective remembrances filled with anger, violence and death were retained in the postwar identity of the *Frontkämpfer*. Feeling isolated from the rest of German society by their experiences in the trenches, combat veterans continued to publish accounts describing their actions and thoughts during the war, simultaneously seeking to cope with the trauma of the war, while engaging in an act of "soul searching," trying to find a new meaning, purpose, or direction to lives that had been profoundly disrupted by industrial warfare.

The aggression and violence that ensured survival during the Great War became an essential characteristic of the Freikorps movement. Disciples in what has been termed the "cult of the assault" by historian Mark Jones,[118] Freikorps members relived the trauma of the First World War, not merely through internal personal

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[116] BA-MA PH 2-458, "Der Feuerüberfall."
[117] BA-MA PH 2-458, "Hill 304."
[118] Mark Jones, "How the War Came Home," in *Political Violence in Interwar Europe*, Christopher Millington ed. (London: Palgrave Press, 2015), 2.

recollections, such as dreams or what Sigmund Freud termed war neuroses, but through a physical re-construction of the industrial killing fields of the Great War. Artillery fire, flame throwers, mortars, machine guns were deployed against their enemies, followed by specially armed *Stoßtruppen* reproducing the violence that had and continued to shape their daily lives. Stressing the importance of the Great War battlefield as an incubator for Freikorps members, Ernst Jünger wrote in 1922 that "the war is not the end but the prelude to violence. It is the forge in which the new world will be hammered into new borders and new communities."[119] Transformed by their experiences, veterans of the war would revolutionize Germany. "New forms wanted to be filled with blood, and power will be wielded with a hard fist. The war is a great school, and the new man will bear our stamp."[120] In this climate, violent expressions of aggression were normalized and held up as virtuous examples for others to follow.

"If there was an identifiable direction to our thinking, it was determined by our ultimate goal," wrote Ernst von Salomon in *Die Geächteten*: "to assert the primacy of force over superficial form."[121] Violence and power lay at the heart of Freikorps operations, placed in stark opposition to the compromises of bourgeois society. "Not content with deliberating possible meaning of the future, we set about determining criteria of judgment," Salomon declared. "Such was the task entrusted to us; and the only crime we could commit was failure. We were fighting God's fight

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[119] Ernst Jünger, "Feuer" in *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, 75. Trans. Anton Kaes ed. *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
[120] Ibid., 76.
[121] Ernst von Salomon, *Die Geächteten*, 472. Trans. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Vol. 2, 377.

with the demons; and the field of battle was vast and open."[122] War, battle and combat formed the core of the Freikorps mentality.

Salomon's description of a German attack on Latvian troops in 1920 exposes the frenzied aggression unleashed by the Freikorps.

> We smashed our way into startled crowds, raging and shooting and beating and hunting. We drove the Latvians across the fields like frightened hares; we set fire to their houses; buckled their telegraph poles, pulverized their bridges. We hurled the corpses into wells and threw hand grenades after them. Anything that came within our grasp was decimated; we burned whatever we could. We had seen red, and our hearts were emptied of human feelings. At every stage of our journey the earth groaned under the weight of our destruction. Where there had been houses, there was now only rubble and ashes, smoldering woodpiles, ulcers festering on naked terrain. Giant smoke plumes marked our passage across the landscape. We had built a funeral pyre to burn dead matter; but more than this, we burned our hopes and longings, codes of civil conduct, the laws and values of civilization, the whole burden of fusty verbiage we carried, our belief in the things and ideas of a time that had rejected us.
> We withdrew, swaggering, intoxicated, and booty-laden.[123]

As disciples of the "cult of the advance," violent motion played a central role in the *Freikorpsgeist.* The principles of attack, aggression, and annihilation directly influenced Freikorps conduct against their chosen enemies. Indeed, the vision of an aggressive pursuit of the frontier was central to Freikorps philosophy and operation throughout their existence. "To us, 'advance' never meant marching on military goals," Salomon wrote. "Instead it meant learning the meaning of a harsh communality; experiencing the heights of tension to which the fighting man is projected. It meant relinquishing all our ties to a world that was rotten and sinking – a world with which the fighting man had nothing more in common."[124] Striking out

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[122] Salomon, *Die Geächteten*, 473. Trans. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Vol. 2, 386.
[123] Salomon, *Die Geächteten*, 69. Trans. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Vol. 2, 360.
[124] Ibid., 360.

towards a spiritual horizon, the Freikorps members sought new meaning in the turmoil of postwar Germany. Only the release of violent energy through an attack could satisfy the *Freiwillige*, argued Salomon. "The word 'advance' held a mysterious and dangerous excitement for those of us who set off to do battle in the Baltics," he confessed. "For us, the attack represented the ultimate, liberating intensification of energy; we longed for the confirmation it would bring of our belief that we were made for every possible destiny. In the attack, we expected to experience the true values of the world within us."[125]

The *Freikorpsgeist* did not merely exist in the words and articles of the most literary members of the movement, but was also evident in the murky depths of the German civil war battlefield. Freikorps members did not simply pay lip service to the "cult of the advance" or to battlefield aggression. Freikorps regulations and training documents stressed the need to incorporate aggressive advances, often executed with deliberately excessive amounts of firepower and violence. The Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps (GKSK) published a list of guidelines in late March 1919, to be followed in future street battles based on their experiences combatting the council movement over the last three months. As one of the most active Freikorps units domestically, these regulations were widely distributed, not only within a significant portion of the Freikorps movement gathered under the GKSK command, but also to numerous smaller independent formations. Violence, aggression, and brutality were the harsh principles that were to guide the actions of the GKSK. "The stronger the means, so much quicker the victory," wrote Lieutenant General

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[125] Salomon, *Die Geächteten,* 69. Trans. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Vol. 2, 360.

Heinrich von Hofmann, commander of the corps, attempting to rationalize his aggressive tactics.

> The enemy is generally cowardly and cannot make themselves stand firm. Therefore no half measures like warning shots, manouvres, etc! Infantry and machinegun fire, against the enemy can only find protection behind the wreck of houses and barricades, makes little effect, and there is no protection against artillery and mortars in the *Straßenkampf*, and in the briefest time will create *Ordnung*. Therefore the strongest means are also the most humane.[126]

For Hofmann, it was not sufficient to merely attack the enemy physically; enemy morale was also a specific target for the Freikorps. "The [Freikorps] invasion must be as intimidating and disheartening as possible for our enemies," Hofmann stated. Firepower superiority was crucial to crushing the enemy's will to fight and bolstering Freikorps morale. "To maintain the confidence of the troops, a strong screen of armoured vehicles should be out front. Machine guns and artillery pieces must directly follow behind, in order to immediately break any resistance," wrote Hofmann when he authored the GKSK's operational directives concerning invasion marches.[127] Also in March 1919, a "Captain Jacobsen" from the General Staff wrote a memorandum detailing his similar experiences observing the Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps' operations against Halle and Weimar. Jacobsen was struck by what historians have termed "performative violence," during this campaign. Rather than conducting a systematic destruction of the enemy, operations like those in Halle, Weimar and Braunschweig aimed to exhibit an overwhelming display of firepower to threaten or intimidate enemy troops, without actually causing

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[126] BA-MA RH 69-1636, "Erfahrungen aus den Straßenkämpfen in Berlin." Lieutenant General von Hofmann, IA Nr 225 – 31 March 1919.
[127] Ibid.

widespread destruction and death. "The more threatening the troops appear in weaponry and demeanor, the more impact they will make and achieve their goals easier and without bloodshed," Jacobsen determined.[128]

Stressing the need for more artillery to execute Freikorps displays of performative violence with greater impact, Jacobsen's commentary highlights the psychological aspects of Freikorps operations. Morale, or spirit, was a critical target in the eyes of the largest and most professional of Freikorps commanders. How an operation was executed was just as important as the outcome and overall objective. Above all, an image of deadly aggression had to be projected at all times by Freikorps formations. "It is not essential *what* we are fighting for, but rather *how* we fight," wrote Ernst Jünger. "The warrior's spirit, the exposure of oneself to risk, weighs more heavily in the scale than all the brooding about good and evil."[129] The aesthetic of combat was at the core of Freikorps philosophy and operational planning.

Compromise and debate were consciously rejected by Freikorps members. There would be no peaceful arbitration or discussions; nothing less than the full capitulation of the enemy was acceptable. "No negotiations!" Hofmann instructed the GKSK. "Instead, complete submission is to be enforced. … They must yield under the compulsion of armed force. There is no time for deliberations."[130] General Maercker similarly demanded unconditional surrender from his opponents

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[128] HStA Stuttgart, M 390, Bd 25, "Aufzeichnung des Ersten Generalstabsoffiziers im Freiwilligen Landesjägerkorps, Hauptmann Jacobsen, über Erfahrungen beim Einsatz in mitteldeutschen Städten."
[129] Jünger, *Kampf*, 276. Trans. Anton Kaes ed., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 18.
[130] BA-MA RH 69-1636, "Erfahrungen aus den Straßenkämpfen in Berlin."

throughout the Landesjägerkorps' march through central Germany. The commander of the FLK confessed his personal desire for combat and a trial of strength through his comments to the citizens of Leipzig after successfully defeating "Red troops" around the city. "I ask you! Help us to spare our Heimat from dying in bed. We want to stand with you in battle and – it must be – it must be advanced with us," announced Maercker. "We do not want to go down inglorious and uncontested. We want to fight back to the last [man], and if we fight back, then we will not be destroyed!"[131]

Motivated by the rhetoric of their commanders, Freikorps troops often displayed remarkable fury and aggression towards their enemies. Reports from a Freikorps operation in Wehrkreis Command VI in Bielefeld illustrated the brutality of domestic battles in April 1919. "It is definitely evident that the troops are extremely psychologically agitated, that hundreds of their *Kameraden* exercised their duty in a ruthless manner to defeat the rebels and have been wounded," the anonymous author stated. "It is clear that a large number had had a very difficult hour of death through the ferociousness of their tormentors."[132] A soldier in the Freikorps Roßbach, writing a letter to his mother on 2 April 1919, laid bare the terror of the *Bürgerkrieg* in the Ruhr valley. "Yesterday afternoon I arrived with my company, and around 1 o'clock we made the first assault. If I was to write everything to you, then you would say they are lies. No quarter was given. We shot the wounded … Whoever was found with weapons is our enemy and must therefore

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[131] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer*, 257.
[132] BArch-Licht, Nachlass Severing, A24, "Grützner-Denkschrift."

be thought of as such."[133] Casualties were high on both sides. By the end of hostilities, the government troops lost 249 dead, including 50 officers with 705 men wounded and 123 labeled as "missing." No accurate figure had been determined for the Red Army, but all sides counted them "in the thousands."[134]

Similarly, emotions ran high on the German-Polish border as well. Major Dietrich von Röder from the *Kavallerie-Schützen-Kommando 41*, attached to the *Detachement Lierau* in July 1919, noted the effect of Polish assaults on Freikorps troops. "Militarily the Poles failed to succeed," Röder wrote to Lieutenant Colonel Lierau. "However they planted a deep and inextinguishable hatred in the hearts of all of the men who defended the *Heimat* with their fists and allowed nothing to strike like they had planned. Therefore the mood of the troops rose to such a degree of rage that they were hardly able to stop themselves."[135] Just as ideological differences with German Bolsheviks evoked passionate displays of aggression in domestic operations, national animosity towards a nascent Poland provided more than enough "battle joy" (*Kampfesfreude*) for Freikorps troops stationed on the German frontier.

Within the Freikorps movement, aggression was viewed as a primary characteristic of the new postwar German man. However, like many key concepts incorporated in the 'spirit of the Freikorps,' their construct of masculinity was heavily indebted to wartime expressions. Stories written by soldiers, for soldiers, increasingly stressed the masculinity of Germany's *feldgrau* defenders. Articles such

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[133] Schulze, *Freikorps*, 315.
[134] Ibid., 316.
[135] BA-MA PH 26-12, "Das Detachement Lierau."

as "The Man of the Front" by Heinrich Otto Oehlke, written just before the start of Entente offensive on the Somme, extolled the virtues of the German male as he defended the Fatherland.[136] Brave in the face of battle, thoughtful and always mindful of his fellow *Kameraden*, Oehlke's construction of the masculine German soldier represented a starting point for the introduction of a more overtly aggressive form of militarized masculinity through the Freikorps movement after the war.

Comradeship and masculinity became constant features in German soldier newspapers. Although expressed in a variety of ways, wartime comradeship was particularly connected to themes of loyalty, duty and sacrifice. However, it was a strategically deployed concept, used to delineate the boundaries of the 'front community' that slowly became more radical as the war drew to a close throughout 1918. The 'manliness' of the troops served to reinforce their Germanness and simultaneously establish a delineation between themselves, their enemies, and civilians on the home front.

After the war, the Freikorps movement symbolized the continuation of the wartime masculine *Kameradschaft* into peacetime. Theweleit masterfully traced the impact of the most, prolific authors like Salomon and Jünger as they crafted and shaped a myth around the Freikorps troops, casting them as "real men" who exemplified the best traditions of the military and Germandom. "They are men forged of steel," Jünger wrote in 1922, describing the new men from the front, Great War veterans who were now active Freikorps members.

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[136] BA-MA PH 2-458, "Der Mann von der Front," in *Feldgraue Blätter aus dem Schützengraben*, June 1916.

> Their eagle eyes peer straight over the propeller's whir, studying the clouds ahead, who, captive within the motorized din of the tanks, dare the hellish journey through the roar of shell-pitted fields, who for days on end, approaching a certain death, crouch in encircled nests heaped with corpses, only half alive beneath glowing machine guns. They are the best of the modern battlefield, suffused with the reckless spirit of the warrior, whose iron will discharges in clenched, well-aimed bursts of energy.[137]

From Salomon:

> Muscles like ropes, broad-chested, tough-jointed, a wall of bodies born of discipline; this was the front, the frontier, the assault, the element of storm and resistance; and behind it stood Germany, nourishing the army with men and bread and ammunition.[138]

Jünger again:

> We were passed by endless streams (of men) – men willing to sacrifice life itself in order to satisfy their will to live, their will to battle and power they represented. All values were made worthless, all concepts void by this incessant nighttime flooding into battle; we sensed that we were witnessing the manifestation of something elemental and powerful, something that had always been, that would long outlive human lives and human wars.[139]

Freikorps officer E.W. Heinz: "Parties are the [tools of] the masses; the Freikorps are fellowships of men."[140]

And finally, Salomon once more:

> We searched for the new, the last possible hope for Germany and ourselves; … We had set out to defend a frontier; but we found no frontier here. We ourselves were the frontier, the men who kept all pathways open.[141]

Therefore through Theweleit's analysis we see that the Freikorps projected an image of a community of all male warriors, bonded together by ideas of wartime comradeship. Although historians often argue that the *Kameradschaft* was rooted in

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[137] Jünger, *Kampf*, trans. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies,* 72-73.
[138] Salomon, *Die Kadetten*, trans. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies,* 155.
[139] Jünger, *Kampf*, trans. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 186.
[140] Heinz, *Sprengstoff*, 162, trans. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* , 77.
[141] Salomon, *Die Geächteten*, trans. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 360.

concepts of duty, loyalty and discipline, a preoccupation with violence, either physical or psychological, must be added to this list of attributes. The image of the Freikorps man was a carefully crafted myth, specifically designed to normalize violent action within a postwar construct of masculinity. This expression of manliness was promoted by individuals who were a part of a segment of German society that remained socially mobilized for war. Preferring violent, militant solutions to all manner of social, political, and economic issues, members of this war-like subculture widely disseminated their thoughts on a new breed of aggressive masculine German warriors throughout the Freikorps movement.

Conclusion

The *Freikorpsgeist* is not an easily defined ideology or world view. With no single ideologue, save perhaps Ernst von Salomon, the Freikorps movement can be characterized in many ways. While many other smaller sub-trends existed within the great outpouring of Freikorps propaganda and publications, in this analysis of the spirit of the Freikorps only the dominant attributes that were common to the broadest number of units and formations have formed the bulk the narrative.

The five characteristics chosen here describe the Freikorps movement in its broadest definitions. As has been demonstrated at length, the legacy of the First World War in shaping the Freikorps cannot be overstated. Each individual attribute of the spirit of the Freikorps found its origin in the industrial killing fields of the Great War before undergoing rapid changes in the postwar social and political climate. The hyper-masculinity of the Freikorps movement was a way to counteract

the emasculation experienced during the war. Unable to defeat their enemies, to save their nation from perceived humiliation, and losing personal control on the battlefield, fueled the Freikorps soldiers' desires to re-assert a new version of normalcy, to recapture their strength and manly pride after the war. The chaotic end of the war and subsequent revolution, spurred the Freikorps' moralistic anti-Bolshevik crusade to re-establish *Ordnung* throughout the nation. Shared collective experiences during combat and trench life created the basis for membership in a new imagined community of brothers, the great embracing *Kameradschaft*, offering unity and acceptance. Finally a loss of meaning after the end of the war led to increased support for a xenophobic radical nationalism and militarized redefinition of '*Deutschtum*' altogether.

In many ways, this chapter has been a cultural history of a decentralized military institution. It has sought to describe the internal culture and ethos of the Freikorps movement to better understand the operations and decisions made by its members throughout the revolutionary period. The *Freikorpsgeist* was not a series of idle boasts or ideological proclamations that had no bearing on the actual daily direction of Freikorps units. Instead, ultra-nationalism, aggressive manliness, belief in the bonds of the *Kameradschaft*, all had tangible effects on the commanders and men of Freikorps units. This series of beliefs, loosely grouped together as the 'spirit of the Freikorps,' was evident throughout the *Bürgerkrieg* not just in the poetic works of men like Jünger and Salomon, but also through the actions of Hofmann and the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps and Maerckers' Landesjägerkorps. The values and virtues expounded by the authors of the Freikorps movement went hand in

hand with the actions taken by commanders and men in the field. The next chapter will examine the bloody legacy of the military operations of the Freikorps and demonstrate the nature of the Freikorps as an army of believers.

CHAPTER VII: AN ARMY OF BELIEVERS

Historians such as Scott Stephenson, Hagen Schulze and James Diehl carefully examined the actions of German Great War veterans upon their return to the revolutionary home front. They have argued that the majority of former soldiers did not become deeply involved in the particular brand of violent militant politics that became commonplace during the early Weimar Republic. Indeed, most soldiers, cynical of patriotic slogans and weary of further combat, took off their uniforms, laid down their rifles, and embraced civilian lives. However the Freikorps were not these men. Instead, a small but committed segment of society joined Freikorps formations and remained motivated to continue fighting. These men were the believers.

The existence of the Freikorps and their particular method of operation within the new Republic demonstrated the weakness of the state's authority to control the means of violence in Germany after the war. Although the Freikorps valued the appearance of legality, they generally did not feel particularly bound to obey rules and regulations that they felt ran contrary to their political objectives. Examining the various military campaigns and operations executed by Freikorps troops highlights the flexible position of the movement within both the political and military hierarchies. Indeed, at times operating more like a parallel military partner than a fully subordinated organization, Freikorps formations pursued government objectives only when it aligned with their philosophical or spiritual desires. This view of the Freikorps as a coalition partner, rather than a subordinate organization, easily extends into the military realm. Effectively playing its role as a critical

coalition member, the Freikorps were central to the organization and decentralization of violence in the early Weimar Republic.

Unlike previous historical works, this section will not recount all major Freikorps operations before 1921.[1] Instead it is a critical examination of the manner of the Freikorps' approach to the deployment of violence in an effort to analyze the role it played in German social, political and cultural life after the First World War. In particular, the Freikorps used a combination of physical and psychological violence to produce an atmosphere of potential violence to control the actions of their enemies While, the Freikorps did at times unleash physically destructive violence in the first years after the war, seeking to kill or maim their enemies, it was not the only, nor even the primary, form of violence they utilized. Alongside physical violence, there was a keen appreciation of the psychological or spiritual effects that could be produced through threatened acts of violence to create a broader atmosphere of potential violence designed to intimidate potential hostile groups in Germany society. Parade marches, occupation of town squares and distribution of propaganda posters were all a part of spreading this atmosphere of potential violence in which Freikorps units sought to convince their enemies as well as the neutral civilian populace that physical destruction could be unleashed at any moment. For the Freikorps, psychological violence was just as useful as actual

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[1] For more information see, Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik*; James Diehl, *Para-Military Politics in the Weimar Republic*; Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism;* F.W. Oertzen*, Die Deutschen Freikorps, 1918-1923* (Munich, 1936); Ann Linder, *The Princes of the Trenches: Narrating the German Experience of the First World War* (Columbia, SC, USA: Camden House, 1996); Erich Otto. Volkmann, *Revolution über Deutschland* (Oldenburg: G. Stalling, 1930); Harold Gordon, *The Reichswehr and the German Republic*; Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955).

physical destruction, if not more so, because it did not disrupt the peace and order that they sought to re-establish throughout Germany during the Bürgerkrieg era.

While the Freikorps movement was clearly a product of both the experience of the industrial killing fields of northern France and eastern Europe, and the particular military culture of the imperial German army, violence after 1918 differed from the First World War in several key ways. First and foremost, lacking a broadly accepted political authority within the Reich borders for the first three months of the republic, and the absence of a commonly accepted political direction within the Freikorps movement, significantly obfuscated the exact nature of their operation throughout the *Bürgerkrieg* era. Compounding this issue, many Freikorps units followed their own political objectives and so in effect represented both the political and military leadership in their own private war. Second, although significant Freikorps operations occurred along Germany's new borders, the new domestic theatres of combat, waged against German citizens, represented a clear departure from the international campaigns of the Great War. Third, as a by-product of the operations undertaken within Germany's borders, the legal framework for the execution of the war against the council movement and other leftwing rebellions was never as clear as German military leaders desired. In many ways, the entire Freikorps movement existed in what can be termed a 'void-state,' neither fully legal nor specifically illegal for the majority of its existence. Fourth, the Freikorps movement was significantly smaller than the gigantic First World War German army. As such, the Freikorps had fewer options available and needed to employ violence for the maximum impact on their opponents. Sheer annihilation was not a

viable solution, particularly in domestic settings, so the Freikorps were forced to create innovative ways to deploy limited means of violence to achieve their localized objectives. Finally, Freikorps members fought a higher percentage of urban engagements than the *Feldgraue* did between 1914 and 1918. While, there certainly were many open field engagements, particularly in the East, Freikorps commanders were forced to recognize that their experiences in the Great War had not prepared them, or their troops, for the realities of the street war (*Straßenkampf*) that faced them. Therefore, in the following chapter, the domestic and foreign experiences and campaigns of the Freikorps movement will be used to analyze the use of violence during the German civil war, particularly during the *Straßenkampf* within Germany and the Border War (*Grenzkampf*) along the newly created German-Polish border. Despite existing in a legalist void-state, the Freikorps were generally accepted within the German military realm. Indeed, their campaigns demonstrate that the Freikorps were the focal point of a broad alliance of organizations, which incorporated various units, including former imperial divisions, hastily assembled armed groups of civilians, newly established battalions of the Provisional Reichswehr, and other rebellious Freikorps companies. The Freikorps are the key to understanding the decentralized network of military violence in Germany after the armistice agreement of November 1918.

War in Germany

Ludwig Maercker's strict orders issued to his subordinate commanders on the eve of the Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps' (FLK) invasion of Berlin in January 1919

highlight the psychological value of violence for the Freikorps. "A close march, energetic commands, and attentive ranks presented with impeccable, coordinated uniforms and armaments will not fail to make their impression on hostile masses and often make the muster call to arms unnecessary," wrote Maercker on 9 January, as the FLK prepared for combat. "A disorderly troop without a solid, cohesive appearance will not impress the troops of the Spartacus League."[2] The specific manner in which the Freikorps presented the possibility of physical violence was important for commanders like Maercker. Further demonstrating his commitment prepare his troops to engage in a war of ideas and emotions, Maercker ordered a series of political education seminars for new recruits so they would could speak at length about the evils of communism and teach correct behaviour and conduct in combat zones. Generally led by lower level squad and unit commanders, these were top-down directed propaganda mechanisms aiming to inoculate the rank-and-file troops with nationalist sentiments to safeguard them against the lure of communist and socialist appeals to notions of brotherhood and freedom from class exploitation. However, attendance at these classes was surprisingly poor. When Maercker investigated the matter, he was told by an enlisted man that their political credo was simply that the "Spartacus are going to catch hell!"[3] Thus while Maercker's comments demonstrate the actual function of the Freikorps – a usefull tool in a war of ideas between the political left- and rightwings of German society - the words of the rank-and-file trooper, belie the intention of many of the Freikorps members and the very present desire of many of these men to deploy physical violence.

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[2] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer*, 62.
[3] Ibid., 63.

In the days before the government-approved operation against the Spartacus revolt, a hybrid Freikorps-Reichswehr force assembled around Berlin. The demobilizing 79th Reserve Division provided significant manpower for III Abtlg of the FLK, while the Metscher Batterie arrived on 9 January to provide much needed artillery support for the FLK's II Abtlg that arrived the same day. Soon more units flowed into the Freikorps muster point around Zossen. Freikorps units, such as the Regiment Meyn, joined the FLK directly, while other formations like the 115th Infantry Division, Abtlg Stobbe, Abtlg Gerstenberg and the Garde-Abtlg von Neufville grouped together under General Dietrich von Röder's leadership and were retitled the "Landesschützenkorps," with silver crosses on their collars.[4] Alongside the new Landesschützenkorps, the FLK, the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps, and the Freikorps von Hülsen were joined by several powerful former imperial formations, including the 17th and 31st Infantry Divisions, to form one unified hybrid command, "*Generalkommando Lüttwitz*," under the overall authority of the newly appointed commander-in-chief of the German armed forces, Gustav Noske. The myriad of names and formation numbers was recounted not merely to relive the pageantry and diversity of the Freikorps movement, which has been discussed elsewhere in this study. Instead, the order of battle for the Berlin operation is included to highlight the most crucial, and often understated, character of the majority of Freikorps operations: Freikorps formations generally fought as members of a broad alliance of organizations. Freikorps often found themselves marching alongside former imperial army detachments, other distinct Freikorps formations, as well as

[4] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 65.

all manner of other volunteer organizations such as the Einwohnerwehr, the Sicherheitsdienst, and the Grenzschutz. From their first major operation in Berlin against the Spartacus League, to their last desperate offensives at the Annaberg[5] and in the Ruhr, Freikorps units consistently and deliberately operated within a broad network of organizations and institutional hierarchies. So long as a formation had sufficient discipline and military capabilities, Freikorps units proved very comfortable marching into battle alongside a highly diverse collection of allies.

In Berlin the FLK's attack march was swift and decisive. Although undertaken against Maercker's wishes without the use of gas artillery shells and significant concentrations of armoured cars, the detachments of the FLK swept through the suburbs of the capital, seizing key crossroads, train stations and major avenues of movement. While most targets had a military value, others were chosen for their psychological effect, such as market places and school houses, specifically to intimidate the neutral civilian populace and the FLK's opponents.[6] Maercker consistently remained conscious that he was engaged in a battle of wills with his enemy. Appearance and presentation mattered. Therefore the advancing troops of the FLK were armed not only with rifles, grenades and trench knives, but also with public decrees. "The Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps is currently under a mandate in understanding with the Ebert and Scheidemann government, and under my leadership in Berlin for combatting the Spartacus League, which for several weeks

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[5] The three battles led by the Freikorps for control of the region around St. Annaberg in Upper Silesia occupied a central position in the Freikorps iconography throughout the 1920s. The legacy of the third and final battle in May 1921 will be analyzed in greater detail in the Conclusion.

[6] For more details on the FLK's operation against the Spartacus League in Berlin in January 1919, see Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 61-77.

has brought unrest and disorder in the Reich Capital and threatens the life and property of many peaceful inhabitants," Maercker wrote, justifying the invasion of Berlin. The general went on, careful to establish the particular brand of the FLK. "The Landesjägerkorps is known by the silver oak branch on the collar. It arrives to create peace and order (*Ruhe und Ordnung zu schaffen*), in order to allow peaceful workers and citizens to go back to productive work. The FLK wants to be ready to support existing government troops. This will support their order, to facilitate a unified advance."[7]

While on one hand some commanders like Maercker insisted that the Freikorps arrived to ensure the preservation of order, other units unleashed an overwhelming display of firepower in a ruthless pursuit of the leaders of the revolt. Artillery pounded the rebels from Moabit, machine-gun duels played out in key intersections throughout the government quarter, and Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were assassinated by members of the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps and tossed into the Landwehr Canal with their throats slit. "*Ruhe und Ordnung*" were the watch-words of the Freikorps invasion, but underneath it lay a terrible reality of physical violence. Although instances of physical destruction would be limited over the coming months, the violence unleashed in Berlin in January 1919 would serve as a reminder of the potential devastation that the Freikorps were capable of deploying.

Further operations throughout central Germany continued to demonstrate the professionalism of the Freikorps movement, as well as its new central role in the

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[7] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer*, 73.

military sphere. On 25 January 1919, Walther von Lüttwitz concentrated forces around Bremen for an anticipated clash with council movement troops. Freikorps Gerstenberg, soon to come close to the strength of a full division, was dispatched alongside III Brigade of the Landesschützenkorps and I Marinebrigade. Mobilizing far fewer than the 100,000 workers they promised, the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Bremen was overrun in less than 24 hours on 4 February as many revolutionary garrisons surrendered rather than face combat against the invading Freikorps.[8] Their reputation for overwhelming displays of violence had preceded Lüttwitz's forces, pre-emptively defeating the enemy's will to fight. Indeed Bremen would not be the only city whose garrison surrendered bloodlessly, rather than face the technologically dominant Freikorps. Many cities and towns would fall to Freikorps troops and their allies without a shot fired in anger as the Freikorps were able to effectively intimidate their enemies through their infrequent, yet highly publicized displays of physical violence. Along with Bremen, Braunschweig, Wilhelmshaven, Emden, Cuxhaven, Bremerhaven and the North Sea Islands all surrendered to Freikorps formations without a shot being fired.[9] Thus an alternation between a few extremely violent blood encounters and a higher number of completely bloodless engagements characterized the Freikorps march across central Germany in spring 1919.

As Freikorps troops assembled around Bremen, Lüttwitz directed Maercker and the FLK to secure the National Assembly in Weimar. Furbished with motorized transport, the FLK moved from Berlin to Weimar over three days at the start of

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[8] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 85.
[9] Ibid., 86.

February where they "pacified" and disarmed the local council organizations. Protection of the National Assembly, the most prominent symbol of republican power in Germany, was once again an example of the carefully orchestrated presentation of the image of the Freikorps movement.[10] Projecting an image of overwhelming strength and violence through a display of firepower, Maercker's deployment and securing of the National Assembly in Weimar was a classic Freikorps propaganda and military deployment. Three full companies of infantry along with a unit of artillery were stationed around the National Assembly itself, while additional companies of infantrymen occupied the major train stations, the National Theatre house, the Post Office, and the Telegraph Bureau. Special guard details occupied the Wittum Palace, while numerous houses around the National Theatre were occupied and transformed into machine-gun nests, covering all lanes of approach to the building. Citizens of Weimar had the clear impression "that the assembly was under the protection of 'Bayonets and Machine Guns.'"[11] As in Bremen, Freikorps troops achieved their objectives through a display of strength without any bloodshed and the National Assembly opened on 6 February 1919.

Spring 1919 was a very busy time for domestic Freikorps operations. Maercker's Landesjägerkorps was involved in so many deployments that Defense Minister Noske nicknamed them the "City Conquerors." As with Berlin and Weimar, the FLK's command staff expertly directed the Freikorps troops into cities and towns scattered across central Germany. While some urban centres fell to the Freikorps without the use of violence, others like Erfurt witnessed a significant

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[10] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 92.
[11] Ibid., 92.

display of the physical violence the Freikorps could unleash. Representatives of the local workers' council allegedly shot and stabbed the commander of the smaller Hessian-Thuringian Waldeck Freikorps (*Hessich-thüringisch-waldekschen Freikorps*) when the unit attempted to disarm the local garrison. Further negotiation attempts by the 38th Infantry Division had failed to produce the surrender of the hostile council bodies, necessitating a dramatic assault by the Landesjägerkorps. Once again, armoured columns rolled through the city, seizing key strong points, communication centres, and transportation routes. *Panzerzug 54* from Altenburg, *Kampfwagenzug 16* from Leipzig, and even Maercker's own armoured staff cars spearheaded the advance, despite the limited practical uses of such heavy vehicles in the confined urban terrain offered in Erfurt. As Maercker projected an image of strength to the inhabitants of the city with his main thrust, the *Jägerbataillon* stormed the Workers' Council Office in the Railway Direction Building as a secondary attack, resulting in a few reported skirmishes and shooting actions.[12] Thus in their operations, the Freikorps consciously sought to display symbols of violence – armoured cars, troops with rifles, machine-gun squads – to produce an atmosphere of potential violence to intimidate the local civilian populace. Presenting an image of potential violence was just as important as the *actual* use of violence in Freikorps operations. Both psychological and physical violence were valued by the Freikorps as both served to help generate an atmosphere of violence that could be used to "re-establish peace and order" throughout Germany.

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[12] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 278.

Many other towns and cities offered little or no resistance to Freikorps occupation operations. Although appearances initially seemed to predict a violent clash in Magdeburg in April 1919, the local workers' and soldiers' council later chose to offer no armed or organized resistance to the invasion of a coalition Freikorps force. As word of earlier Freikorps operations spread throughout Germany, many leftwing garrisons chose not to give battle to the *Freiwillige* formations. Freikorps Gerstenberg occupied Wilhelmshaven, a major centre of the 1918 naval mutinies, and found no active resistance. As stated previously, Emden, Cuxhaven, Bremerhaven, and all of the North Sea Islands were occupied through completely bloodless invasions.[13] However, Maercker's assault on Magdeburg has particular significance as it highlights the ambiguous legal position of the Freikorps movement as semi-official government representatives, attempting to simultaneously wield political, legal and military authority in their operational regions.

As members of the local USPD leadership had arrested senior military commanders from the regional army corps, as well as Justice Minister Eugen Schiffer on 7 April, Maercker and the FLK became the sole government authority in Magdeburg after they completed its occupation. Sent by Noske with orders to "restore order and local command authority," Maercker was also empowered to arrest any and all "revolutionaries and criminals." Once more, familiar Freikorps invasion plans were drawn up and executed with typical speed and displays of firepower. However, unlike previous operations, the FLK did not immediately move

[13] Schulze, *Freikorps*, 86.

on to another hostile location, but instead occupied the city and attempted to re-establish local authority. Maercker's decree to the populace of Magdeburg reveals the insecurity of his position as well as the questionable legal foundation for the Freikorps' authority. Citing articles from the monarchial Prussian Siege Law of 4 June 1851, General Maercker established an Extraordinary War Court (*außerordentliches Kriegsgericht*) for prosecution of all enemy combatants. He also authorized house searches and "arrests of revolutionary authorities" to be performed at his discretion, while deputizing the troops of the Landesjägerkorps as police officials and *Hilfsbeamten* of the State Attorney. Maercker also imposed a curfew, curtailed the right to free assembly, and decreed that any civilian found carrying weapons would be subject to a minimum sentence of one year imprisonment under martial law.[14] Once order was secured and the city pacified, the FLK made preparations to shift some its combat forces to another operation around Braunschweig. As a part of this redeployment, Maercker used his authority to establish the "Regiment Magdeburg," a Freikorps unit that would take over administration of the town until the Reich government re-established civilian authority.

Maercker's decree illuminated the already turbulent civil-military relations in revolutionary Germany. As his only source of legal authority for his invasive policing actions, the 1851 Prussian Law of Siege was no longer the unquestioned source of authority it was six months before Maercker's invasion of Magdeburg. Without the Hohenzollern monarchy, the legality of the imperial constitution was

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[14] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 187.

brought into serious debate. Furthermore, no republic constitution had yet been agreed upon, casting further doubt on the legality of the actions decreed by Noske and executed by the Freikorps as they marched across Germany implementing a harsh form of martial law. In effect, large Freikorps like the FLK, Freikorps von Hülsen, or the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps operated in what can be termed a void state, operating without civilian oversight and deriving their own political, legal and military authority through the means of violence at their disposal.

The bloody street battles for control of Munich represented the highpoint of Freikorps power. Responding to continued unrest in Bavaria, Noske directed Lüttwitz to take action against rebellious council institutions in late April. Lüttwitz therefore appointed Lieutenant General Ernst von Oven as supreme commander for the operation, who began immediately assembling a command staff incorporating Bavarian and Freikorps representatives. Recognizing the delicate political circumstances created by the presence of Prussian troops on Bavarian soil, Lüttwitz assigned Major General Arnold Ritter von Möhl to Oven's command staff as "Bavarian Supreme Commander," although he would have no actual combat forces under his control. Additionally, the prominent Bavarian politician, Dr. Hermann Ewinger, was tasked to serve as the "civilian representative of the Bavarian People," and to assist in any political negotiations. The new political realities of the *Bürgerkrieg* were increasingly evident.

The order of battle for the Munich operation similarly reflected the coalition structure of Oven's command staff, representing a form of power sharing previously unfathomable in the previously Prussian dominated former imperial military. Noske

personally directed Lüttwitz to include various Freikorps units that he believed were both politically reliable and military capable. An order from 23 April 1919 attached "the Prussian Freiwilligen Korps Oven, the *bayerische Schützenkorps* [from Augsburg], the *württembergische Freiwilligen Detachement* [from Ulm] and a still to be assembled Bavarian combat force" to the order of battle against Munich. Alongside these units, Oven continued to gather his forces through a mixture of Freikorps units reporting from all corners of Germany, along with Bavarian army formations still lingering from the world war. Oven established three main combat groups, *Gruppe Generalmajor Haas* based in Landsberg, *Gruppe Friedeburg* with its headquarters at Erfurt, and *Gruppe Deetjen* stationed in Saalfeld.[15] Haas' formation contained the most of the Bavarian troops under Oven's command and therefore would be used for the majority of the urban occupation tasks of the operation. Haas' combat group would prove highly effective throughout the coming weeks, critically demonstrating the compatibility of the Freikorps system with the emerging Reichswehr institution. Indeed, no complaints were recorded when III Bavarian Army Corps marched side by side with the Bavarian Landesschützenkorps Buchloe to seize important railway centres and supply depots, or when the Freikorps Haas from Württemberg and II Bavarian Army Corps marched against the Red Army of Bavaria on 28 April at the opening of the Munich operation.[16]

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[15] BA-MA PH 26-31, "Generalkommando Oven, Order 23 April 1919."
[16] BA-MA PH 26 -31, "Gruppenkommando Oven, Ia/44, 27 1919." For more information on the Munich operation and Freikorps activity in southern Germany see, Heinz Hürten, *Zwischen Revolution und Kapp: Militär und Innenpolitik, 1918-1920* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1977); Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik, 1918-1920* (Boppard am Rhein: H. Boldt, 1969); Ludwig Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer zur*

The successful partnership between Freikorps and regular army units under Haas was by no means the first or last example of this cooperation. However, for it to play such a central role in a major operation ordered by the top branches of the political and military leadership of the republic, contests the work of scholars, FL Carsten or Gordon Craig, who have previously treated the Reichswehr as a distinct entity from the Freikorps movement before the Kapp Putsch. The assault on Munich, like Berlin and the drive across central Germany, all demonstrate persistent administrational, command, operational, and tactical cooperation between the Freikorps system and the traditional Prusso-German military institution as it underwent its postwar transformation.

While Haas' combat group demonstrated cooperation between Freikorps units and former imperial formations, the other two groups under Oven's command consisted of one of the largest exhibitions of Freikorps power within the borders of Germany. *Gruppe Friedeburg*, the third combat force under Oven's authority, was particularly reliant on Freikorps troops. Freikorps Görlitz alone contributed 3,000 troops, alongside the Regiment Alexander from Gotha, the Regiment Augusta from Arnstadt, the Regiment Franz from Erfurt, and the Hessische-Thüringische Waldecksche Freikorps.[17] However, the independent nature of the Freikorps command system remained and other powerful Freikorps formations moved into the Bavarian theatre but continued to operate outside of Oven's command authority. The Freikorps von Lützow, Freikorps Oberland, units of the Garde-Kavallerie-

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Reichswehr: Eine Beitrag zur Geschicte der Deutschen Revolution (Leipzig: K.F. Koehler, 1921).

[17] BA-MA PH 26-31, "Generalkommando Oven, 23 April 1919."

Schützenkorps, the Marinebrigade II (Ehrhardt), as well as elements of Freikorps Epp formed together as independent "*Freiwilligenabteilungen*," assisted by as many as 20 independent Bavarian Freikorps units.[18]

Unlike the bloodless invasions along the north German coast, the leftwing revolutionaries prepared to offer stiffer resistance in Munich. An intelligence report from Oven's headquarters on 27 April estimated the strength of the Bavarian Red Army at 60,000 men, with 12-18,000 described as "combat experienced" (*Kampfkräftigen*).[19] Additionally two Bavarian Pioneer Battalions had defected to the revolutionaries and now held a line along the Nymphenburg Canal in northwest Munich. Presently the gateway for so many tourists headed to Oktoberfest beer gardens, in 1919 the main train station was an armed camp, garrisoned by hundreds of Spartacus supporters, organized into machine-gun squads. The Supreme Commander of the Red Army, Rudolf Egelhofer, emptied the great stockpiles of weapons in Munich to create "armed bands of proletariat."[20] While most armed workers were deemed to have "no significant military value," Freikorps intelligence reports noted the existence of the "Armed Workers' Battalion" which had far more combat strength than general workers' units, owing to some wartime military experience of the members.

The operation against Munich began on the night of 28/29 April. Prussian troops crossed the Bavarian border and assembled in the region around Ingolstadt.

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[18] Schulze, *Freikorps*, 95. Additionally, many future prominent figures from the Third Reich were present in Munich during the operation. Among the many participants in the battle was Adolf Hitler, political theorist Karl Haushofer, historian Karl Alexander von Müller, and future Field Marshal Erwin Rommel.
[19] BA-MA PH 26-31, "Gruppenkommando Oven – Nachrichtenoffizier."
[20] Ibid.

In the following days, Oven's troops created a cordon around Munich and Dachau, effectively sealing off the city by 1 May. Operationally, the invasion of Berlin in January 1919 provided the blueprint for the assault on Munich. However, as pro-government forces moved into position, the situation inside the Bavarian capital worsened. On 30 April two men from the Freiwilligen Husaren-Regiment 8 were taken prisoner and executed, while on the same day 10 members from the anti-Semitic Thule Society were taken captive by Red Army troops for allegedly organizing resistance to the *Räterepublik*. The Freikorps were swift in their response. Oven's troops swept into the city, clashing with determined defenders as bloody skirmishes over major thorough fares claimed the lives of 8 Freikorps officers and 50 enlisted men, while wounding 20 officers and 144 soldiers in the opening phases of the battle. Oven's forces unleashed artillery barrages, mortar fire, three squads of flamethrowers, armoured cars, a few tanks, and aircraft in their brutal assault on the communist forces in the city throughout the first week of May.[21] Once again, violence and aggression defined the Freikorps advance. Several senior commanders, including Oven, were shocked by the lack of discipline displayed by many of the smaller Freikorps units as orders were disregarded, junior officers proceeded as they saw fit, and reports surfaced of petty reprisal actions against personal rivals, an activity that was particularly common among Bavarian Freikorps. Historian Hagen Schulze described some of the reports of abuse and criminal actions by Freikorps soldiers as comparable to the violence of the Thirty

[21] BA-MA PH 26-31, "Werfung des Kommunisten Aufstandes."

Years' War.[22] Freikorps officers ignored orders demanding restraint and fair treatment of prisoners, instead proceeding as they saw fit, and seizing the opportunity to take action against petty rivals and enemies.[23] In the end, the butcher's bill was substantial for the postwar campaigns. 557 lives were lost on both sides, although some sources estimated much higher losses. Well-covered by the German press, the events in Munich registered a significant response of shock and outrage among average citizens, but was met with cold indifference by Freikorps members. "War is violence," Manfred von Killinger, the commander of the *Sturmkompanie* of the Ehrhardt Brigade, offered as rebuttal.[24] "Civil war is violence at its utmost potency. Moderation is stupidity, no, it is criminal for its own Volk and State."[25] Once again the connection between the spirit of the Freikorps and the nature of their operations was clearly on display.

After the occupation of the city, the second task of the Freikorps illustrated a keen awareness of the psychological role that the presence of weapons could play in political life in the new republic. Oven directed his troops to systematically sweep

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[22] Freikorps reports did not attempt to hide the actions of their soldiers. Instead several officers expressed their displeasure that such criminal acts had occurred. One report acknowledged the murder of Munich citizens by Bavarian Freikorps troops on 6 May, but cited their "low quality" as justification for their lack of discipline. BA-MA PH 26-31, "Werfung des Kommunisten Aufstandes."
[23] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 97.
[24] Manfred Freiherr von Killinger was a veteran of the First World War, serving in the German Navy. Killinger served in the Ehrhardt Brigade and participated in the operation against the Bavarian Soviet Republic. After the dissolution of the Ehrhardt Brigade, Killinger was active in the Organisation Consul, including the assassination of Matthias Erzberger. Later a prominent member of the NSDAP, Killinger served as Germany's consul in San Francisco between 1936 and 1939. During the Second World War, Killinger was involved in the Nazi occupation of Romania until he committed suicide in August 1944.
[25] Manfred von Killinger, *Ernstes und Heiteres aus dem Putschleben*, (Munich: F. Eher Nachf., 1942), 21.

through the city and disarm the general civilian populace. Quelling the enemy's ability to engage in a violent political discourse and to register political dissatisfaction through military means was a critical step in re-establishing central political and military control over German society. Even as skirmishes with Red Army troops continued throughout the early days of the operation, Bavarian and Prussian Freikorps troops marched across Munich re-asserting control over munitions and weapons depots, as well as confiscating arms and raiding private homes. Their efforts netted an impressive result. 11 heavy artillery pieces, 169 light artillery pieces, 663 machine-guns, 103 aircraft machine guns, 17,490 infantry rifles, 3719 carbines, 142 pistols and revolvers, 70,724 bayonets and sabres, 18,500 machine-gun cartridges, 6.3 million Infantry cartridges, 1500 pistol cartridges, 99,195 *Stiel* (stick) hand grenades, 213 850 *Eier* (Egg) hand grenades, and 17 flare guns were brought under government control by 10 May.[26] The official report of the disarmament operation concluded thoughtfully, "No government can fulfill their fundamental tasks if they are not master in their own house."[27]

With the Freikorps' *Ordnung* ruthlessly imposed on Munich, Oven began preparations for the withdrawal of his combat forces on 10 May. All Bavarian troops were now transferred to Major General von Möhl's command, although supreme command authority remained in Oven's hands. The same day, Oven issued a decree for the creation of a sizeable Einwohnerwehr unit for the city of Munich. Established for the "protection of the city against violent activity," the Einwohnerwehr was composed of military trained civilians who had a "good reputation, and will stand

[26] BA-MA PH 26-31, "Betreffend Entwaffnung von München."
[27] BA-MA PH 26-31, "Werfung des Kommunisten Aufstandes."

behind a fundamentally legal development of our Fatherland."[28] Representing the cream of Munich society, as well as the local university population, the Einwohnerwehr found many willing recruits, even though the military capabilities of sexagenarian history professors could at best be considered questionable. Although political activity in the Einwohnerwehr was prohibited, the *Wehrleute* pledged to prevent the "actions of anyone who would strive for a revolution against the existing legal *Ordnung*;" a clear position against leftwing political groups.[29] Also on 10 May, the new city commandant, Major Hans von Seisser, in accordance with the new Bavarian government and the Ministry for Military Affairs (*Ministerium für militärische Angelegenheiten*), ordered the creation of a *Wach-Regiment* for Munich to provide heavy firepower in the event of significant unrest. Composed of five battalions, one in each police district, the regiment would contain eight companies of infantry, with additional heavy and light machine-gun units, artillery, and mortars. Unusually, all members of the *Wach-Regiment* were guaranteed transfer into the Reichswehr should the unit be dissolved.[30] Finally, Lüttwitz also ordered the establishment of the large Reichswehr Brigade 21 to protect Munich from potential revolutionary activity. As a reward for their service in the assault on Munich, several Bavarian Freikorps units were transferred into the brigade, alongside the Freikorps von Epp, which would provide the core of the new Reichswehr unit, as the connection between the Freikorps system and the Provisional Reichswehr became institutionalized through personnel transfers.

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[28] BA-MA PH 26-31, "Vorläufige Bestimmungen über die Errichtung einer Einwohnerwehr für die Stadt Münschen."
[29] Ibid.
[30] BA-MA PH 26-31, "Establishment of the *Wach-Regiment*," 10 May 1919.

Straßenkampf

While the Freikorps system was heavily indebted to the patterns of operation and internal culture of the imperial army, in many ways representing a continuation of the violence of the world war, the Freikorps did not merely seek to directly copy and reproduce their experiences during the First World War. Instead, numerous commanders published several documents, some of which were distributed to numerous Freikorps units, concerning appropriate tactics, operational objectives, soldier conduct, duties of Freikorps officers, and policies for interaction with the civilian populace. A series of guidelines and regulations drafted to govern Freikorps troops during the *Straßenkampf* (Street War or Battle), in particular the FLK's May 1919 "Regulations for the Suppression of Domestic Unrest," highlights not only the professionalism of the early Freikorps movement, but also a keen awareness and understanding of the differences between the nature of war on an industrial killing field in northern France and in the village square in central Germany.

As one of the first Freikorps in existence, and boasting a highly trained professional staff, the Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps once again led the efforts of the Freikorps movement to understand and adapt to the new realities of domestic combat. The FLK's invasion of Gotha exposed the new difficulties facing the Freikorps trooper. Confronted by a dense crowd of people, mainly composed of women and children, General Maercker's Landesjäger had a difficult task identifying, disarming and arresting revolutionaries mingling in the crowd. In his usual fashion, Maercker's after-action analysis was blunt. "Our war experiences let

us down," he asserted. "In the many *Straßenkämpfen*, which the German Army had fought in all theatres of the war, all previous considerations of non-combatants, to which we were once bound, ceased to apply."[31] Maercker was influential in relaxing the old prewar army regulations to suit the new realities of the Bürgerkrieg. The old provisions had prohibited the use of artillery fire, mortars and flamethrowers against the civilian populace, unless "used for the protection of human life and national wealth." Instead, he argued that displays of heavy firepower should be used as a pre-emptive warning to discourage future enemy resistance.

Crowds posed a particular problem for urban Freikorps operations. "Our experiences showed above all that units needed to be sufficiently large to keep the crowds of people at arm's length, in order to be capable of the deployment of violence," Maercker wrote after the difficulties in Gotha and Halle. Particularly hostile crowds should be suppressed with the use of armoured cars (*Panzerkampfwagen*), argued the commander of the FLK, as "they [are the best] to solve the major task, to smash through a crowd of people without much difficulty."[32] Wartime fears of camouflaged snipers hiding in dense urban areas, mingling with crowds of non-combatant civilians, influenced Freikorps operational planning. "The agitators are never found in the front line of combat," chided Maercker. "They prefer to 'lead the action' from behind the protection of women and children. … [they are] always deploying several snipers in top stories."[33]

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[31] Maercker, *Vom Kasierheer,* 163.
[32] Ibid., 164. However Maercker complained that such useful vehicles were relatively scarce due to French punitive seizures. Preservation of domestic *Ordnung* was directly threatened by the meddlesome French authorities, Maercker protested.
[33] Ibid., 164.

Based on his early experiences in the civil war against the council movement and the Spartacus League, Maercker wrote a series of regulations to govern Freikorps operations against hostile urban populations, entitled, "Regulations for the Suppression of Domestic Unrest." Sent out to numerous smaller Freikorps units lacking a command staff to produce battlefield analytical studies, Maercker's regulations became a template for the majority of Freikorps formations as even larger units, including the Freikorps von Hülsen, and the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps, adopted the instructions at a conference in May 1919.[34] Maercker's regulations were built upon the foundation of his experiences in the Great War, but only so far as they proved beneficial to the new form of warfare he and his unit faced. Maercker argued that the German army that fought from 1914 to 1918 lacked an appreciation of special training on certain weapons. Victories were lost, Maercker wrote, because the infantry lacked full understanding of the nature and function of artillery, and vice versa. "Weapon segregation" was a major impediment to achieving the most effective combat force, Maercker believed.[35]

Maercker was determined that this failing would be corrected in the Freikorps system. He created a "Special Weapons Mixed Unit" (*Sonderwaffen gemischte Abteilungen*) for each battalion of three companies, for an artillery battery with three or more units, and for cavalry squadrons of three units. Thus, every

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[34] Schulze, *Freikorps*, 45.
[35] Although the German Army had been drastically altered by the introduction of Storm Troop units throughout 1917 and 1918, these units remained specialized penetration squads, in Maercker's estimation. Freikorps soldiers were to not only have an appreciation of infantry tactics, including use of heavy machine-guns, flamethrowers, and mortars, but also standard artillery practices and the limits of air power.

branch of the FLK, which would serve as a model for other Freikorps organizations after the May 1919 conference, contained specialized combatant units designed to promote the use of all arms in each battalion, battery and squadron. Maercker took further steps during urban operations, however. During *Straßenkämpfen*, all infantry companies in the FLK were assigned an additional heavy machinegun unit and mine thrower group, while artillery batteries were assigned extra "all weapons" detachments to stiffen their resistance against hostile civilian crowds. These extra units, the elite of Maercker's troops, were trained to perform specialized tasks produced by urban warfare. Members of the FLK were all given additional training courses to execute train station occupations, hostile crowd control, port and public building seizure, as well as clearing of streets or squares, house searches, and disarming the civilian populace.[36]

All of Maercker's *Bürgerkrieg* combat experiences, as well as the structure of the Landesjägerkorps, were presented as a model for Freikorps creation and operation in his May 1919 publication, "Regulations for the Suppression of Domestic Unrest" (*Vorschrift zur Unterdrückung von inneren Unruhen*). The guidelines detailed all manner of operations that Maercker felt were lacking from Great War infantry manuals, including clearing town squares, occupying train stations and disarming a hostile civilian populace. Indeed, dealing with civilians became such a common problem for Freikorps commanders that Maercker published an extended set of regulations with an expanded chapter solely devoted to civil-military relations, including provisions governing the right to bear arms, declaration of a state of siege

[36] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 52.

and which authorities could take such a measure, as well as the legality of Freikorps executed seizures, disarmaments, house searches, and detentions.[37] Maercker's document, although chiefly preoccupied with establishing very specific rules of operation in hostile urban combat theatres, demonstrates the Freikorps' conception of psychological violence. Intimidation was the preferred tactic of the Freikorps unit when dealing with civilian crowds, but the threat of physical violence was always present. The regulations placed a heavy emphasis on the appearance and "spirit" of the Freikorps troops. The introduction of the regulations stressed the *Geist* of the troops above all else:

> Each firm, tight and disciplined man is of a troop, with a threatening appearance by weapons and demeanor, so that few of them actually need to appeal to the violence of weapons. Through their deep strength, the troops should appear to be serious and earnestness. The populace must have the feeling that the troops, if they want, have a considerable strength whenever it is necessary. … The restrained earnestness and the discipline of the troops will also be shown when they overcome insults and harassment with overwhelming calm. Above all they must – from the supreme leader down to the last Jäger – absolutely have the view to defend legality. They will never allow the masses to be set towards unrest. Civilized character towards the public demonstrates a noble soldierly manner; dominant calm behaviour in difficult conditions, those are the demands that are presented to every Landesjäger.[38]

Maercker was also a proponent of "Demonstration Marches" during *Bürgerkrieg* operations. He felt that the symbolic gesture and presence of the troops was an important propaganda tool designed to bolster the confidence of one's own supporters while simultaneously intimidating potential enemies. Parading the Freikorps' destructive capabilities through urban centres was a critical reminder of the potential physical destruction that the Freikorps could unleash. These marches

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[37] Maercker, *Von Kaiserheer,* 165.
[38] Ibid., 165.

were one of the starkest mechanisms available to the Freikorps to inculcate an atmosphere of violence in German society. Demonstration Marches had already proven their worth, in Maercker's estimation, during the Spartacus Revolt in Berlin. Although the general would lead 3,000 of his Jägern down the streets of Berlin in support of Noske's suppression of the Spartacus Revolt in January 1919, Maercker openly acknowledged that the troops had no military function, and instead were deployed solely for "optical reasons" ("*rein optischen Gründen"*).[39]

Finally, Maercker acknowledged that the Freikorps were venturing into uncertain legal situations by declaring states of siege throughout central Germany as well as their improvised military tribunals and courts. Therefore, he added a jurist to his staff, Halle provincial judge Dr. Johannes Müller, who advised him on economic and legal implications of all future invasion plans. Concerned with all manner of external relations, Maercker also advocated that Freikorps units establish a firm relationship with the local press, and even went so far as to create a Press Division within his command staff to handle all press releases and publicity for the FLK. The image the Freikorps presented to the public was crucial for Maercker and the major commanders. It was a specific military asset in the propaganda battle that raged throughout the *Bürgerkrieg* era in Weimar Germany.

Other units also released regulations governing future Freikorps operations based on their own experiences. The Deutsche Schutzdivision, also simultaneously operating as the Reichswehr Brigade Brandenburg, once again highlighting the

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[39] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 44. Additionally, see, Eric Waldman, *The Spartacus Uprising of 1919 and the Crisis of the German Socialist Movement: A Study of the Relation of Political Theory and Party Practice* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1958).

merger between the Freikorps and the Provisional Reichswehr, distributed a list of instructions on 1 April 1919 entitled "Experiences from the Street Battles in Berlin in March 1919" (*Erfahrungen aus dem Straßenkämpfen in Berlin im März 1919*).[40] Written by Lieutenant General Heinrich von Hofmann, the document shows a remarkably similar approach to urban warfare as exhibited by the FLK, Freikorps von Hülsen, and the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps. It too stressed the delicate legal position of the troops during the street battles, and ordered the inclusion of at least two 'court officers' (*Gerichtoffizieren*) and two stenographers for each battalion to better advise commanders and troops concerning permissible conduct. Otherwise, the Deutsche Schutzdivision adopted many similar policies as the other major Freikorps listed above, illustrating some general parallels between Freikorps experiences within the German borders. As with many Freikorps units, the main focus was on speed, occupation of key strategic positions, and above all, projecting an image of potential physical violence in an attempt to intimidate the local civilian populace into compliance with Freikorps orders. Hofmann specifically prohibited small unit advances,instead ordering his troops to advance in "centres of power" (*Machtzentren*) to occupy key areas of a city with a visible demonstration of the military power at their disposal.

If psychological violence was unable to pacify the civilian populace, Freikorps regulations contained several passages detailing the potential use of physical violence. Artillery, mortars and machine guns, along with barbed wire were to be deployed to establish defensible strong points to inhibit the movement of hostile

[40] BA-MA RH 69-1636, "Erfahrungen aus den Straßenkämpfen in Berlin am März 1919," 1 April 1919.

forces and large crowds of civilians. Furthermore, troops were ordered to create a sizeable "forefield" around any position held by the Deutsche Schutzdivision to ensure that there was a clear field of fire to inflict maximum casualties on any potential hostile force. Schutzdivision attacks were designed to be even more violent. Provision D 10, concerning attacks, stipulated that "before mustering for an assault to attack a building, the streets should be cleared by machine-gun fire. … Initial assault with *Panzerkraftwagen* and storm troopers with flamethrowers, then followed up with the main body of infantry."[41]Artillery and mortar fire were to support the attacking forces. Cold logic once again rationalized the use of such heavy weaponry against German citizens. "The stronger the means, so much quicker the victory," stated Hofmann. "The strongest means are also the most humane.[42]

The Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps (GKSK) republished a similar document written by Hofmann, similarly urging an unflinching annihilation of the enemies of the Freikorps, if psychological violence did not keep the civilian populace in order. "The invasion must be as intimidating and disheartening to our enemies as possible," Hofmann wrote on behalf of the GKSK. "To maintain the confidence of our troops, a strong screen of *Panzerautos* should be out front. Machineguns and some artillery pieces must follow directly behind, in order to immediately break any resistance."[43] The Bautzen Jägerbattalion published regulations likewise dictating a

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[41] BA-MA RH 69-1636, "Erfahrungen aus den Straßenkämpfen in Berlin im März 1919," 1 April 1919.
[42] BA-MA RH 69-1636, "Erfahrungen aus den Straßenkämpfen in Berlin," Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps, 31 March 1919.
[43] BA-MA RH 69-1636, "Erfahrungen aus den Straßenkämpfen in Berlin," Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps, 31 March 1919

harsh and uncompromising stance towards communists.[44] Produced during a meeting of Freikorps commanders on 30 September 1919, the Bautzen Jägerbattalion's guidelines included a detailed analysis of the combat methods of their communist opponents, before providing a list of countermeasures to their troops. The commanders ordered the creation of local Einwohnerwehren to serve as observers, signal carriers and essentially a militia intelligence service. Once alerted to suspected communist agitation, "*Stoßtruppen*" from the Bautzen Jägerbattalion were to be immediately deployed, attacking their enemies without firing warning shots, and assisted by well-prepared artillery. Special close-quarters combat training was provided to the Bautzen Jägern to ensure that each soldier was proficient with pistols, hand grenades, machine guns, and hand-to-hand fighting. Like the GKSK and the FLK, the Bautzen Jägerbattalion stressed that "absolutely no negotiations" were to occur with suspected communists or Bolsheviks.[45]

Although infrequently deployed the degree of violence and firepower the Freikorps unleashed could be significant. Cities under Freikorps occupation could expect major street intersections to be "dominated" through combined arms defensive positions utilizing artillery, mortars and machine guns. Crowds of civilians were subjected to searches, detention, and even execution, authorized by hastily erected Freikorps military courts. Violence and terror were deliberately intensified by the Freikorps in street battles harnessing the destructive power of the First World War for a new domestic war against the enemies of *Ordnung*.

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[44] BA-MA RH 69-37, "Kommandeurbesprechung am 30.9.1919."
[45] Ibid.

The Freikorps in the East

Although they proved well suited for combat within Germany, the Freikorps system faced greater problems along the borders of the new republic and on foreign soil. The international adventures of Freikorps units tended to bring out the independent streak in many commanders and soldiers. Historian Annemarie Sammartino has argued that Freikorps formations, like the Baltic Landeswehr or the Iron Division, were an expression of uncertain identities and a desire to both defend Germany against Bolshevism and also to project German power outward.[46] Nevertheless, they were a product of the same Freikorps system that developed within Germany, and a mixture of physical and psychological violence characterized the nature of eastern Freikorps operations. Sammartino also recognizes the centrality of violence to the existence of the Freikorps, arguing that "this violence must be read as a key component of Freikorps creativity … violence was both a symptom and constitutive element of [the Baltic campaign]."[47] Two main theatres of operation defined the Freikorps experience outside of Germany. First, the volatile Baltic units illustrate the greatest extent of Freikorps independence and offered a warning to anyone who would seek to rely too heavily on their loyalty. Second, the Grenzschutz units that proliferated along the German-Polish border throughout 1919 are the starkest example of the Freikorps as an army of believers. Many of the hallmarks of the *Freikorpsgeist* discussed in chapter six featured most prominently in the eastern Grenzschutz units.

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[46] Sammartino, *Impossible Border,* 46.
[47] Ibid., 46.

Article XII of the November 1918 Armistice Agreement signed between Germany and the Entente Powers stipulated that all German troops were to evacuate the occupied regions in eastern Europe and return behind Germany's new borders.[48] However, until the Entente Powers were able to send their own troops, German units were to remain in those seized areas and maintain order against advancing Russian communist forces. Thus began the German Freikorps' operation in the Baltics. Although the number of men fighting in the Baltic Freikorps fluctuated and therefore cannot be determined with any certainty, there were approximately 20,000 to 40,000 men who saw action in this theatre.[49] Fighting under the command of General Rüdiger von der Goltz, the Freikorps were incorporated into the VI Reserve Corps, and under the overall authority of *Oberkommando Grenzschutz Nord* under General Ferdinand von Quast and his chief of staff Major General Hans von Seeckt.

German Freikorps commands were at surprisingly remarkable liberty to determine exactly what their task was. The Germans interpreted Article XII as Entente approval of their plans to cleanse the Baltic states of any Bolshevik presence and proceeded to create short-term Freikorps units to do so. In this sense, German and English politics were in agreement. Neither nation wanted to see the Red Army sweep into eastern Europe and spread communism in its wake. The French remained insistent that the German army be demobilized, but for the time being were forced to accept the necessity of German troops securing some sort of

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[48] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 132.
[49] Sammartino, *Impossible Border*, 45.

defensive position against the Red Army's march towards the Baltic states as 1918 came to a close.

Desperate times did in fact lead to desperate measures. Socialist council bodies worked quickly to create and arm nationalist Freikorps units from dissolving imperial army formations. On 27 November 1918, after a conference with Social Democrat delegate Otto Winning, the German Chief of the Civilian Administration in the Baltics, Konrad von Goßler, approved the creation of a "rear guard" from various divisional units. In connection with the soldiers' councils in Riga and Mitau, the first Baltic Freikorps, the "Iron Division," was created the following day. Although under officer control, recruitment for the new unit was handled through local socialist soldiers' councils, as combat necessities trumped political differences in a manner unthinkable within the borders of the Weimar Republic. More Freikorps formations were created in the following weeks as the scale of the task facing the German forces became more apparent and the weaknesses of the disintegrating imperial army were exposed.

From the moment of their creation, the Baltic Freikorps were noted for their independence from central command. Compared to the strict discipline of General Maercker's Freiwilligen Landesjägerkorps, founded on broadly accepted military laws of command and obedience, the Baltic Freikorps formations were generally much smaller, ranging between the size of a squad and up to a full battalion, with few written rules and regulations, and instead adopting their character from the personality of their commanding officer. "These formations exist under no proper military laws," wrote a Baltikum commander about these units. "No force created

them and no force keeps them together. The will of the Commander alone was valid…"[50] Command authorities in Libau and Königsberg frequently complained about the unruly nature of the Baltic Freikorps troops. Command structures within units were generally improvised and remained fluid throughout their existence. This organizational disorder reflected the diversity of the Freikorps members fighting in these units. Sammartino has described the Baltic Freikorps as a an irregular group of men, "not regular soldiers but volunteers drawn to the Baltics by a complex set of motivations, including the desire to fight Bolshevism, a wish for adventure, and the dream of Baltic settlement."[51]

The small size of these mobile Freikorps units, operating in vast open spaces, generally without the secure support of their immediate neighbouring formations led to a rejection of operational doctrine from the Great War. The commander of the Jagdkommando, Captain von Besser wrote that although troops were "once trained to fight only in larger units, it was necessary now, without orders from above, to established themselves, entirely as their own master, and each man is only responsible to God in Heaven."[52] Accommodating what Hagen Schulze called "the half anarchist spirit of the Freikorps," the Baltic Freikorps methods represented a full-scale adoption of the old Prussian principle of independence subordinate commanders. These small units generally did not fight and manoeuvre as a part of a centrally controlled corps or division, instead pursuing their own objectives in a

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[50] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 135.
[51] Sammartino, *Impossible Border,* 45.
[52] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 138.

series of small parallel wars fought alongside each other, but relatively independent from the majority of the other units.

The first major thrust against Soviet troops in February 1919 displayed a coordinated system of independent commands. Under General Rüdiger von der Goltz, the Baltic Freikorps were given three main attack routes to assault Soviet troops in the Kurland region. The Iron Division, the Baltic Landeswehr and the 1st Garde-Reserve-Division each executed their own battle plans that drove them into the flanks and rear of the disorganized Russian troops. Pushing the Red Army back over 100 kilometres, by 26 March the majority of Kurland was in German hands including Mitau, Bausk and Tuckum.[53] The new commander of the Iron Division, Major Josef Bischoff described the fluidity and tempo of the Freikorps attack:

> From the thin marching columns with broadly sweeping infantry leaders, diverged small attack groups laterally within sweeping movements after the first enemy shots. Quick and surprising attack groups replaced our deficiency of [troop] numbers and artillery. Skill in utilization of terrain, lightning fast understanding of particular situations, and great mobility … enable flanking manouvres, rather than the defense of the Soviet troops with massive units, too stiff and cumbersome.[54]

Having only just recently quelled a Bolshevik style revolt within the German borders during the Spartacus Uprising in Berlin, Friedrich Ebert's government wanted the Freikorps to act, not only as occupation forces, as the Entente demanded through Article XII of the Armistice Agreement, but also as a physical deterrent against the spread of revolutionary Bolshevism from Russia towards the East Prussian border. By the end of March, the Red Army was reeling under von der

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[53] Josef Bischoff, *Die Letzte Front: Geschichte der Eisernen Division im Baltikum 1919*, (Berlin: Buch und Tiefdruck Gesselschaft, 1935), 61.
[54] Ibid., 63.

Goltz's assault and was pushed back over 200 kilometers from the new German border along the Baltic coast. However, the Bolshevik threat was not yet contained as communist-led revolts in Riga forced a German occupation of the city on 22 May to restore local order. Despite casualties to both the attacking and defending forces, the city fell by the end of the first day as the "*reindeutschen* Freikorps troops" of the Baltic Landeswehr and Detachement Medem secured the city.[55] By 27 May, the Iron Division and Baltic Landeswehr created a defensive position to the East of Riga, aided by the Latvian contingent of the Baltic Landeswehr covering the northern flank.

However, victory brought new problems for the Baltic Freikorps. Soviet troops had been so soundly defeated that they were streaming back to the East, depriving the Freikorps of their fundamental reason for operation in the Baltics. Without the threat of the Red Army, German Freikorps presence was no longer required and many commanders feared that they would be forced to return to the *Heimat*. Many soldiers hoped that they would be able to remain in the Baltics after defeating the Red Army as settlers in Latvia.[56] Indeed, the sympathetic Andreas Needra[57] government in Riga had even begun preparations for the immigration and settlement of German Freikorps troops in Latvia, encouraging the fantastical dreams of the *Freiwilligen*.[58] British observers, however, did not wish to see an extension of German military power in Latvia and began to pressure Ebert's government to

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[55] Bischoff, *Letzte Front,* 62.
[56] Sammartino, *Impossible Border,* 45.
[57] Needras' name came be found under multiple different spellings, including "Andreas Niedra" and "Andrievs Niedra." For this study, "Andreas Needra" will be used.
[58] Bundesarchiv, R 43 I/47, "Telegram der Gesandschaft Libau, 29, Mai 1919."

prepare for the withdrawal of Freikorps units back to Germany. While many Freikorps commanders, such as Major Bischoff and Captain Walter von Medem understood the rationale behind the AOK Nord's orders to return to the *Heimat*, they also voiced a desire to protect the Baltic region from any renewed attempts by the Russian army to re-assert control over the region. Self-interest and romantic visions of glory on the frontier prevailed, as Baltic Freikorps troops attempted to forge a new identity for themselves through physical violence in a contested region.[59] Therefore the Baltic Landeswehr moved to the Latvian-Estonian border on 29 May. The Iron Division followed them the next day. The rupture between the Freikorps movement and the Reich authorities had begun.

Bischoff's decision proved disastrous. Initially, the advance of the German and Baltic troops went perfectly according to plan. The Iron Division crossed the Düna River in two columns and marched into Friedrichstadt and Jakobstadt along the Latvian-Estonian border. Two further days of progress saw the Iron Division push past the border and make contact with the retreating Soviet 24th Guard Regiment, dealing the Russians yet another severe blow. Following this latest setback, the Soviets withdrew all their troops from the Baltics, effectively ceding the region to the German Freikorps and their Baltic allies. Their triumph was short lived. Relocating to the north along the Estonian border, the Freikorps commanders were not greeted as liberators by Estonians and northern Latvians. Instead, to the complete shock of the German political intelligence service, the pro-English Estonian government ordered the complete withdrawal of all German troops to a

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[59] Sammartino, *Impossible Border,* 48.

line south of Riga. In response, the Baltic Landeswehr and the Latvian Nordkorps under Colonel Semitan overthrew Karlis Ulmanis's government and sought to establish a new regime under pastor Andreas Needra, while the Iron Division completed their sweep of the Latvian countryside, rooting out remaining Bolshevik influences.[60]

The German Freikorps units quickly found themselves deeply embroiled in a new bloody civil war between supporters of the Needra and Ulmanis governments. While tensions had existed between the two factions before this point, the presence of the German Freikorps, and the availability of Entente arms, dramatically expanded the scope of the conflict in Latvia. However, after a few weeks of combat, a German-sympathetic American "Colonel Greene" managed to arrange an armistice on 10 June, temporarily halting the advance of the pro-Needra Freikorps. As negotiations continued on 13 June, General von der Goltz recognized the deteriorating support for the continued presence of German troops on Latvian soil and proposed that all "*reichsdeutsche Truppen*" be withdrawn to a position 30 km south of Riga, while half of the Freikorps troops were to return to the German border.[61] Motivated by external pressure, specifically the Allied Military Commission public declaration that the German Freikorps were the most serious threat to Latvian integrity, von der Goltz further conceded that Ulmanis should be allowed to establish a new Latvian government to settle internal issues.

In light of peaceful political negotiations and no significant threat of Soviet invasion, the rationale for the continued operation of a multinational Freikorps

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[60] Bischoff, *Letzte Front*, 66.
[61] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 150.

command evaporated quickly. Cooperation between Latvian and German units broke down as June wore on. The Latvian Brigade of the Baltic Landeswehr, under Colonel Janis Bolodis, declared neutrality and refused to respond to German orders, as scattered White Russian units under Prince A.P. Lieven deserted across the Russian border.[62] German troops also split between "*Reichsdeutsche*" troops, willing to obey Berlin's orders and keen to avoid risking further casualties in a foreign civil war, and dissident Freikorps units eager to continue to fight against any foe they broadly labeled "Bolshevik."[63]

Nonetheless, lingering like an unwanted house guest, the Freikorps command once again went into battle near Wenden on 20 June. The battle ended with a complete defeat of the deteriorating German and Baltic forces. Poor intelligence and confused cooperation between the Baltic Landeswehr and the Iron Division hampered the main German thrust against the city. Here, the shortcomings of the Freikorps system were laid bare. Accustomed to fighting in small isolated units, the Freikorps troops failed in a classic "*Großkampf*." Cooperation and coordination between the attack groups broke down, and individual units, accustomed to operating for months at a time as independent assault groups, leapt into the battle piecemeal and were quickly isolated and ambushed by the Latvian defenders. The vaunted Führer principle of the Freikorps movement compounded the issues plaguing von der Goltz's forces. Confronted with an unfamiliar form of

[62] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 134.
[63] Ibid., 151.

warfare, insecurities of Freikorps commanders frequently projected onto the troops, amplifying the unwilling attitude of the German forces.[64]

The German units fought one last rearguard battle against advancing Estonian troops at the end of June, but the campaign was lost. The official armistice in the Baltics was signed in Strasdenhof on 3 July 1919, between Needra, Ulmanis and the Allied Commission under British General Herbert Gough. Under the agreement, Ulmanis returned to his office as Minister President, and all "*reichsdeutsche*" formations were to be dissolved in the following weeks.

Instead, the German Freikorps operating in the Baltics split even further with the Reich authorities. As the deadline to disband approached in mid August, and "*reichsdeutsche*" troops began to withdraw to the German border, Freikorps units mutinied and refused to report for the voyage back to Germany. Freikorps troops now rebelled not against a political body with which they disagreed, but rather the very military institution that had incubated their movement from its first moment of conception. However, the reaction of the troops demonstrated that they greeted this decision with open arms. One after another, the Freikorps declared their refusal to obey orders and return to the German border. Freikorps Weikmann and the Battalion Rieckhoff were soon joined by Major Bischoff and the Iron Division on 14 August. "Far be it for me to carry out a counterrevolution across Germany," Bischoff told his troops. "I will only concern myself for you. Put yourself firmly behind me! I

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[64] Rüdiger von der Goltz, *Meine Sendung in Finnland und im Baltikum* (Leipzig: KF Koehler, 1920), 203; Bischoff, *Letzte Front*, 136; Edgar von Schmidt-Pauli, *Geschichte der Freikorps, 1918-1924: Nach amtlichen Quellen, Zeitberichten, Tagebüchern und persönlichen Mitteilungen hervorrangender Freikorpsführer* (Stuttgart: R Lutz, 1936), 114; Schulze, 152.

will carry the full responsibility, … I am taking your trust and will not betray it."[65] Rather than taking steps to secure provisions, living quarters, or more muntions, the Freikorps organized a spectacular demonstration of strength. On the night of 24 August the troops of the Iron Division were joined by members of all other dissident Freikorps units in an elaborate torchlight demonstration march through the city of Mitau. Members of the Pan-German League praised the Iron Division's command staff, noting "such enthusiasm has not existed since August 1914!"[66]

Von der Goltz's former command continued to split at the end of August. Officers and enlisted men from several "*reichsdeutsche*" formations deserted from their units. Most of the 1st Garde-Reserve-Division, the Freikorps von Plehwe, part of the Freikorps von Diebitsch, plus some *reichsdeutsche* soldiers attached to the Iron Division assembled themselves as the new Freiwilligen Schützenregiment Baltenland on 25 August. The same day the newly formed Deutsche Legion agreed with Bischoff's decision to refuse orders to return to Germany and remain in combat in the Baltics.[67] Indeed, the Deutsche Legion was not the only Freikorps unit that chose to follow Bischoff's lead. Serving as de facto commander of the rebel Freikorps, Bischoff opened negotiations with the army command in late August. Bischoff met with the Commanding General's representative, Oberst Albert Fleischer, and presented him with a written ultimatum, explaining the insubordination of the Iron Division over the broken promises of the government. On behalf of the estimated 40,000 men under his command, Bischoff demanded the

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[65] Bischoff, *Letzte Front*, 248.
[66] Ibid., 199.
[67] Schmidt-Pauli, *Freikorps*, 128-130.

retention of at least 30 percent of Freikorps officers, non-commissioned officers and troops in the newly created Reichswehr, the preservation of the current form of the Iron Division in the new army, placement of the division on a fixed post on the East Prussian-Lithuanian border as a Grenzschutz unit, land for settlement in Germany, and complete impunity from prosecution for mutiny and other crimes.[68]

As the relationship between the Reich authorities in Berlin and the Freikorps continued to sour, both sides began to issue propaganda statements defending their actions. The rebellious Baltic Freikorps distributed a fairly common declaration through Captain Walter von Medem, entitled "Declaration from the German Freikorps to the German Fatherland and all Cultural Peoples of the Earth" (*Aufruf der deutschen Freikorps an das deutsche Vaterland und an alle Kulturvölker der Erde)*. Wrapping himself in a banner of anti-Bolshevism, Medem argued that the Freikorps only wanted to "protect the borders of our Fatherland from the unspeakable torments, which the breakthrough of the Bolshevik hordes will bring to our Volk."[69] In response, Defense Minister Noske sent an order to the Baltic commanders, reminding them of their duty to the Reich government to maintain order, as well as a thinly veiled threat of the harsh repercussions dissident Freikorps troops could anticipate. "Eastern troops will have no assurances [to join] in the new Reichswehr," Noske declared on 5 September 1919 from Kolberg. "For all officers and men, absolute obedience towards Berlin is demanded. Insistence on rebellion will lead to

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[68] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 167.
[69] Ibid., 168.

a termination of the agreement, and involve a stoppage of the payment of wages and provisions, plus criminal punishment."[70]

Cut off from government funds and provisions, the German Freikorps commanders nonetheless marched on, firmly outside the grasp of Ebert's regime in Berlin. Details of the Freikorps actions in fall 1919 remain scattered; however, several units did group together around Dünaberg in October 1919 under the banner of the "Deutsch-Russische Freiwillige Westarmee." The total strength of the force was approximately 50-52,000 men, of which 40,000 were German, including the Freiwillige Korps Graf Keller, the II Detachement Oberst Weyroglitsch, and old rebels like the Iron Division and the Deutsche Legion.[71] Participation in the Russian Civil War on the side of the White Armies effectively ceded control over the fate of the German rebel Freikorps to forces outside of their control. It no longer mattered how well the Freikorps fought or how many rifles and battalions stood at the ready, now Entente policies concerning Russian intervention and their policy towards Germany would decide their future. The defeat of the White Armies under Alexander Kolchak, Anton Denikin, and Nikolai Yudenich squandered the best chance to defeat the Red Army, and British support for further Russian intervention quickly evaporated. So too, did Allied tolerance of German Freikorps romping through the Baltics. By 13 December, the Inter-Allied Baltic Commission reported that through protracted negotiations, the majority of the Deutsche Legion and the Iron Division had been convinced to return to East Prussia, largely because their severe shortage of funds, provisions and replacement military equipment. The

[70] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 170.
[71] Ibid., 185.

German Baltic adventure ended with the inglorious crossing of the German-Lithuanian border by half-starved troops of the Freikorps Roßbach on 16 December 1919.

The Freikorps escapades in the Baltics demonstrate the dangerous reality of the increased access various organizations had to the means of physical violence that developed after the First World War. With the destruction of the German Army's hegemony over the means of violence, semi or fully independent organizations had the ability to unleash the terrible killing power of industrial warfare to pursue their own political agendas, as was the case with the German troops in the Baltic Freikorps. Dissatisfied with Ebert's decision to honour the terms of the armistice agreement and withdraw German troops from the Baltics, the Freikorps effectively became their own independent state, drafting foreign and military policies as they went. But the Baltic Freikorps campaign was not an anomaly, but rather characteristic of important trends within the broader Freikorps movement. As Sammartino argues, many Freikorps soldiers were attracted by "the lack of order and rules in the Baltics," and others were lured by "the sense of freedom."[72] Independence, a degree of chaos, and a mixture of physical and psychological violence were present in the Freikorps movement, both in and outside of Germany's border. Although the first rupture between the government and the Freikorps system began far away from Berlin along the austere coast of the Baltic Sea, but it would not be long before tremors from this event would shake the very

[72] Sammartino, *Impossilbe Border,* 51.

foundation of the unstable military alliance that Ebert's political authority so precariously rested upon.

The Grenzschutz

Other than Maercker's thrust across central Germany in early 1919, no other campaign or deployment better characterized the full range of Freikorps experiences than their operations along the contested German-Polish border. Organized into a cluster of Grenzschutz commands, Freikorps units fought as members of a military network incorporating all manner of secondary units like the Einwohnerwehr, Selbstschutz, Sicherheitswehr, and Wachdienst. They periodically fought open pitched battles against Polish regular and irregular troops. They spent significant time garrisoning mixed German-Polish towns in hotly contested regions of Upper Silesia. They marched and paraded and participated in a loquacious propaganda war as a part of psychological violence that aimed a producing an atmosphere of violence that would intimidate and pacifty hostile civilian populations. Acting as the "vanguard of Germandom," to use Salomon's self-description, the Freikorps took their role very seriously indeed.

This analysis of the Freikorps' operations on the eastern German border throughout 1919 is less concerned with re-constructing each skirmish and raid in significant detail than it is with firmly demonstrating the fundamental centrality of the Freikorps' radical nationalist ideology to their operational patterns and existence. The *Freikorpsgeist*, discussed in Chapter Six, shaped and guided the

Freikorps actions in the face of a perceived existential Polish-Bolshevik threat, more so than in any other theatre of their operations.

Grenzschutz General Command Nord was particularly concerned with propaganda activities within its command region. As early as 17 February, Grenzschutz Nord, under the command of General Ferdinand von Quast and Major General Hans von Seeckt, began an aggressive campaign designed to simultaneously strengthen morale within German units and towns, and subvert Polish efforts in the same regions. Secret orders concerning propaganda operations bemoaned the "limited success" of German spies' attempts to infiltrate Polish organizations across the border, but were largely pleased with their own attempts to root out "Polish-Bolshevik agitators" from Freikorps garrisoned towns.[73] However reassured by "unlimited funds" provided by a network of civilian associations organized to combat the spread of Bolshevism like the League for the Protection of German Culture (*Liga zum Schutz der deutschen Kultur*), Quast and Seeckt launched an ambitious leaflet campaign, bombarding Polish towns and troops with anti-Bolshevik literature.[74] In the coming months, Seeckt urged local commanders to give anti-Polish propaganda activities "the full attention of all staffs" and that "fighting this agitations was of important and decisive meaning" to the German forces defending the border. Seeckt drew little distinction between the "Polish" and "Bolshevik menace," often using the terms interchangeably, lumping them together under one banner of dangerous "anti-German" forces.

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[73] BA-MA RH 69-207, "Oberkommando Grenzschutz Nord: Propaganda, 17, Februar, 1919."
[74] Ibid.

Divisional orders distributed in late March by the 46th Landwehr Division, attached to Grenzschutz Nord, continued to attach great importance to propaganda activities in the East, but also highlighted new roles for civil-military cooperation and the crucial civilian support network that aided the Freikorps operation along the Polish and Lithuanian borders. Pro-German Lithuanian civilians were directly employed by the 46th Landwehr to spread anti-Bolshevik propaganda across the demarcation line.[75] Working alongside the Lithuanian secret police, and coordinated by the Grenzschutz Nord command staff, Lithuanian agents distributed Russian and Lithuanian language newspapers and leaflets to assure civilians of the Germans' peaceful intentions.

Sensing the need to further coordinate the significant propaganda activities occurring within the command region of the Grenzschutz Nord, Seeckt wrote a comprehensive set of guidelines to regulate all anti-Bolshevik propaganda on 25 March.[76] The document serves as a crucial moment where Freikorps philosophy directly translated into military action. Seeckt was very clear concerning the nature of the new warfare confronting the Freikorps. "It is essential that there be an awareness for the high value of our German culture,"he stated as the goal of their anti-Bolshevik propaganda. "It must be raised and maintained permanently to

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[75] BA-MA RH 69-207, "46 Landwehr Division, 1 Nr 1835/19, 21 March 1919: über propaganda."

[76] For additional information on Hans von Seeckt's activities during this time, see Chapter IX. Also, see Heinz Hürten, *Die Anfänge der Ära Seeckt: Militär und Innenpolitik, 1920-1922* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1979); Hans von Seeckt, *Aus seinem Leben: 1918-1936* (Leipzig: V. Hase & Koehler, 1940); James Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992).

overcome the cultural weakening of Bolshevism."[77] Seeckt therefore ordered a series of political education seminars and discussion groups to be led by company commanders in order to insulate the rank-and-file troops against the "subversive" effects of Bolshevik propaganda. Outlining a dual military-political role for officers, Seeckt stressed that commanders avoid "horror propaganda" tactics from the world war, which detailed the terrible consequences of defeat, and instead postwar materials should focus on the power and benefits of German culture. Maintaining soldiers' morale and belief in the strength of the German military was essential in the spiritual battle against their enemies, Seeckt declared. "In the spiritual battle against this other *Weltanschauung*, the Bolsheviks must be beaten out," he wrote. "They cannot be defeated through police measures alone."[78]

Like the 46th Landwehr Division, Seeckt sought out civilian assistance. Civilian authorities were to handle the majority of the production and design of the "*Abwehrpropaganda*," extolling the virtues of German culture. Military authorities were only allowed to take over such activities if civilians demonstrated an inability to satisfactorily handle their assigned duties. Seeckt's view of morale went beyond keeping up spirits and providing leisure time. This program of political education aimed at building an army of believers; young men who would not break ranks and join their revolutionary worker brothers, but instead hold their position and use deadly force to defend a set of nationalist ideals like duty, order and discipline.

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[77] BA-MA RH 69-207, "Richtlinien für die antibolschewistische Propaganda." Oberkommando Grenzschutz Nord, 25 March 1919. Page 9.
[78] Ibid.

Seeckt advocated for the creation of a spiritually mobilized army, there is some evidence to suggest that the Freikorps units who flocked to the Grenzschutz commands, east, south and north, were motivated by the same ideological principles that senior level Freikorps and army commanders routinely promoted in their propaganda activities.[79] The soldiers of the Freiwilliges Jägerkorps Chappuis, stationed in Silesia, repeatedly rejected the presence of soldiers' council delegates in their assemblies and routinely sang patriotic battle hymns while marching on exercises.[80] The 1000 men of the Abschnitt Birnbaum, the majority returning to military service after a brief experience of postwar civilian life, took up their position in Posen in February 1919, specifically to "defend German Christianity from Polish-Bolshevik attacks."[81] The Sturmabteilung Roßbach marched into battle on 1 February 1919 near Culmsee against Polish irregular troops to stop alleged acts of Polish mobs destroying the local symbols of German political and legal authority in the city. Whether the so-called "Polish mob actually performed these acts, and regardless of the true motivations of the soldiers of the Sturmabteilung Roßbach, the choice to represent their actions in a frequently repeated Freikorps narrative of performing patriotic service to restore peace and order, demonstrates at least a partial acceptance of the philosophical principles of the movement.

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[79] Sammartino, *Impossible Border,* 47-51.
[80] BA-MA PH 26-3, "Grenzschutz Oberschlesien." Friedrich-Wilhelm Chappuis served in the cavalry during the First World War. An active Freikorps commander after the war, Chappuis was nonetheless accepted into the new Reichswehr in October 1919. During the Second World War, Chappuis commanded the 15th and 16th Infantry Divisions. On 15 March 1941, Chappuis was promoted as commanding general of XXXVIII Army Corps. After the dissolution of his battlefield command in May 1942, Chappuis committed suicide on 27 August 1942.
[81] BA-MA PH 26-33, "Grenzschutz Posen West-Abschnitt Birnbaum 1919."

Grenzschutzabschnitt Kattowitz, active in Upper Silesia, similarly reported patriotic nationalist displays and "an awareness of their importance to free Germans."[82] Renamed the Upper Silesian Freikorps (*Oberschlesische Freiwilligen-Korps* or OFK), the former members of the Grenzschutzabschnitt Kattowitz were joined by a host of former imperial reserve officers and non-commissioned officers as they expanded to occupy and garrison numerous smaller villages in the Silesian countryside, demonstrating a passionate commitment by citizen soldiers to continue waging combat for German interests. Of the thirty-two officers who staffed the three battalions of the OFK on 10 January 1919, nineteen were reserve officers, three were retired officers, and only ten, less than a third of the OFK commanding officers, were active duty lieutenants and captains.[83] These were men with civilian lives and professions, waiting to be resumed, but instead they chose to support border units working to accomplish "the purely military task of the strengthening of *Deutschtum*."[84]

Freikorps Grenzschutz units tended to be smaller than the powerful formations operating within Germany's borders, although they were more numerous. Particularly in Upper Silesia where the regular appearance of Freikorps troops marching across the countryside to visit small villages played an important role in maintaining civilians' morale and faith in German authorities to preserve law and order, Freikorps units multiplied rapidly and generally remained localized to a small geographic region, rarely venturing more than a dozen miles from their home

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[82] BA-MA PH 26-22, "Grenzschutzabschnitt Kattowitz."
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

garrison. Although they were only ever loosely tied to the central Reich authorities in Berlin, Freikorps troops, with their displays of pageantry and lethal violence, were a stark symbol of *German* strength along a border that remained uncertain for many months following the November 1918 armistice.

Unlike other Freikorps operations that often only lasted a few weeks or months, the Grenzschutz units existed in an almost perpetual state of tension and experienced frequent low intensity combat from their creation in late 1918 to their eventual tumultuous dissolution in late 1919 and early 1920.[85] Although casualties were generally light, deadly clashes did occur, providing both sides with numerous martyrs to avenge. With such a long border, and a proliferation of militant groups on both sides, combat occurred routinely, although rarely in the same region for a sustained period of time. Some units, like the Grenzschutz Batterie Beutler, spent more time using Polish farm houses for artillery practice than engaging in actual combat.[86] Generally, Grenzschutz units existed as a deterrent against Polish raiders and bandits seeking to steal cattle and whatever food they could easily find. Large-scale military actions were rare and usually brief. However, when compared to peacetime, the Grenzschutz zone represented a starkly militarized world with soldiers parading through streets, machine-guns posts protecting vital

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[85] Official orders from government authorities were generally met with indifference from Grenzschutz commanders in late 1919. However, the government developed an effective tactic to dissolve the Baltic Freikorps that proved equally effective with Grenzschutz units. Once the steady supply of weapons, ammunition, provisions, and money was cut off, the majority of the Freikorps soldiers were forced to leave their squads. Only the most radical soldiers remained after the end of government resources occurred. Schulze, 203.

[86] "Die Entstehung einer Grenzschutzbatterie von Major a.D. Karl Beutler," in Salomon ed., *Freikorpskämpfer*, 232-34.

administration offices, and artillery batteries overlooking strategic crossroads. Judged by the destruction of Maercker's drive across central Germany or the bloody invasion of Munich, the Grenzschutz was a relatively quiet combat zone with few major battles, albeit with a persistent threat of danger.

Otherwise, the Grenzschutz operations followed patterns similar to much of what has already been characterized in this chapter. The Freikorps units established a remarkably effective improvised command structure through the Grenzschutz command posts that were a clear reproduction of the Imperial army's hierarchy. Although the *freiwillige* formations in the Grenzschutz retained their independent nature and often disobeyed or ignored orders, they still remained more reliable than the mutinous Baltic troops. Violent and prone to overwhelming displays of firepower as a propaganda tactic, Grenzschutz Freikorps units nonetheless generally fulfilled their political and military tasks along the German-Polish border. Other than the clear failure to defend the province of Posen, the Freikorps-Reichswehr hybrid military institution remained, if not a potent symbol of German strength, at least an adequate one in contested border regions. As discussed in Part One, the connection between political authority and physical strength was of the utmost importance after the First World War. The ability of Reich authorities to demonstrate any military power along their eastern border was an important message to the pro-German civilians living in contested territories.

Conclusion

Historian Hagen Schulze has argued that "every Freikorps built a small state within a state for themselves." Once a popular term to describe the Reichswehr's position within the Weimar Republic, the "state within a state" thesis has been discredited as a meaningful description of the military's relationship with the new republican government in Berlin. This thesis must also be thoroughly rejected for the Freikorps system. It contends that there was a significant gulf between the republican government and the Freikorps movement which is not borne out by the evidence. As demonstrated previously, the government and the OHL, along with the Reich and Prussian War Ministries actively supported the creation and proliferation of the Freikorps in early 1919. The bonds between the old military structure and the new Freikorps system ran to the very core of both institutions, exemplified by the campaign against the council movement and the wholesale adoption of many large and powerful Freikorps units into the new Provisional Reichswehr in the summer of 1919. As will be discussed in Chapter IX, the Provisional Reichswehr and the Freikorps were intricately fused together until Hans von Seeckt's reformation of the army following the events of the Kapp Putsch in early 1920.

The "state within a state" argument also does not accurately reflect the operation and objectives of the highly diversified Freikorps movement. While certainly some Freikorps soldiers saw themselves as a "vanguard in a forgotten land," charging off to pursue their own agendas, others fought to re-establish "*Ruhe und Ordnung"* within the Reich, including strengthening the authority of the government in Berlin. The "state within a state" thesis attempts to impose a

homogeneous view on the Freikorps, obscuring the diversity within the movement. Little understanding and insight is gained from this admittedly pithy phrase. Instead, the Freikorps must be viewed as a wider social, cultural, political, and of course military movement supported by a broad section of German society fighting for similarly diverse aims, which in some cases led to support for increased central authority and in others move towards greater independence. The "state within a state" argument ignores the practical realities of military power in the Weimar Republic before 1920; to opponents of Friedrich Ebert's government in Berlin, the Freikorps clearly represented the violent authority of the state.

When examining the nature of Freikorps operations, the independent and quarrelsome nature of the Freikorps movement cannot be overlooked. Freikorps commanders were notorious for ignoring orders they did not like, and marching in pursuit of their own objectives. Rules and laws were frequently broken or 're-interpreted' to justify all manner of actions against their chosen enemies. Freikorps commanders often proclaimed that they had no political agenda, yet in numerous examples they did not hesitate to declare a "military dictatorship" when they felt that civilian authorities lacked sufficient authority to implement measures to ensure the preservation of *Ordnung*. However, the majority of the Freikorps movement did not break with the government before March 1920. Instead, Ebert and the army supreme command, under international pressure, ordered the Freikorps to disband in the wake of the Kapp Putsch. Thus, the Freikorps came to occupy a void state or gap state between full legal acceptance by the Weimar Republic and outright independence from political and military authorities in Berlin.

Ultimately, the Freikorps system was fundamentally rooted in violence, even though the actual number of casualties it inflicted was minimal compared to the devastation of the First World War, or even the Spanish flu epidemic. Instead the Freikorps movement sought to create an atmosphere where the threat of violence would be felt wherever Freikorps troops were stationed. Propaganda, demonstration marches, and visible reminders of the military power available to the Freikorps were crucial to their attempt to create a mood where potential physical destruction could occur at any moment. Freikorps operations used both violence and the threat of violence as important tools in a propaganda war to influence the political affairs of the country after the war. Although relatively small in number compared to the bloated German Army of the First World War, and considering the relatively few engagements and skirmishes in which they actually deployed physical violence, Freikorps units unleashed an aggressive barrage of military hardware when called upon to do so. As historians such as Michael Geyer and James Diehl have noted, the Freikorps were not a mass-based movement with millions of troops swelling their ranks.[87] Instead, numbering around half a million or more committed followers, the Freikorps movement utilized its one advantage to magnify its cultural, political and military significance: carefully orchestrated displays of physical and psychological violence. The Freikorps simply did not have the strength and size to physically pacify the entire German working class. Instead, by seeking to create an atmosphere of potential violence, the Freikorps attempted to intimidate potential

[87] Michael Geyer, "People's War: The German Debate About a *Levée en* masse in October 1918," in *The People in Arms: Military Myth and National Mobilization Since the French Revolution,* Daniel Moran and Arthur Waldron eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 142; James Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics*, 30.

hostile civilians before they took up arms against them. Fear and intimidation were the greatest weapons that the Freikorps movement had in their arsenal.

CHAPTER VIII – THE "OTHER" FREIKORPS

On 30 May, the exhausted commander of the Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps, General Ludwig Maercker, was finally able to report to government officials in Berlin that the revolutionary council movement in Leipzig had fallen and the civilian populace had been disarmed. Nearly 3,000 rifles, 50 heavy and 60 light machine-guns, 8 mortars, 24 grenade launchers, and 6 tank guns were seized from private buildings and residences.[1] Addressing a sizeable gathering of the local inhabitants at the Wandelhalle at the university, Maercker mused on the nature of the Bürgerkrieg, and the demands it placed on his Freikorps soldiers.

> Almost every time we march into a city I had to consider the questions: Was our intervention necessary? Where does the German populace stand? Where is the government-friendly working class? Where were our high school students, where were our demobilized Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers, and Soldiers?[2]

Maercker understood that while the regular Freikorps troops in the Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps (FLK), the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps (GKSK), or the Ehrhardt Brigade could and usually did rout the troops of the revolutionary movement, holding cities and towns, and ensuring the preservation of peace, order and government authority was a task for which the Freikorps were ill-suited. "We need a firm consolidation of all those who support the government," Maercker lectured the assembled Leipzigers. "The *freiwilligen* troops are not sufficient for this time to reestablish *Ordnung*. We also require [a unit], in the short term, for peace and domestic stabilization." It was important to differentiate between the combat

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[1] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer zur Reichswehr: Eine Beitrag zur Geschichte der Deutschen Revolution*, (Leipzig: K.F. Koehler, 1921), 256.
[2] Ibid., 257.

troops and security forces organized within the Freikorps system, Maercker stressed. "We Freikorps are the Storm Troops of the government, which should only act as the focal point of the battle," he declared. "Therefore the government must now decree the creation of Einwohnerwehren, and I stand today before you in order to urge you, in this time of the deepest emergency of our Heimat, to do your patriotic duty (*vaterländischen Pflicht*) to contribute in the battle against Terror and Anarchy."[3]

What Maercker recognized, and this chapter will examine, was the vital need for a wide variety of militant support organizations, elaborately sprawling across Germany to aid Freikorps combat operations, deter resurgent revolutionary activities, and most importantly, serve as a highly visible propaganda symbol of the power, ubiquity, and potential violence of the Freikorps movement. As the previous three chapters have focused primarily on the Freikorps proper, the major combat forces most commonly referenced when one invokes the term "Freikorps," this analysis will explore the "movement" portion of the Freikorps movement. The major combat units, like the FLK, GKSK, or the Freikorps von Hülsen, rarely operated alone. Instead, they relied on a diffused network of sympathetic civilians, playing crucial support roles to aid the field campaigns of the Freikorps movement. The development and dissolution of this network had significant implications for the eventual break between the Freikorps movement and the destruction of the entire Freikorps military system.

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[3] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 258.

Despite the close and inextricable relationship between the Freikorps and their support network of Einwohnerwehren, Zeitfreiwilligenkorps, Technische Nothilfe, Sicherheitswehr, and Selbstschutz units, historians have generally avoided a holistic analysis, instead examining each organization independently from the wider movement. Historian Hagen Schulze divides the Freikorps into different groups based on their tasks: support of the government, preservation of "Peace and Order" (*Aufrechterhaltung von Ruhe und Ordnung*) domestically, and defense of the threatened Reich borders from foreign invasion. Schulze relegates all other groups, including the Einwohnerwehren, Selbstschutz units, Zeitfreiwilligenformationen, and Frontkämpferverbände, to merely the role of "Freikorps reserve troops." This segregation is flawed in several ways. First, it assumes that the Freikorps only fought for one specific objective, instead of multiple causes in succession or even concurrently. Second, by marginalizing the non-Freikorps units, Schulze only focuses on the physical violence of the formations, ignoring the important role these units played in creating an atmosphere of psychological violence throughout German society. While there were often clearly defined combat and operational roles for Einwohnerwehren and other units, usually in support positions or patrol roles, in the broader social and spiritual battle against the forces of *Unordnung*, close cooperation and partnership between all of these types of formations superseded the divisions imposed through their military roles.

These units did not exist in an isolated military sphere. Instead the lines between the civilian public sphere and the military were very fluid during the Bürgerkrieg. Drawing out the cooperation and parallels between all of these units

emphasizes their broader social, political, and even spiritual roles. To divide the Freikorps from the Einwohnerwehren or Volkswehr only highlights the purely military roles these units performed from 1918 to 1923. However, the bulk of the literary record left behind by these formations challenges such a narrow interpretation of their role in the Bürgerkrieg and the Freikorps movement as a whole. Ernst von Salomon, Ludwig Maercker, Bernhard von Hülsen, Karl von Hoefer, Hermann Ehrhardt and many other Freikorps officers and soldiers consistently stated that their war was not merely fought with rifles, hand grenades and machine guns, but rather, most importantly "with spiritual weapons." Propaganda leaflets, demonstration marches, local defensive guard patrols, uniforms, and civilian support brigades were all a part of a broader social mobilization that these men felt was crucial to effectively combatting threats to Germandom, specifically Bolshevism, Polish agitation, and the potentially subversive effects of the Entente's peace treaty. While the Freikorps manned the front line trenches in the East, or stormed city after city to crush the council movement, the "other Freikorps" like the Selbstschutz, Wachtregimenten and Einwohnerwehren served as the storm troopers of the social and spiritual battlefield.

Einwohnerwehren

Responding to reports of unrest in rural regions directly following the signing of the armistice agreement, the Ministry of the Interior issued a decree to provincial councils and municipal governments on 15 November 1918 sanctioning the creation

of *Bürgerwehren*.[4] The first of what would become commonly known as Einwohnerwehren (alternatively translated as 'Citizens' Militia,' and 'Civil Guards'), the Bürgerwehr (usually translated as 'Citizens' Guard') was created to preserve public order and security (*Ordnung und Sicherheit*) from the potentially harmful effects of demobilizing soldiers plundering the German countryside on their return to the *Heimat*. Although their intended targets would change drastically in the following months, the initial local character would remain intact for the duration of the Einwohnerwehren's existence.

As the council movement organized and spread across German towns and army barracks, the Bürgerwehr was hopelessly overmatched by the vast number of demobilizing Great War veterans, so much so that it infrequently mustered and even more rarely deployed in any significant fashion except to break up bar brawls and prevent looting of farm houses.[5] This changed dramatically in the wake of the Spartacus Uprising in the capital in January 1919. Now faced with a direct challenge from the Independent Socialists (USPD) and the Spartacus League, Friedrich Ebert's government chose to utilize all means at their disposal to consolidate their authority nationally, regionally and in small towns and villages throughout Germany. Therefore, on 20 January 1919 Defense Minister Gustav Noske ordered the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps (GKSK) to re-organize Bürgerwehr units in their

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[4] Erwin Könnemann, *Einwohnerwehren und Zeitfreiwilligenverbände: Ihre Funktion beim Aufbau eines neuen imperialistischen Militärsystem (November 1918 bis 1920*) (Berlin: Deutscher Militärverlag, 1971), Appendix – Document 1 – Erlaß des Ministeriums des Innern an die Landräte und Oberbürgermeister der Stadtkreise, Bürgerwehren einzurichten, Berlin, 15 November 1918.

[5] For more information on the ineffectiveness of Germany's security forces after the revolution, see, Scott Stephenson, *The Final Battle: Soldiers of the Western Front and the German Revolution of 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

operational region as Einwohnerwehren, and to prepare these units for deployment guarding weapons depots and erecting check points on major roads from the Berlin suburbs into the capital.[6] As the major Freikorps combat troops streamed into Berlin, forcefully expelling the Spartacus troops from the government quarter in bloody skirmishes, armed units of German civilians donned army uniforms, picked up their assigned rifles and carbines and exercised extraordinary powers granted to them by Noske's declaration of a state of siege in and around the capital.[7] Now given a clearly defined political target, units of civilian soldiers entered the Bürgerkrieg battlefield for the first time.

While the first use of the Einwohnerwehren in the early civil war against the council movement stemmed from Noske's order to the GKSK in January 1919 for the Berlin operation, their deployment quickly expanded as the Freikorps marched across Germany in the winter and spring of 1919.[8] Freikorps units began establishing Einwohnerwehren in their operational regions following the cessation of major combat activities. Loosely coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior, Einwohnerwehr recruitment and deployment ballooned in March 1919. The GKSK officially requested permission from Chancellor Philipp Scheidemann to "collect all non-Spartacus inhabitants" in a local Einwohnerwehr for the preservation of "*Ruhe*

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[6] Könnemann, Appendix – Document 2 – Anweisung Noskes an das Gardekavallerie-Schützenkorps, listenmäßige Einwohnerwehren aufzustellen, Berlin, 20 January 1919.
[7] Noske, *Kiel bis Kapp*, 68-70.
[8] Ibid., 71.

und Ordnung" on 3 March 1919.[9] On 18 March, Freikorps units operating in East Prussia followed the GKSK's example and established new guidelines for the organization of a "Heimatdienst" in the region of I Army Corps stationed in Königsberg. As usual, the eastern Freikorps explicitly stated the purpose of the new Einwohnerwehren. "The aims of the East Prussian Heimatdienst" were fourfold, stated the regulations. First they were to serve as a regional administration network for the Freikorps units in the province. Second, the Central Committee for the Heimatdienst ordered the new formations to "combat the foreign and domestic Bolshevism *with spiritual weapons* (*mit geistigen Waffen*)." Third, the Heimatdienst would offer "clarification concerning the danger of Bolshevism and Spartacus thought through the spread of enlightening publications (*Aufklärungsschriften*)" in order to "prevent the fragmentation of East Prussia with all possible means." Finally, and only if absolutely necessary, the Heimatdienst could be called upon to "fight Bolshevism and the spread of violent Spartacus-ism through the use of arms."[10] "The Heimatwehr," the authors concluded, "is the *Schutztruppe* of the region."

Although created with the blessing of I Army Corps, the structure of the East Prussian Heimatdienst and the composition of its Central Committee belied its nature as an expression of local political and military authority. A power sharing agreement was established ensuring that the majority of politically and socially reliable stakeholders would be represented to include the local municipal

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[9] Könnemann, Appendix – Document 5 – Aufforderung des Reichskanzlers Scheidemann an die Beamten zum Eintritt in die Einwohnerwehren, Weimar, 3 März 1919.

[10] Könnemann, Appendix – Document 6 – Richtlinien für die Organisation des ostpreußischen Heimatdienstes und der Heimatwehren der Kreise im Bereich des I. Armeekorps Königsberg, 18. März 1919.

government; members of the East Prussian Heimatdienst itself; the two most prominent civilian groups, the League for the Protection of German Culture (*Liga zum Schutze der deutschen Kultur*), and the Association for the Combatting of Bolshevism (*Vereinigung zur Bekämpfung des Bolschewismus*); as well as a local "Economic Political Clarification Service" operating under the simple title, "Aufklärungsdienst."[11] United together as the Organization for the Protection of East Prussia (*Organisation zum Schutze Ostpreußens*), this central committee represented the main conduit for all civil-military, or more accurately civilian-Freikorps, cooperation in East Prussia. Military and civilian leaders worked together to balance political, economic, social, and ideological concerns to effectively coordinate their combined response to the perceived threat of Bolshevism and Polish agitation.

The organization of a coordinated military-civilian network in I Army Corps' region in Königsberg did not remain an isolated event by any means. The initial success of Einwohnerwehren created by the GKSK and the FLK encouraged the Prussian government to authorize the creation of these units throughout its territory on 15 April 1919. Ten days later the Reichswehr Ministry issued a similar decree to all mayors and municipal governments through the Reich, promoting the creation of Einwohnerwehr units to stiffen local military resistance. Noske stressed that the creation of the Einwohnerwehr was "an affair of the local civilian authorities," and was to be coordinated by a civilian organization council based on the Königsberg model. Recruiting young men over the age of 20 but with some field campaign experience from the Great War, the Einwohnerwehr was closely

[11] Könnemann, Appendix, - Document 6.

connected to the local Reichswehr command posts in order to protect towns and villages against "increasing insecurity in the cities and countryside, those who seek the growth of criminality, armed rebellion, plundering and theft by gangs."[12] These twin decrees, establishing Einwohnerwehren first in Prussia, and then later throughout the Reich, firmly enshrined the local character of these units. They were created in stark contrast to the larger, more professional, and generally all-military Freikorps units, like the GKSK, the FLK, and Freikorps von Aulock, who operated on a national and international stage. The Einwohnerwehr did not fight for Bavaria, Württemberg, or all of Saxony, but instead garrisoned small villages off in the countryside and stood watch over local symbols of *Ordnung*, like grain silos and magistrate offices.[13] Additionally, they stood as one of the clearest examples of the broader militant culture that surrounded and supported the combat formations of the Freikorps movement. Generally only active *after* the cessation of combat operations, the Einwohnerwehr were a stark sign of the potential violence that the Freikorps system could unleash if called upon to do so. These civilians, with their ill-fitting Reichswehr uniforms, recycled steel helmets from the war and odd assortment of rifles and pistols were not the ultimate arbiters of violence in the young Republic, but they stood as a lingering reminder of those who were.

Approval from the central Reich authorities initiated a dramatic expansion of the Einwohnerwehr in the summer of 1919. By May 1919, state officials in Saxony

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[12] Könnemann, Appendix – Document 7. "Rundschreiben des Ministers des Innern an sämtliche Oberpräsidenten und Regierungspräsidenten über die rasche Aufstellung von Einwohnerwehren auf dem Lande, Berlin, 18. März 1919."
[13] Einwohnerwehr tasks such as this are mentioned throughout Maercker's memoir of the FLK's field campaign across central Germany.

informed the new Central Command Post for Einwohnerwehr, operating in connection with both the Reichswehr Ministry and the Ministry of the Interior, that they would be establishing various Einwohnerwehr throughout their province, beginning with a force of some 30,000 men created by Captain Max Jüttner on loan from the FLK.[14] The new units were created primarily as a "self-defense" formation, argued a Saxon civilian and military leader. "The unit will take over the *Selbstschutz* (Self-Defense) of the community," read the stated goals of the Saxon Einwohnerwehr.[15] Elaborating on the deployment of the Einwohnerwehr, the guidelines went on:

> They are the *Selbsthilfe,* fighting against the significant food scarcity, increasing insecurity in the cities and countryside, standing against the increasing criminality of threats to life and property, armed revolts, plundering and thieving bands. … The utilization [of the Einwohnerwehr] should be purely defensive. The Einwohnerwehr are created to support the combat government troops and take over after battles to secure the cleansed nest of Spartacus supporters, in order to free up the government troops for other tasks.[16]

The Saxons did not act alone. By February 1920, the Reich Central Command Post for Einwohnerwehren reported that 16 provinces had approved the creation of Einwohnerwehren and had successfully assembled units.[17]

Although local troops created only for local deployment, Einwohnerwehr were established throughout Germany. Prussia, Baden, Bavaria, Braunschweig, Mecklenburg, Saxony, Württemberg, Hamburg, Lübeck, Bremen, and numerous

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[14] Könnemann, Appendix – Document 13. "Schreiben des Reichswehrministeriums, Zentralbefehlsstelle für Einwohnerwehren, an den Oberpräsidenten der Provinz Sachsen, über die Bildung von Einwohnerwehren in Naumberg, Berlin, 8. Mai 1919."
[15] BA-MA RH 69-300, "Einwohnerwehren im Freistaat Sachsen*."* 19 June 1919.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Könnemann, Appendix – Document 23. " Rundschreiben der Reichszentrale für Einwohnerwehren, Nr 11/Febr. 1920, über die Entwicklung und Stärke der Einwohnerwehren."

other smaller territories published specific laws and regulations for Einwohnerwehr in their regions. The Reich Central also noted that most of these Einwohnerwehr chose to adopt the Königsberg, or Prussian, model as it was commonly designated. Furthermore, the report included highly accurate figures for the strength and armament of Einwohnerwehr across Germany, as well as for units created in the contested eastern border regions.

I. Einwohnerwehr Units in Prussian Territories[18]

Prussia	Member Numbers	Weapon Numbers (Carbines and Rifles)
Brandenburg	63, 556	45, 536
Hannover	88, 158	77, 252
Hessen-Nassau	24, 794	20, 076
East Prussia	35, 611	32, 646
Pomerania	24, 754	18, 825
Posen	6, 622	4, 647
Rhineland	11, 223	8, 350
Saxony	40, 726	36, 627
Silesia	94, 726	82, 811
Schleswig-Holstein	7, 747	7, 734
Westphalia	118, 749	46, 726
West Prussia	10, 106	6, 101

II. Einwohnerwehr Units in Non-Prussian Territories[19]

Non-Prussian Provinces	Member Numbers	Weapon Numbers (Carbines and Rifles)
Anhalt	2, 015	1, 948
Baden	11, 167	7, 654
Bavaria	200,000	121, 452
Braunschweig	13, 030	13, 020
Hessen	6, 960	4 704
Mecklenburg	5, 107	5, 088
Oldenburg	23, 874	13, 868
Saxony	33, 896	23, 765
Saxony-Altenburg	2, 900	2, 807

[18] Könnemann, Appendix – Document 23. " Rundschreiben der Reichszentrale für Einwohnerwehren, Nr 11/Febr. 1920, über die Entwicklung und Stärke der Einwohnerwehren."
[19] Ibid.

Saxony-Coburg	1, 947	1, 805
Saxony-Weimar	5, 000	4, 585
Württemberg	30, 518	30, 518
Hamburg	38, 700	38. 670
Lübeck	3, 888	3, 700
Bremen	4, 838	4, 838
Lippe	500	500

Total Sums:		
Prussia	526, 164	387, 331
Non-Prussia	384, 340	278, 922

III. Einwohnerwehr in German Border Regions[20]

Coordinating Regions	**Member Numbers**	**Weapons Numbers (Carbines and Rifles)**
East Prussia	19, 949	19, 805
Silesia	5, 314	3, 529
Schleswig-Holstein	2, 092	1, 620
West Prussia	7, 590	5, 306

Roughly one million men served in the Einwohnerwehren. Four times the size of the Provisional Reichswehr, and ten times the strength of the reformed Reichswehr under Hans von Seeckt after the March 1920 Kapp Putsch, the Einwohnerwehren saturated the German political and military landscape during the Bürgerkrieg.

The size of the Einwohnerwehr required significant Reichswehr cooperation to properly arm and provision these troops. Based on the September 1919 Prussian regulations for Einwohnerwehr, each member was to be equipped with a rifle, pistol, a bayonet or baton, steel helmet, Reichswehr uniform, backpack, canteen, two medical packs, and an armband identifying the individual as a member of the

[20] Könnemann, Appendix – Document 23. " Rundschreiben der Reichszentrale für Einwohnerwehren, Nr 11/Febr. 1920, über die Entwicklung und Stärke der Einwohnerwehren."

Einwohnerwehr. Additionally, one machine gun was assigned for every 500 members, while more would be provided when buildings were being occupied. Generally, it fell to the local army corps to provide weapons and ammunition to the Einwohnerwehr in their particular sector; however, often these were distributed through Freikorps formations.[21] Lightly armed compared to the firepower of the Freikorps, the Einwohnerwehr were equipped for patrols and occupation duty rather than open combat or urban warfare.

Although the founding documents of the Einwohnerwehr clearly stated the anti-Bolshevik intentions of the units, by late summer 1919,new guidelines seeking to standardize the creation and organization of the civil-military hybrid formations chose to stress the "*unpolitisch*" character of the Einwohnerwehr. [22] The Central Command Post for Einwohnerwehren added the new "apolitical" status to the units' manifesto by the end of June 1919, choosing to camouflage their political aims with nationalist rhetoric like so many Freikorps units. Calling for patriotic men to help cleanse "the most infested cites," the Central Command Post urged participation in the Einwohnerwehr to aid in "the defense of home and hearth (*Haus und Herd*) for women and children (*Weib und Kind*)."[23] Speaking to an Einwohnerwehr unit created by the FLK in Leipzig in May 1919, General Maercker informed them that it

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[21] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 357.
[22] BA-MA RH 69-67. "Reichswehr Brigade 12. Landesschutz Sachsen – Zentralstelle für Einwohnerwehren. 16.6.1919." This version of the guidelines for the creation of Einwohnerwehren included the *unpolitisch* designation, while a similar document also issued by the Zentralstelle für Einwohnerwehren from 27 May 1919 did not.
[23] Könnemann, Appendix – Document 23.

was their "patriotic duty" to stand together with the Freikorps to "fight back to the last man" against "terror and anarchy."[24]

However, despite official approval and significant size, the Einwohnerwehr stood at the zenith of their strength and influence in February 1920. Alarmed by the expansion of the militant civilian organization, and fearing a recreation of the Prussian reservist training system employed during the Napoleonic occupation, the Entente powers issued a memorandum to the German government in April demanding the dissolution of the Einwohnerwehr. Saxon, Bavarian and Prussian ministers were particularly alarmed by the potential disbandment and urged the retention of the units in some new disguised form. Under State Secretary Edgar Haniel believed that the majority of the most military capable units could be absorbed within the Sicherheitspolizei, while the rest could be re-designated as "Ortsschutz" and "Flurschutz" (Town Guards and Field Guards, respectively).[25] All organization and administrational tasks previously performed by the Reich Central Command Post for Einwohnerwehren would be taken over by the Ministry of the Interior, preserving the civilian nature of the units. Haniel was adamant however, that German towns and villages be defended from the potential devastation of Bolshevik agitation. "One must attempt to convince the Entente," he firmly stated in

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[24] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 258.
[25] The Sicherheitspolizei, or Security Police, was created with assistance from the Ministry of the Interior and the Reichswehr Ministry as a militarized police force, specifically for use during times of riots or strikes. Könnemann, Appendix – Document 26. "Auszug aus dem Bericht über die Besprechung der Reichsregierung mit den Ländervertretern über die Auflösung der Einwohnerwehren am 12. April 1920 in Berlin, Braunschweig, den 13. April 1920."

April 1920, "that we are not going to hand over our country for plundering and robbery through the dissolution of the Einwohnerwehren."[26]

In the end, the German government had no choice but to acquiesce to the Entente's demands. As a part of a wider move against the Freikorps movement, the Einwohnerwehren were dissolved in May 1920. However, both the civilian authorities who officially supported the units and the average German citizens who volunteered for the old Einwohnerwehr refused to be so easily dismissed. Within the Ministry of the Interior, a processing office was established to re-organize the former Einwohnerwehren into "*Orts und Flurschutz*" on 16 May 1920. Officially the Orts und Flurschutz was established as an "independent, voluntary, *unpolitisch* creation of Self Defense of the local inhabitants against theft, plundering and attack for the maintenance of public *Sicherheit und Ordnung*."[27] Try as the Entente might, the segment of German society that believed in militant solutions to the social, political and economic problems facing Germany would not be so easily demobilized.

However, the new Orts und Flurschutz was a shadow of the former strength of the Einwohnerwehr. Fewer members reported for the new units and those who did often lacked the requisite military experience for recruitment. In an attempt to dampen Entente fears that the new units were in reality a disguised Reichswehr training reserve, Reich officials prohibited any central administration of the Orts

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[26] Könnemann, Appendix – Document 26.
[27] Könnemann, Appendix – Document 30. "Abwicklungsamt für Einwohnerwehren, Ministerium des Innern, Abteilung IIh Or, über die Reorganisation der Einwohnerwehren in Preußen und die Bildung eines >>Orts- und Flurschutzes<<, Berlin, 16. Mai 1920."

und Flurschutz, as well as any connection between the Reichswehr and the Sicherheitspolizei. Cut off from their supply of weapons, ammunition and training, the Orts und Flurschutz quickly withered. Nor could the Freikorps movement offer much support for the new organization. The involvement of Freikorps troops in the Kapp Putsch, which will be covered in significant detail in the following chapter, caused a deep rupture in their relationship within the Ebert government. No longer supplied with steady recruits and munitions by the government or the Reichswehr, the Freikorps had little support to offer their institutional offspring.

Despite the inglorious end of the Einwohnerwehr, it nonetheless played a vital role in the Freikorps movement's attempt to use psychological violence to create an atmosphere of violence to intimidate and control their political and military opponents. It was an expression of the significant segment of militarized civilians who were willing to volunteer for organizations aiming to deploy violence to defend a set of nationalist principles against the perceived threat of a Bolshevik revolution. The Einwohnerwehren highlight the deep social divisions that produced so much friction and bloodshed after the outbreak of the November revolution. In the Bürgerkrieg era it was not just small bands of radical Freikorps units fighting tiny groups of revolutionary Red Army troops, but rather a wider militarized breach of prewar social divisions, of which the almost one million men marching in the Einwohnerwehren were but one example.

Volkswehr

While the Einwohnerwehr was clearly a product of Freikorps and Reichswehr initiatives, and authorized by civilian ministers in the Reich government, other

organizations had more tumultuous paths in the early republic. The concept and manifestation of the Volkswehr (most commonly translated as "People's Militia") went through several reincarnations as various organizations and institutions attempted to assert primacy over its direction in the early days of the revolution. Officially created by the Law for the Formation of a Volunteer Volkswehr on 12 December 1918, and signed into existence by Friedrich Ebert and Hugo Haase, the Volkswehr was initially given tasks very similar to the Einwohnerwehr, "the preservation of public Order and Security."[28] Existing solely under the control of the Council of People's Representatives, the first expression of the Volkswehr was designed as a counterweight to the potentially overwhelming numbers of the organized working class, which Ebert and Scheidemann feared could be used against the fledgling republican government in the ongoing disputes with the USPD and Spartacus League.

Ebert's control over the Volkswehr was short-lived, however. As was discussed in Part I, the First Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils met in Berlin from 16 to 20 December 1918 and proceeded to ratify the Seven Hamburg Points, which included a sweeping reform of the military. Under the Seven Hamburg Points, the Volkswehr had the potential to replace the old Hohenzollern military hierarchy, establishing a new revolutionary body along similar lines as the Soviet Red Army, although it never reached its full potential. By the start of February the Volkswehr established on the basis of the law from 12 December, only numbered

[28] Reichsgesetzblatt, *1918*, Nr 180, 12 December 1918.

approximately 600 men and its political reliability was rated as low.[29] This organization would eventually be dismantled by the OHL and its few personnel folded into the Berlin Sicherheitspolizei in March 1919.[30] However later that same month, the Berlin branch of the USPD attempted to keep the idea of a leftwing Volkswehr alive when it issued further demands to reform the military sphere. Chief among these proposals were the complete dissolution of the old army and the "creation of a Volkswehr from the ranks of the class-conscious working class … to be self-administrated and serving with elected officers."[31] Due to the counter-revolutionary activities of the Freikorps throughout the spring of 1919 the USPD's version of the Volkswehr was never realized, but it nonetheless demonstrates the contested identity of the concept of a "people's militia" in the early years of the Weimar Republic.

The dramatic breakdown in the working relationship between the SPD and USPD led to the dissolution of the Council of People's Commissars and open hostility between Ebert and the workers' and soldiers' councils across Germany. Although lacking troops, the army finally had a clearly defined enemy and a chance to prove its value to the new political masters of the new republic. It also presented the Chief of the General Staff Wilhelm Groener and his colleagues with an ideal opportunity to strike against soldiers' councils across Germany, the chief architects of the revolutionary Volkswehr. Ensuring the security of Ebert's government not only guaranteed the continued existence of the Army Supreme Command (*Oberste*

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[29] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 18.
[30] Noske, *Kiel bis Kapp*, 113.
[31] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 15.

Heeresleitung or OHL) and the former imperial army, but also offered a prime opportunity to crush the council movement and thereby the threat of a revolutionary Volkswehr supplanting the provisional Reichswehr as the official German military institution.

Once again the Freikorps were the executors of the government's plans. After the FLK, GKSK, Freikorps von Hülsen and others battered the council movement and the Volkswehr units loyal to the lefwing revolutionaries throughout winter and spring of 1919, Freikorps units began discussing the transformation of Volkswehr formations into reliable security troops in August 1919. Existing along side the civilian dominated Einwohnerwehr, the Freikorps-created Volkswehr would be a separate entity from the units that the December 1918 law sought to create. Instead Freikorps-created Volkswehr would be a permanent display of "government" authority in smaller towns and cities, while allowing the new Reichswehr-Freikorps hybrid military institution to focus on larger scale engagements as they arose. Built as a body of auxiliary combat troops for the FLK, General Maercker began reforming the Volkswehr in his Thüringian operational theatre by transferring good quality soldiers from the FLK, who wished to remain in one location rather than marching across Germany, into new rightwing Volkswehr units to serve as a new "*Wachtdienst*" ('Guard Service').[32] The first 2,000 man Volkswehr of the FLK, split between the small towns of Zeitz, Weißenfels and Ohrdruf, incorporated existing Freikorps reserve troops to take over all guard and security tasks, protect major rail lines in the region, and "preserve the authority of the government and protect legal

[32] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 325.

authorities and the court system."[33] Although the Einwohnerwehr and the Volkswehr were given similar tasks and both were expressions of *localized* military authority, the creation and deployment of the Volkswehr was an indication of a perceived need for strong, militarized garrisons for many small towns across Germany.[34] The Einwohnerwehr continued to be a crucial propaganda and administration network, but the Volkswehr supplanted the civilian units as the military reserve of the Freikorps system.

Quickly, Freikorps reformed Volkswehr units throughout their command regions. The FLK, for example, established local Volkswehr units in dozens of small towns. Single Volkswehr units contained 50 men, while Double Units (100 men), Small Companies (150 men) and Large Companies (200 men) were also deployed depending on the size of the village or town. Although representing a potentially significant pool of manpower, Volkswehr units, like the Einwohnerwehr, were specifically designated only for deployment in small local areas, never marching outside of strictly controlled operational regions. Many Volkswehr units chose titles to stress their connection to their parent organizations, trading on the brand recognition of the larger more powerful Freikorps formations. Halle contained a particularly strong Volkswehr unit of some 650 men, who adopted the name "Sicherheits-Polizei-Batallions des Landesjägerkorps." Naumburg and Altenburg each contained a single unit, while Weimar, Merseburg, Eilenburg, Torgau, and Wittenberg all hosted Double Units.[35] Due to persistent trade union unrest,

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[33] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 327.
[34] Armeeverordnungsblatt, *1919*, page 207.
[35] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 328.

Maercker assigned Small Companies to Weißenfels and Bitterfeld. As 1919 drew to a close, citizens of these towns were presented with the visible symbols of Freikorps power. The Volkswehr simply became the newest reminder of the potential physical violence of the Freikorps system.

However, like the Einwohnerwehr, in spring 1920 Freikorps-created Volkswehr units were targeted for dissolution due to the intervention of the Entente Powers. For Hans von Seeckt, newly appointed chief of the disguised German general staff, the Entente's demands neatly aligned with his own campaign to establish far more rigid centralized control over the German military sphere. Fearful that the Volkswehr could serve as "the assembly point for all radical elements," Seeckt quickly and ruthlessly pursued their immediate dissolution as a part of wider efforts to undermine and weaken the lingering presence of the Freikorps system. Mistrustful of any military power outside of the control of the army, Seeckt argued that Volkswehr units could possibly be used for leftwing agitation against the republic and he therefore ordered all Reichswehr army corps to disband the Volkswehr to prevent the creation "of the roots of a possible *Rote Armee*."[36] With few supporters among the army leadership, and no assistance from the Freikorps, the Volkswehr were quietly dissolved by the end of June 1920.

Although short-lived, the many incarnations of the Volkswehr demonstrate the remarkable fluidity of organized violence in the military sphere in Germany

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[36] Könnemann, Appendix – Document 29. "Eingabe der Befehlsstelle VI an das Reichswehrministerium, Heeresleitung, die Auflösung von >>Volkswehren<< zu veranlassen, Breslau, 14. Mai 1920." Although James Corum's work on Hans von Seeckt is a masterful examination of the military theories created and promoted by the general, it nonetheless avoids his political and domestic activities.

after the First World War. Entire new institutions were created and then re-assigned with the stroke of a pen or a new decree from an army corps commander. While the Volkswehr never remained in one form long enough to develop to the size of the Einwohnerwehr, each time the organization was co-opted to serve another political cause, planners remained optimistic that volunteers would flock to the formations. Thousands of men were eager to either establish a new revolutionary workers' army or create a Freikorps auxiliary system depending on the particular expression of the Volkswehr at that time. Regardless of the political direction of the units, the Volkswehr offered German citizen-soldiers opportunities to participate in the violent politics of the early republican era.

Zeitfreiwilligenkorps

Despite the creation of the Einwohnerwehr in early 1919 and the re-purposing of the Volkswehr by late 1919, the Freikorps system continued to mature and spawn new armed groups of citizen soldiers to spread their presence throughout Germany. While the Einwohnerwehr and the Volkswehr provided excellent *local* auxiliary troops, Freikorps leadership sought to create a mobile reserve for campaigns spanning several states or even those that spilled across national borders. On 25 April 1919, in the midst of the dramatic expansion of the localized Einwohnerwehr, Reichswehr Minister Gustav Noske approved the creation of new Zeitfreiwilligenkorps (Temporary Volunteer Corps) to augment Freikorps units as a

mobile reserve of fresh troops, equipment, and munitions, increasing the capabilities of the civil-military network to unleash destructive violence.[37]

Paired together with the Einwohnerwehr, the new Zeitfreiwilligenkorps were considered a vital component of the "Selbstschutz" (Self Defense) of small towns and the rural countryside. "It is the right and duty of every state citizen," Maercker proclaimed, "to protect themselves against dangers to their body, life and property, against thieves, plunderers and revolutionaries, if the state authority cannot provide this protection for them."[38] Indeed Maercker and the FLK believed so whole-heartedly in the usefulness of the Zeitfreiwilligenkorps that they had already begun establishing these units throughout their operational theatre well before the official Reichswehr Ministry decree. By the end of April 1919, Maercker reported that over 400 units were in existence in the region of Merseburg alone. The multitude of groups organized under the umbrella of the FLK were overseen by a specific staff officer designated for the task, Captain Max Jüttner, who was also active coordinating the Einwohnerwehren established by Maercker's unit. Coordinated by Freikorps units, the Zeitfreiwilligenkorps were inextricably tied to their parent formations. As prominent and reliable Freikorps were adopted into the new Provisional Reichswehr in the summer of 1919, many also brought their mobile reserve units with them. Under the supervision of Jüttner's Central Command Post for Zeitfreiwilligenkorps in the Region of the Reichswehr Brigade 16[39] (*Zentralstelle*

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[37] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 328.
[38] Ibid.
[39] The Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps was designated the Reichswehr Brigade 16 (Landesjägerkorps) upon its formal incorporation into the Provisional Reichswehr. Maercker insisted on the retention of the name "Landesjägerkorps" in some form

für Zeitfreiwilligenverbände in Gebiete der Reichswehrbrigade 16), the FLK's Zeitfreiwilligenkorps grew in size and strength through the resources of the Reichswehr.

However, the Reichswehr and the Freikorps had different visions for the purpose and loyalties of the Zeitfreiwilligenkorps. The Reich authorities hoped to use the Zeitfreiwilligenkorps as a pool of men to rapidly expand the Reichswehr in a moment of foreign or domestic emergency without contravening the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. Freikorps commanders naturally viewed the Zeitfreiwilligenkorps as their own reserve body, supplying their formations with crucial manpower for field campaigns. Commanders like Maercker also saw the Zeitfreiwilligenkorps as a convenient mechanism to retain the services of useful, reliable troops who were not formally included in the Freikorps dominated brigades of the Provisional Reichswehr, thereby preserving a body of militarized civilians for the Freikorps movement.

While the future of the Zeitfreiwilligenkorps (ZFK) remained unclear, during its short duration, the Freikorps and the Reichswehr were able to agree upon its immediate purpose and character. The ZFK were assigned to "work alongside mobile Freikorps or regular troops," in any and all campaigns against threats to public *Ordnung und Sicherheit* (order and security).[40] Hoping to circumvent the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles and the watchful eye of Entente military observers, the ZFK were only to serve for three months at a time, impeding any

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even after entry into the Reichswehr for moral reasons and to preserve the Freikorps identity of the unit. For more on this, see Part III, Chapter IX.

[40] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 243.

function as a long-term supply of trained reservists for a resurgent German army. Provisioned with Reichswehr uniforms to help project greater military strength supporting Ebert's regime, the ZFK were specifically defined as a "military formation" in contrast to the civilian dominated Einwohnerwehr. Divided into standard battalions, companies, squads, and groups, the ZFK were more clearly organized along standard prewar military guidelines than the Volkswehr or Einwohnerwehr and therefore were more often involved in combat operations. Indeed, distinguishing the precise roles for the Einwohnerwehr and the ZFK was a topic of some debate in the summer of 1919 until a set of regulations was circulated to all regional ZFK commanders.[41] It stipulated:

> The Einwohnerwehren is a police security organization intended for the purpose of the local defense of individual city regions against plundering etc. The task of the Einwohnerwehr is to prevent disruption of the public *Ruhe und Sicherheit*. They find in peaceful times they maintain order through local patrols, and in unpeaceful times with a complete muster of the Einwohnerwehr for occupation of local important points, thereby constituting police measures.

Whereas for the ZFK:

> If greater unrest happens, the Einwohnerwehren will hereby necessarily require the military help of the Greater Hamburg Troop Units [Zeitfreiwilligenkorps]. First if this is required, the activity of the Zeitfreiwilligenkorps will be supplemented by the Einwohnerwehren.[42]

Despite the limited service period of the ZFK, Entente military observers pressured the Berlin government to dissolve these formations. The speed and success of their assembly certainly warranted such alarm. Additionally, the superior military capabilities of the units, and especially their mobility, made them unacceptable to

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[41] Könnemann, Appendix – Document 11. "Flugblatt des Zeitfreiwilligenkorps in Hamburg, Mai 1919."
[42] Ibid.

the Allied military observers.[43] In Maercker's Landesjägerkorps region alone, hundreds of ZFK units were organized with several thousand members answering the recruitment calls.[44] However, unwilling to antagonize the Entente Powers further, Ebert's government once again agreed to disband the prohibited formation, ending the brief existence of the Freikorps' mobile reserve.

Conclusion

These auxiliary formations played a central role in the Freikorps campaign of psychological violence. Used primarily to serve as visual indicators of the potential physical violence inherent in the Freikorps system, reserve troops like the Einwohnerwehr and Zeitfreiwilligenkorps dotted the landscape of German cities, towns and rural communities to attempt to intimidate local populaces into compliance with the Freikorps demands. Although these units rarely, if ever, were used in skirmishes or physical violence against hostile forces, they were significant tools in the Freikorps' campaign to generate a larger atmosphere of violence and fear.

Therefore units like the Einwohnerwehr, Volkswehr, and Zeitfreiwilligenkorps were considered vital components of the Freikorps military

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[43] Generally this represented the peak effectiveness of the Allied Control Commission in Germany. Never very successful at rooting out secret stocks of weapons and ammunition, nor preventing the development and testing of forbidden tanks and aircraft, the Allied military observers nonetheless were at least usually aware of the creation and proliferation of the largest of the armed militant groups in Germany. Postwar Allied military occupations of plebiscite regions similarly had varying degrees of success. Deeply contested areas in the East saw significant outbreaks of violence as inadequate Allied security forces struggled to maintain public safety.

[44] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserherr,* 331.

system and their ability to preserve *Ordnung und Sicherheit* throughout the Reich's borders. Ebert's apparent powerlessness to prevent the Entente from chipping away at their critical support organizations made many Freikorps soldiers and officers further question their relationship with the new republican regime, especially in light of the failed Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch of March 1920. "The revolutionary government, like the '*Schwarz-Rot-Gold*' government had failed," Maercker wrote after the dissolution of the key elements of the Selbstschutz. "They were not able to re-establish a firm state authority."[45] This inability of the SPD government to re-organize and bolster Germany's military sphere brought the integrity of the entire republican experiment into question, argued Maercker.

By April 1920, the Freikorps system was past the height of its power. The circumstances that had made the government and Reichswehr reliant on the Freikorps system had begun to change. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were dead, and along with them the most serious revolutionary threat from the left. The militant forces of council movement had been thoroughly crushed by the summer of 1919. Polish troops continued to threaten Germany's border provinces in the East, but the danger of another outright seizure of territory, like Posen, had abated. Most importantly, the Reichswehr had begun to show signs of stability. The rise of Hans von Seeckt into a position of authority within the Reichswehr structure brought a new determined resolve to re-organize military authority and bring the means of violence under the complete hegemony of the official German army.

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[45] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 352.

Although often marginalized in analyses of the Freikorps system, support organizations like the Einwohnerwehr or the Volkswehr played important roles within the broader Freikorps movement. The dissolution of this Freikorps civil-military network played a significant part in the breakdown in the relationship between the Freikorps movement and the republican government. Interpreting such actions as a lack of support, or even open hostility by the government, the Freikorps system became increasingly radical and eventually revolutionary. However, disentangling the Freikorps movement from the Reichswehr would not be as simple as the dissolution of the civilian Einwohnerwehr or the short-lived Zeitfreiwilligenkorps. Instead, the destruction of the Provisional Reichswehr, the mutual marriage of convenience between the Freikorps movement and the remnants of the imperial German army, would recast the Freikorps movement as vehemently anti-republican and a deep pool of counterrevolutionary activity.

PART III: HEGEMONY

"I do not know whether [the Reichswehr] is reliable, but it will obey me."

- General Hans von Seeckt
  Summer, 1922

General Hans von Seeckt's response to an irritable line of questioning from a hostile SPD Reichstag deputy was a frank admission of an uncomfortable truth. The product of a long and complicated struggle to re-establish reliable, centralized, professional military authority, the army's obedience to Seeckt was won at a high cost, but its political reliability to the republican government remained suspect until November 1923. Although his views on military affairs would dominate the final form of the Reichswehr, in 1919 and early 1920, Seeckt was one of several contenders to assume leadership of military affairs in Germany.[1] Indeed, Seeckt and his loyal followers were by no means even the most likely power faction to dominate the military sphere. Three key figures vied with each other within the leadership of the Provisional Reichswehr, and Seeckt had neither the passionate support of the Freikorps, nor the clear constitutional authority conferred to him by a superior position within the military hierarchy. However, by the end of his tenure as commander of the Reichswehr in 1926, no one could doubt the central role Seeckt had played, shaping the German Army into a professional and well-disciplined force that above all obeyed the orders of the supreme authorities in Berlin.

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[1] For a broader examination of the Seeckt's military career see: Hans Meier-Welcker, *Seeckt*, (Frankfurt aM: Bernard Graefer, 1967); James Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and the German Military Reform*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992).

Ultimately, the period from late spring 1919 to March-April 1920 marked a significant transition for the Freikorps. By summer 1920, large-scale volunteer formations, obeying their own orders, fighting for self-selected political objectives had become a rarity, rather than a consistent component in an atmosphere of physical and psychological violence in Germany. Although dissidents would continue to organize and plot, they were forced to operate without the capability to unleash the overwhelming destruction made possible by the demobilization of the former imperial army. Forcibly pushed out of the professional military sphere by resurgent government institutions, Freikorps members and their broad array of supporters gravitated to more traditionally defined political activism, even though they never fully abandoned their violent tendencies. Indeed, by the time of the final major Freikorps field campaign at the battle of the Annaberg in 1921, even the most committed Freikorps officers and troops recognized that their forces were a mere shadow of their once formidable strength. Gone were the fresh uniforms, new rifles, flamethrowers, and occasional armoured and aerial support that allowed for intimidating displays of overwhelming violence. In their place stood half-trained students, grizzled old men, and the scattered remains of the former Freikorps soldiers who once crushed leftwing forces, seemingly at will. Embittered and drastically weakened, the Freikorps movement limped on throughout the course of the Weimar Republic, but after March 1920 it never regained its former influential and powerful role in German military affairs.

This final section explores the re-establishment of centralized military authority in Germany and the end of open access to the means of violence that had

allowed the proliferation and maturation of the Freikorps movement. The failure of the Provisional Reichswehr to transform the Freikorps system into a pool of reliable troops to support for the republican experiment, and its subsequent inglorious end, created unstable conditions within the military sphere that threatened to completely undermine the army's position within the German state apparatus. While the previous section explored the remarkable access everyday Germans had to deadly force in the immediate postwar era, this part will focus on the re-imposition of hegemony by the reformed Reichswehr under Seeckt's stern leadership in the wake of the Kapp Putsch, as well as the climactic collapse of the system of compromises that underpinned the existence of the Provisional Reichswehr.

CHAPTER IX: THE FREIKORPS' REVOLUTION

Initially completely dependent on *freiwillige* troops for a decisive edge in the ability to deploy violence to achieve political objectives, by early 1920, Friedrich Ebert and his leadership circle became increasingly wary of the numerous publicized incidents of vengeance by *freiwillige* formations and above all their fundamental independent character. Just as a resolution to deploy physical violence to safeguard political authority gradually developed within the Cabinet after the November revolution, a keen appreciation for a *reliable* body of troops took root in the political and military leadership as revolutionary activity persisted throughout the summer of 1919.

However, this did not lead to an immediate elimination or marginalization of the Freikorps movement. Instead, several attempts were launched to mold the best and most politically acceptable formations into a new military institution that would support the fledgling republican government. Chief among these was the Provisional Reichswehr. The centre-piece of Ebert's attempt to re-establish centralized control over the fractured military sphere, the Provisional Reichswehr represented a concerted effort to erect a new military institution, embracing the hybrid and ad hoc partnership that had formed between the Freikorps movement and the remnants of the former imperial army commands. Its spectacular failure was not a result of poor planning or petty squabbling between key figures, although both plagued the formation, but rather the longevity of the spirit of the Freikorps and their general inability to effectively operate within a traditional top-down military organization based on absolute discipline and obedience.

Although the awkward attempt to fuse a decentralized independent military-political movement like the Freikorps into a centralized and reliable institution produced a substantial amount of friction from both sides, the final break between the Reich authorities and the Freikorps movement was largely the result of Freikorps intrigues and plots against the federal government in Berlin. As feelings of betrayal mounted in light of the government's acceptance of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and the subsequent troop reductions, the number of dissident Freikorps members grew dramatically towards the end of 1919 and into the early part of the following year. It was the Freikorps' actions, both by the rank-and-file and the officers, and their willingness to partake in plots to overthrow the government that finally and irrevocably hardened the government's resolve to ruthlessly crush the Freikorps' military capabilities before finally disbanding them altogether. The Entente's demands and the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles simply provided the perfect pretext for the suppression of the Freikorps.

The Provisional Reichswehr

Introduced to the National Assembly on 25 February 1919, the Law for the Creation of the Provisional Reichswehr was intended to be a crucial step in Ebert's plans to re-establish centralized political and military authority in the aftermath of the failed Spartacus Revolt in January 1919 and the ongoing fight against the council movement spread out across the country. Coming into effect on 6 March, the law gave supreme command of the Provisional Reichswehr to the president of the republic, although in reality the Reichswehr Minister presided over military affairs

unless directly overruled by the president. Initially, the Reichswehr Minister did not have his own staff, instead operating through the Prussian War Ministry until the official creation of a Reichswehr Ministry on 1 October 1919.[1] The law officially established a new army for the republic. All imperial formations and institutions were dissolved under the Provisional Reichswehr law, while simultaneously providing for the transfer of officers, officials, non-commissioned officers, and rank-and-file soldiers into the new army.

The law specifically emphasized the command powers of the officer corps in all military affairs, in sharp contrast to leftwing proposals that would have drastically reduced their authority and influence. Indeed the postwar era was a time of uncertainty for the officer corps. Twenty-four thousand regular officers served in the imperial army, including those soldiers who had been offered a regular commission during the First World War. However, due to the drastic reductions anticipated under the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, it was clear to most officers that they would not find continued employment in the new army. Indeed, combined with retirement of older officers and dismissal of those promoted during the war, only one out of every six officers who served in the Great War would remain in the service by 1921.[2] The Reichswehr Ministry therefore chose to take this moment to carefully examine the leadership class of the army and dismiss less able commanders and officers. Socially and politically unacceptable officers found themselves slated for dismissal and few men who had been promoted during the

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[1] For consistency, this study will still refer to the Reichswehr Ministry, even though it was technically the same as the Prussian War Ministry until 1 October 1919.
[2] Harold Gordon, *The Reichswehr and the German Republic, 1919-1926* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 66.

war were adopted into the Provisional Reichswehr. As early as winter 1919, Generals Wilhelm Groener and Hans von Seeckt attempted to impose their vision on the new institution, retaining a far higher concentration of general staff officers than the army personnel office had originally intended. Junior officers, shaped by their experiences in the trenches, faced a difficult path in the new army as Seeckt and Groener's preference for staff officers was already apparent in the early stages of the creation of the new army. Combat officers, such as Ernst Röhm, resented this preference for staff officers, adding to the growing sense of betrayal among such dismissed combat commanders.

The law also granted far-reaching powers to the commanders of the newly established Military Districts (*Wehrkreise*), affording them an influential role in determining the character and culture of the Provisional Reichswehr. Replacing the old imperial system of general commands (*Generalkommando*), each army corps or military district now became its own relatively autonomous recruiting region. Although the ability to appoint senior commanders remained in the hands of the Reich authorities in Berlin, junior officers were selected solely by regimental commanders. This was a mechanism for the transfer of Freikorps officers and troops into the brigades of the Provisional Reichswehr. Newly appointed regimental staff officers had nearly complete freedom to welcome their old Freikorps comrades into the new army.[3] This regional independence also serves to explain the varying levels of political reliability of the Provisional Reichswehr during periods of crisis and revolt. Areas that witnessed significant Freikorps activity and deployment were

[3] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 56.

more likely to incorporate a greater number of Freikorps officers and troops into their local Reichswehr brigades, thereby politicizing their formations, while this process only rarely occurred in regions of the country that saw infrequent Freikorps operation.[4]

While the Reich military and political elites may have intended the Provisional Reichswehr to be a decisive step in re-establishing hegemonic control over the military sphere, key figures within the Freikorps movement did not share this view. Commander of the Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps (FLK), General Ludwig Maercker, admitted that "order was needed in the military realm," but also laid the blame for the present "chaos" firmly at the feet of the SPD government.[5] "[The government] initially smashed the old army before they had created something new," Maercker critiqued in February 1919.

> They created a new military entity whose impracticality was certain from the beginning. … They allowed the creation of new Freikorps, Grenzschutz units, Volkswehren and Sicherheitstruppen with government funds, and had not made the attempt to win influence over these formations. Now the creation of a unified Wehrmacht was a very urgent need.[6]

Indeed, Maercker's comments neatly summarize the task facing the new commanders and administrators of the Provisional Reichswehr. The tangled web of *freiwillige* organizations that had been condoned and encouraged to proliferate in early 1919 was hardly a suitable foundation for a new instrument of federal authority. Even if only the best units from the Freikorps and Volkswehr were

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[4] Gordon, *Reichswehr*, 58-60.
[5] Ludwig Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer zur Reichswehr: Eine Beitrag zur Geschicte der Deutschen Revolution* (Leipzig: KF Koehler Verlag, 1921), 221.
[6] Ibid., 221.

selected, instability would be a fundamental problem for the Provisional Reichswehr.

Structurally, the Provisional Reichswehr Law sought to dismantle the antiquated, fractured imperial military system where authority remained hopelessly splintered between the various competing war ministries of the once independent German states. At the centre of the Provisional Reichswehr stood the Reichswehr Ministry, headed by the Reichswehr Minister, a civilian cabinet member, granted supreme command of the armed forces by presidential decree. The senior ranking military commander, the Chief of the Command Staff (*Chef der Heeresleitung*), was initially General Walther Reinhardt. Directly under him served the Chief of the Troop Office (*Chef des Truppenamts*), General von Seeckt, who assumed control over the thinly veiled German General Staff. Initially, the Provisional Reichswehr was divided into four group commands, but this would be later reduced to just two. General Walther von Lüttwitz[7] headed Group Command I, which included all of Germany east of the Elbe River, along with the Free State of Saxony, the Prussian provinces of Saxony, Hannover and Brunswick, as well as Thuringia.[8] Group Command II, under General Roderich von Schöler, encompassed the west and southwest of Germany. The short-lived Group Command III was established to

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[7] Born 2 February 1859, Walther von Lüttwitz was a Prussian General who served with distinction in the First World War, first as Chief of Staff of 4th Army, and later as commanding general of III Army Corps. Winner of the *Pour le Mérite*, Lüttwitz also commanded troops during the Saint-Quentin/La Fere offensive in Ludendorff's final bid to win the war in spring 1918. Nicknamed the "Father of the Freikorps," Lüttwitz relieved heavily on *freiwillige* troops when he served as commanding general in the operation against the Spartacus Uprising in January 1919, and in the subsequent march against the council movement.
[8] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 46.

replace the Freikorps dominated Grenzschutz Nord command post, and was dissolved after Russian and Polish threats to Germany's eastern borders abated. One remnant of the imperial system persisted: Group Command IV consisted solely of Bavaria, a small symbol of Bavarian exceptionalism. However, its existence was temporary and would later be re-classified as Wehrkreis VII and directly subordinated to the Heeresleitung (Army Command Staff) after the Kapp Putsch.

Under the powerful group commands, Germany was divided into seven Wehrkreise, serving as the regional and tactical headquarters for the new Provisional Reichswehr. Except for the units stationed along the eastern border, the 24 brigades of the Reichswehr were directly subordinated to the Wehrkreis commands. Most brigade commanders were selected with influence from Seeckt and the Truppenamt; however, Saxon and Bavarian brigade commanders were appointed internally. Bavaria was also granted the additional honour of choosing its own Wehrkreis commander.[9]

The end of the separate war ministries and the new internal structure of the Provisional Reichswehr should have lent itself well to the creation of a powerful centralized military institution. Apart from the ambiguous and poorly defined role of the Chief of the Heeresleitung, which was only clarified after the Kapp Putsch, the architects of the new army provided the rough basis to establish a firm pillar to support the regime. However, some historians, most notably Harold Gordon, have argued that the unclear role of the Chief of the Army Command Staff, combined with the powerful position of the commander of Group Command I and the independent

[9] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 75.

authority of the Truppenamt, created too much friction and conflict in the uppermost branches of the new army, creating significant instability. While it is certainly true that an uneasy partnership existed among these three posts for the duration of the Provisional Reichswehr and a dramatic clash would play out between them during the Kapp Putsch, the main source of the rivalry was the different personalities and ambitions of the three men who occupied those offices, rather than the powers and authority of the posts themselves. Thus with only minor structural alterations the organization of the upper branches of the final version of the Reichswehr mirrored the Provisional Reichswehr, and did not see the same type of internal scheming and putsch activity until late in the republican era. Instead the blame for the ineffectiveness of the Provisional Reichswehr cannot be placed solely on the structure of the new army, but rather on the men who attempted to utilize it for their own political agendas. The composition, rather than the structure of the Provisional Reichswehr, was its fatal flaw.

The basic rules drafted by the army leadership to govern the selection of units and individuals for entry into the Provisional Reichswehr were few and brief. Officers were to be chosen based on their abilities and efficiency. At Seeckt's insistence a relatively high number of officers were drawn from the cadre of staff officers. The choice of units for absorption was made on the basis of combat performance, but political reliability and strong discipline were likewise valued.[10] Units which had rebelled at any point were not considered ideal candidates for the new army. Otherwise, establishing the new Provisional Reichswehr took over a

[10] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 46.

month of highly tedious staff labour. Bringing small, geographically scattered, and unevenly structured Freikorps units together with the shattered remnants of imperial formations proved to be a very difficult task for the new administrators, one that was not finally resolved until the summer of 1920.

Matters were further complicated by the absence of any specific body to oversee the transition of the Freikorps system into the new army structure.[11] As the Reichswehr Ministry and the Reich Interior Ministry were unable to decide whether the civilian or military leadership should handle the process, it fell to junior clerical staff within the individual army Wehrkreise to sort it all out.[12] Many unreliable Freikorps units exploited this lack of oversight and coordination, slipping into the new army where they festered and created internal divisions. With this haphazard influx of Freikorps troops and former imperial soldiers, the Provisional Reichswehr grew rapidly. In April 1919 the five brigades were created from the predominantly Freikorps troops previously marching under Lüttwitz's command. In March the Provisional Reichswehr Group Command I had contained approximately 78,000 men, and as a direct result of a wave of Freikorps migration it had swollen to 120,000 by June 1919.[13]

Although Seeckt continued to work through the Truppenamt to increase the percentage of general staff officers within the senior officer corps, the junior officer corps and the rank-and-file of the Provisional Reichswehr took on a decidedly different character. The foundational work by historian Harold Gordon examines

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[11] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 70.
[12] Ibid., 72.
[13] Ibid., 71.

the influx of Freikorps troops and units into the new army.[14] Of 146 Freikorps groups that Gordon examined, 80 were accepted into the Reichswehr completely intact. An additional 13 formations joined the army but were dispersed to provide manpower to other units. Only 18 units in Gordon's sample were specifically excluded from the Provisional Reichswehr, the vast majority of which were dissident Freikorps formations from the Baltic campaign (the infamous "*Baltikumer*"), who were noted as highly rebellious even for Freikorps troops. For the remaining 35 Freikorps organizations, Gordon states that while the records were incomplete and their fates unknown, there was some evidence to suggest that they were at least partially accepted into the army as well. Thus almost 65 percent of Gordon's Freikorps sample joined the Provisional Reichswehr either completely or partially intact, with the possibility that another 24 percent also managed to join the new army, statistics that appear to be generally applicable to the entirety of the Freikorps movement.

Gordon's data demonstrates the remarkable breadth of the move made by Freikorps units into the Provisional Reichswehr, but a closer examination of the size, strength and reputation of the particular formations involved in this process created an opportunity for the Freikorps to influence the character of the new army. Many prominent, popular Freikorps units maintained their celebrity status within the Provisional Reichswehr. General Maercker's Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps became "Reichswehr Brigade 16 (Landesjäger)," operating within the Provisional

[14] Gordon (Gordon, *The Reichswehr and the German Republic)* provides detailed appendixes listing all Freikorps troops (p. 431), and demonstrating the transfer of a significant number of known Freikorps units into the Provisional Reichswehr (p. 439).

Reichswehr entirely intact. The Deutsche Schutz Division became Reichswehr Brigade 25, while Freikorps Roßbach was renamed Reichswehr Jäger Battalion 37 and continued to function largely as it had before its acceptance into the new army. Other brigades were an amalgamation of several smaller Freikorps units. Reichswehr Brigade 21 was founded through the combination of officers and men from a variety of formations, including Freikorps Epp, Hergott, Haack, Oberland, Bogendörder, Probstmayr, Würzburg, Bayreuth, Wolf, Berthold, and a plethora of scattered artillery and cavalry units.[15] Many of these formations remained highly recognizable and politically active after their acceptance into the new army. Retaining distinctive insignia and continuing to publish and proclaim their views on domestic and foreign affairs, the Freikorps units did not fully submit to central authority, but rather continued their political activities according to their own wishes.

The sheer number of Freikorps officers and men involved in the transfer into the Provisional Reichswehr ensured the survival of the Freikorps system within their new host organization. Numbering nearly 13,000 men by August 1919, the FLK alone composed nearly seven percent of the entire Provisional Reichswehr.[16] Even if one only focuses on the formations with the most reliable data - the officer-created Freikorps units - the percentage of Freikorps soldiers serving in the new army is significant. Freikorps Hülsen (11,000 men), the Badishen Volksheer (5,000 men), the Gard-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps (GKSK) (10,500 men), the Landesschützenkorps (5,700 men), the Saxon Grenzjägerbrigade (5,000 men) combined with the FLK

[15] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 223.
[16] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 296.

composed 26 percent of the combat strength of the Provisional Reichswehr.[17] These are only six of the 93 known Freikorps units that entered into the new army. Many of the most powerful and politically active Freikorps units also remained grouped together, concentrated within Lüttwitz's Group Command I, creating a saturated atmosphere in one particular region of the army and the country. The FLK, Freikorps Hülsen, Freikorps Potsdam, the Landesschützenkorps, Brigade Reinhardt, the Deutsche Schutz Division, as well as remnants of the dismembered GKSK all remained under Lüttwitz's command, just as they had before their transition into the Provisional Reichswehr. The names might have changed, but the Freikorps system largely survived its adoption into the new army.

The continuation of the Freikorps movement within the Provisional Reichswehr was more than a structural and physical phenomenon; the *Freikorpskämpfer*, or Freikorps Fighter, identity continued to proliferate long after Freikorps soldiers donned Reichswehr uniforms. Many formations insisted on retaining some sign of their Freikorps identity, often merging their old unit designation with their new Reichswehr title. Freiwilliger Verband von Aulock insisted on the special "Jäger" distinction in their title, while the lingering Freikorps practice of naming units after geographical regions and famous commanding officers is evident through the creation of the Reichswehr Infantry Regiment Schulz and the Reichswehr Battalion Libau. The FLK insisted upon the addition of the epithet "Landesjäger" to "Reichswehr Brigade 16" in an effort to maintain the legacy and reputation they had won during the Bürgerkrieg. "I felt considereable pride

[17] Statistics for the strength of these units can be found in the appendix of Harold Gordon, *The Reichswehr and The German Republic.*

(*Waffenstolze*) to retain the name of the Landesjägerkorps as long as possible," Maercker later wrote in his memoir. "I knew, that there was a great incentive for the troops that lay with the designation: 'Landesjäger.'"[18] Maercker also stressed the important propaganda function that the distinctive Freikorps name had with the general populace. It was crucial, he argued, that the urban and rural populations be keenly aware that the same Freikorps units that had imposed order during the civil war were still in operation. Both pre-war and post-war traditions needed to be maintained, in Maercker's opinion. The Freikorps legacy and identity was foremost in the minds of many former commanders and troops, even as they began service in the new Provisional Reichswehr.

However, although some military leaders believed that the *freiwillige* were acquired to supplement the strength of the new army, the Freikorps did not simply become a vast pool of manpower and resources to be cannibalized by the Provisional Reichswehr. Instead, in many cases Freikorps units expanded quickly in the new institution, accumulating significant resources and recruits, as well as the important technical services that had previously been too costly to maintain as a strict combat Freikorps formation. For example, Maercker stripped troops from the former imperial Infantry Regiment 72 to create the V Abteilung for the FLK, while gathering new cavalry forces from the Husar Regiment 12, and establishing his own pioneer battalion from the Infantry Regiment 36, stationed outside Halle.[19] General Arnold Ritter von Möhl, now head of Group Command IV, the future Wehrkreis VII, similarly began folding former imperial units into new formations dominated by

[18] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 225.
[19] Ibid., 223.

Freikorps officers and troops, with whom he felt he shared a similar political and cultural outlook.[20]

All of these troop transfers dramatically expanded the Provisional Reichswehr far beyond levels that would be tolerated by the Entente Powers. At its peak, the new army numbered almost 400,000 men, although many of these troops were already scheduled for discharge even as the new structure was in the process of creation. Although the Provisional Reichswehr still numbered over 325,000 men at the start of July 1919, by February 1920 it had been reduced to 290,000 and Seeckt's purges in April of that same year brought that figure down to 231,000 men. The officer corps was not immune to these reductions and only numbered a mere 9,000 men in April 1920, barely more than a third of its wartime strength.[21] These discharges may have appeased demands of the Entente powers, but they also generated a dangerous domestic climate for the Republican authorities in Berlin. Many Freikorps units, particularly the quarrelsome '*Baltikumer*' and the two naval brigades (under the command of Ehrhardt and Loewenfeld) resisted attempts to disband and disarm them. A significant portion of the nearly 15,000 officers who were dismissed from the Provisional Reichswehr never forgave the civilian government for this act of perceived betrayal and weakness towards the Entente demands.[22] Meanwhile troops who survived the initial reductions nonetheless feared that they too would be disbanded in a future wave of discharges as retention

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[20] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 71.
[21] Ibid., 79.
[22] Sammartino, *Impossible Border,* 60.

in the final form of the army became less and less likely. Uncertainty over the future began to brew unrest within the military sphere in Germany.

Indeed, resentment within the Provisional Reichswehr mounted as 1919 came to an end. Troops complained of a low level of material compensation for their services, as well as poor financial incentives. There was also a significant shortage of food and clothing for the new units and what was often available was poor quality. Although Germany fought a series of new foreign and domestic enemies after November 1918, the republican government had already begun shifting economic production to peacetime. Uniforms and rifles, once so plentiful directly after the war, needed to be replaced and procured. Furthermore, adoption of the republican national colours chosen by the Weimar Republic, as well as new rank insignia for all officers and men sparked considerable anger and resistance within the Provisional Reichswehr.[23] "We officers desired the preservation of the traditions of the old army," Maercker argued. "Not from some counterrevolutionary expression, but rather from the understandable pride in the wonderful brave actions of the old glorious army (*des alten, herrlichen Heeres*)."[24]

Change was not warmly received by the Freikorps officers and men serving in the new army. To many of the officers, the old national colours, black-white-red (*Schwarz-weiß-rot*), represented the victories of 1870 and the heroism from the long campaigns of 1914-1918. Supplanted by the black-red-gold (*Schwarz-rot-gold*) of the failed 1848 revolutionaries, many officers and men expressed a longing to return to the old glorious traditions of the past. The official signing of the Treaty of

[23] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 224.
[24] Ibid., 225.

Versailles on 28 June 1919 was another major source of resentment towards the republic. The so-called 'War Guilt clause' and the extradition of the accused war criminals were particularly contentious issues directly after the war. Signing the peace treaty complete with the War Guilt and Extradition Clauses was the final turning point for a number of troops who would become involved in the Kapp Putsch. Such a "display of weakness and dishonour" made them committed opponents of the new regime. Maercker expressed his continued disappointment with the republican government in early 1920:

> The monarchy had thanked the soldiers for the protection of the throne and state by caring for the soldiers, protecting their authority, and granting them various advantages. The monarchs and their war ministers always intervened powerfully in favour of the Army and for the protection of its honour.
> That ceased suddenly after the 9 November. From the troops, the new rulers demanded personal protection, security of their political power and protection of the borders of the Reich. Of their obligation to care for the well-being of the troops and to protect them against unjust attacks which rose from these demands, the new men showed little understanding. If the troops were sorely needed, one occasionally found fine words, but no more. Two days before our entry into Berlin in January 1919, Scheidemann made a speech to my Landesjäger in the Central Academy in Lichterfelde. It contained words of enthusiastic recognition for 'our incomparable army leaders Hindenburg and Ludendorff'; it was full of 'hearty thankfulness for the volunteers and their officers.'
> When Scheidemann was no longer a Minister, but again only a party politician, in November 1920, he stated instead: 'The officer should be thankful that the patience of the people allowed them to escape in November 1918 with the loss of their should-straps.' The Moor has done his duty. The Moor can go.[25]

Within the Provisional Reichswehr, tensions often ran high between Freikorps members and military personnel who had not joined *freiwillige* units after

[25] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 317.

the war and supported the federal authorities.[26] Common insults like "Baltic Pigs" (*Baltenschweine*) were rejoined with "Noske Dog" (*Noskehunde*) as Freikorps and 'Reichswehr' soldiers awkwardly served alongside each other, competing for limited resources and even fewer permanent positions in the final composition of the army.[27] Officers were not immune from this rivalry. The old wartime animosity between 'front' and 'staff' lingered in the minds of Freikorps officers who viewed themselves as commanders of combat troops during the Bürgerkrieg and were now being pushed out of the Provisional Reichswehr in favour of former general staff officers. Additionally, top-down reforms, initiated to dismantle or at least weaken the Freikorps system, sparked considerable resistance in units determined to retain their old flags, names, insignia, and especially their old commanders.

The Freikorps were not the only group attempting to maintain their identity, power and prestige in the transition to the new army. Former imperial general command staffs persisted in their assertion that they, not the Freikorps troops, were solely responsible for the "preservation of *Ruhe und Ordnung*" in Germany, and therefore had the right to deploy lethal violence for political objectives. Maercker vented his frustrations on the matter, stating:

> A complication arose that the general command of the old army continued to exist as command posts. They felt also that they were still responsible for peace in their corps regions, but they had almost no troops subordinated to them. They kept watch jealously over their senior posts over the garrison commands, even as the old army processing posts were broken down.[28]

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[26] Hereafter the latter category of troops, soldiers who supported the Reich military and political authorities, will be referred to as 'Reichswehr' troops, as opposed to Freikorps members.
[27] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 220.
[28] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 302.

Maercker went on to describe a similar process with newly appointed Reichswehr officers attempting to take command of former Freikorps units.

> If he [the officer] was solicited by the Reichswehr, then [the troops] would know this and his lack of capability. For the Reichswehr commander again lacked the possibility to take all requisite measures for the suppression of unrest if he was not also a respected member of the garrison.[29]

Clamoring into the already heated competition for resources and positions between the remnants of the old imperial army and the Freikorps, the officers and rank-and-file troops from the ancillary *freiwillige* formations also sought to secure their entrance into the new military institution. During the height of the Bürgerkrieg assurances had been made to members of the Volkswehr, Sicherheitswehr, Einwohnerwehr, and Technische Nothilfe by political and military officials of varying levels of authority that these troops would all be considered for service in the Provisional Reichswehr. Given the large number of troops already swelling the ranks of the new army in July 1919, few members of these support formations actually found their way into the transitional army, although most notably members of the Volkswehr who were deemed particularly reliable did become a part of Reichswehr Brigade 13 in Baden-Württemberg.[30]

Ultimately the creation of the Provisional Reichswehr failed to firmly rebuild centralized military authority in Germany, nor did it once again establish a hegemonic grip over the means of violence in the hands of the legally sanctioned representatives of the people. Instead, the Provisional Reichswehr represented the formalization and institutional scaffolding around the uneasy partnership between

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[29] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 302.
[30] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 223.

the remnants of the imperial military and the Freikorps movement. Despite the military elites' stated aim to only select the most reliable and disciplined Freikorps units, and to mold them into suitable formations embracing the ethos and characteristics of the old imperial army, throughout 1919 the Provisional Reichswehr still reflected the Freikorps' desire for independence, political activity, and displays of overwhelming violence. In reality, before April 1920, Seeckt's feeble assertion that the Reichswehr was spiritually distinguished from the Freikorps movement was false. *Freikorpsgeist*, not *Reichswehrgeist* dominated the character and function of the Provisional Reichswehr.

Revolutionary Freikorps

Although there was considerable unrest among Freikorps troops adopted into the Provisional Reichswehr, it paled beside the anger and feeling of betrayal found in those *freiwillige* soldiers who remained outside the new army or those who were aware of their pending dismissal. Unrest over the exclusion from the Provisional Reichswehr was only one source of discontented Freikorps members, however. An increasing scarcity of materiel and vital funding, both from various levels of the civilian government and private interests, initiated an existential crisis in the Freikorps movement as 1919 drew to a close. Critically, a noticeable decline in available manpower began to reduce the number of acceptable recruits for the Freikorps movement, as Great War veterans began to return to civilian life in greater numbers and the new influx of student trainees lacked the appropriate training and combat experience to maintain the high level of combat effectiveness

on which the Freikorps prided themselves. All of these factors increased the possibility of a right-wing putsch attempt during fall 1919 and winter 1920 as desperate Freikorps members explored new options to secure their future existence. One year after their actions in Berlin rescued the republican government, Freikorps troops were its most dangerous threat.

There were two main types of dissident Freikorps members after the summer of 1919. First and foremost were the quarrelsome, yet highly effective, naval brigades under the command of Ehrhardt and Lowenfeld. Second, several Freikorps dismissed from Grenzschutz Ost and almost all of the Baltic Freikorps organizations who had disobeyed the government's order to return to the German borders continued to operate outside the authority of the republic.[31] However, on the order of Reichswehr Minister Gustav Noske, these '*Baltikumer*' Freikorps lost access to all state resources, including recruits, equipment, provisions, and most importantly funds as punishment for their disobedience.[32] "*Freiwilligen* units," read the Reichswehr Ministry decree, "which are not approved by the Reichswehr Minister to join the Reichswehr will no longer be allowed to demand *Reichsmittel* (federal means)." Therefore, keenly aware of what awaited them in the event of dismissal from the Provisional Reichswehr, the mere threat of disbandment was sufficient in many cases, and particularly for the naval brigades, to raise the serious possibility of a putsch attempt to safeguard their position and resources. The material means to unleash violence were central to the Freikorps movement's ability to generate the atmosphere of violence with which they sought to influence

[31] Sammartino, *Impossible Border,* 61.
[32] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 47.

the political affairs of the country. Obviously without weapons Freikorps troops would be unable to unleash physical violence, but the loss of the means of violence also deprived the Freikorps of their ability to attempt to threaten or intimidate the civilian populace. Therefore without the presence of deadly weapons the Freikorps were rendered incapable of physical or psychological violence and thus politically impotent. This weakness of the Freikorps system slowly became apparent to both the government leadership and the Freikorps in late 1919.

Furthermore, there was a sense within the remaining Freikorps troops, both inside and outside of the Provisional Reichswehr, that as their strength was beginning to ebb so too did their ability to influence the military and political affairs of Germany. Finding acceptable recruits, both with the necessary combat training and acceptable cultural-political viewpoint, became increasingly difficult throughout late 1919. As early as March 1919, reports from Bavaria indicated there were already difficulties finding "ready-to-use" *freiwillige* units. Captain Carl August von Gablenz's appraisal of the military-political situation in Bavaria confessed his inability to gather sufficient number of Freikorps troops in Bamberg or the general region of II and III Bavarian Army Corps to protect the Landtag assembly.[33] What troops were available were often of uneven and decreasingly quality. By 19 May, Bavarian army officials were forced to concede:

> An intervention by the Reich is necessary. Above all it must create a military power in Bavaria which remains independent from the government and can use force to negotiate in cases of emergency. … The creation of this power [in

[33] Heinz Hürten, *Zwischen Revolution und Kapp: Militär und Innenpolitik 1918-1920* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1977), 79-81. Only days before the Landtag had been occupied by the deputies of the Bavarian Soviet Republic, however as of 3 May 1919 was returned to the democratic republican government.

> Bavaria] has not been successful. Even the good Freikorps are largely composed to a high degree of only officers and students. The units are generally politically reliable and effective in combat, although having few [rank-and-file] soldiers and lacking the necessary sense of duty in the usual service. The lower levels of the staffs, as far as the officers are concerned, are often indifferent, dull and unreliable.[34]

This trend was not confined to just Bavaria, however. Manpower issues threatened the border security in Pomerania in April 1919. The commander of II Army Corps reported to the Heeresleitung that "Pomerania is man poor and lacking strong troops. *Freiwilligen* inflow is drying up. Only 1600 men have been retained in the Grenzschutz. The students in Greifswald make too many demands for future assurances that the government cannot fulfill."[35] Personnel deficiencies hampered the operation of the *Detachement Lierau* in Upper Silesia in summer 1919. "The detachment suffered a lack of young officers," noted the unit's war diary. "The active lieutenants were almost all dead or heavily wounded, and the reserve officers have begun to turn back to their studies or back to their professions."[36] Even large Freikorps formations began to worry about their diminishing strength and combat effectiveness. Despite their transition into the Provisional Reichswehr, General Maercker noted that there was a sizeable influx of students into many former Freikorps units, including the FLK, as First World War veterans slowly returned to prewar civilian life in search of material benefits no longer available through many *freiwillige* formations.[37] The powerful Ehrhardt Brigade (II Marinebrigade) had been

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[34] BHStA IV – Kriegsarchiv – Gruppenkommando IV, Bd 25a. 19 May 1919.
[35] BA-MA N 42-14. Nachlass Schleicher. "Protokoll einer Besprechung der Obersten Heeresleitung mit dem Generalkommando des II Armeekorps über die innere Sicherheit." Stettin. 9 April 1919.
[36] BA-MA PH 26-12. "Das Detachement Lierau." August 1918 – August 1919.
[37] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 257.

weakened so drastically by loss of skilled personnel that it was forced to undergo several weeks of training in January 1920 in an effort to maintain its combat effectiveness and in Ehrhardt's words "build the unit into a *Machtfaktor* (power factor), which will allow us to determine our own future."[38] Therefore, at the start of 1920, many Freikorps commanders, either operating independently or within the Provisional Reichswehr, were increasingly aware of their fleeting strength, the mortality of the entire movement. The time to act, to claim a strong and powerful position in the future of the new republic, needed to happen quickly before attrition and time removed any possibility of such action.

The relationship between the Freikorps and the political authorities in Berlin began to unravel in late 1919. Angered by a perceived weakness towards their left-wing opponents during the height of the Bürgerkrieg, many Freikorps commanders and troops voiced their displeasure over the government's reconciliation attempts with socialist and trade union officials. "Compromise means weakness, and never leads to a solution and relief, but rather always to the intensification and aggravation of every situation," declared Freikorps Captain Waldemar Pabst in September 1919. "We soldiers want no compromise, we want a solution, we want a new, strong Reich with a firm state authority."[39]

Further friction between the Freikorps and the government arose over the so-called "Flag Question." On 11 August the National Assembly passed the new constitution, in which Article III designated the *Schwarz-Rot-Gold* flag of the 1848

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[38] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 259.
[39] Curt Hotzel, *Deutscher Aufstand: die Revolution des Nachkriegs*, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1934), 39.

revolution as the new Reich national colours. Tied to this, on 14 August, the new oath of loyalty for all Reichswehr personnel was published. It read: "I swear loyalty to the Reich Constitution and pledge that I as a brave soldier of the German Reich will always protect its constitutional establishment, and will loyally obey the Reich President and my Superiors."[40] These changes proved intolerable for many Freikorps and army officers, as they clung to the traditions of the old imperial military. This was particularly clear for the leaders of Reichswehr Regiment 29. They announced that the new oath must immediately be discarded, *Schwarz-Weiß-Rot* cockades should be retained by all troops, no oaths should be taken on the new flag, nor should it be hung on any Reichswehr building. Combined with the new republican constitution, one of the most progressive in the world at the time, many conservative members of the military chose to express their indignation over the new realities of post-revolution Germany through demonstrations over the flag question.

Joined in their protest by Reichswehr Brigade 15, formerly Freikorps von Oven, and personnel from the Ehrhardt Brigade, the discontentment of the troops also grew dramatically as the demands of the Entente concerning the War Guilt clause and the extradition of accused war criminals were announced. On 14 November 1919 the officers of Reichswehr Brigade 3, formerly Freikorps von Hülsen, joined the protest within the military realm, declaring:

> We members of the Freikorps and the Reichswehr have done our full obligations in the fulfillment of our duty to the Fatherland. Under commitment of blood and life we have carried out the protection of the government authority and whose existence was guaranteed. Numerous

[40] Heeresverordnungsblatt I, Nr 7, 13 September 1919.

> *Kameraden* fell here for the Fatherland. Therefore we feel concerned and must give our disconcertment about this expression, that those who sit at the top of the Reichswehr, including the "Reichswehr" Minister, who represents the interests of the men who are subordinated to him, have not rejected [the Entente demands] with all severity.[41]

Only through the direct intervention of Lüttwitz did these units eventually agree to end their open hostility towards the new symbols of the republic; however, a lack of protest should not be considered acceptance in this case.[42]

The formal acceptance of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles was a pivotal moment in the deteriorating relationship between the government and the Freikorps movement. No single act taken by the Ebert government would be so consistently referenced when referring to the "betrayal" and "weakness" of the republican regime. Even relatively moderate Freikorps officers, such as Ludwig Maercker, declared to the Reichswehr Minister on 23 June:

> I am as a Prussian General not in the position to further serve a government that recognizes the guilt of Germany for starting the war, and which would extradite my former supreme military commanders and German leaders to their enemies. Certainly a great part of the officer corps and not a few of the non-commissioned officers and troops of the Landesjägerkorps think the way I do.[43]

War Guilt and the extradition of so-called War Criminals weighed heavily on the minds of the Freikorps members throughout the summer and fall of 1919. Although historians now believe that the inclusion of the War Guilt Clause was largely motivated by the need to secure a legal basis for the imposition of reparation clauses - the final sum would not be finalized until the summer of 1921 - for the

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[41] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 217.
[42] Ibid., 218.
[43] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 288.

Freikorps troops, the clause was nothing less than a shameful attack on German honour. "The signing of the peace treaty has caused a vast outrage in the army," wrote the commander of the Grenzschutz South, General Kurt von dem Borne. "The officer corps feels especially the inclusion of the shameful paragraphs as the most bitter insult. … The army and the people have suffered a dishonour, and the officer corps has lost faith in the government."[44] Military elites informed Noske in June that should the government sign the peace treaty, they anticipated a significant number of *freiwilligen* units would mutiny or resign. Although the danger proved to be largely illusory, Freikorps accounts from this time, such as those by Maercker, Salomon, and Bischoff, consistently stress the feelings of betrayal and shame associated with the signing of the treaty. Indeed, the anger over the acceptance of the Entente's terms proved so considerable and long lasting that Matthias Erzberger, signator of the treaty, was eventually assassinated on 26 August 1921, by the Organization CONSUL, a group of radical dissident Freikorps members.[45]

The actions of the Organization CONSUL highlight a growing trend in Freikorps activity that was becoming increasingly evident by early 1920 and would come to dominate the future shape of the movement.[46] Many units, now forced to operate without the government assistance necessary to continue fielding large professional military field formations, remained active but transitioned into other

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[44] BA-MA N 97-6. 28 June 1919. "Erklärung des Oberbefehlshabers des Grenzschutz Süd, General der Infantrie von dem Borne, zur Unterzeichnung des Versailler Vertrages."
[45] Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism,* 217.
[46] For more on Organization CONSUL and Orgesch see: Martin von Sabrow, *Organisation Consul (O.C.), 1920-1922* (Bavarian State Library, 2010); Christoph von Hübner, *Organisation Escherich (Orgesch), 1920/2*1 (Bavarian State Library, 2009).

groups commited to violent political activism featuring street demonstrations, marches and brawls in auditoriums and public houses. Although not specifically labeled as Freikorps units, these other associations represented a transitional phase of the Freikorps movement away from militarized physical violence to alternative means to express their political beliefs. Many former Freikorps members shared the political aims of the Stahlhelm and also had membership in the paramilitary organization, and the new group continued to grow in number until the end of 1921 when the government took steps to reduce its strength. Before the Kapp Putsch in March 1920, there were only 30 local Stahlhelm chapters spread across the country. By June 1921 that number rose to 63, and by the end of the year to 300. In June 1922 the Stahlhelm boasted 500 local groups and over 500,000 members.[47] The Stahlhelm was primarily concentrated in central and northeastern Germany, mirroring the regions with highly levels of Freikorps activity. In western Germany the dominant military association was the *Jungdeutscher Orden* (the Young German Order), or the Jungdo. Formed in Kassel on 10 January 1919 by a young officer, Artur Mahraun, the Jungdo initially only numbered approximately 200 men and was generally localized to Kassel. By January 1923, the Jungdo had 200,000 members and nearly 200 local groups. It would remain the second largest militant group throughout the Republic, even into the early 1930s. However, the main bastion for the creation of what historian James Diehl has termed 'Political Combat Leagues' was Bavaria. Originally led by Georg Escherich and Rudolf Kanzler, the *Orgesch* grew

[47] James Diehl, "Veterans' Politics under Three Flags," in *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War*, James Diehl and Stephen R Ward eds (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975), 164.

dramatically in the early 1920s. Although formally dissolved by government decree in June 1921, the organization continued as an underground military association renamed Bund Bayern und Reich under the leadership of Otto Pittinger. Although established before the Kapp Putsch, these violent political organizations would become the most easily recognizable expression of the Freikorps movement throughout the remainder of the decade.

The Kapp Putsch

On the eve of the Kapp Putsch the leadership of the Provisional Reichswehr was divided. The antagonism between the three main leaders of the army, Seeckt, Reinhardt and Lüttwitz, was a defining cataclysm between the representatives of divergent groups existing within the military sphere, specifically the "Reichswehr" and Freikorps. Just as important as the actual physical clash between the former comrades in arms, the antagonism between Seeckt and Lüttwitz embodied the long brewing battle over the future spiritual direction of the armed forces.[48] By the end of March 1920, the fate of the Provisional Reichswehr would be set by one of these two men, either embracing the traditions of the German-Prussian officer corps stretching back to Frederick the Great, or alternatively, the new ideology of violence, action and nationalism borne from the destruction of the First World War and the instability of the immediate postwar era.

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[48] For more on the creation of the final form of the Reichswehr see: William Mulligan, *The Creation of the Modern German Army: General Walther Reinhardt and the Weimar Republic, 1914-1930* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005).

Despite being the highest ranking military officer in January 1920, Reinhardt's position as Chief of the Heeresleitung was actually the most insecure of the three. He benefited neither from the buttressing power of traditional authority, as Seeckt enjoyed from the support of the disguised German General Staff, now operating as the Truppenamt or Troop Office, nor could he count on the passionate support of hundreds of thousands of patriotic Freikorps troops as did Lüttwitz. As the commanding general of Group Command I, Lüttwitz's position within the army leadership was unnaturally strong, largely owing to his bond with rank-and-file Freikorps soldiers and the concentration of a preponderance of the army's combat troops in his command region.[49] Seeckt's authority stemmed entirely from the support of the staff officer community, and his open determination to root out the dangerous streak of independence that characterized the Freikorps movement. Thus, the divisions in the leadership of the Provisional Reichswehr came to reflect the social divide that already existed within the cohorts of the army. All that was needed was a spark to set off open hostilities.

The ignition point for the confrontation between the Freikorps and the Reichswehr over the future direction of the military came in the unlikely figure of Dr. Wolfgang Kapp. The son of a prominent liberal leader during the 1848 Revolution, Kapp was a disgruntled monarchist who had worked against the republican government since its first days in November 1918. Co-founder of the Fatherland Party during the war, Kapp's work with nationalist groups continued during the Weimar Republic through the creation of the National Union (*Nationale*

[49] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 222.

Vereinigung), a right-wing propaganda organ co-founded by his future conspirators Erich Ludendorff and Waldemar Pabst. Around Kapp gathered a diverse coterie of unemployed imperial bureaucrats, conservative and nationalist politicians, and men seeking advancement at any turn. The German Nationalist deputies Dr Gottfried Traub and Freiherr Friedrich von Wangenheim, former Under State Secretary Freiherr Adolf von Falkenhausen, former Government President Traugott von Jagow, and the industrialist Arnold Rechberg were among the most prominent of the civilian conspirators.[50] Quickly they began to contact military figures who they believed would be sympathetic to their embryonic plan to overthrow the republic. Unfortunately, most of the military supporters of the Kapp Putsch had no political experience or instincts. Generals Ludendorff and Graf Rüdiger von der Goltz were the leading military dissidents to join the putsch and gave it the appearance of legitimacy, as both men were still highly regarded in military circles. Von der Goltz had also been active in the Freikorps campaigns in the Baltics and brought with him the loyalty of the troublesome *Baltikumer* troops.[51]

According to Lüttwitz, planning for the putsch, therefore, only began in earnest in July. At the start of that month, Lüttwitz began his first open discussion of a violent revolution. He spoke to his Chief of Staff, Major Karl von Stockhausen, concerning the feasibility of deploying the Freikorps in such an operation against the government. While Stockhausen agreed that the Freikorps could certainly be useful, he argued that they were not suited to restrain themselves and would require a strong controlling commander like Noske or Lüttwitz to provide critical

[50] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 92.
[51] Sammartino, *Impossible Border,* 50.

political direction. During this period, Lüttwitz and Kapp first became acquainted, and a meeting was held in Kapp's Berlin home on 8 July to establish the basis for the putsch leadership. Generals Ludendorff, Otto von Below, Fritz von Loßberg, and Major Karl von Unruh all attended.[52]Encouraged by the positive outcome of this meeting, Lüttwitz sought out other officers in the Provisional Reichswehr leadership, but found little success. General Friedrich von Schoeler, commander of Group Command II, firmly rejected Lüttwitz's putsch overtures. Indeed, Lüttwitz found a very frosty reception to his plans among most staff officers whom he consulted. However, all was not lost. Lüttwitz was warmly received by Freikorps commanders, who were concerned about their vulnerable position in the transition army.

On 25 July the first major planning meeting for the eventual Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch took place with seven other generals and five Freikorps commanders in attendance to discuss political circumstances within the Republic.[53] Alongside Lüttwitz's staff officers, several prominent Freikorps officers took part, including Generals Heinrich von Hofmann, Bernhardt von Oven, Friedrich von der Lippe, and Maercker.[54] While Maercker would contend that it was not the business of the Reichswehr to enter politics, other officers showed no such reticence and supported Lüttwitz's proposals entirely. The conference finally accepted a compromise settlement, worked out by Majors Stockhausen and Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord, which provided for military action in a variety of situations. If the government

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[52] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 252.
[53] Ibid., 250.
[54] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 99.

should attempt to turn any accused war criminals over to the Allies, including Wilhelm II, or the unity of the Reich were threatened, or the government violated the constitution, or if reductions in the strength of the Reichswehr were ordered while the threat of a revolution still appeared imminent, the plotters would initiate their plans to overthrow the republic.

After this crucial command meeting between most of the key conspirators, the purpose of the National Union, or *Nationale Vereinigung,* was altered to fulfill a dual military-political role during the planning and execution of the putsch. The function of this body was to establish alternative military and political institutions to those ruling in Berlin. It is also an indicator of the close connection between the military and political realms during the revolutionary era in the Weimar Republic. No political movement or revolution was complete without a powerful accompanying military force to guarantee its existence during the Bürgerkrieg. Composed of military and civilian members, the National Union represented the formation of a military-political institution with the Freikorps movement at its core. Indeed, *freiwillige* officers played critical roles in the military planning and propaganda functions of the group. Major Pabst was a crucial organizer at this stage, supported by Major Alfred Fletcher, the former commander of the Baltische Landeswehr, and Major Franz von Stephani, former commander of the Freikorps Potsdam.[55]

Kapp-Lüttwitz supporters now began to search for reliable military forces to deploy against the republican government. Originally, their plans centred on the

[55] BA-MA N 40-11. "Erinnerungen von Hilmar von Mittelberger an den Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch." 13 March 1920. Berlin. Page 9.

powerful and revolutionary Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps (GKSK); however, they were forced to explore alternatives after a surprise and failed putsch attempt by the Freikorps unit led to its dismemberment in late July 1919. Instead, the plotters contacted Maercker, Wilhelm Heye and Ehrhardt, hoping to woo their powerful Freikorps troops to the side of the putsch. While Heye and Maercker both rejected the overtures, Ehrhardt and his formation, fearing dismissal from the Provisional Reichswehr, decided to support the plot. With a firm commitment from the Ehrhardt Brigade, vital manpower for the putsch had been secured.

Word of these schemes and maneuvers eventually reached Seeckt by early October 1919. Seeckt had suspected a putsch was being prepared in July, after Kapp supporters had foolishly contacted his friend and subordinate, Colonel Heye. Armed with knowledge of their intrigue against the republican government, Seeckt issued a withering critique of generals who would seek to enter politics. "I expect every general staff officer to work constantly to achieve the highest possible level of military proficiency and to act as a model and stimulus to advancement throughout the army," Seeckt wrote in an order to all staff officers on 10 October.[56] "We need peace, order and work at home," continued Seeckt.

> In order to achieve these we need the greatest possible unity of all men. Everything that breeds dissension and unrest among the people must be avoided. … I warn against wanton toying with revolutionary ideas, without consideration of the external and internal consequences, and against following irresponsible counselors in word and writing.[57]

Although he could not force his superiors to take action against Lüttwitz, Seeckt was still able to order his subordinates to abstain from contact with Lüttwitz and his

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[56] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 101-103
[57] Ibid.

fellow plotters. In another order, also written on 10 October, Seeckt wrote to his subordinates in the Truppenamt:

> I have ascertained with pleasure that, in accordance with my wishes, general staff officers have almost entirely avoided stepping into the political limelight. I have recently learned, however, that various parties have been attempting to influence general staff officers in definite political directions, and even to persuade them to participate actively in political movements. I am obliged to warn forcibly against acceptance of such overtures, not merely in the interest of the Officer Corps itself, but, far more, in that of the Fatherland.[58]

Opposition to the putsch began to mount throughout the month of October. In a speech delivered in the National Assembly on 29 October, Noske indicated his awareness of the possibility of a right-wing plot to overthrow the government and sharply condemned anyone who sought to resist constitutional authority. Indeed, word of putsch activity became so wide spread that Noske even considered dismissing Lüttwitz in November, but was persuaded by Reinhardt that it could potentially incite resistance from the Freikorps troops within the army. Ultimately it was the government's determination to acquiesce to the Entente's demands for troop reductions that brought matters to a head. Lüttwitz loudly opposed any reduction of the army, arguing that it was tantamount to "national suicide" and would immediately lead to a leftwing revolution. Nevertheless, Noske, Reinhardt and Seeckt persisted with their plans, even if it required Lüttwitz's eventual dismissal from the army. The divisions within the army were more exposed than ever before.

Aware of their clear sympathy towards the putsch organizers, Seeckt began troop reductions with the demobilization of the naval brigades under Ehrhardt and

[58] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 102.

Loewenfeld. As the Ehrhardt brigade was the lynch pin for Lüttwitz's putsch plans in the Berlin area, its disbandment would greatly reduce the likelihood of a revolt. Ignoring Lüttwitz's protests, the official resolution to disband the two naval units was adopted at a conference held on Sunday, 29 February 1920. Both brigades were to be officially dissolved no later than 10 March. This move left few options for Lüttwitz. All of the plans for the Kapp putsch depended on the strength of the Ehrhardt Brigade to seize and hold Berlin while they awaited support from Baltic Freikorps formations in the following days. Resolute in his decision to oppose the government and the Treaty of Versailles, Lüttwitz felt he had no choice but to act before the dissolution of the brigades, and chose to accelerate his timeline from April to early March.

Despite opposition to his plans from his chief of staff General Martin von Oldershausen and Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord, Lüttwitz openly rejected Noske and Seeckt's order to transfer control of the brigade to Trotha and presented a formal ultimatum to President Ebert in the evening of 10 March. The list of demands consisted of a sampling from political programs from right-wing parties and Lüttwitz's own military modifications, which called for the replacement of General Reinhardt with General Ernst von Wrisberg and the maintenance of the army at its present strength. Other political demands were later added to obscure the predominantly military motives for the putsch. Lüttwitz demanded immediate Reichstag elections, popular election of the president, and the acceptance of ministers into the government, regardless of their political affiliation.[59] However,

[59] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 106.

despite the added political trappings, military issues remained at the core of Lüttwitz's decision to support Kapp and overthrow the government.

Friedrich Ebert decisively rejected Lüttwitz's terms. Echoing his agreement, Noske stated that no government could survive after accepting those demands, and that no general had a right to present such demands to his political superiors. Noske also confirmed that not only would Reinhardt be retained, but that the scheduled reductions would go ahead as planned.[60] Finally, Noske reiterated that the Ehrhardt Brigade should be immediately transferred to Trotha's control for demobilization.[61] After Lüttwitz departed from the Chancellery, both Noske and Ebert anticipated that the general would offer his resignation the following day. Neither man took any action to protect the government against the putsch attempt that they had been informed was possible since July 1919.[62] When Lüttwitz's resignation failed to materialize the following morning, Noske began taking action to neutralize the commander of the largest cohort of military troops in Germany. He issued an arrest order for Lüttwitz, removing him from command and placing him temporarily on leave. Oldershausen was directed to take control of Group Command I and issue telegrams to all Wehrkreis commands, informing the officers that Lüttwitz had been relieved from duty as a result of insubordination to the civilian authorities. Feeling assured that Lüttwitz was effectively contained, Noske finally issued arrest orders for the rest of the conspirators including Kapp and Bauer. However, due to the

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[60] Noske, *Kiel bis Kapp*, 196.
[61] MA-BA N 40-11. "Erinnerungen von Hilmar von Mittelberger an den Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch." 12-14 March 1920. Berlin. Page 10.
[62] Noske, *Kiel bis Kapp,* 196-198.

lethargy of the Berlin police department, most of the key members of the plot avoided capture.[63]

In response, the putschists implemented their plan to seize control of the capital. Optimism ran high in the early days of the Kapp putsch, in large part because of their poor grasp of international and domestic political circumstances. Deluded into believing that Britain was far more sympathetic than was the case, many putsch leaders thought that their refusal to carry out the troop reductions would be met with leniency by the Entente, instead of the immediate protests that followed.[64] Furthermore, several generals mistook left-wing criticism of Ebert's government as a potential indication of support for *any* attempt to overthrow the republican government, even one from the extreme right. However, the most significant miscalculation for the putschists concerned their own supporters. Fundamentally, the Freikorps movement was not a stable pillar upon which to establish any regime. Fickle, quarrelsome and prone to disobedience, the Freikorps movement had already proven rebellious within the Provisional Reichswehr and would do so again for Kapp and Lüttwitz. The decentralized and independent nature of the Freikorps should have precluded their involvement in the creation of any centralized military institution. The Freikorps had the potential to lead a revolution, but not govern a nation.

Although they counted some brilliant military planners among their members, the putsch leaders chose to assign the dentist turned journalist, Karl

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[63] MA-BA N 40-11. "Erinnerungen von Hilmar von Mittelberger an den Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch." 12-14 March 1920. Berlin. Page 12.
[64] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 110.

Schnitzler, to draft the "action plan" to move against the government. Despite its non-military origins, the plan had merit.[65] The key members of the government were to be arrested in the night. Berlin was to be cut off from the rest of the nation. A state of siege was to be imposed at dawn and the new government would take over. The Einwohnerwehr and Officers' Companies were to be called up to suppress potential left-wing activity. The middle class was to be won over with promises of peace, order and prosperity. The operation was slated to begin on the night of 12 March, when lead units from the Ehrhardt Brigade were to begin marching on Berlin at 10 pm. Traffic would be allowed out of the city but not into it. Berlin was to be isolated from the rest of the Reich, while the Ehrhardt Brigade seized strategic crossroads, buildings, services, and members of the government. The next morning, Germany would awake to a new regime.

However, news of the Ehrhardt Brigade's preparations quickly reached Noske. Admiral von Trotha was initially sent to demand the end of putsch preparations outside of the capital, although he would defect and join the rebels the following day. Therefore, on the evening 12 March the government held a final war council to determine their options and the most effective response to the crisis. Seeckt, Reinhardt, Oven, Oldershausen, and Noske's aide Major Werner von Gilsa were all in attendance as Noske and the civilian government demanded that the assembled officers lead the Berlin garrison against the mounting insurrection.[66]

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[65] For full details of the Kapp-Lüttwitz putsch plan, see Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 110-112.

[66] BHStA, Gruppenkommando 4, Volume 11, Document 6. 13-16 March 1920. "Bericht des Reichswehr-Gruppenkommando 4 an das Truppenamt über seine Maßnahmen während des Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsches."

While Reinhardt and Gilsa were both amenable to the order, Seeckt quickly quashed any such notion. "The Reichswehr does not shoot on the Reichswehr," Seeckt retorted. "Do you, Herr Minister have the intention of approving a battle in front of the Brandenburg Gate between troops who have fought side by side against the enemy?"[67] Angered by Seeckt's response, Noske accused the officers of attempting to shelter the insurgents from a strong military reaction. Seeckt answered: "This is not so, but I do know the unfortunate consequences that combat would bring. If Reichswehr clubs down Reichswehr, then all *Kameradschaft* in the officer corps would be at an end."[68] Finding no viable options to deploy the army, Noske moved to play his final card. He would lead the 9,000 men of the Sicherheitspolizei into the streets of Berlin to secure the government quarter. However, before Noske could issue his orders, Seeckt informed the beleaguered Reichswehr Minister that the poorly trained, organized and equipped units of the Sicherheitspolizei were not suited for a clash with an efficient combat formation like the Ehrhardt Brigade, and the point was moot: they had already defected to the rebels.

For the entire German military sphere, this was a critical moment. Where did their loyalties lie? Maercker would later write that for the men of the Landesjägerkorps, the Kapp Putsch constituted nothing less than a definitive "soul-searching" event.[69] While some moderates, like Maercker, saw value in both sides of the conflict, other men within the military saw matters in a simpler manner. Freikorps troops tended to support the Kapp Putsch, largely due to Lüttwitz's key

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[67] Friedrich von Rabenau, *Seeckt,* (Leipzig: Gesellschaft der Freunde der Deutschen Bücherei, 1942), 221.
[68] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 114.
[69] Maercker, *Vom Kaiserheer,* 353.

role in the rebellion, as they felt that the general was their best opportunity to secure control over the future direction of the army and direct it according to their vague nationalist principles embodied in the *Freikorpsgeist*. Troops who remained loyal to Ebert's government tended to have little or no connection to the Freikorps movement, and although not necessarily hostile to the Freikorps themselves, tended to place more value in discipline, order and constitutionally derived authority than the personal charisma and influence of a particular individual.[70] Therefore, although the division within the military between the Freikorps and the "Reichswehr" troops broke out into armed conflict in March 1920, this rupture lacked the passionate vehemence of the campaign against the 'Bolshevik' council movement, executed one year before. There were clear sympathies between both camps during the insurrection, yet different visions of the future of military and political authority nonetheless led to this brief but deadly clash between former comrades.

At 10 o'clock on the evening of 12 March, the Ehrhardt Brigade was ready to march. Well-armed columns of infantry, supported by artillery and mortars began moving towards the capital. As the brigade marched from its muster point in Döberitz towards Berlin along the Spandau-Pichelsdorf route, pro-government forces began defecting to the putsch, at first a few units at a time, but later whole batteries of heavy artillery troops and the entire contingent of 5,000 men from the Potsdam Reichswehr Brigade.[71] Ehrhardt communicated a few demands to Generals

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[70] BA-MA R 43 I/2719. 19 March 1920. Berlin. "Befehl des Stellvertretenden Reichswehrministers, Generalmajor v. Seeckt, an die Reichswehr-Gruppenkommandos über das Verhalten der Truppe beim Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch und seiner Beilegung."
[71] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 268.

Oven and Oldershausen, including appointment of ministers, reinstatement of General von Lüttwitz, election of the Reich president by popular vote, new elections to the National Assembly, and immunity for Kapp and his supporters.[72] Noske in turn rejected all of these demands and issued an ultimatum demanding Kapp, Lüttwitz and Ehrhardt immediately surrender. However, while Noske stood firm, the military leadership in Berlin was far less certain about the loyalty of their troops. They began issuing orders, instructing nominally pro-government troops to return to their barracks and avoid contact with the invading Freikorps troops in an attempt to prevent a mass defection to the ranks of the putschists.

Negotiations floundered and Ehrhardt's troops resumed their advance at 3 o'clock in the morning of 13 March, forcing Ebert's government to flee to Dresden. Shortly thereafter, leading units of the Ehrhardt Brigade occupied the Tiergarten, although there was hesitation to occupy the entire government quarter until 7 o'clock later that morning: a critical blunder that allowed the majority of the government to escape, and significantly delayed the establishment of Kapp's regime.[73] Despite this error, Berlin fell without resistance. A few units of a local Einwohnerwehr unit deployed in the streets as the Ehrhardt Brigade advanced, but only remained in position long enough to greet the invaders with loud cheers and salutes.[74] After momentary resistance from Oldershausen in the Reichswehr

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[72] BHStA Gruppenkommando 4, Vol 11, Document 6. "Bericht des Reichswehr-Gruppenkommando 4 an das Truppenamt über seine Maßnahmen während des Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsches." Page 4.
[73] Ludwig Schemann, *Wolfgang Kapp und das Märzunternehmen vom Jahre 1920*, (Munich: JF Lehmann, 1937), 147.
[74] Johannes Erger, *Der Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Innenpolitik 1919/1920* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1967), 149.

Ministry, Ebert's government ceded total control of the capital. Ehrhardt marched over the threshold of the Brandenburg Gate shortly after 7 o'clock in the morning, where he was joined by Kapp and Ludendorff, who would later testify that he simply happened to be taking his morning stroll at that precise moment and location.

Kapp immediately entered the Reich Chancellery and began establishing his new government. However, the putsch had been rushed due to the threatened dissolution of the Ehrhardt Brigade and key government positions, including the new cabinet, had not yet been filled. Kapp was appointed Reich Chancellor, Lüttwitz became Reichswehr Minister, Traugott von Jagow assumed the post of Prussian Minister of the Interior and Dr. Gottfried Traub took over the Ministry of Culture.[75] Poor organization also hampered the Kapp government's attempts to disseminate their new program. Owing to a lack of typewriters, Schnitzler was unable to send typed copies of the government's agenda to newspapers until the following day, as the putschists failed to utilize a crucial mouthpiece for the new administration. Kapp also declared the dissolution of the National Assembly and the Prussian Landtag, announced new elections, and published a wide-ranging government program critiquing Ebert's government and offering a vague outline for the future direction of Germany.[76] It was not a particular compelling vision of a new Germany. Indeed, Kapp's program sought to offer so many benefits to so many different groups that it

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[75] Erger, *Kapp-Lüttwitz*, 94.

[76] Kapp stated that the Versailles Peace Treaty would be upheld, "so far as it is possible and not self-destructive."[76] Provisions were included in the program that would have drastically scaled back the achievements of the SPD government. Kapp called for the re-establishment of old provincial authorities governing finance and culture, new concessions for property holders including protection from strikes and work stoppages, the abolition of what he termed "unilateral capitalism," and new programs to aid war veterans, widows, churches, and regional associations.

is difficult to see where he felt his main support base lay. While it was certainly a move away from the policies pursued by Ebert and the SPD, the program still included some clear concessions to the left-wing in a naïve attempt to gain allies within the socialist and communist parties.

Ultimately the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch was a military affair that overflowed into the political realm due to the integrated nature of the military and political spheres in the early Weimar Republic. Support from the military was critical to the future of Kapp's regime. Control over the means of violence and the ability to continue to use those weapons to influence the political affairs of the country lay at the heart of the Kapp Putsch. Berlin was firmly in the hands of the Kapp troops. Alongside the Ehrhardt Brigade, the Reichswehr Brigade III from Potsdam, composed of troops from the former Freikorps von Hülsen and Freikorps von Potsdam, held complete control in the Reich capital. The majority of troops in Berlin declared for Kapp and Lüttwitz, including remnants of the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützendivision, members of the dissolved Freikorps Roßbach, as well as a steady trickle of former '*Baltikumer*' Freikorps troops. Berlin's fate appeared decided, but the rest of the Reich remained unclear.

As news of the government's flight to Dresden, and later to Stuttgart, became public knowledge, the military sphere descended into chaos. "Like almost all officers of the Reichswehr Ministry, I was surprised by the sudden outbreak of the action," Major Hilmar von Mittelberger wrote in his diary. "I must consider it a significant mistake that a timely orientation of the officers of the Reichswehr Ministry was not

undertaken. As a consequence, at first no one knew what was actually happening."[77] Indeed, for the first few days after Ehrhardt's seize of Berlin there were no clear instructions issued to any of the command posts from either side, allowing each commander to take their own position regarding the putsch. An order to Wehrkreis Command IV, sent on 13 March, merely informed the commander that the "previous government has left Berlin," a new government had been created under *Generallandschaftsdirecktor* Wolfgang Kapp, and that "in the military, all command and subordinate relationships should not be changed or altered."[78] There was no attempt to coordinate operations between Munich and Berlin, and indeed the Chief of Staff of Wehrkreis VII in Bavaria still reported that he had no knowledge of the putsch in the afternoon of 13 March.[79] Thoroughly unimpressed by the poor organization of the attempt to overthrow the government, Mittelberger already concluded on 14 March that his initial observations "were enough for me to clearly understand that the organization of the Putsch was built on sand and they would not be able to alter the internal political power dynamics through speeches alone."[80]

Generally, the commanders in the east and north gave the clearest statements regarding their position towards the putsch. General Ludwig von Estorff,

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[77] BA-MA N 40 - 11. "Erinnerungen von Hilmar von Mittelberger an den Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch." 12-14 March, 1920. Nachlass Mittelberger.
[78] BA-MA RH 37 – 5087. "Befehl des Wehrkreiskommandos IV an die Reichswehr-Brigade 19 über das Verhalten angesichts des Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsches." 13 March 1920.
[79] BA-MA N 40 – 11.
[80] Ibid. Mittelberger also had a low opinion of Kapp's propaganda wing. Noting the ineffective means of communication utilized by the rebels, Mittelberger wrote: "As I read the declaration of the Kapp Government on the poster columns, with type written slips of paper, which hardly was noticed by the populace, my [poor impression of the putsch] found affirmation. How miserable must the organization be if they were not even able to commandeer a printing shop!"

commander of Wehrkreis I in East Prussia, declared for Kapp. With him were General Graf Egon von Schmettow in Breslau, General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck in Schwerin, Major General Gustav Hagenberg in Weimar, Oberst Freiherr Karl von Wangenheim in Hamburg, and the vast majority of the naval commanders.[81] Only General Walter von Bergmann, commander of Wehrkreis V in Stuttgart, openly supported the government. The remainder of the commanders of the major command posts remained guarded. In general, the situation in Group Command II, responsible for west and southern Germany, was murky. General Roderich von Schoeler, commander of Group Command II, and his Chief of Staff, Major General Fritz von Loßberg, had both had conversations with Lüttwitz but remained unconvinced that an attempt to violently overthrow the republic would be successful. Due to their hesitation in the planning phase of the Kapp Putsch, Group Command II had not been included in any of the preparations and therefore were completely surprised when Ehrhardt marched on Berlin.[82] General Freiherr Oskar von Watter, commander of Wehrkreis VI, only chose to express his patriotic sentiments and commitment to the preservation of *Ruhe und Ordnung* in his region, but would not openly declare for or against Kapp and Lüttwitz. The ever-calculated General von Möhl, commander of Wehrkreis VII in Bavaria, held back from commenting and deferred his decision in the opening days of the putsch.[83]

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[81] Walther Lüttwitz, *Im Kampf gegen die November-Revolution*, (Berlin: O. Schlegel, 1934), 123.
[82] Erich von Manstein, *Aus einem Soldatenleben, 1887-1939*, (Bonn: Athenäum-Verlag, 1958), 75.
[83] Friedrich Wilhelm von Oertzen, *Die deutschen Freikorps, 1918-1923*, (Munich: F Bruckmann, 1936), 374.

However, the major source of resistance to the putsch came from Hans von Seeckt. The Chief of the Truppenamt refused to offer his cooperation, and the vast majority of the general staff officers chose to follow his lead. In response to Lüttwitz's putsch attempt, Seeckt tendered his resignation on 13 March, appointed Colonel Heye as his representative in the Truppenamt, and took his leave. Although physically absent from the drama that played out in the capital, Seeckt remained involved in the affair, operating through proxies to continually stymie the putschists' efforts to take over the army. Without the vital support of Seeckt and the general staff, the putsch supporters were hard pressed to project their power outward from Berlin. Critical planning and administrative offices were denied to the rebels, as the central organs of the military largely remained outside of the control of Kapp supporters. As legal holders of military authority, the Wehrkreis commanders held enormous influence over their regions and complete power to decide whether they would disseminate the instructions issued by Kapp and Lüttwitz to their troops. Their hesitation doomed Lüttwitz's attempt to consolidate military authority and with it the entire Kapp Putsch.

Faced with resistance from both the military and civilian bureaucracies, the Kapp Putsch was already beginning to falter on 14 March. Most of that day was occupied with futile negotiations between the Kapp regime and Ebert's government, amateurishly conducted through the would be negotiator Ludwig Maercker. In the end neither side wholly trusted Maercker to represent their interests and crucial hours were squandered by the putschists. The following day disaster struck for Kapp and Lüttwitz. General strike orders went into effect and a crippling mass

demonstration, organized by trade unions and left-wing political parties, brought Germany to a standstill. No troops could be moved by railway, no information could be easily communicated, and all economic life ground to a halt. Ehrhardt proposed harsh measures to break the strike, including summary executions and cutting off all water supply to the workers' quarters in the city, but the putsch leaders shied away from such draconian punishments as they were keen to avoid an open civil war with the working class on only their second day in office.[84] While the general strike effectively guaranteed the Kapp Putsch would fail, the outcome of the putsch had already been decided earlier through the inability of the rebels to impose their authority over the military realm.

By 16 March, Kapp's regime began to unravel quickly. Kapp expressed his own doubts to Pabst concerning Lüttwitz's ability to consolidate control over the military and the persistent resistance within the civilian administration to the rebels.[85] The *Generallandschaftsdirecktor* even started to openly discuss quitting the undertaking altogether. While some troop commanders, particularly Ehrhardt, remained committed to the attempt to establish the new regime, others were hesitant to risk open warfare in the streets of Berlin once more.[86] Sensing the depressed atmosphere hanging around his closest military supporters, Lüttwitz began to examine options to make a dignified exit. Through his intermediary, Pabst, Lüttwitz entered into negotiations with the sole remaining government representative left in the capital, Dr. Eugen Schiffer. Schiffer, however, was not in an

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[84] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 120.
[85] Friedrich Freksa, *Kapitän Ehrhardt: Abenteuer und Schicksale*, (Berlin: A. Scherl, 1924), 184.
[86] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 121.

understanding mood. He reminded the rebels that the government had already adopted several of the rebels' demands, including new national elections and the popular election of the Reich President and insisted on an unconditional surrender from the putschists. Lüttwitz sent back word that the Kapp government would insist on complete fulfillment of their original terms. Angered by Lüttwitz's impertinence, Schiffer withdrew all of his previous offers, including a general amnesty for all putsch leaders. The last opportunity for a dignified end for Kapp and Lüttwitz had expired.

The next day the entire putsch collapsed. During the night of 16/17 March, the military position of the Kapp government rapidly deteriorated. The Guards Engineer Battalion deserted, arrested their own officers, and declared themselves to be loyal Ebert supporters.[87] Early in the morning of 17 March, the ever-fickle Sicherheitspolizei, unimpressed with the wave of left-wing agitation sparked by the Kapp Putsch and the lackluster performance of Kapp's government, returned to their barracks and refused to cooperate with the rebels any further. In the late afternoon, rebel troops began publicly mutinying along the Köpenickerstraße, as inactivity and a general lack of results from the Kapp government quickly weakened the troops' confidence in the undertaking. Sensing the collapse of the entire affair, Kapp deserted as well, handing full control of the government to Lüttwitz. Now the sole authority in Berlin, Lüttwitz weighed his options, and eventually decided that his forces had been degraded to beyond hope of success and chose to move to end

[87] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 121.

the rebellion, despite the request from Ehrhardt to turn his brigade loose on the organized working class in the capital.[88]

However, one last drama was yet to play out. Members of the officer corps staged a revolt against Lüttwitz's regime. A delegation of senior officers from the Reichswehr Ministry met with Lüttwitz late on 17 March in the Reich Chancellery. Heye, appearing on direct orders from Seeckt, informed Lüttwitz that although the officer corps sympathized with the motives behind the putsch, the threat of civil war as a result of Lüttwitz's actions could not be tolerated. Furthermore, every day the rebellion continued, it turned former comrades against each other, damaging the internal cohesion of the army. Heye demanded that Lüttwitz immediately resign and hand full authority over to Seeckt.[89] Lüttwitz did not react with much poise. After pounding his sabre on the floor and threatening to arrest Heye, Lüttwitz accused the assembled officers of insubordination and refused to resign. Despite this outburst, Lüttwitz nonetheless recognized his hopeless position and drove to the Reich Justice Ministry hours later to meet with Schiffer and finally tender his resignation. Now without Kapp and Lüttwitz, Ehrhardt met with Schiffer to resign his commission in the navy and end the putsch on 18 March. Although it only lasted five brief days, the impact of the open revolt of the Freikorps units within the Reichswehr would be far-reaching and lead to a dramatic transformation of the German military sphere.

The failure of the Kapp Putsch demonstrated the limit of violence to influence political authority. Feats that may have been possible directly after the revolution,

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[88] BHStA Gruppenkommando 4, Vol 11, Document 6. "Bericht des Reichswehr-Gruppenkommando 4 an das Truppenamt über seine Maßnahmen während des Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsches." Page 8.
[89] Rabenau, *Seeckt*, 225-6.

including an armed seizure of power in Berlin, were no longer feasible. Put simply, March 1920 was not November 1918.The Kapp rebels had well-trained and armed military means at their disposal, but failed to topple the Ebert-Bauer government. Three thousand people died, roughly one million marks were spent, and over 1,000 years of prison sentences were handed out, but the attempt to overthrow the republic still failed.[90] It did so for two key reasons. First, Lüttwitz and his supporters were ill-suited for the task set before them. The Freikorps system was not a suitable foundation for a new reliable military institution nor was it able to secure political authority for a new regime. Quarrelsome and prone to selectively following orders, the Freikorps system was de-centralized and prone to radical political views: hardly the basis for a stable government in a deeply politically divided country. Second, institutional authority had begun to reassert itself by late 1919. The organs of the republic were no longer novel experimentations of a socialist government. Instead, the civilian and military bureaucracies had begun to grow accustomed to operating within the new regime. Charsmatic personalities were not the influentual source of authority that it was in 1918 and would be again after 1933. Additionally, Ebert and his ministers had weathered such storms before. Although the flight to Stuttgart was dramatic, the republican administration under Chancellor Gustav Bauer eventually re-established contact with all major ministries and key Wehrkreis commands, and reasserted its authority within a few days. Therefore, by the time of the Kapp Putsch, the Weimar Republic had already begun to show small signs of stability, even during the chaos of the first few years. It was no longer possible to achieve the

[90] Gerhard Schulze-Pfälzer, *Von Spa nach Weimar, die Geschichte der deutschen Zeitenwende*, (Leipzig: Grethlein, 1929), 325.

overthrow of the state through an armed putsch attempt. The government was far more stable in 1920, and most importantly, Ebert's regime had been legitimized by democratic elections. The age of the putsch as a viable means of taking control of the political direction of the country was over, although it would still be a few years before this was widely understood by would be revolutionaries.

Therefore, despite their flair and strength in March 1920, the Kapp Putsch represented the high point of the Freikorps movement and the beginning of the end of their ability to deploy professionalized military violence as a decisive political tool in the Weimar Republic. Although it only involved a portion of the total number of units scattered about the German countryside and border regions, the Kapp Putsch irrevocably hardened the will of the Reich political and military authorities against the movement. No longer would their volatile disobedience be meekly accepted and tolerated. Continued fears of Bolshevik revolts and agitation would periodically necessitate cooperation between lingering Freikorps units and the Reichswehr that would be rapidly reformed by Hans von Seeckt, but these instances would become rare rather than an accepted norm. The Freikorps revolution had failed.

CHAPTER X: THE REICHSWEHR TRIUMPHANT

Although Kapp and Lüttwitz's putsch attempt had failed, in 1920 the military sphere was still highly fragmented and lacked strong central control. The Provisional Reichswehr remained internally divided between troops who had rebelled against the government, largely Freikorps units, and those who had remained loyal to Ebert and the republic. Seeckt had been appointed emergency commander of the army, but his control over the rank-and-file had not yet been fully established or tested. Military affairs were further complicated by left-wing revolutionary activity and the lingering possibility of strikes and demonstrations, organized by working-class military-political organizations, seeking to undermine the position of the Provisional Reichswehr in the new regime. However by the end of 1923, a significant transformation of the military sphere had occurred. While divisions would continue to exist within the army, and not all troops would remain model republican soldiers, Seeckt's reformation of the Reichswehr nevertheless established a centralized military authority within Germany, dominating access to the means of lethal violence and ensuring the safety the Weimar Republic from attempts to overthrow the government by force.

After Kapp

Even as the final negotiations between Schiffer and Ehrhardt were being handled on 18 March, President Ebert and his colleagues were already working to find a replacement for Lüttwitz. The final decision was delegated to Schiffer, who chose to promote Seeckt, rather than General von Oven, or to re-instate Reinhardt. Seeckt

wasted no time in enacting a sweeping reform of the Reichswehr. Mere moments after he was appointed Chief of the Heeresleitung, Seeckt began issuing orders by telephone, relieving a large number of senior officers from their post in the "curtest manner and with ruthless rudeness."[1] Described by Schiffer as "especially hated by the Kappists," Seeckt returned the sentiment, and struck against his opponents with brutal efficiency. Some of them, such as Kapp who flew to Sweden and Lüttwitz who fled to Hungary managed to escape his grasp, but the majority of the conspirators were slated to be purged on Seeckt's orders.

However, before Seeckt could begin his campaign against the Freikorps movement, left-wing revolutionary activity forced him to temporarily delay his reforms. In the wake of the Kapp Putsch, working-class demonstrations spread across Germany as a wave of anti-military sentiment seriously threatened the army's position in the republic. Drawing no distinctions between Freikorps and Reichswehr loyal troops, a broad coalition of trade union supporters, including the SPD, USPD, KPD, Christians, and radical anarcho-socialists, fiercely protested the continued prominent influence of the military in the political affairs of Germany. Although the timing was a reaction to the military putsch in Berlin, this was not a random protest; left-wing organizers had been preparing for such action since late 1919. An eight-point program had already been established by communist planners, demanding the immediate abolition of the existing military, occupation of public buildings, disarmament of all police organizations, destruction of rail networks to prevent foreign capitalist intervention, and the "immediate declaration of a Soviet

[1] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 124.

Republic (*Räterepublik*)."[2] Indeed, USPD and KPD organizers were already meeting on 13 March 1920 when the fate of the Kapp Putsch was still far from certain. The protestors made it clear that they were against the forces of 'reactionism' and their allies. "We do not fight for the Ebert-Noske government," stated a newsletter distributed in Essen. "Our slogan reads [that we are] 'Against the Reaction, against the traitors of Socialism, the henchmen of the Bourgeoisie, and for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat!'"[3] Red Guard units quickly organized and assembled themselves into self-proclaimed "Red Army" formations. As the Ruhr had not undergone a significant process of disarmament for fears of upsetting the organized working class in the region, Red Army units were well-equipped within days of assembly. Indeed, shortly after their declaration, some reports estimated the total number of Red Army soldiers around 80,000 men, while the Reichswehr believed the number was closer to 100,000.[4]

Seeckt's means to respond to the crisis were limited. The reliability of many Reichswehr units and Wehrkreis commands were questionable after the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch. Like Noske had before him, Seeckt was forced to turn to the one source of consistent anti-leftwing military power existing within Germany: the Freikorps.[5] Although openly opposed to trusting the Freikorps troops again, particularly mere days after they rebelled against the government, Seeckt had no

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[2] Hans Spethmann, *Zwölf Jahre Ruhrbergbau 2. Aufstand und Ausstand vor und nach dem Kapp-Putsch bis zur Ruhrbesetzung* (Berlin: Hobbing, 1928), 49.
[3] Carl Severing, *1919/1920 im Wetter – und Watterwinkel. Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerunge*n (Bielefeld: Buchhandlung Volkswacht, 1927), 142.
[4] MJ Braun, *Die Lehren des Kapp-Putsches*, (Leipzig: Frank, 1920), 173.
[5] See also, Gustav Noske, *Von Kiel bis Kapp" zur Geschichte der deutschen Revolution* (Berlin: Kulturverlag, 1919).

viable alternative but to unleash previously insurrectionary Freikorps units against the Red Army troops in the Ruhr valley. Freikorps Roßbach and elements of the Baltic Iron Division were quickly dispatched to join other Freikorps and Reichswehr troops assembling on the borders of the Ruhr.[6] As usual, the Freikorps were quick to unleash their distinctive brand of overwhelming professional military violence against the "spectre of Bolshevism."

The first clashes between Red Army and Freikorps troops occurred in the vicinity of Wetter on 15 March as the Freikorps Lichtschlag marched into action flying *Schwarz-Weiß-Rot* banners, in open defiance of the new Reichswehr flag regulations. Deeper in the Ruhr valley, there were more hostilities between workers and Freikorps troops. One hundred seventeen workers attacked a squad of 64 Freikorps soldiers, "decimating" the government forces, while seven revolutionary comrades died in a fight for control of major railways.[7] By 18 March the frontlines between the two forces had stabilized, allowing the Freikorps and Reichswehr to concentrate increasing numbers of men and materiel against the isolated Red Army of the Ruhr. Freikorps troops undertook operations against Dortmund, Remscheid and Essen. Increasingly, the tide turned in favour of the Reichswehr and Freikorps troops. On 21 March Reichswehr Regiment 61 and Freikorps Schulz re-enforced Freikorps Lichtschlag and assaulted Wesel, holding the town against a determined Red Army counterattack on 25 March. As the end of March approached, the government concentrated many of the largest and most notorious Freikorps units for the final assault on the Red Army in the Ruhr. Freikorps Schulz, Düsseldorf and

[6] Rabenau, *Seeckt*, 227.
[7] Carl Severing, *1919*, 146.

Libau were joined by units of the 3rd Garde-Kavallerie-Schützenkorps, once more under the command of General Heinrich von Hofmann, while former Kapp supporters, Freikorps Roßbach, Faupel, Kühme, Aulock, Lützor, Oberschleisen, and III Marine Brigade assembled in support of the main thrust.[8] Completely surrounded by Reichswehr and Freikorps troops, conditions began to deteriorate for the Red Army by 27 March. The need for more troops led the Red Army leadership to call for a general strike and deploying militant workers on the front lines; however, this significantly weakened the Red Army's combat effectiveness and disciplinary issues soon plagued many units. After quick assurances from Ebert's government were sent to the French government that German army troop operations were solely to re-establish domestic order, the final assault on the Ruhr was approved on 31 March. Over the course of the first week of April, the Freikorps unleashed the most violent and destructive campaign in their history.

The aggression and fury of the Freikorps was once again on display in their assault in the Ruhr. One young student recruit recorded the devastation in a letter to his mother. "Yesterday afternoon I arrived at my company, and in the afternoon we made the first assault," he wrote. "If I was to write everything to you, then you would say that they are lies. No quarter was given. Therefore we shot the wounded. … Whoever was found with weapons was our enemy and they were thought of as such."[9] An order from Wehrkreis Command VI, dated 12 April, recalled the shocking conditions of the battle. "It is understandable that the troops are extremely

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[8] Friedrich Wihlelm von Oertzen, *Die Deutschen Freikorps, 1918-1923* (München: F Bruckmann, 1936), 415.
[9] Maximilian Scheer, *Blut und Ehre: Unter Mitarbeit eines Kollektivs deutscher Antifaschisten* (Paris, 1937), 43.

psychologically agitated," the report stated. "Hundreds of Kameraden were ruthless in the manner of the exercising of their duty to defeat the rebels; it is clear that a number [of Red Army troops] had had a very difficult hour of death through the ferociousness of their tormentors."[10] For, unlike the members of the council movement in the winter and spring of 1919, the Red Army was far more determined to resist the invasion of the Freikorps. While they proved willing to stand and fight, the assorted collection of workers, plunderers and idealists were no match for the proven, battle-tested Freikorps that now moved against them. By the time the last Red Army units collapsed on 8 April, the death toll was significant for a country nominally at peace. The Freikorps suffered 249 dead, including more than 50 officers, 705 wounded rank-and-file soldiers, and 123 missing. Casualties for the Red Army were never accurately determined, but both sides and neutral observers listed them "in the thousands."[11]

Thus, in one of the more bizarre incidents of the revolutionary era, Reichswehr and Freikorps troops, who mere days before had been at odds with each other during the Kapp Putsch, set aside their differences and marched side by side to crush the Red Army's resistance in the Ruhr. Pro- and anti-Kapp units operated seamlessly beside one another, registering little interest in each other's political stance during the Kapp Putsch. However, unbeknownst to the men of the Freikorps battalions at the time, the March actions in Berlin and the Ruhr would be the last large-scale military operations the Freikorps movement would execute. Never again would they march in such significant numbers, well-supported by government

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[10] BA-MA, Nachlass Severing, "Grützner-Denkschrift."
[11] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 317.

resources, on the same level as the Reichswehr, to win victories for their Fatherland. Although further crises arose in the following years, such as in central Germany in 1921 and Hamburg and Munich in 1923, the available means of violent protest and the determination to use them, for both the radical left and right, were not the same after March 1920. The era of the Bürgerkrieg had come to an end.

Seeckt: The Purge of the Freikorps and the Creation of the New Reichswehr

With the Kapp Putsch and Ruhr Rebellion now behind him, Seeckt finally was able to take action against the Freikorps movement. Supported by a particularly vindictive mood in the political cabinet, Seeckt moved simultaneously against his two main threats, lingering Kapp-Lüttwitz supporters and Freikorps troops and officers. However, despite his desire to see his opponents purged from the Reichswehr, Seeckt was insistent that there should be no broader proscription of the army, or large-scale sweeping reprisals for the actions of a few individuals.

The Freikorps had no intention of going quietly, however. As demobilization orders were announced in several barracks, *freiwillige* troops and officers began to mutiny. Once again the Ehrhardt Brigade was scheduled for dismissal. But rather than meekly submit, many soldiers chose to join a "*Landarbeitsgemeinschaft*," a new pseudonym for underground Freikorps units, determined to continue their campaigns, although with limited resources and far fewer supporters. Others found their way into provincial and municipal police departments, and a few remained in the army and navy. Other units chose a more dramatic end. About 4,000 Freikorps soldiers in the Baltics seized control of the island of Dänholm near Stralsund and

declared themselves an independent country, only to be surrounded and disarmed by government troops after a short standoff. A battalion of Freikorps troops resisted their dissolution in Münster in early May 1920, but were successfully disbanded by police units with clubs. Former Freikorps soldiers continued to organize long after the dissolution of their formations, as demonstrated by continued activity in Stettin and throughout Bavaria and the eastern border regions, but their military capabilities were significantly reduced.[12]

Nonetheless, the government was quite pleased by the generally smooth dissolution of the quarrelsome Freikorps units. Resources proved to be the key to undermining the *freiwillige* movement. As funds, provisions and vital war materiel were restricted from June 1919 to May 1920 the ability of the Freikorps formations to field significant combat units was reduced and later altogether halted. Without these essential means at their disposal, many of the most seasoned war veterans who composed the true combat power of the Freikorps drifted away from the movement in early 1920. Indeed, by June 1920, the civilian government was quite confident that the Freikorps problem had largely dissipated, despite the initial instances of resistance by more radical units. The newly appointed Reichswehr Minister, Dr. Otto Geßler, informed the Cabinet that by no later than 10 June all undesirable Freikorps personnel would be removed from the Reichswehr, although he did concede that there was a lingering danger of these men reorganizing in a "Frontbund" and continuing to organize putsch activity outside of the army.[13] To

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[12] Schulze, *Freikorps,* 202.
[13] Ibid., 324. For more on Otto Geßler see: Otto Geßler, *Reichswehrpolitik in der Weimarer Zeit* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1958); Heiner Möller,

safeguard against such intrigues, the government agreed to publish new regulations firmly prohibiting the continued activity of any Freikorps unit. Paragraph 1 forbade the incorporation of "previous or current members of the Freikorps into the Reichswehr," while also strongly warning against any attempts to interfere with orders from centralized political and military authorities. Any person found guilty of those offenses would be punished with a minimum five-year prison sentence. Although this regulation was never actually invoked, it clearly expressed the new relationship between the Reich government and their former defenders. No longer a quasi-legal, emergency measure to defend the state's authority, the Freikorps were now irrevocably recast as state dissidents. Firmly positioned outside of the realm of legal arbiters of violence, the Freikorps' battle against the republic did not end here, but rather would take on a new, less violent, form in the coming years.

Alongside the long desired marginalization and dissolution of the Freikorps rank-and-file, Seeckt also took action against his main rivals within the army, in order to establish a fully reliable military institution within Germany for the first time since the Kaiser abdicated. Older accounts of Seeckt's reform of the Reichswehr, written by historians such as Francis Carsten and Harold Gordon, view these actions as the end result of a climactic struggle for control of the army between Seeckt, Reinhardt and Lüttwitz. Force of personality was the key factor that divided the army according to these studies. However, a detailed analysis of *which* officers were removed from their positions demonstrates a different image of Seeckt's purge of the Provisional Reichswehr. Certainly, key Kapp and Lüttwitz

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Reichswehrminister Otto Geßler: eine Studie zu "unpolitischer" Militärpolitik in der Weimarer Republik (Frankfurt aM: P. Lang, 1998).

supporters were dismissed from the army, but alongside these men were many officers who had remained neutral during the putsch, or had offered relatively consistent service to defend the republic since its inception.[14] Therefore, Seeckt's actions cannot be merely understood as an anti-Lüttwitz campaign of revenge against his opponents from March 1920. Instead, Seeckt executed a long desired campaign to root out the chief supporters and propagators of the Freikorps movement and the *Freikorpsgeist* within the Reichswehr.

A special joint civil-military commission was established, nominally to investigate the conduct of military personnel during the Kapp Putsch, but in effect to eliminate the lingering influence of the Freikorps system on the army and rebuild Germany's central military institution as Seeckt saw fit. The purge primarily targeted Freikorps officers within the Reichswehr. In all, Seeckt's commission dismissed twelve generals, four colonels, one lieutenant colonel, seven majors, and a great number of company grade officers.[15] Many of them were prominent, seasoned veterans of the Bürgerkrieg. Generals Lüttwitz ("Father of the Freikorps"), Lettow-Vorbeck , Julius von Bernuth, Otto von Diepenbroick-Grüter (Garde-Husaren Regiment), Wilhelm von Groddeck, Drüger, Ludwig von Estorff (Baltikumer Freikorps), Walter von der Hardt, Helmuth Strempel, and Maercker (FLK), were all dismissed from the army. Other officers with confirmed Freikorps ties included Arnold von Lequis (GKSK), Paul Hausser (Grenzschutz), Hans Maikowski

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[14] BHStA Department IV, Gruppenkommand 4, Volume 2. 20 March 1920. Munich. "Meldung des Oberbefehlshabers der Reichswehr-Gruppe 4, Generalmajor v. Möhl, an den Stellvertretenden Reichswehrminister, Generalmajor v. Seeckt, über die aus dem Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch herrührenden Gefahren für das Offizierkorps."
[15] Gordon, *Freikorps,* 128.

(commander of the "Mördersturm"), and Volker Hagmann (Baltic Freikorps). Thus 16 of 23 of the most senior officers purged by Seeckt were active members of Freikorps units. A full 70 percent of the higher commanders targeted by the new Chief of the Heeresleitung were Freikorps leaders at one point. At least 180 officers of all ranks were dismissed for "putsch activity." The number of Freikorps officers remained high in this broader cull of the officer corps. Other officers who were not outright released nonetheless faced harsh reprisals within the army. Demotion was the most common tool employed to encourage Freikorps officers to leave the Reichswehr. Transfers to more junior postings, or to rural, insignificant sectors of the country became frequent, as Seeckt and his supporters efficiently targeted the remnants of the Freikorps movement, and effectively marginalized its power and influence within the army.

While this reform of the Reichswehr was underway, Seeckt also took steps to consolidate his control over the military bureaucracy. Temporarily appointed commander of the army leadership on 25 March, before the end of his first full month Seeckt achieved what Reinhardt had never been able to accomplish: the full clarification of the role of the duties of the Chief of the Heeresleitung. He enforced the absolute subordination of the commanders and staffs of the group commands and the military districts to his authority. Through subtle personnel changes, Seeckt was able to occupy most of the key power positions within the military with loyal supporters. Seeckt's long time friend and ally, Heye, was promoted to the rank of general, and became the new head of the Army Personnel Office, simultaneously removing a staunch opponent, General Johann von Braun. Another Seeckt supporter,

Dr. Keber became the new Chief of the Army Administration, further cementing Seeckt's control over the institutional organs of the army. Within a few years, Seeckt's authority over the offices and commands of the Reichswehr was absolute. In 1919 the majority of the Wehrkreis commanders had experience serving in or commanding Freikorps formations. By 1922 all of these officers had been replaced by Seeckt approved staff officers. He had finally achieved the full unity of command that had been absent since the end of the First World War.

Supported by the majority of the civilian politicians in Konstantin Fehrenbach's cabinet, as well as the new Reichswehr Minister, Otto Geßler, who once remarked that the "Reichswehr is the *Reichsmacht*,"[16] Seeckt instituted broad structural reforms to create standardized units and break down regional pecularisms that had dogged the army administration since the unification of the German Empire in 1871.[17] Like the Provisional Reichswehr, the new army would again be divided into two group commands. Group Command I, headquartered in Berlin, oversaw Wehrkreis I through IV, while Groups Command II directed Wehrkreis V through VII. Both commanding generals for the group commands were responsible to Seeckt as Chief of the Heeresleitung in all matters pertaining to training, administration and operation of the troops. Germany was divided into seven Wehrkreise.[18] Simultaneously, the seven commanders of the military districts

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[16] Fehrenbach Cabinet Minutes. 1 July 1920.
[17] For more on the reform of the German Army see, James Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and the German Military Reform* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992).
[18] Reichswehrministerium, *Rangliste des deutschen Reichsheeres nach dem Stande vom 1. Mai 1925* (Berlin: ES Mittler, 1925), 206-212. Military District I (Königsberg) oversaw East Prussia. Military District II (Stettin) included Pomerania, Mecklenburg,

also served as commanders of the seven infantry divisions permitted under the Treaty of Versailles. As military district commandants these generals were in charge of all administrative and supply services within the districts and were the commanders of all troops within the military districts. As division commanders, they were in charge of the training and operations of their units.

Each Reichswehr 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, and a training battalion. Each rifle battalion contained three rifle companies and one machine-gun company, plus battalion headquarters. The cavalry division commander was directly subordinated to the infantry division commander, as the latter was also the Wehrkreis commander and therefore the supreme authority in the region.

With the new structure of the Reichswehr firmly in place, Seeckt began to reform the internal military and political culture of the army. He took this opportunity to enforce his long held belief that the army should remain out of all political activity. "We soldiers have to keep ourselves far away from politics," Seeckt declared in his first order to the Reichswehr group commands after the events in

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Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, and Lübeck. Military District III (Berlin) contained Berlin, Brandenburg and Silesia. Military District IV (Dresden) covered the province of Saxony, the Free State of Saxony, and Anhalt. Military District V (Stuttgart) included the two Hesses, Thüringia, Baden, and Württemberg. Military District VI (Münster) encompassed Hanover, Westphalia, Brunswick, Oldenburg, and the Rhineland, while Military District VII (Munich) consisted of all of Bavaria.

Berlin in March 1920.[19] The army must not find itself engaged in putsch activity or attempts to take over the political administration of Germany, he proclaimed. However, while Reichswehr interference in the civilian political realm would not be tolerated, Seeckt still envisioned a vital role for political education of the rank-and-file of the Reichswehr. The new mantra was very similar to the anti-Bolshevik rhetoric of the early years of the Bürgerkrieg. "The army saved Germany from Bolshevism in 1919," Seeckt preached to his soldiers. "It must now set itself again willingly under the constitutional government, to prevent once again the unleashing of Bolshevism."[20] However, tempered against the anti-communist dogma that had become commonplace by this point in the republican era, Seeckt sought to reinforce the army's acceptance, if not support, of the republican government. "The officers corps must become rejuvenated," Seeckt wrote to the soldiers of Group Command I at the end of March 1920.

> The Freikorps are an eternal great danger. … An army is only not dangerous if it is positioned as an integral part of the Volksgemeinschaft. … One must not politicize the officers and the troops, but they must be *politically clarified*, we must show them where the interests and goals of the Fatherland lie. It must be made clear to them, that for Germany only a *peaceful, democratic development* is possible now.[21]

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[19] BA-MA R 43 I/2719. "Befehl des Stellvertretenden Reichswehrministers, Generalmajor v. Seeckt, an die Reichswehr-Gruppenkommandos über das Verhalten der Truppe beim Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch und seiner Beilegung." 19 March 1920.
[20] BHStA Abtlg IV, Gruppenkommando Bd 2. "Meldung des Oberbefehlshabers der Reichswehr-Gruppe 4, Generalmajor v. Möhl, an den Stellvertretenden Reichswehrminister, Generalmajor v. Seeckt, über die aus dem Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch herführenden Gefahren für das Offizierkorps. 20 March 1920."
[21] *Berliner Tageblatt*, Nr 140. 26 March 1920. "Erklärung des Oberbefehlshabers der Reichswehr-Gruppe 1, Generalmajor v. Seeckt, in der Presse über die militärpolitische Lage." Emphasis in original.

Rally together against the threat of communism, urged Seeckt, but the army must also recognize that there was no way forward for Germany outside of a democratic republic.

While Seeckt's efforts to rebuild a new "*Reichswehrgeist*" to counter the spirit of the Freikorps did not entirely succeed as evidenced by continued operation of the so-called "Black Reichswehr" (*Schwarze Reichswehr*),[22] it nevertheless made the majority of the army more moderate and less likely to engage in revolutionary intrigues. Central to his attempt to insulate the Reichswehr from the political turmoil of the early years of the republic was Seeckt's 26 March 1920 regulations for the internal cohesion of the army. First and foremost, he demanded the absolute obedience of all command posts and individuals within the Reichswehr. Only with complete reliability could the army become a stable pillar of the republic, and maintain its still influential role in the affairs of state. Second, Seeckt adamantly insisted on a "further move away from all political activity."[23] Specifically, he targeted monarchial and radical right-wing propaganda activities within the army. Troops were no longer allowed to display the old *Schwarz-weiß-rot* flag, paint the increasingly popular swastika on their helmets, or sing patriotic battle hymns like "*Heil dir im Siegerkranz*." The troops needed to be isolated not only from the

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[22] The Black Reichswehr were secret paramilitary formations created to circumvent the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. Although he tolerated the existence of the Black Reichswehr, Seeckt disliked their independence from the official army hierarchy and the inclusion of unruly organizations like the Bund Oberland and the Stahlhelm. For more on the Black Reichswehr, see James Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1977), 117-119.
[23] BA-MA RH 27/5058. "Bericht des Majors Hüttmann über eine Bresprechung im Reichswehrministerium zu Ablauf und Konsequenzen des Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsches." 26 March 1920.

corrosive influence of Bolshevism, but also the destructive intrigues from right-wing organizers like Kapp and Lüttwitz, Seeckt declared. The need for a "tightly led, internally solidified Wehrmacht" was crucial for the future of any state "if it wants to avoid falling into anarchy and destruction," wrote Seeckt. "Propaganda from all corrosive elements must be kept away from the army with all available means."[24]

In the coming months, Seeckt argued that the Reichswehr had two essential objectives:

> The central task of the Reichswehr for the immediate future – in addition to the preservation of *Ruhe und Ordnung* to secure a constitutional state of affairs – must be the stabilization of the internal substance of the troops, which has been significantly rattled through the events of the previous weeks.[25]

Seeckt took steps were try to remove the new Reichswehr from the turmoil of political life of the Republic. This was a crucial moment in the reorganization of the army, and the control over the means of violence within the Republic. The memory of General Arnold von Lequis' failed march on Berlin in December 1918 had not yet faded and the drama of the Kaiser's troops melting away in the face of revolutionary protestors left a significant legacy in the minds of the military and political leaders of the republic. Therefore, to isolate their troops from the barrage of subversive leftwing propaganda they would have experienced near the major cities, the Reichswehr leadership chose to create a system of small garrisons in provincial towns. The incurred expenses and command difficulties were balanced against the

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[24] Heinz Hürten, *Die Anfänge der Ära Seeckt: Militär und Innenpolitik, 1920-1922* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1979), 104.
[25] BHStA, Abtlg IV – Schützen Brigade 21, Bd 52. "Befehl des kommissarischen Chef der Heeresleitung, Generalmajor v. Seeckt, über die innere Festigung der Truppe nach dem Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch." 3 April 1920.

improved reliability of the troops in a potential outbreak of unrest. Above all else, the maintenance of morale and loyalty was critical in Seeckt's new army.

The end result of Seeckt's purge of the Freikorps and structural reforms of the army was the creation of a disciplined, reliable dictatorship over the means of violence. A strong, rigid command structure once again dominated the military sphere. The decentralized system of independent commands established through the Freikorps movement during the era of the Bürgerkrieg and the field campaigns of the *Straßenkämpfen* had come to an end. The Reichswehr once again resembled other professional, national armies across Europe. These reforms represented an overwhelming victory for the supporters of institutionalized, constitutionally-authorized violence in the Weimar Republic. The crucial grey areas that allowed for the toleration and proliferation of the Freikorps system had been abolished through Seeckt's sweeping overhaul of the army after the Kapp Putsch. While supporters of the radical right-wing political culture that gave birth to the Freikorps would continue to operate and deploy violence as a political tool throughout the course of the republic, they would never again have the same access to the means of professional military violence that they had between November 1918 and March 1920. While para-military organizations, like the Stahlhelm, the Röterfrontkämpfer Bund and the SA, would continue to use violence to further their political agendas throughout the course of the republican era, the nature and the scale of physical violence was irrevocably changed by Seeckt's structural and personnel reforms in the early summer of 1920.

Despite Seeckt's reformation of the Reichswehr as a centralized and increasingly reliable source of republican support, many skeptics remained in the civilian administration. In particular, throughout the middle and latter half of 1920, the Reich Ministry of the Interior mounted a determined challenge to the Reichswehr's hegemony over the means of violence within the borders of the republic. The main conduit for the debate was the negotiations over the combat and peacetime roles of the Sicherheitspolizei (Security Police), which fell under the jurisdiction of the civilian Interior Ministry, and the Reichswehr. The initial guidelines from 23 June 1920 did little to clarify matters. Stating that "in regular times neither will the Reichswehr report to the Sicherheitspolizei, nor will the Sicherheitspolizei report to the Reichswehr," the Interior Ministry's regulations offered no clear position to determine which organization held supreme command authority in times of domestic crisis.[26] The Interior Minister, Dr. Carl Severing, complained to Chancellor Hermann Müller about the "fundamental resistance from the Reichswehr Ministry" to produce a new set of guidelines.[27] Stressing that "in the interest of smooth cooperation of the Reichswehr and the Sicherheitspolizei" a "quick regulation of the *Kommandogewalt* question for domestic unrest is of the greatest importance," Severing was alarmed by the potential for armed resistance among the general populace. By 11 July, a report presented by Seeckt to the new Fehrenbach Cabinet detailed the scope of the military means still unaccounted for

[26] Barch-Licht – R 43 I/2691. "Entwurf des Reichsinnenministeriums für die Regelung der Befehlsführung für Reichswehr und Sicherheitspolizei bei gemeinsamer Verwendung." 23 June 1920.
[27] Barch-Licht – R 43 I/2691. "Schreiben des preußischen Innenministers Severing an Reichskanzler Müller über die Regelung der Befehlsführung für Reichswehr und Sicherheitspolizei bei gemeinsamer Verwendung." 23 June 1920.

within Germany's borders. Approximately 2.7 million rifles and pistols remained within the republic, of which 1.9 million were in "unassigned hands."[28] Some 600,000 rifles were in the hands of the semi-reliable Einwohnerwehren, and 155,000 with the Reichswehr, Seeckt calculated. "Sicherheitspolizei, Einwohnerwehr and Reichswehr must work together" to disarm the general populace, Seeckt informed Reichswehr Minister Geßler, but only under the authority of the army.

Overcoming accusations by the new Interior Minister, Erich Koch, that the army was too lenient towards Kapp-Lüttwitz supporters and still sheltered many of them within the regional Wehrkreis command posts, a new agreement was nonetheless finally struck on 11 July that settled the dispute between the military and the civilian administration. Koch began the negotiations by expressing his fears that use of the army to disarm the general populace "will create the greatest mistrust from the left-wing," and that the Reichswehr would "adopt coercive action much too early, according to their general nature."[29] Only after a "most lively" protest by Seeckt was the execution of the disarmament campaign reclaimed exclusively for the Reichswehr. Arguing that the Interior Ministry lacked the means and organizational ability to undertake such a delicate task, Seeckt and Geßler firmly resisted any further attempt by Koch and the civilian government to handle affairs concerning the application of the means of violence within the republic. In

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[28] Barch-Licht – R 43 I/411. "Chefsbesprechung vom 11. Juli 1920: Durchführung der Entwaffnung."
[29] BA – Nachlass Koch-Weser. "Aufzeichnung des Reichsinnenministers Koch über Verhandlungen bei einer Chefbesprechung wegen der Entwaffnung der Zivilbevölkerung." 11 July 1920.

the end, the affair was put to the chancellor to decide. Fearing nation wide general strikes if the affair was mishandled, Konstantin Fehrenbach chose to uphold the army's supremacy in all matters related to the domestic use of violence.

This represented the final victory for Seeckt in his campaign to rebuild the military in Germany. He had successfully dismantled the Freikorps system; demobilizing their battle formations, cutting off all access to vital government resources, and had ruthlessly purged the senior and junior officer corps of sympathizers. His main rivals for control over the army had been dismissed as well, Lüttwitz in exile in Hungary, and Reinhardt and Noske thoroughly discredited as defenders of the republic. Furthermore, Seeckt had managed to institute a remarkable centralization and standardization of the military, about which imperial officers like Helmut von Moltke the Elder and Alfred von Schlieffen could have only dreamed. Most importantly for the reliability of the new army, the marginalization of the Freikorps movement from the ranks of the new army had significantly reduced the possibility of putsch intrigues involving Reichswehr personnel.

But most importantly, Seeckt had re-established a monopoly over the means of violence within Germany. After the demobilization of the Freikorps, the decisive defeat of the Red Army in the Ruhr, and the comprehensive disarmament of the civilian populace, the Reichswehr was the clear hegemon within the Weimar Republic. While there were still some small Freikorps operations in Silesia in 1921 and 1922, they only occurred with direct approval from the army. No more could patriotic young officers throw together a unit of Great War veterans and embark on their own field campaigns against enemies of their choosing, supporting their own

independent goals and causes. By the later summer of 1920, Seeckt stood atop the military sphere, with a unified command structure, supported by a professional, reliable army, as the complete master of the means of violence in Germany. An open ended, or democratic access to violence was at an end; the German military realm was once more a dictatorship.

The Reichswehr's Test: The Nazi Beer Hall Putsch

Domestically, the next few years after the Kapp Putsch were relatively quiet for the army. While there were several international crises that demanded the full attention of Seeckt and his new leadership coterie - particularly the final terms of the Treaty of Versailles and the French occupation of the Ruhr valley - within the borders of the Reich there were only two putsch attempts between April 1920 and the beginning of 1923. These were critical years for the Chief of the Heeresleitung, ones he put to good use carefully and meticulously consolidating his grip over all means of violence within the republic. Indeed, when Polish-German tensions erupted into armed clashes in Upper Silesia in 1921 and Freikorps troops were once again needed to defend German interests in the region, Freikorps Roßbach, Heydebreck and Schwarzkoppen were deployed, but only following Seeckt's approval and with strict operational orders and military oversight.[30] Further demonstrating Seeckt's

[30] Freikorps rather than Reichswehr troops were deployed in Upper Silesia, because of international pressure and restrictions. In winter and spring 1919 Freikorps troops had been utilized because of a lack of available options. This was not the case throughout 1921. Reichswehr troops were strictly prohibited from any operations in the contested plebiscite region by Entente decree. Use of Germany's official military would have provoked a significant international backlash that Seeckt and Geßler were keen to avoid. By late 1921, the Freikorps movement had been so

unquestioned authority in military affairs, as soon as the conflict subsided the army quickly oversaw the successful demobilization of all Freikorps units without incidents of mutiny.[31] Reichswehr artillery units were called into action to break a communist-led strike in Leuna in March and April 1921, but the operation was so limited that infantry and cavalry units were not deployed. Thus, although the period from April 1920 to January 1923 was turbulent in many ways for the young republic, from a purely military standpoint, and specifically for Seeckt, these were years of important stabilization and consolidation.

1923 would be a major test for the new institution that Seeckt had built. Mounting economic issues combined to give rise to a new wave of left and right-wing revolutionary activities. Several minor communist uprisings took place during the early months of the year, most notably in Thuringia, the Ruhr, Saxony, and the northern coastal cities. Separatist movements in the Rhineland and Bavaria, supported by French occupation authorities, produced local outbursts of unrest as well. Generally these incidents were localized and often did not require the direct intervention of the Reichswehr; merely the threat of deployment was sufficient to restore order alongside well-organized police measures. However, the first major revolt of 1923 occurred in Thuringia and Saxony, when SPD, KPD and USPD provincial delegates declared their hostility to the Reich government and their

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thoroughly disavowed by the German army and government that officials could plausibly deny any connection between the Freikorps and the Reichswehr, and instead argue that the *freiwillige* troops were simply concerned, patriotic Germans wishing to express their desire to retain Silesia within the borders of Germany. BA-MA F 4884, Volume 2. 26 February 1921. "Befehl des Chefs der Heeresleitung, General d. Inf. von Seeckt, über die politische Zuverlässigkeit des Reichsheeres."

[31] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 227.

determination to fight the growing "fascist menace" organizing in Germany.[32] A state of siege was declared in both regions in late September. In early October, Reichswehr troops were sent to support local troops if matters worsened. The army eventually was forced to act on 22 October when they received intelligence of a communist-organized putsch planned for the following day. The Saxon government was quickly toppled by Reichswehr troops, communist newspapers offices were occupied, and the threat of revolution dissipated.

And yet tensions continued to mount in neighbouring Thuringia. Two weeks later, on 6 November, the Reichswehr marched into the region to assert military control. Their purpose was two fold. First, the Reich government wanted to ensure that the communist threat in Thuringia had truly collapsed as a result of the Saxon operation. But secondly, and more significantly for events to follow, the government and the army were very concerned about the recent illegal Freikorps activity underway across the Thuringian-Bavarian border. Re-establishment of these units was, by now, completely intolerable to the Reich military and political leadership. Therefore, Seeckt moved quickly to re-assert control, dispatching government-loyal troops immediately. Indeed, General Otto von Hasse did not hesitate to announce that the Reichswehr would fire upon any Freikorps troops if they marched against Thuringia or Berlin.[33] While the Reichswehr's intervention in Thuringia settled

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[32] For more information on left-wing political activities see: Werner Angress, *Stillborn Revolution: The Communist Bid for Power in Germany, 1921-1923* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).
[33] Heinz Hürten, *Das Krisenjahr 1923: Militär und Innenpolitik, 1922-1924* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1980), 118.

affairs in that region, Bavaria remained hostile to the central authorities in Berlin, and Freikorps localized activity was permitted to continue.

Tensions between Bavaria and Berlin had been growing throughout the fall of 1923. The Kahr-Seisser-Lossow group had grown increasingly powerful in Munich after Gustav von Kahr was appointed "*Generalstaatskommissar*" and given broad dictatorial powers on 26 September in response to the communist activity in Thuringia and Saxony. Kahr had declared a state of emergency and immediately began recruiting right-wing supporters into a Bavarian Emergency Police. Dissident Freikorps members flocked to Munich as though it was a counterrevolutionary Eldorado, keen to find another way to practice their form of violent politics. Along with his chief supporters, Colonel Hans Ritter von Seisser (commander of the Bavarian Security Police), and General Otto von Lossow (commander of the 7th Infantry Division), Kahr's political objectives variously aimed to either reclaim Germany for conservative interests, or to declare independence from Germany and unite with Austria to form a Catholic kingdom under the Wittelsbach dynasty.[34]

Whatever Kahr's future plans may have been, by early October, Seeckt had seen enough. Determined to maintain the new political isolation of the Reichswehr, Seeckt stated on 9 October:

> It is time the Bavarians realize that their dispute with the national government must not be fought out in the military sphere, and that the Bavarian Reichswehr must not be presented with a problem which cannot be solved without damage to its inner steadfastness, honor and prestige.[35]

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[34] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 233.
[35] Rabenau, *Seeckt*, 356-57.

Negotiations to end Kahr's resistance to the Berlin authorities began in earnest on 19 October, but floundered when the Bavarian General Friedrich Freiherr Kress von Kressenstein, acting as the envoy of the Ebert government, failed to convince Lossow to abandon Kahr's government and resign his commission in the Reichswehr. In response, Geßler officially dismissed Lossow and appointed Kressenstein commander of the 7th Infantry Division, simultaneously placing him in charge of all troops in Wehrkreis VII. Kahr refused to execute this order, and chose instead to assert his independence from "Marxist Berlin" by commanding the 7th (Bavarian) Division to swear allegiance to his government in Munich.[36]

As Seeckt and his colleagues contemplated taking immediate military action against Kahr's regime, a second power group sought to seize control of the Bavarian government for its own aims. Adolf Hitler, Führer of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), Erich Ludendorff, and radical right-wing Reichstag Deputy Albrecht von Graefe, believed that the moment had arrived to begin a national re-awakening based on the tenants of National Socialism and *völkisch* philosophy. By the end of October, Hitler and his leading deputies had begun to call together what para-military supporters they could muster, including the Nazi Storm Troopers (*Sturmabteilung* or SA), the Bund Oberland, Reichskriegsflagge, and other members of the dissident Freikorps movement who could be quickly mobilized in Munich. Many of these men had once served in the Provisional Reichswehr, but had been forced out during Seeckt's post-Kapp Putsch reforms.

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[36] Erich Ludendorff, *Auf dem Weg zur Feldherrnhalle: Lebenserinnerungen an die Zeit des 9.11.23, mit Dokumenten in 5 Anlagen* (München: Ludendorff, 1937), 54, 134.

Joined by Gerhard Roßbach, whose popularity among the ultraconservatives and radical right-wing supporters remained high, Hitler and Ludendorff began to establish a plan to seize control of the government in Munich.[37] Roßbach proved adept recruiting impressionable young recruits for the putsch. Gathering young cadets and junior officers at the Reichswehr's Infantry Officers' Training School, Roßbach won over supporters with his enthusiasm for a new national Germany.[38] Indeed, Hitler's group was clearly the more active and determined at the start of November. While Hitler, Ludendorff and Roßbach appeared unshakable in their belief that the time was ripe for an overthrow of the government, Kahr, Lossow and Seisser grew increasingly wary of Seeckt's threats, as the Chief of the Heeresleitung began to take steps to resist the revolutionaries. Additionally, Lossow's support amongst the officers and troops of the 7th Infantry Division began to clearly erode in light of Seeckt's continued messages to the Bavarian Reichswehr troops. Seisser, too, had doubts concerning Bavaria's ability to resist Seeckt's looming invasion.

These weaknesses in Kahr's leadership group became apparent to Hitler as well. He therefore chose to act before Kahr, Lossow, and Seisser gave into the

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[37] Roßbach demonstrates the remarkable longevity of the most committed Freikorps members. Even as their units and commands melted away around them, true believers in the *Freikorpsgeist* continued to fight on and refused to return to civilian life. Although their numbers grew fewer and fewer after the Kapp Putsch, these men could not and would not be fully demobilized from the war. Although once an ally of Hitler in the Beer Hall Putsch, Roßbach would be later imprisoned by the Nazi leader in a concentration camp during the Third Reich. For more information, see Gerhard Roßbach, *Mein Weg durch die Zeit; Erinnerungen und Bekenntnisse* (Weilburg-Lahn: Vereinigte Weilburger Buchdruckereien, 1950).
[38] Roßbach, *Mein Weg,* 78-81.

demands of the Reich government.[39] Hitler decided to strike on the night of 8 November 1923; the five-year anniversary of the November revolution, and the moment of a key meeting of Kahr supporters at the Bürgerbräukeller. As Kahr addressed the assembled Bavarian political elites, Hitler's storm troopers moved into position around the Beer Hall. At 8:30 in the evening Hitler and three companions marched into the hall and forced their way through the crowd. In a side room, Hitler and Ludendorff offered key positions to Kahr, Lossow and Seisser in their new "national government." Ludendorff was to become Reichswehr Minister, while Lossow was offered the post of Chief of the Heeresleitung, and Kahr was to be appointed Bavarian Vice-Regent. Hitler assumed the title of the "political leader of the Revolution," but avoided naming himself chancellor. Later that night, Captain Ernst Röhm took the first military action on behalf the rebels. Gathering the men of the Reichskriegsflagge, his personal paramilitary force, the bulk of the SA, and the Bund Oberland at the Löwenbräukeller, Röhm announced the start of the putsch. Assisted by Kampfbund Zeller, his forces marched through the city centre and occupied the Wehrkreis headquarters, formerly the Bavarian War Ministry. Roßbach quickly drove to the infantry school and gathered up the majority of cadets. Abandoning their allegiance to Seeckt, the majority of the recruits joined the putschists. The initial stage of the rebellion was unfolding according to plan.

In Berlin, the government reaction was swift and united. The Cabinet quickly assembled and voted to take drastic measures to ensure that Bavaria was once again

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[39] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 243. For more on the Beer Hall Putsch see: Richard Hughes, *The Fox in the Attic* (New York: New York Review Books, 2000); Harold Gordon, *Hitler and the Beer Hall Putsch* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

subordinated to the Reich political and military authorities. All information in the press was to be censored at the discretion of the Reichswehr Minister. All military districts were put on alert. Bavaria was completely cut off from the Reich and a ban on all travel and commerce with the region was enacted until the Reich authorities were certain that the putsch was over. Seeckt was appointed dictator of Germany by Geßler and Ebert. Granted extraordinary powers under Article 48 of the constitution, the Chief of the Heeresleitung was now only responsible to the president. Smoothly and efficiently, the bureaucratic and institutional machinery went to work, as legal authority and constitutional powers guided the government's reaction. There was no panic in Berlin. There was no terrified call for Freikorps soldiers to save the government or flight from office. Instead, as was clearly outlined in the constitution and legal guidelines, the republic went to war conditions to deal with the outbreak of domestic revolt.

Thus, while Röhm and Roßbach marched across Munich and Hitler and Ludendorff plotted the downfall of the Berlin government through a Mussolini-inspired triumphal march on the capital, Seeckt and the numerous Reich government supporters quickly formed a firm opposition around them. As the vast majority of the Reichswehr outside of Bavaria remained openly loyal Seeckt and the government, the Reich leadership was able to focus on one lone crisis region.[40] Members of the Bavarian government still at large managed to call out five battalions of the Landespolizei; a significant force compared with the two battalions of Bavarian Reichswehr troops nominally under Lossow's shaky control. Crown

[40] BA-MA RH 37-213a. 8 November 1923. "Aufzeichnung über eine politische Besprechung bayerischer Reichswehroffiziere."

Prince Rupprecht influenced the monarchial Bavarian officer associations to abstain from all putsch activity, denying the rebels crucial administrational and communication support.[41] By the end of the night, Kahr, Lossow and Seisser issued a joint address via radio, publicly denouncing Hitler and the Beer Hall Putsch. But most importantly for Seeckt and the monopoly over the means of violence within the republic, portions of the Munich Reichswehr garrison elected to remain loyal to Berlin, uniting with the Landespolizei against the putsch. Overnight several government-loyal battalions mustered in Munich, completely changing the balance of power in Bavaria.[42] Although divisions certainly remained within the Bavarian Reichswehr, and many units had already joined the putsch, including cadets from the Reichswehr Infantry School and soldiers from companies scattered across Wehrkreis VII, a significant portion of men chose to answer the call of the central government authorities rather than the revolutionaries. This divided military landscape in Bavaria was not an overwhelming declaration of support for the Reich authorities, but it was sufficient to end the possibility of a Reichswehr assisted coup in Munich and Berlin.

Few options remained to Hitler and Ludendorff after the decision of the Bavarian Reichswehr troops. Their final gamble: a desperate march across Munich to meet up with Röhm and occupy the centre of the city. Ludendorff fully believed that the Reichswehr and Landespolizei would not dare shoot at the great "*Feldherr*" from the First World War as he led a column of supporters through the streets. At first he was right. The revolutionaries marched across the Isar River singing

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[41] BA-MA RH 37-213a.
[42] Gordon, *Reichswehr,* 235.

"*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*," managing to reach the Rathaus in good order. However, in front of the Feldherrnhalle, a detachment of police stood firm. Shots rang out as Hitler, Ludendorff and the Nazis advanced. A full volley from the Landespolizei scattered the protestors after an ineffective attempt to return fire. Ludendorff was arrested. Röhm was forced to surrender control of the Wehrkreis command building. Hitler surrendered to the authorities the following day.

The putsch had failed. But more importantly than the outcome of Hitler's first attempt to assume control over the direction of the German state, was the specific way in which the revolt unraveled. Government-loyal forces, obeying centralized military and political institutions, empowered by constitutional authority, stood together with Bavarian policemen and shot down charismatic men whose power was derived solely from their personal will to victory. In those moments in Munich, late on the night of 8 November when elements of the Reichswehr garrison lost faith in the putsch and declared their support for the government, and on the following morning when police blocked the path of the Nazi rebels, the Reichswehr passed its final test. It was not a flawless performance, but Seeckt's army had answered the call of its master. Politically active officers and soldiers still existed within the army after 1923, but they were permanently reduced to a slim minority, unable to influence the majority of the new army to engage in attempts to overthrow the republic by force. Thus, while the Reichswehr had already proven reliable against left-wing agitation and revolutionary activity, it now begun to distinguish itself from former comrades in arms operating with the revolutionary political right. The atmosphere that had produced the Freikorps movement was forever gone. The government and the army

refused to tolerate the continued operation of independent military forces. But not only had the large combat formations been disbanded, like the GKSK and the FLK, but the overall conditions necessary for their existence no longer prevailed in Germany after 1923.

Conclusion

Before Kapp and Lüttwitz's misguided intrigue against the government, there were tensions between the Freikorps movement and "Reichswehr" officers and men, but no definitive efforts had been undertaken to eliminate the destructive influence of the volunteer forces. The army was internally divided between an uneasy triumvirate, splitting authority among three men supported by vastly different networks existing within the Provisional Reichswehr. But most importantly for the prevalence of violence in the early years of the Weimar Republic, there was still no sole hegemon, ruling with absolute authority over the use of deadly force. Freikorps formations still existed outside the control of the army, and a democratized access to the means of violence persisted in the German military.

After March 1920, everything changed. The will to crush the Freikorps system was finally consolidated in the upper branches of the military and civilian authorities. Fortuitously, Ebert and his cabinet had the perfect man for the job already in place. Seeckt's leadership was critical to the reformation of the army and the demobilization of the Freikorps, but only through the re-establishment of a politically reliable military institution were civil-military relations normalized once again within Germany. The ruthless demobilization of the Freikorps, coupled with

the sweeping disarmament of the general populace, and the re-assertion of discipline and command chain obedience within the army, revolutionized the German military sphere. Therefore after the end of the war and the November Revolution, the Kapp Putsch was one of the most significant events in the military sphere. After April 1920, the open access to the means of violence, embodied by the Freikorps movement and the Red Army of the Ruhr, was closing rapidly. Where once any group of citizens could easily find arms and materiel to embark on their own political and military campaigns, now there stood the clear dictator in the military sphere: the Reichswehr. Seeckt's victory was complete.

CONCLUSION – THE LEGACY OF THE FREIKORPS

In early April 1933 Adolf Hitler's National Socialist Workers' Party (NSDAP) was still in the early stages of a grand "coordination" or *Gleichschaltung* of the German burueacracy and civil society in general. As a part of these efforts, the Reich Ministry of the Interior drafted the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, aiming to produce a 'national' civil service and remove any non-Aryans and opponents of the new regime from office.[1] It had an unintended reaction, however. At the behest of the current President and former Field Marshall, Paul von Hindenburg, several special clauses were added, granting a reprieve to civil servants who lost a father or son in combat during the Great War, or who had been in the civil service continually since the start of the war. One other category was included for special protection from the Nazis' purges: Veterans of the Great War *who had served at the Front*. This sparked a substantial debate within the German bureaucracy. Who was a Front Soldier? How does one distinguish a Front Soldier from a *Heimat* soldier? Did this definition still matter? In a broader sense, however, Hindenburg's demands, and the bureaucracy's quick efforts to apease him, demonstrated the lingering power of the legacy of the *Frontkämpfer* in the broader process of myth making and identity formation in postwar German society.

By 10 August 1933 and after three rounds of revisions, Franz Vahlen, co-author of the Civil Service Law, was compelled to produce a commentary explaining this new piece of legislation and specifically providing a technical definition of the Front Soldier. Under the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service,

[1] For more on the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, see Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, (New York: Penguin, 2006), 14-15.

the Front Soldier or *Frontkämpfer* was defined as anyone "who in the World War (in the period from 1 August 1914 to 31 December 1918) took part with combat troops in a battle, a skirmish, or a positional battle or siege."[2] Corroborating evidence concerning the soldier's involvement in any engagement had to be found in the Army War List (*Kriegsrangliste*) or in the War Personnel Register (*Kriegsstammrolle*).[3]

But crucially, Vahlen added two stipulations to his definition of a *Frontkämpfer*. First, to be classified as a Front Soldier it was insufficient to have merely been present in the combat area during the war; instead, the person in question must have *actively* engaged in combat. Secondly, and most significantly, Vahlen stated that "participation in the battles in the Baltics, in Upper Silesia against the Spartacists and Separatists, and also the enemies of the national rising are to be treated as equal to the battles of the World War." Through Vahlen's commentary on the Civil Service Law, 'Combat Troops' were now defined as "formations of a military kind," including units taking part in the battles in the Baltics in late 1918 and early 1919 against the Spartacus Uprising in Berlin, liberating Munich from the Council Government, or fighting against the Red Army in Central Germany. These Freikorps troops were to be treated as *Frontkämpfer* and were explicitly given equal status to veterans of Verdun, Flanders or Tannenberg. More than a decade after the end of the Bürgerkrieg, the Freikorps soldier had been elevated to the same position as the Great War veteran.

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[2] BA-B R72-1174. 11 August 1933, *Berliner Tageblatt*, "Wer gilt als Frontkämpfer?"
[3] BA-B R 72-1174. Article in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, 373, 3 December 1933, "Wer gilt als Frontkämpfer?"

However, the broader social movement that had once supported the Freikorps rallied once more to register their dissatifaction with Vahlen and the new law. Over the next five months, former Freikorps members and radical conservatives published a wave of articles in the *Vossische Zeitung*, the *Kreuzzeitung, Berliner Tageblatt*, the *Berliner Börsen Zeitung* and other newspapers, generating a passionate public discourse on the nature of the *Frontkämpfer* identity. While many former Freikorps members agreed with the privileged legal position afforded to Freikorps soldiers under the new law, they rejected Vahlen's technocratic, legalist interpretation of the nature of the *Frontkämpfer*. Instead they argued that the Front Fighter community could only be defined through emotional and spiritual characteristics not reflected in the new legislation. Rebellious and quarrelsome to their last moments, the Freikorps and Great War veterans who supported the movement remained fiercely independent and opposed to institutional restraints.

Yet the wording of the new law, written fifteen years after the end of the First World War, illustrates the contested nature of the Front Fighter identity and the lingering bitterness within the community of veterans. The law specifically included volunteer "nationalist" Freikorps formations in the legal definition of the *Frontkämpfer*, while no mention was made of leftwing and republican veterans who were similarly active during the turmoil of the immediate postwar era. The law deliberately included the period after the armistice, from November 1918 to January 1919, to allow for the inclusion of Freikorps troops engaged in domestic conflicts, and not merely formations that were simply delayed in demobilizing. The additional instructions for interpreting the Civil Service Law explicitly specified that

Freikorps formations fighting in the Baltics, Upper Silesia, as well as against the Spartacus League and aspiring "Separatists," were to be given equal status to Great War veterans under the law.[4]

Thus in 1933 the *Frontkämpfer* identity still held some political and social value within rightwing circles. However the right-wing narrative of unity within the community of Front Fighters was only possible through the deliberate marginalization of socialist and communist Great War veterans from the *Frontkämpfer* identity. A highly politicized concept from its inception, the legacy of the Front Fighter remained contested well into the early Nazi era, particularly in light of rightwing attempts to synonomize the legacy of the Freikorps with the image of the *Frontkämpfer.* Even as the Third Reich dawned, the Freikorps legacy continued to play a role in German identity politics as Bürgerkrieg era issues were periodically dredged up almost fifteen years later.

Indeed, veterans' politics and the Freikorps legacy had cropped up after 1923 with some regularity. Para-military units, such as the *Rote Frontkämpferbund* (or RFB), and the Reichsbanner (*Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold, Bund der republikanischen Kriegsteilnehmer*) vied with rightwing groups, including the Nazi Storm Troopers (SA), and *Stahlhelm: Bund der Frontsoldaten,* for political influence and supremacy over the powerful veterans demographic during the Weimar era. Created by the SPD, the Reichsbanner attempted to maintain a non-partisan identity, although its membership was nonetheless overwhelmingly Social Democratic. While its stated goals were to defend the republic and pro-republican

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[4] BA-B R72-1174, 11 August 1933, *Berliner Tageblatt*, "Wer gilt als Frontkämpfer?"

organizations, the Reichsbanner adopted many of the popular trappings of other militant groups, including uniforms, flags and insignia, even as it fought for the defense of parliamentary democracy and civilian government. The RFB began to organize in the summer of 1924, at first exclusively seeking out war veterans but soon allowed in non-military members as well. Presenting themselves as the embodiment of a future Red Army that would liberate Germany, the RFB never hid its military appearance while it supported the efforts of organized workers to achieve a communist revolution in Germany.

Other organizations turned away from a militarized form and focused on social issues such as pensions and medical care. The Confederation of War-Disabled and War Veterans (*Bund der Kriegsbeschädigten und ehemaligen Kreigsteilnehmer*), founded and developed by Social Democrat Erich Kuttner, humbly began with 5,000 members in 1917, but later grew to 500,000 by 1920 and maintained this size throughout the Weimar period, as former soldiers continued to press the republican government for social programs that would aid the veterans of the First World War. Additional groups with niche membership criteria nevertheless were able to maintain strong levels of support due to the persistent and reliable commitment of their followers. The German Officers' League (*Deutscher Offiziersbund*) had a stable membership of more than 100,000 members during the course of the republic, while the Young German Order (*Jungdeutscher Orden)*, the second largest militant group after the First World War, had 200,000 supporters organized in 200 local chapters well into the 1930s. Although the veterans of the Great War largely abandoned their violent means after 1923 and ceased attempts to overthrow the

republican government by force, the community of Freikorps supporters, like Salomon and Hermann Ehrhardt continued a remarkable level of activity, seeking to continue the cultural presence of the Freikorps movement, primarily through literary works and public speeches issued well into the late 1920s and early 1930s.[5]

Former Freikorps movement supporters used commemorative displays, for both Great War and Bürgerkrieg era events to continue to express their political views after the era of the putsch ended in 1923. Although there are ample examples of this process, the commemoration of the battle at the Annaberg in May 1931, was demonstrative of the nature of the Freikorps legacy in the late Weimar period. Held on the site of the last great battle of the Freikorps movement – the three-day campaign to re-take and hold the Annaberg mountain - former comrades and commanders returned to commemorate a ten-year-old victory that comprised a central myth in the pantheon of Freikorps iconography and legend building. In the nationalist narrative, it was there, on the open fields and dense woods around the Annaberg, that German Freikorps troops stood against the advance of their spiritual and national enemy, Polish Bolshevik units, and performed one of their crucial self-appointed tasks; the defense of the frontiers of the German Fatherland.

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[5] One of Salomon's best known works, *Das Buch vom deutschen Freikorpskämpfer*, was published in 1938, while Ehrhardt remained politically active in rightwing associations until he fled the country in the aftermath of Hitler's purges during the Night of the Long Knives in June 1934. Although Jünger never embraced Hitler and the NSDAP, his publishing record into the early 1930s demonstrates his the lingering presence of Freikorps thought, particularly in *Der Arbeiter* (1932) and *Über den Schmerz* (1934). These are just three prominent examples of the activities of old Freikorps members seeking to play a political and social role through literary means and public activities, long after their military campaigns had come to an end.

The reality of the battle for the Annaberg was far less romantic than the legend that was later created around the events. Captain Viktor Scheffel, a former officer in III *Sturmfahne* of the Freikorps Oberland, later serving as the commander of the 5th Company of the 51st Infantry Regiment in the Reichswehr, described the delapitated state of the Freikorps movement. "Oh the appearance of the 'troops'!" Scheffel exclaimed in his diary.

> One would have laughed and wept at the same time! Few uniforms, civilian clothes in all styles and in every shade. Field caps beside felt and straw hats. Wind jackets beside church going suits, combat boots beside elegant shoes. And the weapons! Whoever had a rifle wore it proudly on their shoulder, alongside those with hunting rifles - but the others, and that was very, very many of them - carried wooden clubs, bayonets, a dagger, or even an old cavalry sword! To the observer, these were no soldiers for the decisive battle against the accursed Poles. But the Spirit (*Geist*) of every single of the old and young swash-bucklers was animated and exquisite: soldierly, self-aware, confident and determined to the last effort![6]

Gathering together his motley crew of "Silesian natives, city dwellers, farmers, old *Frontsoldaten*, and young white faced kids who had never smelt gunpowder," Scheffel marched into position against the oncoming rush of Polish forces. However, the captain's account of the battle is a far cry from the hyperbolic, patriotic image that was later crafted to describe the last victory of the Freikorps:

> From the command post came the ultimate order: 21 May, 2:30 pm, all forces attack! Seven weak battalions, without heavy weapons, without even artillery, against an enemy in dug-in positions, with numerous heavy weapons, including heavy machine guns, mortars, strong artillery, and outnumbering us by four times - such an attack order must be viewed as pure madness. It must simply be unsuccessful! ...[7]

After first contact between the two forces, it appeared Scheffel was correct. German units were repulsed by strong Polish positions throughout the afternoon of the first

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[6] Viktor Scheffel, "Annaberg," in Ernst von Salomon, *Das Buch vom Deutschen Freikorpskämpfer* (Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert Verlag, 1938), 270.
[7] Ibid., 273.

day, only outflanking them and seizing the central market on the Annaberg through the timely and surprise appearance of German artillery units. Despite the great swell of emotion Scheffel felt seeing the *Schwarz-weiß-rot* flag hoisted in the town square and hearing "*Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles*!" sung on the night of 21 May, he was forced to admit that the German victory could have easily been a spectacular defeat.

Ten years later in 1931, the former commander of German forces at the Annaberg, General Ernst von Oven, had few words to say about the exact nature of the battle and instead deployed well-worn cliches and familiar slogans heralding the virtues of the German victory. Here again, new political struggles were negotiated through a constructed image of past events attempting to re-define the importance and legacy of the Freikorps. In the midst of the open tensions between the communist party and the growing Nazi movement, Oven and other conservatives chose to stress the patriotic, apolitical sacrifice of the Freikorps troops, as they rallied together not as members of various political parties but instead as Germans, defending a piece of the German Fatherland. "Upper Silesia is German land!" declared Oven to the 100,000 Silesians, estimated to have attended the three day celebration of the Freikorps final battle. "We know that the actions in 1921 did not guarantee the future of our Heimat," read the official leaftlet comemmorating the Annaberg festivities in 1931.

> The enemy's greediness is in no way satisfied. ... The younger generations must be trained to be vigiliant for future service for the Heimat. This is built from the spirit of 1921. Back then we did not ask about political affiliations, every brave German man was welcome. ... We must reject the notion that the

> actions of the Selbstschutz were some type of domestic political effort. ... Here, *Deutschtum* held together and will not be pulled a part![8]

The myth and reality of the Freikorps operation at the Annaberg highlights the significant changes brought about by the resurgent Reichswehr under Hans von Seeckt. Although they were once powerful combat forces, by 1921 the Freikorps were barely able to contain the advance of Polish irregular troops in Silesia. Restriction of resources proved to be the key to undermining the combat power of the Freikorps system, as shown by the suppression of the rebellious Baltic units and the impact of Seeckt's unwillingness to continue to support any militant formation that did not align with his vision of a disciplined and professional Reichswehr after the Kapp Putsch in March 1920.[9] Furthermore, they had lost much of their social and financial support network that afforded them their previous operational independence. Therefore despite Oven's assertion that these men answered a spiritual call to defend the threatened Fatherland, *freiwillige* formations were created, deployed and dissolved under the complete control of Seeckt and the Reichswehr. Indeed, Freikorps troops were no longer vital components of the government's ability to project political authority through military means after the summer of 1920. Instead, they were downgraded to an occasionally useful nuisance to be tolerated in isolated circumstances, but no longer a powerful role player in the military sphere. Although they lacked their previous military capabilities and resulting political influence, the Freikorps legacy continued to have political and cultural capital long after the end of the Bürgerkrieg. New conflicts and debates

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[8] Scheffel, 278.
[9] For more on this, see Chapter X.

continued to be negotiated through a discourse on *Freikorpsgeist* and identity years after the *freiwillige* troops had fired their last shots or played a meaningful role in the military and political affairs of the Reich.

But what made the Freikorps so important to the course of Weimar political, military and cultural life that their legacy continued to play a function so long after their formations were disbanded? It was not the use of physical violence, or even the number of dead they left in their wake; Dirk Schumann has demonstrated that neither of these statistics were very significant. Instead, the importance of the Freikorps, and the source of the movement's longevity lies in the specific type of violence they deployed: psychological violence designed to control and intimidate their enemies and the civilian populace of Weimar Germany. The Freikorps movement attempted to wage a psychological or spiritual war, to use their term, through threats and symbols of physical violence to produce a broader atmosphere in which their enemies believed that the potential for violence continually existed. Therefore long after the ability of the Freikorps to deploy physical violence was lost, supporters of the movement could still reference this atmosphere of fear and intimidation without needing to actually commit physically violent acts. The very nature of the Freikorps violence, more psychological than physical, allowed for its continued social and political presence decades after the last Freikorps machine gun fired its' last shot.

The Freikorps movement was emblematic of the fluidity of German political and military affairs directly after the war. Produced through the decentralization of political and military authority during the first few weeks of the revolution, the

Freikorps were a highly visible example of the reduced powers of the new regime and their inability to immediately and effectively re-impose order. Notoriously self-promoting and aggrandizing, Freikorps authors and supporters believed that they were engaged in a spiritual war against their enemies that would be fought not only in the streets of Germany, but equally through newspaper articles, memoirs and leaflets. Therefore, even as the individual units of the Freikorps were disbanded and demobilized, the broader social and cultural movement that supported and incubated the volunteer combat forces persisted, waging war for the soul and substance of German political life carrying the Freikorps legacy of anti-Bolshevik German nationalism for decades to come.

After the Second World War, some scholars, like Robert Waite, argued that the Freikorps movement served as an incubator nascent Nazi movement during the Bürgerkrieg era and indeed at first glance, the parallels between the tactics and propaganda activities of the Freikorps and the early Nazi party seem apparent. The connection between Freikorps and Nazis appeared stronger after scholars, like Peter Merkl, produced detailed histories of early Nazis, some of whom served in Freikorps units or as para-military street thugs in the Weimar Republic, which seemed to draw a line of continuity between the violence of the First World War, the postwar Bürgerkrieg and the Third Reich. However, Merkl's work indicates that the Freikorps connection to the Nazi movement was most likely restricted to lower level "enforcers" and was not prevelant among higher-level Nazi officials, although there were certainly exceptions to this trend. His examination of 581 autobiographical statements from early members of the NSDAP demonstrates that while 22 percent

of Nazi "enforcers" in his study served in the Freikorps and 37 percent participated in street violence of some sort, the same connection between Nazi party administrators and senior leaders could not be made, thus generally limiting the scope of the connection between the Freikorps and the NSDAP to lower level rank-and-file members.[10] Thus Freikorps participation in the NSDAP tended to be most significant in violent organizations like the SA, which was marginalized within the Third Reich after June 1934. However the low level of Freikorps participation by mid-level and senior Nazi administrators and bureaucrats, who Merkl labels "party men," challenges any narrative seeking to broadly describe the Freikorps movement as an incubator for the NSDAP in the early years of the Weimar Republic.[11] Unfortunately exact figures of Freikorps supporters serving in the para-military wings of the Nazi party may never be known due to the constant fluctuations in Freikorps numbers and loss of records. Furthermore, while the spirit of the Freikorps, the *Freikorpsgeist*, certainly had some overlap with National Socialist ideology, the worldview of the *freiwillige* soldier was diverse and only loosely articulated with no central institutions or propaganda ministry to oversee its expression and development. Therefore, although the NSDAP and the Freikorps movement originated from similar portions of German society and had generally compatible philosophical or spiritual components, they were never fully

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[10] Peter Merkl, *Political Violence under the Swastika: 581 Early Nazis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 707-709.
[11] Ibid., 709. Merkl's data set indicates that while "party men" expressed sympathy with the Freikorps and Kapp putsch activities, they did not generally participate in them. "Enforcers," including former Freikorps members tended to only join the party after the 1930 elections, a trend which Merkl argues was motivated by the attraction of new street violence.

synonomous. The Freikorps was as a distinct, yet related, historical phenomona occurring alongside the rise of Nazism in Germany

The development of a multi-polar political sphere directly after the First World War, and the subsequent creation of a plethora of military bodies competing for dominance of the military realm, challenged the classical relationship between the three constituents of Carl von Clausewitz's trinity. Describing an idealized structure for interaction among political authorities, military commanders and the general populace, Clausewitz envisioned a monarchial political sphere establishing clear policy to be executed by a loyal military institution.[12] After the collapse of imperial authority and several distinct versions of Clausewitz's trinity engaged in a struggle for military, political and social hegemony as no fewer than six political bodies, including the Ebert and the SPD controlled cabinet, the Executive Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Berlin, the Congress of Councils, the Spartacus League, the plotters of the Foreign Office Putsch from 6 December, and the radical council republic in Bavaria, sought to claim ownership of supreme authority during the Bürgerkrieg era. Furthermore, the relationship between each member of these trinities became closer as civilian organizations adopted military roles and combat forces developed political agendas and increasingly appreciated the importance of broader social support. Instead of neat divisions between civilians, military personnel and political leaders, a sliding scale emerged with a wide spectrum of units, organizations and associations reflecting a merger between the once distinct constituents of Clausewitz's trinity. As the Freikorps clearly

[12] Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, trans. Peter Paret (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1976), 734-735, Book Eight, Chapter Six.

demonstrated, in Weimar Germany the divisions between what was political, or military, or civilian were vague and constantly shifting.

However, while the Freikorps movement was exceptional for its use of psychological violence, it was not unique in European history. Despite the many differences between the German and Russian revolutions, both featured the use of psychological violence in lieu of widespread killing and destruction of property. While the death toll would later rise significantly, before the Bolshevik seizure of the central government in Russia, Red Guards relied on psychological violence to influence political discourse. Workers' militias and Red Guard units did not actually engage in significant levels of physical violence before the October Revolution and the outbreak of the Russian Civil War, instead seeking to project an image of potential violence through the development of an extensive network of armed groups of supporters dispersed throughout Russian towns and villages.[13] As the size of Red Guards formations expanded to over 100,000 members by October 1917, their ability to psychologically intimidate their opponents correspondingly grew, even though physical violence remained minimal until after the start of the civil war.[14] While they did not consciously adopt these tactics, the Freikorps movement's use of psychological violence to intimidate their own enemies within Germany mirrored the intention behind Red Guards activities before the Bolshevik revolution in the fall of 1917.

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[13] Rex A. Wade, *Red Guards and Workers' Militias in the Russian Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 294.
[14] Ibid., 294.

The Freikorps movement was only one example of the broader changes that dramatically altered the role of violence in German political and cultural discourse. Through the trauma of the carnage and destruction of the First World War battlefields in France and eastern Europe, an entire generation of Germans experienced physical violence, both directly and indirectly, on a staggering scale. As home front and battle front forcefully collided after the end of the war and the outbreak of revolution, physical and psychological violence continued to play a role in the patterns of many Germans' lives. The symobols of military life and physical violence - marching, wearing uniforms, and carrying weapons - continued to shape the experiences of men long after the Kaiser had abdicated and the war was lost. Therefore, as Germany failed to undergo a widespread *social* demobilization, comparable to the economic, political and military demobilization conducted after 1918, many Germans continued to express wartime attitudes, thoughts and actions. The Freikorps were merely one of the most visable and important expressions of this culture of violence that shaped life in the early Weimar Republic.

Periodic outbursts of violence were the basis for the atmosphere of violence that the Freikorps movement sought to create in the years following the First World War. Accompanying occasional public displays of killing, the material culture of violence pervaded Germany after 1918, serving as stark reminders of the potential violence inherent in the Freikorps system. Although the imperial army slowly demobilized after the armistice and drastically shrank with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, German citizens continued to be surrounded by the physical symbols of violence in everyday life. Freikorps troops took deliberate steps to ensure that

local populations under their "protection" were keenly aware of their violent capabilities, executing "demonstration marches" through public spaces and altering military tactics to emphasize particular weapons believed to have the deepest psychological impact on would be attackers and neutral civilian populations. Rifles, machine-guns, uniforms, and armoured vehicles accompanied the Freikorps movement wherever they were deployed throughout Germany, as military symbols and the tools of war found new places in civilian spaces after the war. Thus, even when Freikorps soldiers and leftwing revolutionaries were not actively engaged in killing, their presence indicated the potential for violence in German towns, villages, and cities: a ever present reminder of the deadly nature of politics in the first years of the republic.

The ubiquitous presence of violence also indicated a significant transformation of the organization of the German military sphere. With the means of violence so dispersed throughout the Reich, everyday citizens had unprecedented access to advanced military technology. Furthermore, through the expansion of the German Army over the course of fours years of mass murder during the First World War, new members of German society, particulary the working class, were educated in military skills for the first time, significantly enlarging the pool of well-trained potential troops in the country. With the abdication of Wilhelm II and the collapse of political and military authority in Berlin during the November revolution, the German military sphere was transformed almost over night. Instead of a single dominant hegemon, absolutely ruling over access to the means of violence, for the first time in Germany, anyone with weapons and training could challenge for their

own political and social agenda. While there are certainly parallels to the Russian Revolution, in Germany, deliberate attempts were made to limit the scale of violence, instead turning to psychological violence to avoid the more destructive results of the Russian Civil War. However in the new republican era, there were many viable ways into influence the political direction of the country. While the ballot box was the preferred form of political expression for most Germans, others chose to attempt to voice their politics through machineguns and pistols.

November 1918 did not mark the end of death and destruction in the lives of many Germans. Instead, the violence and killing unleashed during four years of bloody industrial warfare returned to Germany as the demobilizing imperial army provided an abudance of well-trained manpower to support new campaigns. Made possible by the unprecedented access to the means of violence for everyday citizens as the imperial military and political authority collapsed, the Bürgerkrieg era was a direct by-product of Germany's defeat in the First World War. Old social and political divisions re-emerged after the war, but expressed through new violent means as communists, socialists, rightwing nationalists, and radical veterans fought each other in the streets and fields of Germany. Even though only a fraction of the soldiers of the Great War joined a militant group or participated in the battles of the civil war, the Freikorps movement and its diverse consortium of associated organizations had a keen understanding and appreciation of the spiritual or philosophical nature of the war they were fighting allowing for the development of a broader culture of violence in postwar Germany.

Ultimately, the ramifications of even the brief two-month breakdown in the authority of Germany's centralized political institutions proved to be extensive. This momentary lapse in governance prevented the re-establishment of a military institution to safeguard the development of the republican regime and was the necessary pre-condition to enable the proliferation of militant groups throughout 1919 and 1920. In the absence of a dominant authority ruling over access to the use of deadly force, physical and psychological violence was unleashed in German society. While most Germans chose to voice their political concerns through peaceful democratic means, the Freikorps movement attempted to produce a sense of fear and intimidation, in which any failure to submit to the orders of the Freikorps would result in harsh reprisals. Although physical violence was rare, the Freikorps movement sought to wage psychological warfare against their enemies and the civilian populace. Only after the military realm was re-organized and brought under the hegemonic control of Hans von Seeckt and the resurgent Reichswehr were the Ebert's opponents forced to abandon their attempts to overthrow republic. Five years after the end of the First World War, German society finally returned to peace.

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