

TRANSFORMATION OF THE GERMAN *REICHSHEER*

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Military History

by

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ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMATION OF THE GERMAN *REICHSSHEER*, by MAJ H. Allen Skinner Jr., 130 pages.

Following the end of the World War I, the major combatants engaged in varying degrees of reorganization and reformation to incorporate the lessons learned from the conflict. Germany faced the pressing need to quickly reconstitute and reorganize her armed forces to meet both external and internal threats. The *Reichsheer* (German Army from 1919-1935) was the only major combatant to conduct a thorough and systematic study of the tactical and operational lessons of the war. The *Reichswehr* transformational efforts in doctrine, reorganization and training laid the foundation for the expansion and early World War II successes of the *Wehrmacht*.

The research question of this thesis was to explore exactly how the *Reichsheer* leaders transformed their warfighting doctrine. This thesis also looks closely at the underlying organizational philosophy, and how the philosophy guided the *Reichsheer* leadership cadre in affecting change within the organization. *Reichsheer* doctrinal manuals, directives and contemporary journal articles, supplemented with American observer reports, served as primary source material for the thesis. The thesis will clearly link the importance of a leader creating and articulating an envisioned end state in successfully effecting change within a military organization.

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ACRONYMS

CAS	Close Air Support
FM	Field Manual
F.u.G.	<i>Führung und Gefecht der verbundened Waffen</i> – Combined Arms Leadership and Battle
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
NCO	Noncommissioned officer
OCS	Officer Candidate School
OHL	<i>die Oberste Herresleitung</i> – The German High Command during World War I
OKH	<i>Oberkommando des Heeres</i> – Army High Command
OKW	<i>Oberdommando des Wehrmacht</i> – Armed Forces High Command
RC	Reserve Component
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Course
TOE	Table of Organization and Equipment

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The German Army in the summer of 1940 was widely considered the best army in the world--and with good reason. Adolf Hitler's desire to avenge the humiliation of Versailles culminated in a series of victorious military campaigns. The *Wehrmacht* (German armed forces after 1935) overran Poland in a quick campaign which shocked the rest of the world. Following Poland, Germany swallowed up Norway and Denmark to secure vital natural resources and access to the Atlantic. Hitler then turned to France, invading on 10 May 1940. The French will to resist collapsed in a shockingly brief period, resulting in the Nazi occupation of vital population and commerce centers, and the installation of a puppet regime to administer the south and the French overseas colonies. Britain was left largely impotent with her army defeated and forced to flee the Continent in humiliation and disorder.

Subsequent German operations in the Balkans and North Africa produced more impressive battlefield achievements. In June 1941, the German war machine invaded the Soviet Union. The German armies seemed invincible, despite fanatical Soviet resistance. By late fall 1941, the Germans had won numerous operational victories, and taking thousands of square miles of Soviet territory while causing millions of Soviet casualties.

German forces in the first part of 1942 also enjoyed many successes, besting British forces in North Africa, and Soviet forces in the Crimea and Caucasus regions. By summer 1942, Germany was master over large portions of Europe and Africa. But from the high point in 1942, Germany faced an increasingly impossible strategic situation. Numerous poor strategic decisions by Hitler made defeat inevitable but only after three

years of protracted fighting. By 7 May 1945, Nazi Germany lay in ruins, defeated, and partitioned by the victorious Allies.

How was Germany, defeated and prostrate in 1919, able to create armed forces which were, until mid-1942 unmatched by any other nation? The explanation for the *Wehrmacht's* warfighting capacity can be found in a study of the formation of the *Reichswehr* (post-WWI German Armed Forces). The *Reichswehr* was a product of the strict limitations the Versailles Treaty placed on the Germans. The Allies, at French insistence, crafted the treaty in order to leave Germany militarily weakened and incapable of future offensive action. The treaty also levied large indemnities intended to weaken the German economic base, and compensate for Allied losses. Despite these obstacles, within ten years the Germans were able to successfully rebuild and restructure their forces, creating some of the arguably best quality leadership of any contemporary army. Within the *Reichswehr*, the *Reichsheer's* (Army) efforts to develop new doctrine, reorganize, and train future leaders served as the foundation of the *Wehrmacht* expansion and preparation for war in the late 1930s. Apparently the *Reichsheer's* senior leaders were able to construct a vision of the organization's direction, articulate the vision, and successfully transmit that vision to the rank-and-file members so as to facilitate productive organizational change and develop highly effective combat leaders.

The bedrock of the German's transformational success in the interwar years was the influence of the *Reichsheer's* "leadership philosophy." The best definition for philosophy is: "The critical analysis of fundamental assumptions or beliefs; a set of ideas or beliefs relating to a particular field or activity; a system of values by which one lives."¹ At a more practical level, a personal or organizational philosophy provides a

foundation upon which values and behaviors (for an organization) are built upon.² The *Reichsheer's* leadership performed a thorough, systematic study which captured the critical lessons from the Great War, refined relevant doctrine, and developed high caliber leaders able to effectively apply the doctrine. This thesis will focus on how the *Reichsheer* leadership articulated their war fighting philosophy, conducted their analysis, developed doctrine, and trained their leaders and soldiers to apply it.

The key research question associated with the thesis is: How did the *Reichsheer* transform their warfighting doctrine after World War I? Subordinate questions to the research question include:

1. What was the organizational philosophy of the key *Reichsheer* leaders?
2. How did the *Reichsheer* leadership transmit this philosophy and vision to their leaders and soldiers?
3. How were *Reichsheer* leaders selected, trained, and developed?
4. How did the *Reichsheer* contribute to German expansion in early World War II campaigns?

Gaining insights to answer these questions first requires a close look at the conditions which gave rise to the *Reichsheer*.

Strategic Context

Germany, despite her numerous tactical successes, faced defeat in the fall of 1918. Germany's allies had been separately crushed by Allied offensives and sued for peace. A combination of Allied pressure and domestic unrest, sparked by Bolshevik agitators, served to drive Kaiser Wilhelm to abdicate his throne and flee to Holland. Moderate Socialists in the government established a provisional Republic to fill the

power vacuum and prevent a Bolshevik takeover of Germany.³ The Army, facing a lack of resources and disintegrating morale, asked the government to accept an Armistice on 11 November 1918. Following the armistice, the German units on the Western Front withdrew from occupied France and Belgium, and the victorious Allies occupied bridgeheads across the Rhine River. At this point, the *Kaiserheer* effectively disintegrated with most Western Front units dissolving, while units still deployed in the Baltic region became politically unreliable and unwilling to fight the Bolshevik Russians. The Republic was forced to turn to irregular *Freikorps* units to stabilize the Baltic region as well as maintain order within Germany. Some *Freikorps* units were composed of relatively well disciplined ex-*Kaiserheer* soldiers while others were nothing more than armed gangs. The *Freikorps* served as a stop gap until the formation of a regular Army.⁴

The German (Weimar) Republic in 1919 was under great domestic pressure to preserve order, stabilize the economy, absorb millions of demobilized soldiers and negotiate for the best treaty terms from the Allies. The German government and citizens were deeply shocked at the punitive terms dictated by the Allies. France was determined that Germany should never again wage offensive war and pushed to ban German possession of all offensive type weapons, such as tanks, airplanes and poison gas. The Versailles Treaty placed strict limits on manpower and banned conscription and reserves. Further clauses levied huge war indemnities in the form of gold and raw materials, which were intended not only to compensate for Allied losses but to also cripple the German economy. The clauses which aroused the greatest German anger demanded the surrender of the Kaiser and other key leaders for war crimes trials, and the German nation was required to accept full blame for starting the Great War.⁵ Germans, whether Socialist or

Monarchist, deeply resented this treatment. But the Allies naval blockade and control of the Rhine bridgeheads prevented any possibility of effective military resistance to the treaty, so the Republic grudgingly accepted the Versailles Treaty in June 1919.⁶

The final version of the treaty ended Germany's ability to wage offensive war, and called into question their ability to effectively defend their territory since the army was sized to provide nothing more than internal security and policing duties. In 1919, Germany had serious security challenges and needed a capable professional force. Germany needed to defend the western border from Polish and Bolshevik Russian forces fighting across Poland. The Versailles Treaty split Danzig from the German nation by cutting a Polish controlled corridor through the former empire. The treaty also forbade new fortifications which meant the Army could not prepare defenses to block Polish or French incursions into German territory.⁷

There were also serious problems with internal German state dynamics; relations between the *Heer* and the Republican government were strained. Army officers as a group were decidedly pro-Monarchist and anti-Republic. But, Wilhelm Groener, the chief of the provisional *Reichswehr* was enough of a realist to recognize that the Army and the Republic had to work together to ensure national survival. He pledged the Army's support to the Republic in exchange for government money, supplies, and most importantly support in suppressing of Bolshevik revolutionaries. The Republican Chancellor, Matthias Ebert, agreed to the exchange and Groener ensured the Army remained loyal to the Republic. However, the fact that the interim Republican government took responsibility for requesting the Armistice, instead of the Army, helped create the "stab in the back" myth which fuelled Germany's desire for revenge.⁸

Military Background to the *Reichsheer*

The *Kaiserheer* in 1914 was in many respects the best prepared, and most confident of victory among the various Great War combatants--this in large part due to their success in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. German Army officers and soldiers believed that they could attain a quick victory, or at least a favorable outcome to the war, with some reason. Despite the strategic failure of the 1914 invasion of France, Germany maintained both a military and moral superiority over the Allies. She occupied France's most valuable industrial and agricultural regions for three and a half years, and blunted every Allied offensive. By 1918 the Western Allies were exhausted and waiting for American intervention. Successive German offensives had dealt mortal blows to Russia, and overwhelmed Serbia and Rumania, The spring Peace Offensives of 1918 brought the Germans very close to breaking the Allied coalition. So when German will to resist collapsed in November 1918, many *Kaiserheer* soldiers could not comprehend how that had happened.⁹

The Republic quickly recognized the new internal and external security threats and took steps to rebuild the Army. A law passed in March 1919 officially dissolved the *Kaiserheer* and established a provisional *Reichswehr* (Armed Forces). This force incorporated the disciplined *Freikorps* elements plus the remaining *Kaiserheer* units and General Staff structure. Subsequent laws established a senior command structure for the *Heer*, and a national defense ministry. Unlike the prewar *Kaiserheer* structure, where each state maintained a separate ministry and general staff, the *Reichswehr* ministry combined the army and navy into one armed force, each with clear chains of command. The ministry also exercised budgetary responsibility for the armed forces and interacted

directly with the civilian government on policy matters. The Reichstag appointed General Hans von Seeckt as the *Heer* Chief and General William Groener to head the Defense Ministry.¹⁰

Establishment of the provisional *Reichswehr* in March 1919 was a necessary step to maintain national security while the force reorganized and reduced manpower to comply with the Versailles Treaty. The provisional forces totaled approximately 400,000 men and still equipped with large quantities of banned artillery, machine guns and aircraft. The *Reichsheer* largely completed their transitional period of reduction and reorganization by March 1921 by reducing manpower to 100,000 men and scrapping or giving up their forbidden arms to the Allies. At the end of this period, Seeckt retained his position as the *Reichsheer* Chief of Staff.¹¹

Interim Leadership

Army leadership in the inter war period before the final *Reichsheer* establishment was strained in many ways. Disillusionment, war weariness and distrust of the Army leadership served to drive many skilled officers from the ranks. Many more refused to serve a Socialist government widely believed to have betrayed the Army and the Kaiser. However, enough stayed in uniform to help maintain order in the ranks. The officer ranks consisted of a mix of former *Kaiserheer* regular and reserve officers, and former NCOs (noncommissioned officers). The ex- *Kaiserheer* group was generally well trained and competent, many with General Staff training. In contrast, former reserve officers and NCOs lacked in-depth training and education and were generally competent only in company-level operations and incapable of functioning effectively as regimental staff officers.¹²

Treaty Restrictions

The Allies desired end state was a Germany incapable of offensive war. They intended to accomplish this by hobbling Germany's armed forces with manpower, equipment and force structure restrictions. Besides the manpower ceiling of 100,000, the treaty banned short-term conscription and trained reserves, mandated long-term enlistments for the active army and severely limited accessions and discharges. These actions were intended to ensure the pool of trained manpower available in Germany, the Great War veterans, would progressively shrink over time.¹³

Versailles radically changed the Army structure by abolishing the General Staff and the staff training academy (*Kriegsakademie*). Another restriction was on the number of combat units. The treaty allowed for only seven infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions; each division had restrictions on manpower and officer positions. Further clauses limited internal police and security forces, and prohibited border fortifications. Lastly, the treaty banned modern weapons such as tanks, aircraft and poison gas, and placed quantity and type limits on infantry weapons, such as artillery and machine guns. Germany was required to destroy, scrap or turn over the banned weapons to the Allies. Germany was also prohibited from researching or manufacturing the banned weapons.¹⁴

General Hans von Seeckt

General Hans von Seeckt's selection as the *Reichsheer* chief was not accidental; by 1918 he had established a reputation as being one of the best *Kaiserheer* staff officers, and was one of the few general officers not discredited by defeat. Seeckt was unusual compared to his peers, having earned a liberal arts *abitur* (secondary school certificate) from a civilian *gymnasium* (secondary school) instead of attending the Imperial cadet

school. Seeckt was well versed in the arts and literature, and was well acquainted with the world due to his frequent travels in Europe and Asia.¹⁵ Seeckt started his career as a cavalry officer in 1887, and displayed enough talent to earn a rare appointment to the Imperial War Academy as a lieutenant. He performed well during the course, scoring exceptionally well on military history, tactics and General Staff functions. Seeckt graduated in 1896, and received a transfer to the General Staff, a rarity for a lieutenant.¹⁶ Seeckt climbed the company and field grade ranks, both as a commander and staff officer and was appointed the III Army Corps chief of staff in 1913.¹⁷ Upon the outbreak of war, Seeckt displayed a talent for operational maneuver during the Western Front offensives. Seeckt's planning also enabled the III Corps to win several more important battles before the Western Front combatants settled into indecisive trench warfare.

Seeckt further enhanced his reputation as a master of maneuver warfare while serving on the Eastern Front as the chief of staff for the newly organized 11th Army in early 1915. His planning and operational synchronization resulted in a devastating operational breakthrough against the Russians, and seizure of Galicia and Poland while inflicting some 850,000 casualties.¹⁸ Seeckt continued his operational success throughout 1916, planning and directing the successful Austro-German defense against the Russian Brusilov offensive, the subsequent counterattack, and the Rumanian invasion in December 1916.¹⁹

After spending two years on the Eastern Front, Seeckt received a posting in 1917 to the Turkish General Staff to help shore up the tottering Ottoman Army, where he served in staff and command capacities. The Provisional government then appointed him to oversee withdrawal of the forces from Poland and Galicia, and to organize *Freikorps*

units to defend against Polish and Red Army incursions.²⁰ Seeckt then received his most disagreeable job to date to serve as the German military representative at the Versailles peace negotiations while also serving as the provisional *Reichsheer* Chief of Staff. There he fought unsuccessfully to retain a 200,000 man professional army armed with modern equipment--a force he deemed the minimum needed to defend Germany against invasion.²¹

The German Command and General Staff System

The *Kaiserheer* had a command tradition, dating back to the Napoleonic Wars which gave leaders great flexibility in prosecuting war. The genesis of this tradition was in the social contract between the Prussian king, Frederick William, and his *Junker* (nobility class) officer corps. The king expected to give a general mission order and have his officer execute the mission; excessive kingly interference in how the *Junker* executed the order was considered a violation of their social contract.²² The Prussian battlefield experiences during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries further bolstered this tradition. Reforms, initiated by Scharnhorst following the Prussian army's embarrassing defeat by Napoleon at Jena-Auerstadt in 1806, included the establishment of a trained general staff, opportunities for educated middle class citizens to become officers, and a system of exams to determine an officer's fitness for promotion and responsibility.²³ Prussian and *Kaiserheer* regulations recognized the validity of Karl von Clausewitz' theories on "friction" and the "fog of war," and counseled commanders and staff to anticipate unforeseen changes and to adapt to the battlefield conditions. General Staff officers received thorough grounding in operational concepts, and were expected to ensure the uniform application of those concepts across the entire army.²⁴ Commanders and staffs

were trained to create mission type orders which emphasized the “what” of the mission, but left the “how” of mission execution to the field commander. Mission orders consisted of two parts. The first part consisted of an intent section which outlined tactical goals and how the commander intended to meet those goals. The second part of the order spelled out the task or role assigned to each subordinate. The commander wrote the directive loosely enough to allow the tactical commander to deviate from the plan if, by doing so, he could create a greater impact upon the enemy. Senior commanders were trained not to interfere in the junior’s conduct except to correct a serious mistake or misjudgment. Of course, the junior leaders were expected to not misuse their independence and to stay within the boundaries set by the commander’s intent.²⁵

One of the key strengths of the General Staff was their dedication to institutionalized excellence. The Prussian reformers in the early nineteenth century recognized that simply duplicating Napoleon’s organizational structure was not enough. Napoleon’s success depended largely upon his own innate genius; he dictated his own orders to staff officers who would transcribe and distribute his orders. Scharnhorst determined to create a body of officers trained in both the art and science of war to serve alongside the commander, and translate the commander’s vision into clear, actionable mission orders. At that period in time, no other European army had a system to systematically train staff officers, instead depending instead on the genius and personality of the commander to direct operations. The weakness in this method meant that a unit would often flounder leaderless if the commander died or was incapacitated. The German staff system ensured each regiment had a pool of trained officers expressly trained to

assist the commander in directing operations, and capable of quickly taking command if necessary.²⁶

By the twentieth century, the General Staff school had turned out hundreds of identically trained officers who served as staff officers at all command echelons. Chiefs of staff wielded a great deal of influence, and in many instances exercised actual command authority. The Imperial Army viewed General Staff officers differently than their British or French counterparts. German General Staff officers were trained and managed separately, but were expected to rotate between staff and command positions to maintain a good balance of theoretical and practical knowledge. The Allied armies certainly had their share of officers capable of recognizing and creating good tactics and procedures. What made the German General Staff stand apart was their ability to recognize, develop and *disseminate* improvements throughout the entire organization. German staff officers were expected to regularly visit their front line counterparts to cull tactical lessons and to build rapport between front and rear echelons. Regimental staff officers would publish and distribute tactical bulletins, not only within their organization, but to OHL which describing effective tactics and techniques. The OHL (The German High Command--*die Oberste Heeresleitung*) staffers would review the bulletins. This stands in contrast to the British and French General Staffs, whose members rarely visited the front lines, and had no overarching system to study and derive lessons from field experience.²⁷

The General Staff in the Great War

A good example of the superiority of the German Staff system was their systematic reaction to the Western Front stalemate. In 1914, the Germans assumed the

strategic defense in the West as an economy of force measure. Regimental officers quickly learned how to integrate machine guns, artillery and mortars into a combined arms defense which decimated repeated Allied offensives--this despite a relative lack of prewar defensive doctrine. OHL staffers assisted in the process by collecting good tactical lessons, and distributing them to the entire force.²⁸

The war in the East was quite different. The large tracts of open space in Poland and European Russia permitted large scale operational maneuver, warfare the General Staff was well trained for. Good examples of German operational success abound, most notably Tannenberg in 1914 and Gorlice in 1915. These successes pointed to the fact that operational maneuver was still possible, but new solutions were needed to prevent the attacker from reaching a premature logistics culmination point.²⁹

Germany, by late 1916 was at a strategic crossroads. The Kaiser relieved General Erich von Falkenhayn in November 1916 as the OHL Chief of Staff, due to his strategic and operational level failures. Falkenhayn had replaced von Moltke upon his relief after the failure of the 1914 Western offensive. Falkenhayn's strategy in the West had been terrain oriented defense, expecting to hold on to every square inch of French territory, regardless of casualties. This policy robbed tactical leaders of flexibility and led to heavy casualties. Falkenhayn also chose to ignore recommendations from Hindenburg, Ludendorff as well as von Seeckt to shift major offensive operations to the East. The "Easterners" pointed to Tannenberg as an example of how the Germans could still conduct maneuver and decisive encirclement battles. Their belief was that, if given a greater share of resources, continued operations could occupy large portions of European Russia and knock the Russians out of the war. Falkenhayn instead chose a strategically

bankrupt operation, an attack on Verdun in 1916 intended only to attrit the French and nothing more.³⁰

Falkenhayn's replacement was Field Marshal von Hindenburg, who was assisted by his intellectually brilliant Chief of Staff, General Erich Ludendorff. Ludendorff acted quickly to create a tactical solution to the Western Front impasse. He toured the front to form his own judgments from first hand information and observations. More importantly, he directed the OHL staff to study and find new solutions to the tactical problems in the West.³¹

The OHL staffers coordinated with army group staffs to gather ideas and recommendations for relevant tactical doctrine. This information gathering and analysis process was not unusual, since OHL staffers routinely visited the front to gather data and share tactical lessons, and were not above adapting good ideas gleaned from their enemies.³² The OHL staff then analyzed the data, drafted new tactical principles, and distributed the draft principles to the field armies for review.

Ludendorff's role as the OHL Chief of Staff is instructive and well worth studying in detail. He allowed time between the release of the draft and final document to allow for critical review and feedback from the field. Ludendorff showed a remarkable degree of tolerance for constructive criticism, even allowing the publishing of criticisms along with the draft regulations in order to stimulate debate. He established ownership in new regulations by the active solicitation of good ideas from the field, and giving credit to the sources. Lastly, Ludendorff enforced application of the regulations, relieving field commanders if necessary for non compliance.³³

The new doctrine required a significant training and leadership shift by relying heavily upon junior leaders to control decentralized defenses. One potential problem at this point of the war was the quality of junior leaders. The Imperial Army had started out with a cadre of well-educated and trained NCOs capable of applying the new doctrine. But by 1916, NCOs were not as good quality due to high leader casualties and poorer quality training; some NCOs were also considered politically and culturally unreliable.³⁴

OHL's solution was thorough leader training. OHL published companion training manuals, and supervised the establishment of special tactical schools for training the new tactics. The training was first aimed at key senior leaders and staff officers who were then expected to establish internal training programs for the field commanders, the junior officers and most importantly, NCOs.³⁵

The *Kaiserheer*, by early 1917, had completed training and restructuring based on the new defensive regulations. Initial battle experience showed the effectiveness of the new regulations but revealed incorrect applications as well as new lessons. Ludendorff relied upon telephone conversations with field commanders, and the dispatch of trusted OHL staffers to assist Army commanders in correctly applying and refining the new doctrine. This approach reveals a key German attitude towards doctrine. The Germans treated doctrine as conceptual, not prescriptive, and was wrote broadly enough to allow adaptation without modification, and with enough detail to ensure well synchronized efforts. The Germans also attempted to use their best talent in the organization to refine their doctrine. Field staff and commanders were expected to share information and criticism of the principles with OHL and share the information among all units in the army.³⁶

The German strategic failures in the war tend to overshadow their truly remarkable tactical and operational accomplishments. The array of Allies against Germany as the senior Central Power allied with Austro-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey was an unequal match. The Allies had larger populations, greater resources, control of sea and land transportation routes. Yet, Germany did not lose by much, coming close both 1914 and 1918 to defeating the British and French field armies. German defenses in the West bloodied and blocked every Allied offensive before August 1918. German planned offensives overran and occupied Serbia, Rumania and large portions of Poland, Russia and Italy. The Russian collapse in 1917 came in large part due to a morale failure from repeated defeats at German hands. German tactical units in the Great War were generally more effective in comparison to Allied units both in the attack and the defense. German units typically inflicted more casualties than their opponents, regardless of the type of operation--indications that the German tactical and operational methods were generally better than that of their opponents.³⁷

Summary

Understanding how the *Kaiserheer* successfully adapted and persevered in the War is critical to our understanding of the *Reichsheer* transformation efforts. The *Kaiserheer* successfully adapted to the unusual conditions of the Western Front and stalemated repeated Allied offensives, while large scale operational maneuvers in the East met with many great successes. Most instructive was the *Heer's* tactical refinement process. Ludendorff recognized the problem, the need to update doctrine with new tactical lessons in order to reduce casualties and improve tactical operations. His staff used detailed analysis of the tactical problem, using first hand observation, expert ideas

and input to formulate and refine their concepts. The OHL staff wrote the doctrine as inductive principles designed to balance uniformity with adaptability to local conditions. Ludendorff tolerated dissent and criticisms during the refining process, and created stakeholders in the process by rewarding credit to deserving innovators. The OHL staff published and ensured dissemination of the new doctrine to all tactical levels once the refinement process was completed. Ludendorff focused on articulating his organizational focus and vision to his key leaders first, then placing responsibility on the Field Army commanders to train their subordinate leaders and units. Unit leaders continued the Prussian-German tradition of tough, realistic training to prepare leaders and soldiers to apply the new doctrine. Lastly, leaders at all levels enforced application of the new doctrine, punishing errant leaders if necessary to ensure compliance.

So by 1918, the *Heer* had successfully transformed itself even while maintaining combat operations. Units were now organized in cohesive combined arms teams, under the direction of capable NCOs and operating largely independently within the framework of the tactical commander's mission order. This transformation was successful enough to sustain Western Front defenses for another full year while simultaneously building combat power for the 1918 Peace Offensives. This foundational framework of analysis, refinement, training and application set the stage for the post-war *Reichswehr* reorganization and reformation.

¹Available from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/philosophy>; Internet; accessed on 21 March 2006.

²COL Maureen K. Leboeuf, USA, Developing a Leadership Philosophy, 1-2 [document on-line]; available from <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/leboeuf.htm>; Internet; accessed on 21 March 2006.

³Trevor Dupuy, *A Genius for War: The German Army General Staff, 1807-1945* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), 183.

⁴*Ibid.*, 190.

⁵Tim Ripley, *The Wehrmacht* (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003), 13.

⁶Robert Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg: Doctrine and Training in the German Army, 1920-1939 (Path)* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999), 34 (hereafter cited as *Path*).

⁷*Ibid.*, 8.

⁸Dupuy, 185.

⁹James Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg (Roots)* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 1 (hereafter cited as *Roots*).

¹⁰Corum, *Roots*, 35.

¹¹United States Army Military Intelligence Reports (USAMI), Reel XIII, 245.

¹²Corum, *Roots*, 80.

¹³Samuel J. Lewis, *Forgotten Legions: German Army Infantry Policy, 1918-1941* (New York: Praeger, 1985), 25.

¹⁴Bernard Shermann, "General Hans von Seeckt: Architekt of the Wehrmacht" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1975), 91.

¹⁵Harold J Gordon Jr., "The Character of Hans von Seeckt," *Military Affairs* 20, no. 2 (summer 1956), 95.

¹⁶Shermann, 19.

¹⁷Citino, *Path*, 8.

¹⁸Corum, *Roots*, 27.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 28.

²⁰Shermann, viii.

²¹*Ibid.*, 91. The material does not elaborate on Seeckt's relations with the Allied committee members, but one is tempted to believe Seeckt's icy reserve and sharp tongue were not helpful in positively influencing the outcome.

²²Citino, *Path*, 32.

- ²³Ibid., 129.
- ²⁴Corum, *Roots*, 5.
- ²⁵Martin Samuels, *Doctrine and Dogma: German and British Infantry Tactics in the First World War* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 89.
- ²⁶Robert Citino, *The German Way of War (Way)* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 131.
- ²⁷Samuels, 31.
- ²⁸Ibid., 35.
- ²⁹Corum, *Roots*, 7.
- ³⁰Ibid, 3.
- ³¹Samuels, 95.
- ³²Corum, *Roots*, 6.
- ³³Timothy Lupfer *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 1981), 22.
- ³⁴Bruce I. Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army 1914-1918* (New York: Praeger, 1989) 23.
- ³⁵Ibid., 24.
- ³⁶Lupfer, 57.
- ³⁷Ibid., 178.

CHAPTER 2

LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY AND DOCTRINAL REFORM

Hans von Seeckt and Versailles

Many senior German officers and government officials strongly opposed signing the Versailles Treaty, preferring to fight and risk a total Allied occupation in order to avoid the shame of accepting war guilt. Many officers, Ludendorff in particular, characterized the treaty as a “stab in the back” by craven civilians. However, cooler minds, particularly Groener and Seeckt, recognized Germany had no effective means of resistance and counseled acceptance of the terms.¹ Groener, as the senior General Staff representative, took responsibility for accepting the treaty, not only to maintain the loyalty of the *Reichsheer* but to avoid a full scale leftist uprising.² Seeckt, for his part, publicly accepted responsibility for the failed treaty negotiations, stating that acceptance of the treaty, in itself, was not a dishonor as long as he and others faithfully performed their duties.³ The Republican government, bolstered by support from the *Reichswehr* accepted the treaty provisions just before the deadline on 24 June 1919.

The Republican government repaid Seeckt’s loyalty by retaining him chair the Commission for the Peacetime Army Organization, which had the task to oversee the reorganization and disarmament of the *Heer*. Seeckt also assumed duties as the Chief of the *Truppenamnt* (Troop Office) which was the staff section charged to replace the functionality of the old General Staff.⁴

Seeckt's Philosophy and Vision

Seeckt's wartime experiences on both Eastern and Western Fronts made a profound impression upon his beliefs--beliefs which were often at odds with his contemporaries. One of his key beliefs was in the necessity of fighting an operational war of movement (*Bewegungskrieg*) as key to victory. Many *Reichsheer* officers had served on the Western Front and were convinced of the superiority of the defense. Seeckt, however, viewed the Western Front position warfare (*Stellungskrieg*) as an aberration. *Stellungskrieg* had happened because of the collision of clumsy mass armies in the constrained territory of northern France and Flanders. The mass armies were unable to decisively maneuver and deadlocked in bloody trench warfare. Seeckt openly questioned the value of conscript mass armies:

The soldier must ask himself whether these giant armies can ever be maneuvered in accordance with a strategy that seeks a decision, and whether it is possible for any future war between these masses to end otherwise than in indecisive rigidity.⁵

Seeckt believed offensive operations were still the key to victory. His experiences led him to believe operational victories were still possible, especially against an enemy reliant upon a cumbersome mass army.

Seeckt's focus on operational maneuver was in keeping with (and was profoundly influenced by) the Prussian tradition of operational maneuver warfare (*Bewegungskrieg*) which dated back to the Great Elector, Frederick William of Brandenburg and had been practiced by the Prussian-German army since that time. Frederick and his successors lacked defensible terrain and limited economic resources, and were furthermore surrounded by potential enemies. Frederick determined that only a policy of determined

aggression would preserve his throne. One key innovation introduced by Frederick was the granting of autonomy to his aristocratic commanders (*Junkers*) in executing his plan. Frederick issued general mission orders, but did not interfere in how the Junker executed the mission; any interference on Frederick's part was viewed by the Junker as a gross violation of their social contract.⁶

Frederick II (Frederick the Great) inherited the title of King of Prussia in 1740. He also inherited a well trained professional army from his father, and the legacy of *Bewegungskrieg* and mission type orders from Frederick William. He introduced further innovations to the art of war. He studied his first (near-disastrous) battle in detail, and created a body of writings (Battle Instructions) for the various arms--a precursor to modern military doctrine.⁷ He used strenuous drill and field maneuvers to test his Battle Instructions. Frederick II impressed on his leaders the need to improvise, grasp opportunities and to aggressively attack in order to seize the initiative. He believed the key to victory was an operational flanking maneuver (not in contact with the enemy) to unbalance the enemy force and a decisive attack to destroy the enemy regiments in detail. Frederick's operational success depended on his generals understanding the overall mission, coordinating all arms, and shocking the enemy with decisive action in order to gain a moral advantage.⁸

Seeckt saw danger not only treating *Stellungskrieg* as anything but normal, but in blindly following such futurists, such as J. F. C. Fuller and Giulio Douhet, who predicted the dominance of great fleets of machines in a future war. Seeckt believed in adopting machines to facilitate maneuver, but counseled against blindly rushing towards mechanization:

We certainly ought not to close our eyes to the development of the motor vehicle and its employment for military purposes. We shall not ignore it, but rather try to lay the theoretical foundations, and, as far as possible, the practical foundations for its use, but we must take care not to neglect, existing, tested, serviceable appliances in favor of something that may be possible in the future. . . . The solution to the problem lies therefore in making full use of the products of technical science to extend and modernize what already exists, but not by substituting something dead for something alive.⁹

Seeckt also recognized that a lack of technical and economic training of the General Staff officers led to poor strategic decisions during the war--Ludendorff's failure to grasp the potential of the tank, for example--which wasted valuable manpower and raw materials.¹⁰

One of Seeckt's major breaks with the Prussian/German tradition was his belief in the superiority of professional soldiers versus conscripted soldiers. The Prussian-German army had resorted to conscripting fit male citizens into a mass army since the Napoleonic era reformation. One key assumption behind conscription was that shared service among all citizens would inculcate patriotism and a sense of belonging to an army of the people.¹¹ Implicit in this assumption was that professional soldiers would develop loyalty only to their officers or regiment, and were less likely to fully support an unpopular war.¹² Seeckt, however, reached the conclusion that professional, technically trained soldiers were superior to the poorly trained mass armies of the Great War.¹³ He presented his first proposal for the postwar Reichswehr in a February 1919 memorandum presented to the *Reichstag*. Seeckt proposed a professional force of 200,000 soldiers enlisted for two years, backed by a partially trained national militia. He intended the professional covering army to prosecute offensive battles or serve as a defensive covering force in order to allow time for national mobilization. Seeckt intended the militia to serve as a trained manpower pool to fill covering army losses, and to provide internal defense.¹⁴

Another notable facet of Seeckt's philosophy was the importance he attached to the man of intellect over the man of action. The *Reichswehr* faced the dilemma of how best to eliminate 6,000 excess officers as dictated by the Versailles Treaty. Many senior *Heer* leaders believed in retaining only officers with proven front line experience. Seeckt himself certainly attached great importance to capable and decisive leaders, believing character was greater than intellect in the exercise of command.¹⁵ But he differed from many officers in believing General Staff officers had greater intellectual capacity necessary to reorganize the *Reichswehr* and lead the force in the future. General Staff officers were also trained and fully capable of assuming command of a regiment or division. In contrast, battlefield appointees usually lacked the training and education to adequately serve as regimental or division staff officers.¹⁶ Furthermore, Seeckt questioned the ability of the *Frontsoldaten* to unlearn their Great War experiences and embrace the philosophy of offensive maneuver. In the end, Seeckt's viewpoint prevailed, and a majority of retained officers consisted of General Staff qualified officers.¹⁷

Seeckt also attached great importance to the leader's intellect and character, viewing these qualities as essential for leading his new professional force. Seeckt spent a considerable amount of time writing on the subject of a leader's character. He identified the key components of a leader's character as: the sober assumption of responsibility for oneself and others; a high degree of efficiency in commanding and obeying orders; and lastly, the duty of the person to subordinate himself to the greater good of the entire Army.¹⁸

In Seeckt's view, another key component of a leader's character was honor. Seeckt believed that a soldier's honor was bound in the successful discharge of his duties,

regardless of personal risk. The leader further assumed responsibility for the conduct of his soldiers; Seeckt expected the leader to exercise “the duty of severity for honor’s sake” in order to complete his assigned tasks.¹⁹

He noted that one of the key weaknesses in the Allied mass armies was their weak officer leadership. Seeckt observed that Allied officers in the Great War often lacked thorough training and the character qualities essential to the creative thinking needed to overcome tactical and operational problems.²⁰

A key component of Seeckt’s operational maneuver concept was the need for short verbal orders, usually issued while both the leader and subordinate oriented to the actual objective on the ground.²¹ Here Seeckt stressed the importance of clarity and sharpness in expressing the commander’s desired end state:

The will arising out of the decision must therefore express itself all the more sharply and clearly in form. It is not without good reason that in military life we insist on a special phraseology for orders. It must express the commander’s will so clearly that no doubt can trouble weaker spirits, while the refractory are forced to comply. The commander must expect to find both of these temperaments . . . and they may, indeed always will, create obstacles which he must try to avoid or diminish by the force and clarity of his language. . . . It is therefore the commander’s great task to *force his will* [emphasis mine] so vigorously into the chosen channels that its pulsations will be perceptible in their uttermost ramifications.²²

Seeckt emphasized the need for the commander to closely imprint his desired outcome and determined will upon his staff and commanders, while still leaving the means to the end up to the leaders on the ground. Critical to the oral operations order was the commander’s ability to give the orders at the right time in order to get inside the enemy’s decision cycle in a meeting engagement: “The leader on the spot has a special responsibility. He ought not to make his decisions based upon time-consuming

reconnaissance. He must often make orders in a confusing situation and he can assume that the enemy is no more prepared for battle than he.”²³

Seeckt recognized the importance of studying military history, and the application of military science in the conduct of war, but believed developing the leader’s character was of greater importance than developing the intellect. He also clearly recognized the importance of a leader’s grasp of the intangible in the prosecution of war:

The soldier, then as a typical man of action, must be equipped with the knowledge and education necessary for the accomplishment of the task. . . . The value of knowledge acquired by study must not be over-estimated. . . . Such knowledge as that derived from the study of the history of war is only of living practical value when it has been digested, when the permanent and the important has been extracted from the wealth of detail and has been incorporated with a man’s own mental resources--and it is not every man who has the gift for this.²⁴

Seeckt believed that only a leader imbued with these three key character traits could bridge the gap between science and art in what he described as the exercise of genius.²⁵

Seeckt, despite his emphasis on honor and self-subordination, clearly did not believe in creating an army of unthinking robots. He believed the Army needed to include citizens of all classes and backgrounds in order to meet the varied needs of the *Heer*.²⁶ Seeckt believed inclusion of all classes would ensure the *Heer* would remain connected to society. Additionally, Seeckt placed a great emphasis on a spirit of unity and cooperation within the ranks in order to foster high morale among the soldiers.²⁷ He however believed the *Heer* should remain clear of political entanglements and provide service to the state in a dispassionate manner.²⁸

Political separation was a matter of great concern to Seeckt given the ongoing turmoil in the German state in the early 1920s. Seeckt viewed the *Heer* as a bastion of stability against anarchists and Bolsheviks; as such he intended to limit any outside

influence which might destabilize the force. He even went so far as to relocate the *Wehrkreis* (regional commands) from their traditional urban garrisons to rural locations to limit corrosive political influence.²⁹

Another political challenge Seeckt had to contend with was widespread anti-Republican sentiment among the officer corps. Resistance to the demobilization process triggered a short lived attempt by the Berlin *Wehrkreis* commander, General Walther von Luttwitz, to overthrow the Republican government in 1920. Seeckt refused government orders to use force against the *Putsch*; he however also gave no support or recognition to Luttwitz. After the *Putsch* collapse, Seeckt relieved Luttwitz and his chief supporters, but declined to administer discipline in order to avoid creating further turmoil in the Army; he immediately sent forces (including *Freikorps* units) into the Ruhr to quash a Spartacist revolt. Seeckt, despite his pro-monarchist leanings, was pragmatic enough to recognize that supporting the Republic was the best method to preventing a Bolshevik takeover in Germany.³⁰

End State

Seeckt geared all efforts towards the day when Germany could openly rearm and possess an army large enough to conduct true offensive operations. His future vision imbued the *Heer* recruitment policies, organization, regulations and training. However, he was forced to focus the majority of his efforts into rebuilding the *Heer's* conceptual base, and creating a *Führerheer*, an army of leaders, since he could do little to openly rearm or expand. Seeckt expected every officer, NCO and soldier to learn skills and gain experience in functioning at least one grade higher. Therefore, home station training and field exercises were routinely conducted with privates running gun crews and NCOs

leading platoons. Lieutenants were routinely assigned as company commanders, while captains participated in staff rides and map exercises to hone their skills for eventual regimental command.³¹

Analysis and Reform

Seeckt spent much of his early days as the *Heer* chief involved in the reorganization process, outwardly complying with the treaty restrictions while preserving much of the old structure and lineage of the *Kaiserheer*. He officially disbanded the General Staff but preserved the staff functions by embedding the illegal sections in civilian agencies and using misleading names to conceal the real actions of the *Truppenamt* and other “legal” staff sections.³² To maintain esprit de corps and the lineage of the former Imperial Army, Seeckt assigned *Reichsheer* battalions to assume and preserve the colors and history of the former regiments³³

In December 1919, Seeckt issued a detailed directive to the *Reichsheer* leadership to which outlined his plan to analyze Great War experiences, draw correct conclusions and to update regulations to codify the lessons. The directive created committees composed of staff and commanders to study everything from air power to water obstacle crossing. He directed the committee chairs to analyze and write a case study on their particular topic which would capture not only experiences but also new unsolved problems. Seeckt deliberately hand-picked many committee chairs due to their recognized expertise in a particular branch or specialty. One area of particular emphasis was military leadership, with seven committees alone analyzing various aspects of the subject.³⁴

This period of objective analysis and reporting was in keeping both with Prussian-German tradition, reinforced by *Kriegsakademie* training, of battle analysis and application to future operations. The *Reichsheer* staff conducted the bulk of their studies in 1919-1920, but continued follow on studies well into 1923.³⁵ In contrast, the Allies, particularly the French, did little to capture and learn from their wartime experiences. Some individual visionary officers, the American Dwight Eisenhower or J.F.C. Fuller of Great Britain for example, published articles exploring concepts of future war. However, the early *Reichsheer* soldiers were unique in having a military culture which generally encouraged and supported visionary officers. In contrast, the French Army culture actively limited junior officer participation input, and critical thinking about their doctrine.³⁶

The committee which analyzed German offensive war strategy found no major fault in the emphasis (both the Schlieffen Plan and the battles on the Eastern front) on encirclement and destruction of the enemy forces. The analysts concluded that poor tactical mobility helped produce a premature culmination point in the West. A tactical breakthrough by either side would not translate into an operational or strategic breakthrough for several reasons. Simply, attacking forces could not cross the tactical zone quickly enough to affect an operational penetration into the defender's rear area. The defender had easy access to railroads, and could seal off tactical penetrations by shifting reserves to the threatened spot. This lack of tactical mobility also hindered the movement of supplies and artillery forces forward to support the penetration. The committee findings confirmed Seeckt's observations and experiences which pointed to a need for a technological and doctrinal solution to restore operational maneuver.³⁷

One of Seeckt's important leadership qualities seen during this time of analysis was evidenced his efforts to foster an open command climate. Seeckt deliberately maintained an air of icy reserve towards his peers and senior government officials, and was often openly critical of their perceived shortcomings.³⁸ Yet he willingly listened to his subordinates' ideas, and was surprisingly tolerant of opposing viewpoints, although he could seldom resist making cutting remarks if he disagreed. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring worked as a member of the *Truppenamt* staff in 1923, and his recollection is illustrative of Seeckt's leadership style and his influence on junior officers of the time:

What could have replaced the debates, often held in my room, in the presence of Lieutenant-General von Seeckt, who knew so well how to listen and then sum up in a way that always hit the nail on the head? What a model General Staff officer and leader of men!³⁹

One case in point was his handling of the debate over the Great War lessons. Many war veterans as well as current *Reichsheer* officers published books, pamphlets and articles analyzing various topics associated with the Great War. A small minority of junior officers challenged the new Regulations both on psychological and emotional grounds. Ernst Jünger wrote several emotionally charged books relating to his war experiences. Jünger placed his emphasis on tactics, the will of the soldier and his attachment to patriotic ideals to the exclusion of doctrine and strategy. Kurt Hesse wrote a book asserting that Germany lost the war because *Kaiserheer* officers lacked an understanding of individual and group psychology as related to their soldiers. Both lieutenants publicly disparaged the retaining of prewar traditions and concepts due to their association with the defeated *Kaiserheer*.⁴⁰ Their assertions stirred up a series of articles in the *Militär-Wochenblatt* (the semi-official military journal of the era) many of which roundly castigated the young upstarts. Seeckt himself acidly mocked their theories:

“A youthful school of military writers recently discovered the term “General Psychologos.” Platitudes have their periods of rejuvenation. As though the true arts of statesmanship and war had ever been imaginable without psychology!”⁴¹ Yet the junior officers had their public defenders, and the end of the debate served to convince most officers that the doctrinal emphasis on maneuver warfare was correct. Hesse’s career did not suffer from the controversy; he maintained a reserve commission after voluntarily leaving the *Heer*, and served as a lecturer at the cavalry and artillery schools several years thereafter. Seeckt, unlike his contemporaries in the American, French and British armies, generally tolerated different opinions and dissent as long as his leaders followed the Regulations.⁴²

New Doctrine

The next step in the reform process was to include the committee findings and recommendations in the writing of new Regulations to help the Army leaders in organizing the new force and training their soldiers. Seeckt took an active role in the task, ensuring the regulations reflected the renewed focus on the Prussian/German operational art.⁴³ Seeckt placed great emphasis on the war of movement and the use of motorization to allow his force to encircle and destroy an immobile conscript opponent. Staff writers ensured the new regulations were scalable; written for a full sized *Heer* equipped with tanks, aircraft and all supporting arms instead of the current restricted structure.⁴⁴

The Versailles Treaty did not forbid motorization, so commanders and staff were able to openly experiment with the concept of motorized infantry, and use motor cars to simulate tanks in maneuvers. The Army modified the Table of Organization and Equipment (TOE) of the three cavalry divisions to include a motorized division base

which would increase operational mobility. Eastern Front experiences showed cavalry were still useful for reconnaissance and security screening missions, so Seeckt viewed the time and invested in motorizing cavalry formations was useful.⁴⁵ Staff sections quietly researched, tested, debated and wrote doctrine for forbidden weapons such as tanks and aircraft as much as possible without the presence of the equipment and force structure.⁴⁶ A final reason to emphasize motorization in the near term was to help offset the numerical inferiority of the *Reichsheer* in the event of war with France or Poland. Seeckt envisioned using the mobile professional forces to fight a delaying action to allow enough time to mobilize the reserve militia.⁴⁷

New Doctrine

The *Reichsheer* released their foundational Regulation, the *Combined Arms Leadership and Battle (Führung und Gefecht der verbundenen Waffen*, abbreviated as *F.u.G.*), in September 1921. In the introduction Seeckt clearly articulated his future force vision: “this regulation takes the strength, weaponry and equipment of a modern military major power as the norm, not that of the Peace Treaty’s specified German 100,000-man army.”⁴⁸ *F.u.G.* was Seeckt’s way to balance the modern instruments of war with the classic Prussian-German way of operational maneuver, doing so in way which emphasized combined arms cooperation at all levels. In this way, the Regulations captured the relevant operational and tactical lessons of the Great War without becoming fixated upon positional warfare or upon unproven theories.

The first chapter outlines the update *Heer* philosophy of leadership in battle which incorporated Prussian-German tradition modified by the Great War experience and Seeckt’s leadership philosophy. The regulation stressed the importance of the leader’s

decisive actions to seize the initiative and take the fight to the enemy, regardless of terrain, weather or fatigue. *F.u.G* incorporated one of the key leadership lessons from the Great War: the need to decentralize mission execution responsibility to junior leaders in order to overcome battlefield frictions.⁴⁹ Seeckt believed other factors contributing to the failed 1914 Western Front offensive was the breakdown in command and control, and frequent failures of commanders to seize and retain the initiative. Seeckt knew that a war of movement was characterized by friction, and meeting engagements with the enemy were common. This factor required tactical leaders who were capable of making quick battlefield assessments and issuing a quick oral order to attack the enemy and seize the initiative. *F.u.G.* laid particular stress on the commander remaining close to the front in order to personally assess the situation and issue the orders directly to their junior leaders. The regulation, above all, warned leaders against adopting a “textbook” solution; each leader was expected to analyze each tactical problem within the current operational context and fully commit to an action.⁵⁰

The *Reichsheer* published additional regulations over the next several years. These regulations addressed combat tactics, services and support arm procedures. Each regulation echoed the main themes of *F.u.G.*: the display of strong character, steely resolve in carrying out a mission, and the willingness to undergo danger and privation without complaint.

The first page of the *Field Training of the Rifleman and of the Squad (Ausbildung der Schützengruppe)* is devoted entirely to an outline of leadership principles expected of every squad leader. The regulation noted that war made great demands but even in an age dominated by machines, the soldier was the final arbiter of battle. Further sentences

directed the NCO to educate his soldiers in “self-denial, promotion of daring, strengthening of will power and self-confidence, and accustoming himself to bodily exertions, fit him to master the greatest difficulties.”⁵¹ The regulation directed the squad leader to appoint a substitute squad leader to take charge if needed, and to ensure the substitute was fully trained and capable. The squad leader needed the ability to quickly assess a situation and “form quick decisions, which he must make on his own initiative within the limits of the instructions he has received.” in order to avoid losing the initiative to the enemy.⁵² In keeping with the combined arms emphasis, the squad could receive attached machine gun or mortar teams so the squad leader had to know how to control the combination combat squad. The last sentence of the Leadership section is illustrative in grasping the essence of the *Reichsheer* leadership philosophy: “Decisive action is the principle requirement in war. Everybody, the commander-in-chief just as much as the youngest soldier must be imbued with the fact, that omission and neglect are a more grievous fault on his part than an error in judgment in selecting the means.”⁵³

Similar leadership principles appear in Regulations for the Motor Corps Units which, interestingly, were published prior to the *F.u.G* in December 1920. The General Principles section directs the Motor Corps NCO to pay special attention to instilling honor, fidelity, patriotism, and a spirit of comradeship. Further paragraphs dwelt on strenuous physical conditioning, thorough technical training, the need to understand other branches, and when possible “cooperate with the other arms in mixed exercises (Transport of troops, liaison by motorcyclists, intervention of tanks).”⁵⁴

The *Truppenamt* collaborated with the separate branches to publish handbooks to summarize the key points of the Regulations. The *Truppenamt* intended these handbooks

to help soldiers understand the renewed emphasis on maneuver warfare, and their role in aggressively executing the Regulations.⁵⁵ One surviving handbook example was the *Der Artillerist* (The Artillerist), written for artillery NCOs and officer candidates. The first chapter dwells at length upon the need for “character absolutely above reproach, he must be true, honorable and just.” A subsequent sentence describes character traits:

“Reliability, devotion to duty and punctuality were the three fundamental traits in the character of the best type of non-commissioned officers of pre-war times.”⁵⁶ Subsequent paragraphs outline “The principle requirement in addition to these two indispensable characteristics (character and personal conduct) is thoroughness of training in his calling as a non-commissioned officer, and in the training to make him a perfect leader in his place. Modern warfare demands personalities in the lowest officer ranks that act independently.”⁵⁷

Summary

The Germans, in recovering and reorganizing after the Great War, arguably were the sole combatant to codify sound future doctrine in the 1920s. That is not to say the Allied armies did nothing in the aftermath of the War. However, a combination of victor’s complacency, pacifist sentiment, and tight budgets inhibited wide scale Allied innovation. Senior Allied leaders did little or nothing to encourage critical thinking or analysis of the Great War. The few Allied officers who engaged in critical thinking on warfare created theories which were difficult to test and prove. The Germans, in contrast, systematically analyzed the Great War to learn from the experiences, form and test theories, and put the best theories into practice. Arguably, the Germans had the motivation to learn since they lost the War, but that is too simplistic. The Germans,

culturally, had a tradition dating back before the Napoleonic era of rationally studying and learning about warfare--so one could make the point that the Germans would have analyzed and learned from the conflict regardless of the outcome.

Understanding the importance of General von Seeckt in the process is critical. Many Great War officers were convinced of the primacy of the defense, but this viewpoint was based more on an emotional reaction to the horror of the Western Front. Seeckt pointed to the successful operations on the Eastern Front to prove his point that maneuver warfare was still possible and profitable. Even on the Western Front, the Germans enjoyed many tactical successes in the 1918 Peace Offensives despite the formidable Allied defenses.

Where Seeckt departed from his contemporaries was in his vision of future war, and his fusion of technology with tested tactics and operational art. He saw technology as an enabler to bridge the gap between tactical and operational maneuver success--and that offensive war was Germany's only real chance for success in the next war; a future *Stellungskrieg* would lead to Germany's exhaustion and collapse.

Seeckt also saw technology as a way to enhance operational maneuver but would not replace the need for well trained, resourceful leaders making decisions in the heat of the battle. He saw future warfare dominated by well trained, technically savvy soldiers who would decimate poorly trained conscripts. Seeckt rejected the visionaries, such as Fuller and Douhet, who envisioned fleets of machines eliminating the need for mass armies. Seeckt saw the primacy of the human intellect over material, believing that any advantage gained by a new technology would prove momentary. Thus, Seeckt believed that Germany's future hope was the presence of a well trained and well equipped army

capable of decisively executing offensive operations to encircle and crush an enemy force. But the Versailles Treaty prevented Seeckt from pursuing his vision. Frustrated from openly pursuing technical innovation, Seeckt focused first on developing the intellectual framework, or doctrine, with which the force would operate within. His subsequent efforts focused on developing the leaders and soldiers capable and willing to grasp doctrine and operate within the doctrinal framework.

¹Corum, *Roots*, 35.

²Dupuy, 196.

³Gordon, 98.

⁴Corum, *Roots*, 29.

⁵S Hans von Seeckt, *Thoughts of a Soldier* (London, England: Ernest Benn, Ltd., 1930), 55.

⁶Citino, *Way*, 32.

⁷*Ibid.*, 49.

⁸*Ibid.*, 102.

⁹Seeckt, 85.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 52.

¹¹Dupuy, 27.

¹²Baron von Freytag-Loringhoven, *The Power of Personality in War* (Harrisburg: The Military Service Publishing Co., 1938), 21.

¹³Seeckt, 59.

¹⁴Corum, *Roots*, 31.

¹⁵Seeckt, 123.

¹⁶Corum, *Roots*, 80.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁸Ibid., 74-77.

¹⁹Ibid., 22.

²⁰Corum, *Roots*, 33. One tendency in the German (and especially Allied) army which particularly irritated Seeckt was the use of buzzwords as a substitute to critical thinking to solve tactical problems. See Seeckt's essay, *Catchwords*, for his opinion on the subject.

²¹Citino, *Way*, 243.

²²Seeckt, 128.

²³Corum, *Roots*, 40.

²⁴Seeckt, 123-124.

²⁵Ibid., 126.

²⁶Seeckt, 76.

²⁷Schermann, 191.

²⁸Citino, *Roots*, 30.

²⁹Schermann, 186.

³⁰Dupuy, 211.

³¹Ibid., 210.

³²Corum, 35.

³³Lewis, 14.

³⁴Corum, *Roots*, 37.

³⁵Ibid., 39.

³⁶Fred Green, "French Military Leadership and Security Against Germany, 1919-1940" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1971), 42.

³⁷Dupuy, 214.

³⁸Gordon, 96.

³⁹Albert Kesselring, *Kesselring: A Soldier's Record* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1954), 11.

- ⁴⁰Corum, *Roots*, 60.
- ⁴¹Seeckt, 125.
- ⁴²Corum, *Roots*, 62.
- ⁴³Schermann, 193.
- ⁴⁴Corum, *Roots*, 39.
- ⁴⁵Lewis, 30.
- ⁴⁶James Corum, *The Luftwaffe: Creating the Operational Air War, 1918-1940 (Luftwaffe)* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 72.
- ⁴⁷Larry H Addington, *The Blitzkrieg Era and the German General Staff: 1865-1941* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 29.
- ⁴⁸Corum, *Roots*, 39.
- ⁴⁹Lupfer, 19.
- ⁵⁰Citino, *Path*, 17.
- ⁵¹USAMI, *Field Training of the Rifleman and of the Squad (Ausbildung der Schützengruppe)* Reel XII, 1.
- ⁵²*Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁵³*Ibid.*, 2.
- ⁵⁴USAMI, *Regulations for the Service and Instruction of the Motor Corps Units*, Ministry of the *Reichswehr*, 25 December 1920, Reel XIII, 295.
- ⁵⁵Corum, *Roots*, 45.
- ⁵⁶USAMI, Lieutenant Gilbert, *Der Artillerist*. Reel XI, 6.
- ⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 12.

CHAPTER 3

LEADERSHIP SELECTION, DEVELOPMENT, AND TRAINING

Strategic Context

The period of time between the establishment of the Provisional *Reichswehr* in March 1919 and the *Reichswehr* in March 1920 was one of considerable turmoil. Demobilization and reduction of the standing army, domestic insurrection and threats from the nationalistic Poles all produced feelings of doubt and uncertainty in the German populace. Yet during this time the *Reichsheer* maintained adequate cohesion, and continued with sufficient capabilities to maintain internal stability and guard the eastern border. The *Heer* accomplished this by pressing into service the more reliable *Freikorps* units. This measure was strictly a stop gap measure; in the long term, the *Heer* needed more reliable units, since many of the *Freikorps* leaders were politically suspect and were unwilling to fully obey *Reichsheer* directives.¹

Seeckt faced a particular challenge in overcoming the Versailles Treaty manpower constraints. He pushed for a manpower ceiling of 200,000 soldiers, insisting he needed that number in order to field a modern force able to combat Polish incursions and maintain internal stability. The Allies remained unsympathetic, fearing the presence of a reorganized and well equipped German army capable of offensive operations. The Germans were forced to accept the lower 100,000 man ceiling which they “officially” achieved in February 1921.²

The Allies’ long-term purpose for the tight manpower restrictions was to progressively weaken Germany’s ability to create a mass army. The treaty banned short term conscription and trained reserves, mandated long term enlistments for the active

army and severely limited accessions and discharges. These actions ensured that the trained manpower pool, primarily the supply of trained Great War veterans, would progressively shrink.³ Unsurprisingly, the *Heer* quietly attempted to circumvent these restrictions. The *Freikorps* units were a potential pool of trained reserves, although Seeckt looked askance at the units due to their questionable reliability.⁴ Other methods of retaining talented personnel included camouflaging officers as civilians in various government ministries, and placing former officers and NCOs into the various civilian police branches.⁵ The police agencies also served as convenient places to maintain quantities of automatic weapons and armored cars, ostensibly for internal security duties. However, this practice served to arouse Allied suspicion and complaints of German duplicity.⁶

Seeckt's deliberate evasion of the treaty provisions reveals a strong streak of pragmatism in a man who preached the virtues of obedience and honor. He apparently saw no contradiction in his hidden activities, presumably viewing his loyalty to the German state as overriding true compliance with the treaty.⁷

The net effect of these manpower shell games was mixed at best, and probably counterproductive to promoting stable relations with the French. France occupied the Ruhr region in 1923 as punishment for German delays in compensation payments; this response was arguably prompted by French anger over Germany's obvious and widespread disregard of treaty disarmament clauses.⁸ The Ruhr crisis sheds light on the true level of *Reichsheer* military preparedness during the early 1920s. The Republican government wanted to resist the French if they continued to advance into German territory. Seeckt bluntly told the Reich chancellor that the *Heer* was incapable of

defeating the French, and counseled passive resistance and diplomatic efforts to halt further incursions.⁹

Seeckt concluded that the Versailles Treaty had effectively crippled the *Reichswehr* by eliminating the force structure and weapons capable of even a delaying defense. Accordingly, Seeckt modified his long term plan for the Army; proposing a strategy of building a cadre army (*Führerheer*), developing and procuring modern arms, developing a reserve force and exploiting the Soviet Union for technical and tactical development.¹⁰ Finances and the need for secrecy necessarily limited improvements in the last three options, so Seeckt concentrated the majority of his direction and efforts on building a cadre army intended, on a man-for-man basis- to become the best in the world.¹¹

Soldier and Noncommissioned Officer Career Progression

The first step in the *Führerheer* process was the establishment of the policies governing recruiting, selection and training of soldiers. Unlike the current American Army's model of pooled recruiting, each *Wehrkries* commander provided oversight of all recruiting actions, while individual company commanders had the responsibility for the actual recruitment. Army regulations placed particular importance on the commander's role in the process: "The recruiting should be, first of all, in the hands of the Commanders of Companies, etc. since these are especially in a position to take advantage of personal relations and since they have a direct interest in the excellence of all the army replacements."¹²

Attracting enlisted recruits was not terribly difficult given the anemic postwar German economy. Many citizens viewed military service as an honorable profession with

the advantage of an adequate salary, comfortable pension and the prospect of entry into civil service employment. Some regiments would receive as many as fifteen applicants for a single private position.¹³ The recruiting regulation took note of the fact, admonishing commanders to not waste money on recruiting advertisement unless absolutely necessary.¹⁴ Each applicant was required to fill out a formal written application, plus submit legal documents, such as a birth certificate, certificates from former employers and provide a certificate from the local police attesting to his spotless civic record. Ideal recruits were between the ages of 17 and 23, of good moral character, and above average in physical and mental abilities. Commanders had the ability to waive the age requirement to enlist previous war veterans, but only to a limited degree.¹⁵ Applicants passing an initial application screen underwent a thorough physical examination. One screening tool introduced by Seeckt was the use of physiological aptitude tests to help screen enlistees for suitable military specialties.¹⁶

Those applicants found physically and morally fit were then interviewed by unit commanders who had the final say in the acceptance process. Those applicants accepted by the unit commander were inducted by the local *Wehrkreis* for basic training. Each *Wehrkreis*, plus the three cavalry divisions, maintained a separate training battalion to support and oversee recruit training. The new recruit, regardless of branch, underwent basic infantry skill training prior to receiving their branch specific training--all of which occurred within the first two years of service. Basic training placed great emphasis on physical conditioning, and performing as a member of a rifle squad. All soldiers were then sent to their line unit, with the specialist soldiers receiving their technical training from their NCO leaders or consolidated schools run by the regiment.¹⁷ A soldier's

training did not stop at this point. Besides the normal unit tactical training, soldiers often attended specialist schools to learn other technical skills, such as operating a machine gun or *minenwerfer* (Mortar). In keeping with the *Führerheer* concept, soldiers routinely received training in other branches. Cavalry troopers attended artillery school, while infantry soldiers learned the duties of the motor and horse transport units.¹⁸

One important step took place during this basic training time--the oath of enlistment. The *Heer* replaced the Imperial Articles of War with an order, published in April 1922 which clearly outlined the soldier's duties. The first article outlines the soldier's responsibility to fully perform his duties as a part of preserving the nation and constitution. The majority of the articles were clearly directed at the soldier's character, stressing honor and the avoidance of personal moral failures. The order also articulated the persistent fear of a revolution sparked by military action: "He who undertakes to change the constitution of the German Empire or the German states by force, or who betrays his country or its secrets to the enemy, is a traitor and commits a breach of faith." The new soldier was bound by oath to uphold the Orders, and every *Reichsheer* soldier was required to hear the orders and renew their oath once at least once per year.¹⁹

The Versailles Treaty stipulation of long-term volunteers posed potential morale issues for the soldiers. The *Heer* recognized the need to make military life more attractive, not only to attract high caliber recruits but also to make a twelve-year enlistment more bearable. Soldiers enjoyed a better quality of life than their *Kaiserheer* predecessors. Soldiers slept in well furnished four-man rooms, instead of austere open squad bays. The soldiers enjoyed good quality food and were given a full range of off-duty recreation and sports opportunities. The Army also dramatically improved pay for

all ranks, with a *Reichsheer* NCO receiving better pay than a lieutenant in the *Kaiserheer*.²⁰

Opportunities for personal and professional growth greatly increased for the soldier after his completion of two years of service. The Army's Personnel Office was directed by Seeckt, in a remarkable display of concern for his junior soldiers, to establish special schools to teach marketable job skill to all enlisted soldiers. Each soldier was eligible to receive a certain number of hours of training in their selected vocation, anything from administration or business, a specific trade craft, or even agricultural skills. The program was intended more to benefit career soldiers; the allotted training hours increased with the soldier's years of service, with the final months of the soldier's career dedicated solely to finishing his training or education. The schools, in cooperation with private concerns and government agencies, would then work to match the retirees with jobs in the civilian sector.²¹

Promising soldiers with three year's experience could receive their commander's nomination to take the NCO probationer's exam, which tested knowledge of general military subjects. An eligible private passing the exam would receive promotion to *gefreite* (lance corporal). The Army treated lance corporals as junior NCOs with better pay and privileges than the privates. Subsequent promotions were also made based on the commander's evaluation and the soldier's duty performance and exam results; unlike many other armies, longevity was a minor factor in promotion consideration. The Heer took advantage of Allied shortsightedness in not limiting the number of NCOs within the ranks, and promoted as many as were capable of assuming greater responsibility. By mid-1926 the Army had over 18,000 senior NCOS, and almost a one-for-one ratio of junior

NCOs to privates.²² However, Seeckt's standards were very demanding. He continued his emphasis on the importance of character over intellect: "Even though a very high standard of knowledge must be required as a pre-condition for promotion to the grade of sergeant, etc., in an army with a long term of enlistment, nevertheless highly valuable character qualities *will take priority over knowledge and capability* [emphasis mine]." The sergeant aspirant was expected to pass an exam showing his grasp of theoretical and practical skills ranging from horse care to signal communications. The sergeant-major aspirant was required to pass an exam which demonstrated his knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of a platoon leader. Passing the exam however did not guarantee promotion, since the commander's judgment on the aspirant's character and competence was the final and most important part of the promotion process.²³

The Heer derived another advantage from the Versailles NCO loophole by promoting large numbers of seasoned war veterans to the senior NCO grades. These senior NCOs routinely assumed duties formerly done by officers; commanding platoons and attending training with junior officers. The sergeants, like their enlisted soldiers, enjoyed good pay and benefits and could look forward to job skill training and the guarantee of a civil service career upon retirement.²⁴

Officer Accession

As noted earlier in the text, the Versailles Treaty severely limited the number of officers in uniform to no more than 4000. Accordingly, Seeckt determined he would retain as many General Staff officer trained officers as possible; he also attempted to retain officers of proven experience who showed the intellectual capability to function in positions of greater responsibility. Seeckt took advantage of the situation to enact another

significant reform: removal of social background as a selection criterion for commissioning officers. The aristocratic *Kaiserheer* requirement of proper social background had served to stifle accession of well educated officer aspirants and quality NCOs, and had certainly created resentment in the NCO corps. Seeckt believed well educated officers could grasp the nature of complex modern weapons and how best to apply them on the battlefield. But he believed that iron will and superior physical conditioning was also a key indicator of future success as an officer. Seeckt adjusted key criterion to emphasize education, good character and good physical condition as the litmus test for officer aspirants.²⁵

The application process to become an officer aspirant was similar to that of the enlisted soldier, except the aspirant had to provide an *Abitur*, a diploma from a secondary school. The aspirant was also required to show evidence of sound character and excellent physical conditioning. An innovation that the *Heer* began was the use of psychological testing as part of the screening process. The *Heer* conducted experiments using basic psychological tests to determine an enlisted soldier's aptitude for technical training. The Army went a step further by implementing simple psychological tests for officer aspirants in 1925. In addition to the physical and psychological exams, the aspirant had to submit a written personal history for review by his regimental command and was subject to a comprehensive oral exam before a board composed of two regimental officers, a medical officer and two psychologists. Afterwards, the aspirant was placed in charge of solving different problems, often by leading a team of soldiers. The testing was intended to identify and eliminate candidates incapable of complex decision making while under mental or physical stress. The tests were controversial, and generated considerable debate

among the *Heer* leadership, both for and against the tests. However, the tests were viewed simply as an additional tool for the commander in selecting future leaders, and not as a replacement for the commander's judgment.²⁶ The final step in the process was an interview by the regimental commander. The commander used the interview, plus the psychological tests and character references to determine the aspirant's character and aptitude for service— character being the critical determining factor in selecting an aspirant.²⁷

Once accepted by the regimental commander, the aspirant enlisted for a period of four years, during which time he would have to overcome numerous challenges before receiving his commission. The first fifteen months were taken up with basic military training (the same as any other enlisted soldier), followed by troop leading duties as a junior NCO. The first stage aspirant was treated, with expectations and privileges, as a junior NCO during this period. The aspirant, following the first period, was required to pass a comprehensive written exam testing his skills and knowledge. He then received appointment as an officer-aspirant with the added privilege of messing with the regimental officers.

Following a second portion of troop duty, the officer-aspirant underwent another ten months of schooling, and passed the exams for promotion to sergeant and ensign, respectively. The final two years were spent attending consecutive courses at the major branch schools in order to gain a thorough knowledge of the combined arms. The courses also taught the latest technical and tactical employment of banned weapons, especially aircraft and tanks.²⁸

Following this period of education were the final officer exams and promotion to senior ensign, and a final stint at troop duty under the watchful eyes of the regimental officers. The regimental commander would then accept the aspirant into the regiment as a new lieutenant.²⁹

The officer aspirant training program was well designed and focused on practical instruction and experience. The aspirant received gradually greater levels of responsibility in leading and training, since their troop duty time involved leading and training actual soldiers. The extended time in the enlisted ranks also tended to build close relations between the officer and enlisted soldiers. The standards for the aspirant were exacting, with any failed exam leading to a discharge from the *Heer*. Seeckt intended this seemingly draconian policy not only to cull the weak, but to also allow the failed aspirant to return to the civilian work force with enough time to adopt a new career.³⁰

The *Reichsheer's* highly ambitious officer accession program would not produce its first lieutenant until 1924, and did nothing in the near term to address immediate officer vacancies. Seeckt's insistence on the *abitur* as a selection criterion had greatly reduced the potential manpower pool. Another factor which limited aspirant recruiting in the immediate post war period was the distrust, bordering on outright hostility, displayed by many upper middle class citizens towards the military. This deficit in aspirant applications lasted from the 1919 through the end of 1922; the deficit largely disappeared due to renewed confidence in the military, and a sharp economic downturn which made a military career more attractive.³¹

The *Heer* also resorted to a process to access otherwise well qualified soldiers who lacked an *abitur*. Prospective soldiers were eligible to take a series of scientific

aptitude tests upon completion of their second full year of enlisted service. Those that passed were granted a waiver, and enrolled in the four year aspirant process with the other *abitur* holders. As *abitur* holding candidates filled the replacement pipeline, the *Heer* largely stopped granting waivers, since by 1928 only 3 percent of all officers were former NCOs.³² The *Heer* could not completely eliminate granting *abitur* waivers; each regimental commander had the final say and could still accept these candidates. Some regiments, located in predominately working class districts, had little choice but to accept larger numbers of the non-*abitur* candidates. Other regimental commanders were inclined to accept the non-*abitur* candidates if the offspring of a *Kaiserheer* veteran, especially a deceased veteran.³³

Officer Training and Education

The new junior officers found that a considerable amount of education was still required after commissioning. The officer corps in the Provisional *Reichsheer* period of 1919-1921 was composed of a mix of former *Kaiserheer* regular and reserve officers, and former NCOs. The former reservists and NCOs had received only short duration courses geared exclusively to company level operations, and lacked grounding in administration, logistics and regimental staff duties. All groups also required significant training in the new maneuver warfare doctrine. The *Heer*, subscribing to the viewpoint that training their future officers was critically important, populated the school cadre with high quality General Staff and operational officers.³⁴

Officers also required specific training to handle the complex modern battlefield. The *Heer* set up functional courses covering such diverse subjects as training messenger dogs, gas (chemical) defense, pioneering (engineering) machine guns, and so on. The

courses were centrally located at a specific branch school, with the students attending in a temporary duty status and returning to their parent regiment.³⁵

Efforts were also made to circumvent the Versailles Treaty as much as possible to maintain trained reserve officers. Many of the officers were hidden in civilian agencies as well as the various civilian police agencies. Additionally, retired senior NCOs received reserve promotions to lieutenant and were retained on clandestine reserve officer lists. These officers were periodically rotated into short regimental training courses, and would receive a correspondingly higher reserve rank for the course.³⁶

The *Reichswehr* also instituted a unique policy in the form of unofficial travel abroad to give their officers greater geographical and cultural understanding. These visits were in addition to the officially sanctioned trips which *Reichswehr* officers undertook to observe foreign military maneuvers and gather intelligence on technical and tactical developments.³⁷ The unofficial travels were conducted at the officer's own expense and were intended to give the officer a chance to practice a foreign language, study the culture and to pick up items of military interest.³⁸

Another item of note practiced by Seeckt and his successors was the use of staff rides to exercise senior commanders and staffs. Seeckt's purpose was to ensure that officers at all levels understood and could uniformly apply the doctrine. The staff rides took place in terrain close to the frontiers, which not only lent realism to the exercises (compared to map exercises) but also served to familiarize the leaders with the terrain they might have to soon operate upon in the case of operations against Poland or Czechoslovakia.³⁹

General Staff Officer Training

Completion of formal schooling did not finish the officer's education. Officers routinely participated in classes coordinated by the regiment, such as economics, political science and military theory designed to broaden their professional outlook. The officers also regularly participated in map or sand table exercises to sharpen their leadership skills. Seeckt placed the responsibility of training and educating officers on regimental commanders as well as the schools. In 1919, Seeck reestablished the use of a comprehensive entrance exam for the General Staff. The *Kaiserheer* had not required all officers to take their General Staff exam; the exam was strictly voluntary, with many officers not taking the exam in order to remain in regimental line units for their entire careers. Seeckt, in line with his concept of growing a *Führerheer*, intended the exam not only as a selection tool for the General Staff, but also as a screening tool to identify marginal officers for possible elimination. He believed the exam results would give him a way to holistically assess the professional development of the officer corps as a whole, and would also give the regimental commander another tool to grade his officers.⁴⁰

The exam process started at the *Truppenmant* level, where the T4 (Training) section wrote and distributed the exams to the *Wehrkries* commands for administration. T4 published a study guide in October and a subject list to guide regimental commanders in conducting exam preparatory training during the winter months--with the expectation that the candidates would still maintain their normal officer duties in addition to preparing for the exam.

Only lieutenants with at least three years experience were allowed to take the exam and only if they had completed all of the preparatory training and had a nomination

from the regimental commander. The preparatory training focused primarily on theoretical and applied tactics (at the regiment level), technical characteristics of weapons, engineering and communications. The officer was also expected to brush up on *Abitur* level subjects such as history, chemistry and geography. Lastly, the officer was expected to gain a basic proficiency in a foreign language, preferably French or English.⁴¹

One key component of the training was the use of tactical problems to improve the officer's skill at leading on the battlefield. A T-4 book, published in 1924 contained a series of open ended problems, with suggested solutions, to the whole spectrum of tactical problems. The book gave the student an array of blue (friendly forces) under a corps command, opposed by a notional red (or Polish) force, and used the terrain of the western border region to frame the scenario. The student was expected to array the blue forces to combine effects from all arms to affect an operational advantage against the enemy. The suggested school solutions reinforced *Reichsheer* doctrine by emphasizing the importance of coordinated offensive actions.⁴²

Each *Wehrkreis* centrally administered the exam for all officers within the district, on the same date in March. The exam process took several days, and was intended to see how the officer performed under pressure. The core exams consisted of 3 separate tactical problems which the officer had to analyze, using correct doctrine, and create a written regimental order incorporating all arms. Other tactical exams covered field engineering, map reading and course of action sketches. Six more exams covered the general knowledge subjects, and another exam required the candidate to translate a foreign language military article into German. Lastly, the candidate underwent a grueling

physical fitness test which evaluated his ability to run long distances, high and long jump, throw hand grenades and perform various gymnastic exercises.⁴³

Once the tests were complete, the *Wehrkries* commander returned the exams to the T-4 for grading. T-4 section graded the final exams in order to preserve the integrity of the process. Seeckt's concern in the entire testing process was to maintain the uniformity and consistency of the process in order to select only the best candidates.

Not surprisingly, the exam process produced a high first time failure rate. A failure was not an automatic career killer, but did serve to further retard an already slow promotion process and brought unwelcome attention from the regimental commander. Repeated failures would result in the officer's dismissal, however just passing the exam was not enough to ensure satisfactory career progression. Only top exam performers (roughly 5 percent or less of all examinees) were selected for General Staff training. For those officers interested in attaining senior rank within the *Reichsheer*, Completion of the General Staff course was almost mandatory for those officers aspiring to promotion to senior grades; General Staff officers enjoyed better promotion potential than their regimental peers. The average performers were relegated to positions only within their home regiment, which severely limited their career prospects.⁴⁴

Candidates selected for General Staff training received attachment to the *Wehrkries* headquarters in October to begin their first phase of the course. During this first period, the student maintained his normal regimental duties, but was allowed each afternoon off to read and study on tactical subjects assigned by the *Wehrkreis* trainer-- each district maintained a pool of T-4 trained officers specially tasked to oversee this phase. The second course started in April and lasted for a full year. This course was

divided into two parts, the first part devoted to tactics and military science, the other part to general subjects, such as history, political science, geography, and economics.⁴⁵ The tactical portion of the second course focused on fighting a combined arms fight with all of the arms and services of the reinforced regiment. Students regularly practiced combining infantry with the various arms, including tanks and aircraft, in war games to hone their warfighting skills. The general subjects, besides academic subjects, also covered supply operations, motor transport, and foreign language instruction as well as regular physical fitness sessions. This portion of the course also contained several staff rides to help the students internalize their operational skills.⁴⁶ The curriculum placed special emphasis on incorporating tanks and aircraft into combined arms teams. For example, students received classroom instruction every week on an airpower related topic, and were expected to write papers which explored tactical airpower concepts.⁴⁷ The focus of the first two years was to create an officer skilled at the art of war, able to handle battlefield uncertainties. Accordingly, the school did not focus on a “school solution” to tactical problems. The students were graded, not on rote memorization, but on the ability to creatively solve tactical problems.⁴⁸

An American observer of the second year course, COL A. Conger, noted the high caliber of the tactical and technical training, but rated the military history and strategy courses weak. Conger felt the history course was superficially taught, and did not challenge the student to reflect upon history as a guide to their profession. Furthermore, Conger believed the weak strategy coursework was a glaring oversight; he felt a similar defect of strategic incompetence had contributed to Germany’s ultimate defeat in the Great War.⁴⁹

Following completion of the second year studies, many students would return to their regiments, with only the top performers passed on to the next training phase--a posting to a divisional or *Wehrkreis* staffs to receive a year of hands-on experience and training. The students were then assigned to the *Reichswehr* ministry for a final year of academic training and hands on staff experience. Following completion of the course, the students who completed the entire course regimen would receive a permanent designation as a General Staff officer. The newly designated staff officers would receive postings back to regiments or divisions usually as the chief of staff to oversee the unit staff. The General Staff officers were managed and promoted separately than their peers, in order to avoid problems of resentment or discrimination from jealous superiors.⁵⁰

In another break with the *Kaiserheer*, Seeckt arranged to send selected General Staff candidates for a year of university studies. This policy helped ensure a larger population of officers had some technical education, and were therefore better able to cope with the modern demands of war. The policy also helped in a larger context by helping to combat a tendency towards cultural elitism (seen in the pre-war General Staff) as well as imparting economic and civic awareness to the officer students.⁵¹

The *Wehrkreis* exam also served as a tool to screen potential candidates for advanced technical education at a civilian *Technische Hochschule* (Polytechnic Academy). Officers with the demonstrated aptitude were allowed the opportunity to attend the Polytechnic Academy on a full time basis to earn a technical degree. The officer received the title of “Doctor Engineer” and would likely receive an assignment to the *Truppenamt* to help create new technical solutions for the *Heer*. These technical

officers were also transferred to the General Staff for management and promotion purposes.⁵²

The entire General Staff process, in keeping with Seeckt's vision of excellence in the officer corps, was designed to retain only the top talent for inclusion in the General Staff. Candidates were closely watched and subjectively assessed by their instructors, and a fair percentage of candidates were eliminated at each level of the program; Citino estimates that as few as ten officers per year were accepted into the General Staff, with the rest classed as "acceptable if needed" and returned to the units.⁵³

However, elimination from the program was not necessarily a bad thing, for both the officer and the *Heer*. The officer returned to his regiment with up to two years of graduate level warfighting education under his belt. The regiment gained in having many exceptionally well trained company grade officers. Finally, the *Heer* benefited in having a pool of General Staff trained officers capable of filling staff positions when expansion was possible. Conger estimated that in 1926 the *Heer* had 150 officers enrolled in the second year division level course--roughly 3 ½ percent of the entire officer corps. That means that in a ten year period, from the start of the new staff course in 1922, the *Heer* could rotate almost one-half of the entire officer corps through at least one year of General Staff training.⁵⁴

Unit Training

The soldier's training, of course did not stop after his formal schooling. The *Reichsheer* continued the German-Prussian traditions of comprehensive and thorough unit training to develop their soldiers. However, political instability and Seeckt's policy of scattering garrisons into rural locations meant training in the early 1920s centered on

small-unit tactics taught in the *kaserne*. Winter months, from October to March, were devoted to individual training controlled by the individual company commander. The commander would use this time to focus on individual training of his platoon leaders, section leaders and individual soldiers. The commander divided each group of men (platoon leader, squad leader and individual soldier) into separate classes, each under the leadership of an officer. The officer, assisted by high caliber NCOs, then conducted classes on various combat and leadership skills. The classes were designed specifically, in keeping with the *Führerheer* concept, to prepare soldiers to function as squad leaders and NCOs to serve as platoon commanders. Instructors rated their pupils according to their abilities, and a sharp private could easily find himself advanced into the squad leader's class ahead of his peers. The class schedule also incorporated considerable time devoted to drilling, weapon firing and physical conditioning, not only to maintain soldier fitness but to also prevent boredom.⁵⁵

One particularly effective teaching tool was the use of a sand table to train and exercise tactical concepts with the soldiers prior to the spring maneuvers. The company commander used the sand table to practice maneuvers from the fire team to company level. The sand box itself was large and contained icons and materials sufficient enough to represent terrain, objects and every individual soldier. Conger was impressed with the use of the sand table, noting that the commander expected even the privates to participate and show understanding of the tactical problem. More importantly, the object of the training was not only to train soldiers in the new tactical concepts, but to train every soldier to quickly grasp the situation and to react decisively.⁵⁶

This focus on soldier initiative and aggressive action was key to the successful execution of offensive actions as outlined in the Regulations, a fact recognized by the German officers. A short article by an anonymous German officer contrasted postwar French and German tactical procedures. The French developed their doctrine around a centrally controlled positional warfare mindset--this doctrine required detailed operational orders which required junior leaders simply to execute the orders as written. In contrast, the German army, having four years of maneuver warfare experience on the Eastern Front, recognized that centralized control was "neither possible nor desirable." The *Heer* depended on well trained officers and soldiers, each with ingrained tactical sense and individual initiative, to achieve the desired combination of all arms to attain victory.⁵⁷

Physical conditioning was a year round concern for the company commander. A typical garrison day would start with a 30 minute bout of exercise before the start of formal training. The morning instruction period, which followed a quick coffee break and uniform change, would often include section or squad drills, while one to two hours in the afternoon were devoted to physical exercises. The soldiers would perform gymnastics to improve their strength and balance, while team sports were used to build agility and endurance, with the side benefit of improving teamwork.⁵⁸

Not all winter training took place in the *kaserne*; units routinely performed day and night field exercises at least twice per month in addition to frequent weapons firing. The soldiers normally foot marched to and from training, due not only to the shortage of vehicles but also as a means of keeping the men in good marching condition.⁵⁹

Doctrinal Refinement and Feedback

Seeckt's personal focus in the early years was in ensuring all unit leaders understood the new Regulations and correctly applied the tactical concepts in the field. Therefore, Seeckt ordered that training during the summer months was devoted to training leaders in realistic field exercises. Unit training plans in the spring would build on team, squad, platoon and finally company level tasks in preparation for the summer Army wide maneuvers. Since the Army was still relatively disorganized and weak in doctrinal knowledge, the annual maneuvers in the first couple of years were focused more on platoon and company tasks.

Seeckt and his staff spent a great deal of his time in traveling to observe unit training not only in their garrisons but in maneuver areas. He certainly provided on the spot feedback but also produced an annual report, titled *Observations of the Chief of the Army Command* not only to provide feedback and disseminate good ideas, but also to help shape the training for the upcoming year. The *Observations* also included a section from every branch chief summarizing observations from their field inspections and visits. Every officer received a copy of the *Observations* and was expected to read and apply the guidance and lessons to conducting future training.⁶⁰

Reading the 1921 *Observations* give good insights into the process of how the *Reichsheer* worked to internalize their new regulations; *F.u.G.* had been published in late 1920, so 1921 was the first year for the Army to apply the doctrine and provide feedback and criticism. Seeckt felt that the soldiers displayed great enthusiasm for their tasks, and he charged unit commanders to maintain soldier interest by “endeavor(ing) to interest their men in discussing their ideas prior, during and after the exercises, to awaken their

imagination and cause them to draw their own conclusions and act independently.” He however noted that many of the soldiers were prematurely fatigued, so he ordered the commanders to place a greater emphasis on physical conditioning over sports.⁶¹

Seeckt, of course, keyed in what he saw as systemic weakness in the force, namely poorly trained junior leaders and insufficient emphasis on combined arms cooperation. By referencing earlier training directives, Seeckt reemphasized the fact the company commander had great control over the majority of his training year, and was subject to outside inspections only late in the training year. Seeckt stressed the importance of ensuring officers and NCOs attended training courses to improve both practical and theoretical knowledge. Another method advocated by Seeckt to build combined arms knowledge was to cross attach soldiers to ensure they gained knowledge and experience in other branches; cavalry troopers trained infantry soldiers in animal husbandry, while artillery crews trained both branches in handling artillery pieces.⁶²

The bulk of the *Observations* dwell on the Army wide annual unit maneuvers. The maneuvers posed particular challenges since the lack of tanks and aircraft limited realism; the relative lack of forces also required the use of flags and markers to serve as an enemy force. Nevertheless, the maneuvers served to give new leaders field experience in leading their soldiers, and working through the practical problems of integrating arms. One criticism Seeckt had with the large scale maneuvers was the tendency for some soldiers to stand idle while their commanders grappled with the challenge of maneuvering large units. He recommended keeping the maneuvers smaller to avoid boring the soldier, and relying upon map exercises to train senior officers, and reduce the difficulties commanders experienced in the field.⁶³

Throughout his *Observations*, Seeckt maintained his emphasis on readiness for a war of maneuver. Paragraph after paragraph hammered home the point of combining the various arms, and practicing the ability to fix and maneuver against an enemy flank. He noted the key importance of how the leader gave his orders:

All leaders, from the commanding officer of the regiment down, must, as a rule, give their orders based on the conditions of the terrain. Instructions will be given from the map only when necessary because of atmospheric invisibility, darkness or hindrances due to vegetation. . . . [T]he orders of a leader must be so clear and definite that the sub leaders and troops understand them fully.⁶⁴

In addition to Seeckt's comments, each branch chief included their comments and observations oriented towards their particular branch. These comments shared best practices as well as technical and tactical areas which required improvements over the next training year.⁶⁵

Publishing of the core *Reichsheer* regulations in the early 1920s did not stop the debate and refinement of tactical and operational doctrine. Besides the theories of Jünger and Hess (outlined in Chapter 2) published in book and article form, many other Army officers published articles which debated tactics, technology and operational doctrine. Many of the articles published in the *Militär-Wochenblatt* journal consisted of information gleaned from *Truppenamt* staff studies. Another fruitful source of material was translations of foreign articles, especially from sources considered credible by the Germans, and reports on the small wars of the 1920s.⁶⁶

The debate and refinement process, unlike in Britain and America, was synergistic, involving the efforts of many individuals, branches and *Reichswehr* staff sections. A good example was the effort attached to developing armor theory, tactics and equipment. Ernst Volckheim, as a member of the Motor Transport corps, was deeply

involved in German armor doctrinal development from its infancy in 1918. He studied both German and foreign theory and articles on armored warfare, taught tactics, and participated in weapon testing efforts. Volckheim wrote many articles for the *Militär-Wochenblatt*, in addition to translating several foreign articles, and in 1924 published a comprehensive text book, *The Tank in Modern Warfare*.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, the Weapons Office of the *Truppenamt* was busy working to develop technical characteristics of battle tanks, while the T-3 (Intelligence) section collected, translated and analyzed information on foreign tank development.⁶⁸ The German's goal in all of these efforts was to think through the benefits, problems and second order effects to armor employment on the battlefield--not only their offensive employment but also how best to defend against an enemy armored force.⁶⁹

The armor vignette serves as one example of how the entire *Reichsheer* leadership--Seeckt, staff, and branch directorates--were continuously engaged in a process of analysis, refinement and application of tactical and technical improvements, regardless of source. The staff strove to gain a conceptual, and when possible, technical advantage, over their potential enemies for the day when Germany could openly rearm.⁷⁰

Summary

By 1926 the *Reichsheer* was well along the path to building, on a man to man basis, a world class organization. Germany, alone of the Great War combatants, had conducted a thorough and relatively impartial analysis of the War and derived tactical and operational principles from the analysis. The updated doctrine retained the Prusso-German emphasis on operational maneuver and decisive battle, but incorporated new technologies such as tanks, aircraft and motor vehicles as doctrinal enablers.

Treaty restrictions severely limited manpower and officers in an attempt to prevent Germany easily expanding the Army to conduct offensive warfare. In response, the Army chose to select and officers with proven intellectual and leadership capabilities, train NCOs to serve as officers, and train privates to serve as NCOs--all efforts to facilitate a rapid Army expansion when the political situation permitted open rearmament. Accession policies were geared to selecting high quality educated candidates who were capable of grasping military technology. Institutional training focused on creating leaders possessing iron will, superb physical conditioning, and a creative mind capable of making quick and effective decisions in the heat of battle. The Army maintained a high training tempo year round which served to further develop leader and soldier skills. Large scale summer maneuvers were used to further test and refine tactics, organizational structure and operational concepts.

Seeckt applied his leadership emphasis to ensure unity of effort in refining doctrine to reflect the Great War lessons and incorporate new technologies. He designated branches (such as the Motor Troops branch for armor) as proponents for the new systems, such as tanks and aircraft, in order to place the importance of the new systems on an equal footing with the other combat arms branches. Motor Troops officers provided training and technical expertise on the combat unit staff, as well as provided mock up or substitute equipment to provide realism for training during summer maneuvers.⁷¹ Seeckt laid particular emphasis in the use of field maneuvers, including mock tanks and actual motor vehicles, to test doctrinal concepts and provide feedback to further refine the doctrine. The other branches were expected to identify problems in combined arms cooperation, and to provide feedback to the *Truppenamt* for analysis and

problem solving. The goal of the refinement process, as Seeckt saw, was to fully integrate technology into the existing maneuver warfare concepts to help restore operational mobility to the battlefield in the event Germany went to war again.⁷²

¹Corum, 65.

²USAMI, Reel XII, 245.

³Lewis, 25.

⁴Ibid., 28.

⁵Corum, 35.

⁶USAMI, Lt. Col. Reboul, *Camouflage in the Army: The Reichswehr*, Reel XV, 523.

⁷DuPuy, 211.

⁸USAMI, Lt. Col. Reboul, *Camouflage*, Reel XV, 524.

⁹Corum, 172.

¹⁰Ibid., 172.

¹¹Lewis, 26.

¹²USAMI, *Regulations for Filling Up the Ranks of the Army*, December 1920, Reel XIII, 192.

¹³Corum, 70.

¹⁴USAMI, *Regulations*, Reel XIII, 196.

¹⁵Ibid., 199.

¹⁶Schermann, 195.

¹⁷Corum, 71.

¹⁸USAMI, *Report on Military Situation in Germany July-Dec 1922*, Reel XV, 181.

¹⁹USAMI, *Duties of a German Soldier--Service Report* Reel XV, 489.

²⁰Guenther Blumentritt, *The German Armies, 1914 and 1939* (Historical Division, HQ United States Army Europe; reprinted in *German Military History* (Fort Leavenworth: United States Army Command and General Staff College, CSI, AY 1985-1986), 265.

²¹USAMI, F.W Nagel, *The Training of an Infantry Company*, Reel XIV, 799.

²²Corum, *Roots*, 77.

²³USAMI, *Regulations Governing the Examination of Enlisted Men for Promotion to Sergeant and Sergeant-Major, Senior Grade, Aspirants*. Reel XV, 801.

²⁴Blumentritt, 266.

²⁵Seeckt, 63.

²⁶H. L. Ansbacher, "Lasting and Passing Aspects of German Military Psychology," *Sociometry* 12, no. 4 (November 1949): 301.

²⁷David Spires, *Image and Reality: The Making of the German Officer, 1921-1933* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 6.

²⁸Corum, *Luftwaffe*, 66.

²⁹USAMI, *Bulletin Regarding the Career of an Officer-Aspirant in the German Army*. Reel XIV, 98

³⁰*Ibid.*, Reel XIV, 99.

³¹USAMI, *Review of Activities in German Army in 1921--Service Report*. Reel XIII, 816. A contemporary service report published in the *Militär-Wochenblatt* journal noted that many potential officer aspirants were wary of the apparent mercenary nature of the new Army.

³²Corum, *Roots*, 79.

³³Spires, 6.

³⁴Corum, *Roots*, 80.

³⁵USAMI, *Education of Staff Officers in the Reichswehr*. Reel XIV, 70.

³⁶*Ibid.*, *German Secret Societies*, Reel XVI, 292.

³⁷Corum, *Roots*, 158.

³⁸USAMI, *Influence of the Observations of the Chief of the Army Gen. Oberst v. Seeckt on his Regimental Training*, Reel XIV, 572.

- ³⁹Citino, *Path*, 106.
- ⁴⁰USAMI, *Influence of the Observations of the Chief of the Army Gen. Oberst v. Seeckt on his Regimental Training*, Reel XIV, 84.
- ⁴¹*Ibid.*, 86.
- ⁴²Citino, *Path*, 67.
- ⁴³USAMI, *Notes on Education of Officers of the Reichswehr*, Reel XIV, 160-162.
- ⁴⁴Corum, *Roots*, 85.
- ⁴⁵USAMI, *Education of Staff Officers in the Reichswehr*. Reel XIV, 168.
- ⁴⁶Corum, *Roots*, 90.
- ⁴⁷Corum, *Luftwaffe*, 67.
- ⁴⁸Lewis, 86.
- ⁴⁹USAMI, *Third Division Officers' School*, Reel XIV, 408.
- ⁵⁰*Ibid.*; and *The Selection and Training of the German General Staff*, Reel XIV, 525.
- ⁵¹*Ibid.*; and *University Education for the Officers of the German Army*, Reel XIV, 151.
- ⁵²Blumentritt, 265.
- ⁵³Citino, *Roots*, 91.
- ⁵⁴USAMI, *Third Division Officers' School*, Reel XIV, 403.
- ⁵⁵*Ibid.*; and Nagel, Reel XIV, 796.
- ⁵⁶*Ibid.*; and A. L. Conger, *Report on the Winter Training of an Infantry Company*, Reel XIV, 782.
- ⁵⁷*Ibid.*; and *The Difference Between French and German Post-War Tactical Procedures*, Reel XIV, 595.
- ⁵⁸*Ibid.*; and Nagel, Reel XIV, 797.
- ⁵⁹*Ibid.*; and Reel XIV, 798.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, *Influence of the “Observations of the Chief of the Army Directorate” Gen. Oberst v. Seeckt on the Regimental Training*, Reel XIV, 564.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, *Remarks of the Chief of the Army Command Based On His Inspections and Observations During the Year 1921 (Observations 1921)*, Reel XV, 74.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 75.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 77.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, *Remarks of the Chief of the Army Command Based On His Inspections and Observations During the Year 1922 (Observations 1922)*, Reel XV, 565.

⁶⁶Corum, *Luftwaffe*, 69.

⁶⁷Corum, *Roots*, 127.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 131.

⁶⁹Allan R. Millet and Williamson Murray, eds., *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Williamson Murray, *Armored Warfare: The British, French and German Experiences*, 39.

⁷⁰Kesselring, 12.

⁷¹Corum, *Roots*, 133.

⁷²USAMI, *Observations of the Chief of the Army Administration on the Basis of His Inspections in the Year 1924 (Observations 1924)*, Reel XV, 152.

CHAPTER 4

THE PATH TO WAR

Introduction

By late 1926, the *Reichsheer* was well on the way to a well trained and motivated force inculcated with an aggressive offensive doctrine which incorporated modern weapons. The 1926 summer maneuvers included the corps level headquarters to practice handling multi-division maneuvers, and the conduct of large-scale experiments with combined tank-cavalry units. The infantry units, equipped with large numbers of trucks and motorcycles, practiced rapid reconnaissance and small unit maneuvers on a broad front, actions designed to bypass, fix and envelop enemy forces.¹

A. L. Conger, an American observer to the exercises, was deeply impressed with the *Reichsheer's* progress in training leaders to apply the new doctrine. He noted the soldiers displayed high morale and were well trained in combining machine guns and light artillery in supporting infantry maneuvers. But Conger also noted that the force was still ill-equipped, and questioned the Army's ability to effectively resist a French invasion due to their lack of trained reserves.²

In October 1926 came the abrupt end of General von Seeckt's career. Seeckt had arrogantly allowed Prince William of Prussia (son of the former Crown Prince) to attend the summer maneuvers while in uniform. Not only was this action specifically forbidden by Versailles, but was an affront to the Republican government. Seeckt's gaffe came at a particularly sensitive time when the Republic was negotiating the Allied withdrawal from German soil.³ Even worse, the government discovered the incident only when a

newspaper article published in September revealed Seeckt's actions. Seeckt, called to account for his actions, was compelled to tender his resignation in October 1926.⁴

Seeckt made many mistakes in his tenure as the *Reichsheer* chief. His icy personality and arrogance in dealing with his civilian masters certainly contributed to his downfall, while his efforts to de-politicize the Army arguably made his officers vulnerable to political manipulation by the Nazi regime.⁵ Seeckt had also, by the end of his career become somewhat reactionary and less willing to innovate in his approaches to policies and doctrine.⁶ However, Seeckt's contributions to the *Reichsheer* outweigh his personal flaws and failures. He synthesized his personal philosophy of the nature of war with previously existing Prussian-German doctrine and theory to create a suitable body of maneuver doctrine. Following this, Seeckt then build upon the Kaiserheer foundation of leader training processes to refine a system which institutionalized excellence in the officer and NCO corps. Seeckt's efforts were such that he perpetuated a culture of continuous analysis, refinement and improvement in his officers; a culture which remained in place long after his departure.⁷

The Post-Seeckt *Reichsheer*

General Wilhelm Heye received appointment as the next *Heer* Chief of Staff. Heye continued with Seeckt's program of training, refinement and improvement, but also instituted several controversial changes.

The first major innovation Heye enacted was the expanded use of psychological tests for officer aspirants. The tests were thorough and geared towards identifying aspirants capable not only of thinking but more importantly directing others while under pressure. These tests, like those for the enlisted candidates, were intended only to aid the

regimental commander in selecting candidates, and not as a replacement for the commander's judgment.⁸

Heye's also introduced policy changes which increased the already competitive nature of the force. The practice of accessing non-*Abitur* candidates largely ceased, and regimental commanders were directed to give lower fitness ratings to NCOs not possessing the *Abitur*.⁹ The Army practically doubled the rate of enlisted discharges from 13 to 25 percent, a practice which--although illegal under the Versailles restrictions--served to covertly build a pool of trained reserves.¹⁰ The policy served not only to improve the enlisted ranks by retaining the best and motivated soldiers, but as a relief valve to reduce tensions in the enlisted ranks by discharging soldiers who no longer desired a career. Increased discharges also served to reduce the high rate of suicides seen prior to 1926, numbers high enough to prompt official inquiries from the government.¹¹

Heye made his greatest changes in reforming the General Staff education process. He standardized the candidate selection process, and raised the minimum scores needed to gain acceptance in the course. The changes produced a more stable selection process and generally resulted in a candidate pool of 150 officers; of those only 30-40 were accepted in the program each year.¹² The other fundamental change Heye made was in the General Staff curriculum. He entirely eliminated the first year (or Preparatory) phase, and removed the third year general education coursework--replacing these subjects with additional tactics and technical training.¹³ The curriculum shift served to produce superbly trained tactical specialists who were ignorant of strategic, political and economic factors which would impact Germany's ability to fight and win a future war. It

also reversed the attempt by Seeckt to craft the training curriculum in order to produce officers with a broader educational base.¹⁴

In other areas, Heye maintained existing programs and processes. Motorization experiments continued unabated, not only on the maneuver grounds but also at clandestine testing facilities deep inside Russia. So by the late 1920s, the *Reichswehr* had not only written thoughtful, well balanced doctrine which incorporated armor and motorized concepts, but had tested and refined the doctrine with comprehensive large scale maneuvers and tests.¹⁵

The Nazis Come to Power

Contrary to the belief that the *Reichswehr* expansion began after Hitler's assumption of power in January 1933, the Army had already begun a cautious expansion after the departure of the Allied Control Commission in 1926. One of the first efforts at expansion was in the creation of a reserve system. The Republic enacted laws placing all secret military reserves and societies under the control of the *Reichsheer* as *Landesschutz* (Land Defense) forces. The forces were ill-equipped and of dubious value except for static defenses, but organizing the forces was a necessary first step in expansion.¹⁶

Germany also took considerable steps to build the industrial base for rearmament. Domestic manufacturers illicitly developed or procured machinery to produce modern machine guns and artillery. Others moved tooling, blueprints and materials to subsidiaries in neutral countries, such as Holland and Sweden, and openly developed and manufactured heavy guns, aircraft and submarines. By 1930, Germany was openly manufacturing (and exporting) substantial quantities of military aircraft, and working to

develop synthetic fuels, rocket motors and a host of other technical innovations to an expanded military.¹⁷

However, change within the *Reichsheer* accelerated dramatically after Hitler's accession to power. Hitler envisioned an army capable of moving quickly and shocking an enemy into surrender by overwhelming strikes with aircraft and mechanized forces.¹⁸ To put this vision into action, Hitler met with his senior generals immediately after assuming power in January 1933 in order to outline his strategy. In this meeting, Hitler pledged to stabilize Germany's political situation, rebuild the Army and restore Germany to her rightful place in the world. Hitler's envisioned end state was the restoration of Germany's power in world affairs, destruction of Poland, taking revenge on France, and the acquisition of natural resources and living space in the east.¹⁹

Political disagreements with the Republican government had served to eliminate Groener, Heye (and Heye's successor, General Hammerstein) from their *Reichsheer* leadership positions. Hitler appointed Lt. Gen Werner von Blomberg as his new Minister of Defense . Blomberg in turn appointed Lt. Gen. Ludwig Beck as the new Chief of the General Staff, and Col. Friedrich Fromm as the Chief of the reorganized General Army Office. Fromm's duty was to oversee the day to day work of force development, reorganization and rearmament of the *Wehrmacht*.²⁰ Additionally, Blomberg appointed Lt. Gen. Werner von Fritsch as the latest Chief of the Army High Command (OKH or *Oberkommando des Heeres*). Fritsch was a Seeckt disciple and shared Seeckt's beliefs in maintaining quality over quantity in any expansion of the Army. Despite his concerns about Hitler's methods, Fritsch believed in accommodating Hitler since they shared the same beliefs of rejecting the Versailles armament limitations. Fritsch however,

mistakenly believed he could restrain Hitler's ambition before things got out of hand. Therefore, Fritsch tacitly supported Hitler's bloody purge of the SA, the paramilitary arm of the Nazi party in order to eliminate the threat of a parallel armed force in Germany.²¹

Another change underway before Hitler's accession was the updating of the core Leadership regulation (*F.u.G.*) Like the *Reichsheer* postwar analysis efforts, the Army formed a committee, chaired by General Ludwig von Beck, to incorporate tactical and technical lessons learned since 1922. A comparison between the introductory chapter of the *F.u.G.* and the 1933 *Truppenführung* (Troop Leading) shows a great deal of continuity in the Army's leadership philosophy--with many sentences repeated word for word. The conduct of war was still considered an exercise of art grounded in science, and subject to the will of the enemy and the presence of friction. Character outweighed the exercise of intellect on the battlefield. The leader was expected to set the example for his men by his "superior knowledge and experience, his earnestness, his self control and high courage." Further sentences extol the virtues of disciplined obedience, willful acceptance of responsibility, full exertion of effort at completing the mission, and the development of mutual trust through constant training and mutually shared hardships. Paragraph 10 states: "The emptiness of the battlefield demands independent thinking and acting fighters, who, considering each situation, are dominated by the conviction, boldly and decisively to act, and determined to arrive at success." The last paragraph is a paraphrase of Seecktian philosophy: "The first demand in war is decisive action. Every, the highest commander and the most junior soldier, must be aware that omissions and neglect incriminate him more severely than the mistake of choice of means."²²

The *Truppenführung* took into account the impact radio communications had on the conduct of combat operations. Air and ground reconnaissance was a priority, and information flow was expected to constantly occur in all directions. The commander, however, was not to allow “information paralysis” to overcome his ability to decisively give orders. The regulations admonished commanders not to issue excessive orders in the middle of battle, in order to avoid confusing or hindering the junior commander’s freedom of action. Commander’s orders were to give the junior commanders all the information needed to independently execute the order, and if possible were given orally (with a confirmation backbrief). Written orders were normally produced at the division or higher, since the time needed to create and transmit a written order at the regimental (or below) level was considered a hindrance to seizing and retaining the tactical initiative.²³

The *Reichsheer* embarked on full scale expansion in order to meet Hitler’s guidance, but proceeded with a veneer of secrecy to avoid prematurely alarming the Allies. The *Truppenamt* settled on a plan, similar to those done during Seeckt’s tenure, to gradually expand the Army to a 28 division force built of reservists recalled in “waves.” The staff believed, even with introducing a 12 month enlistment period to quickly train new reservists, that the Army would not have a sufficient manpower pool further expand (without greatly sacrificing quality) until 1937; Hitler disagreed the plan and demanded the 28 division force by fall of 1934 in order to support his political plans.²⁴ By October of 1933 Hitler had withdrawn Germany from the League of Nations, asserting Germany’s right to gain military parity with the other European powers.²⁵

The Expansion of the *Wehrmacht*

To accomplish Hitler's goal of rapid expansion the *Reichstag* enacted the National Defense Law of 21 May 1935, which law dissolved the *Reichswehr*. In its place, the created the *Wehrmacht* (Armed Forces) which consisted of the *Heer*, *Kriegsmarine* (Navy) and *Luftwaffe* (Air Forces). The law also recreated the War Ministry and the War Department General Staff.²⁶ More ominously for the future, the law established Hitler both as the Supreme Commander and Reich Chancellor, and required all *Wehrmacht* members to swear allegiance to him personally.²⁷ Further passages in the law restored conscription, establishing a one year conscription period for all males 20 and older. Veterans were liable for recall until their 35th birthday, while males between 35 and 45 were included in the *Landsturm* or a territorial reserve.²⁸

The one year conscription period had the advantage of rapidly creating a large mass of semi trained reservists. However, the effort of packing two years' of training (under the *Reichsheer* program) into a single year brought great stress on the officer and NCO corps. Another unforeseen consequence of the law meant that the Army would have a trained force present for only eight months of every year--a policy not conducive to warfighting effectiveness. Accordingly, Hitler issued a new decree in August 1935 which enacted a two year conscription process; he also announced his plans to expand the force to thirty-five divisions.²⁹

To increase war preparedness, the Nazi Party introduced compulsory pre-induction training for teenaged boys between 14 and 18 years of age. These youths were enrolled in the Hitler Youth, where they received para-military training including rifle marksmanship, land navigation, and group sporting activities. Upon reaching 18, the boys

would enter the national Labor Service to perform tasks such as farming, road repairs and local sentry tasks--all duties designed to free up fighting men for the front. The Labor Service teens lived in barracks and received their training and supervision from Army NCOs. The two youth programs served to create a pool of physically fit, trained and indoctrinated men who required little post-induction training to become effective soldiers.³⁰

Despite the pressure to produce more leaders, the Army maintained their focus on creating quality officers. Their continued commitment to high quality training was apparent in the continued policy of assigning high caliber officers to teach officer-aspirants. One example was the assignment of Captain Erwin Rommel as an instructor at the Infantry School. Rommel had earned a stellar reputation as a company grade officer in the Great War, and had received the *Pour le Merite* (Germany's highest award for bravery) for his exploits on the Italian Front. Rommel spent four years at the Infantry School, influencing hundreds of aspirants by his own version of decisive battle leadership, and writing a comprehensive textbook in the process.³¹

The Army increased their accession of officer aspirants, but maintained the requirement for completion of the *abitur*. One new restriction (due to Nazi ideology) was a ban on accessing non-Aryan candidates, especially Jews. The increasing demand for officers forced the Army to shorten the officer aspirant course to two years in 1937, and resort to temporary commissions of promising enlisted soldiers after the start of the war. Regardless of the shortened education process, all aspirants were still required to complete at least fifteen months of enlisted troop time, with at least two months of additional field experience as a troop leader.³²

The *Heer*, of course, had challenges in finding enough leaders to train and direct the new conscripts. Seeckt's vision of a *Führerheer* came to pass in the expansion, with officers advanced to fill senior positions in the newly formed regiments, senior NCOs receiving commissions as lieutenants, and privates becoming NCOs. The Army also recalled hundreds of retirees and reservists and commissioned civilian Security Police officers. More officers were combed out of desk jobs, and replaced by *Landsturm* or civilians.³³

The continued officer shortage accelerated the trend towards NCOs taking a greater share of the leadership burden, with most platoon leader positions filled by senior NCOs. As with the officers, the *Wehrmacht* attempted to maintain the old *Reichsheer* standards for selecting and training their NCO-aspirants.³⁴

The rapid expansion and reorganization of the force put great demands on the experienced ex-*Reichsheer* cadre to maintain the standards and mold new soldiers and equipment into functional units. Many of the brightest new officers were placed in the *Luftwaffe*, *Kriegsmarine* (Navy) or other specialist forces. The rapidly expanding *Waffen-SS*, the fighting force outgrowth of Hitler's elite bodyguard force, was another diversion of quality officer candidates from the Army. On the plus side, new Army conscripts were generally bright, eager, and thanks to the Nazi para-military training, quick learning trainees. However, the pervasive Nazi indoctrination in society served to create some tension between the old guard *Kaiserheer/Reichsheer* veterans and their idealistic young counterparts.³⁵

To fill the demand for modern war machines, German industry tooled up to manufacture aircraft, tanks and artillery pieces to fill out the new formations. Mass

production of the light PzKW I and II tanks started late in 1933, with enough available by fall 1934 to fully equip a few independent mechanized units. By March 1935, when Hitler publicly repudiated Versailles, the Army was able to field three Panzer divisions, albeit largely equipped with inferior equipment, and equip the legacy infantry divisions with a mix of modern arms, and arms left from the *Reichsheer* stocks.³⁶

Hitler continued to drive expansion and rearmament at a frenetic pace through the latter part of the 1930s, while simultaneously pursuing his expansionist goals. He ordered his forces to reoccupy the Rhineland demilitarized zone in March 1936, using a force which--on the inside was hopelessly ill-prepared--appeared a modern well trained force equipped with tanks and aircraft.³⁷ Further adventures rapidly followed: intervention in the Spanish Civil War, political union with Austria and occupation of the Czech Sudetenland. Each operation was studied and analyzed by the OKH staff, with the lessons learned applied in preparing for the next major operation.³⁸

During this time period, other events took place which forever altered the fundamental nature of the *Heer*. Hitler's willingness to undertake risky operations with a partially expanded Army stood in sharp contrast to his senior military leaders who favored a more cautious strategy. Blomberg, Fritsch, and Beck had all opposed the Rhineland operation, viewing it as entirely too risky given the weak state of the *Wehrmacht*. Their opposition angered Hitler, and he dismissed Fritsch and Blomberg soon after the Rhineland occupation succeeded.³⁹ Hitler then reorganized the entire High Command and assumed the duties as the Commander in Chief of the *Wehrmacht*. He also eliminated the Defense Minister position, and used the ministry staff to create a new Armed Forces High Command (OKW) headed by the subservient Gen. Wilhelm Keitel.

A compromise candidate, Gen. Walther von Brauchitsch, was installed as the Chief of the Army command, while the General Army Office would now report direct to Keitel, not to Brauchitsch.

The immediate effect of the reorganization was to destroy the former close cooperation of the Army staff with the other services, and more importantly, communications between the Army staff and the Ministry of Defense. Hitler directly controlled strategic decision making power over the Army, and reduced their independence in operational decision making and preparing for future operations.⁴⁰ Another sign of Hitler's fixation on maintaining rigid control of the Armed Forces was his order limiting information on a "need to know basis." The order made sense from an operational security perspective, but ran counter to the culture of information sharing and dissemination ingrained into the General Staff trained officers.⁴¹

The Invasions of Poland and France

The beginning of the Second World War came on 1 September 1939 with Germany's invasion of Poland. The Germans operationally completed the campaign in eighteen days by encircling or destroying the major Polish units, and by surrounding Warsaw. To the outside world, especially the Western Allies (Britain and France) the Nazi war machine seemed a mechanized nightmare. Nazi propaganda newsreels portrayed German forces as long columns of tanks and motorized infantry soldiers smashing hapless Polish formations. The truth was rather different; the Germans certainly had some well balanced mechanized forces, but the mechanized forces comprised a relatively small percentage of the entire field force. The bulk of the force consisted of

foot soldiers--albeit equipped with more modern support arms--marching to war as their Prussian ancestors did in the eighteenth century.⁴²

The Germans started the campaign with several strategic advantages over the Poles. The Germans attained strategic surprise (and a moral superiority) over the Poles, and had the Red Army in the east to prevent the Poles from trading space for time. Despite the dichotomy in their maneuver forces, the Germans did show they had well learned how to incorporate modern technology into their already existing conceptual framework of operational maneuver and decisive battle with combined arms. The German's tactical mobility, well rehearsed command and control measures enabled by tactical radios, and the operational commander's latitude in executing missions overloaded the Pole's ability to react. Friction, as expected, plagued operations from the start, while inadequate logistic support proved to slow operations at critical points in the campaign. Most leaders and soldiers had not seen combat, and many were hesitant and nervous while under fire. Ground cooperation with artillery fires and CAS was poor, resulting in frequent friendly fire incidents. Nevertheless, the focus on developing quality commanders and staff officers had made a difference. German tactical commanders generally stayed close to their forwards elements, where they were often able to quickly grasp opportunities and react faster than their opponents. This leadership style depended heavily not only on reliable radio communications, but capable staff officers in the unit command posts able and willing to direct actions in the absence of the commander--both elements which the *Wehrmacht* had in abundance.⁴³

Following the fall of Poland, the bulk of the *Wehrmacht* forces redeployed to prepare for the forthcoming attack against the Western Allies. Hitler and the OKH

wrestled with the campaign operations plan--with the entire process marred with arguments, numerous weather delays and the accidental delivery of secret planning documents into Belgian hands.⁴⁴

While Hitler and the OKH staff fumbled their way through their operation plan, the French and British sat passively in their defensive positions while the *Wehrmacht* prepared for the upcoming operation. Unit commanders embarked a strict training regimen of physical conditioning, firing drills, and vehicle driving. Erwin Rommel, now a new division commander, shook down his regiments, ran map exercises with his staff and commanders and continued refinement of combined arms support.⁴⁵

The Germans also studied their Poland operations to improve their operational techniques for the next campaign. Fire support and close air support coordination procedures had proven weak, and needed refinement. Some of the organizational structures in the mechanized units needed adjustment to balance the ratio of tanks and supporting arms. The Germans also reorganized their logistics plans, moving maintenance teams well forward to keep vehicles in operation, and using *Luftwaffe* cargo aircraft to push logistics forward to unit field trains.⁴⁶

OKH and Hitler finally resolved the operational scheme of maneuver and issued the operations order for *Fall Gelb* (Case Yellow) in February 1940 for an attack in May. The *Schwerpunkt* of the entire operation aimed to traverse the weakly held Ardennes, split the Allied lines, and cut the Allied lines of communication from northern France and Belgium to the French interior. Shaping operations into Holland and Belgium were designed to fix Allied attention away from Ardennes, and to create the illusion of a repetition of the 1914 Schlieffen Plan. The shaping plan included the use airborne and

glider assaults against key Dutch and Belgian objectives--actions designed to further convince the Allies that the main effort lay in the north.⁴⁷

When the *Wehrmacht* executed *Fall Gelb* on 10 May 1940, the operation unfolded largely according to plan. German assaults in the Netherlands quickly shocked the defenders, and forced a quick surrender. Simultaneous operations in Belgium disrupted communications, captured bridges and quickly paralyzed the defenders. The operation to capture Fort Eben Emael, the key fort guarding the juncture of the Meuse and Albert Canals, serves as a good example of the *Wehrmacht* leader's ability to exercise initiative while under fire. The Germans planned to capture the fortress by landing a specially trained assault force, by glider, on the fortress roof. The platoon leader's glider landed prematurely, leaving a NCOs in charge of the first assault wave. By the time the lieutenant landed on the fort and took charge two hours later, the NCO led assault had neutralized the fort's defenses and pinned the garrison inside.⁴⁸

The Allies obligingly conformed to the German deception plan by deploying their best combat forces to advance to the Dyle River in Belgium. There the Allies planned to assume a positional linear defense to stop the supposed German main effort. Unfortunately for the Allies, the German main effort was quickly destroying the pivot point of the entire Allied defense by traversing the Ardennes. Individual actions by junior officers and NCOs kept the columns of German tanks and vehicles constantly moving west by outflanking and bypassing strongpoints and obstacles. By the evening of 12 May, elements of Heinz Guderian's XIX Corps forced the Meuse river in an improvised attack in order to maintain tempo and keep the second rate French units off balance. The German attack, although hasty, was not ill conceived, and used the combined effects of

all available weapons to suppress the defenses to allow the infantry to cross in rubber boats.⁴⁹

Erwin Rommel's division found similar success in crossing the Meuse near Dinant on 12 and 13 May 1940. He found a suitable point to cross, quickly assembled available weapons to suppress the French defenders, and quickly formed a bridgehead on the western bank. Key to these operations was the ability of the German commanders to adapt and innovate on the fly with the resources currently at hand. Actions of the senior commanders (Guderian and Rommel serve as particular examples) at the point of decision were critical to maintaining the impetus of the advance.⁵⁰

The actions of the many junior leaders in directing the smaller combat formations were of equal importance in maintaining pressure on the Allies and allowing them no time to recover. The German emphasis on concise mission orders and subordinate initiative paid great dividends in the subsequent breakout from the Meuse bridgeheads. Rommel's operations order to his regimental commanders for the breakout from the Meuse bridgehead consisted only of an axis of advance from the bridgehead to the Channel port of Le Harve. Certainly Rommel involved himself deeply in assigning follow on missions to his regiments as new opportunities unfolded. But his emphasis on brief, direct orders, coupled with his subordinate's initiative and independence in task execution, allowed his division to dictate the operations tempo to their Allied enemies.⁵¹

More worrisome, from the German operational commander's viewpoint, was Hitler's increasing tendency to involve himself with operational maneuvers. Hitler, despite his strategic boldness, was often stricken with panic if he perceived a threat to his forward forces and would direct OKW to slow the tempo of the advance. For example,

disjointed Allied counterstrokes against the Panzer spearheads, while not operationally significant, served to give Hitler a case of the nerves. He ordered Guderian to halt his advance to the English Channel to allow for consolidation with the foot infantry units. Guderian, characteristically for an officer inculcated with the tradition of operational independence, stretched the limit of his orders and continued the advance. A subsequent order from OKW, however, halted the Panzer forces short of cutting the British forces from the Channel ports. Hitler's reason for the stop order was to avoid high tank losses in capturing the port cities, as well as give the *Luftwaffe* pride of place in destruction of the British. The halt order ran counter to the German annihilation culture, and proved a colossal strategic blunder by allowing the British to extricate enough manpower from France to rebuild their forces.⁵²

Operation Barbarossa

By summer 1941, the *Wehrmacht* completed redeployment to Eastern Europe and was poised to take the offensive to the hated Soviet Union. Following the end of the campaign for France, Hitler had engaged in a belated attempt to invade the British homeland. His ambition frustrated by British stubbornness, Hitler turned his attention elsewhere. Forced to turn elsewhere, Hitler engaged small numbers of forces in subsidiary operations in North Africa, Yugoslavia and Greece to stabilize his southern flank and keep the British off balance in the Mediterranean.

Underneath all of these subsidiary operations was Hitler's long cherished desire to invade and destroy the detested Bolshevik Slavic state. Hitler's had outlined his hatred of Communism in his writings and speeches. Despite his antipathy, Hitler had made temporary accommodations with the Soviet Union in order to first destroy Poland, and

then neutralize the Western Allies before turning on the Soviet Union. Hitler also needed time to further expand the *Wehrmacht* as well as to secure vital oil and raw material sources. Accordingly, the Germans engaged the Soviets in a diplomatic dance which resulted in the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939. The public parts of the pact were concerned with economic benefits for both sides: grain, oil and raw materials for Germany, and machinery, weapons and other finished goods to the Russians. The pact also included a secret protocol which divided Eastern Europe in spheres of interest, allowing the Soviets to encroach on Finland, the Baltic states and western Poland. In return, Germany received a guarantee of freedom to operate against western Poland, and Western Europe.⁵³

Hitler had no intention of a long term relationship with the Soviets. So following the French collapse, Hitler instructed OKW Chief Alfred Jodl to begin planning for the operation eventually known as *Barbarossa*. In keeping with his mania for secrecy, only a few of his most trusted advisors were included in the initial planning.⁵⁴ Hitler's success in the earlier campaigns had widened the rift between him and the General Staff. He was increasingly less willing to accept advice from the General Staff on military strategy, depending instead on his (supposed) infallible intuition. Ironically, the OKW officers, products of a system designed to create officers of character and intellect, able to perpetuate military excellence, and trained to complement the man of action with a man of intellect, were now marginalized by a former *Frontsoldaten* NCO--a man of action and indomitable will as envisioned by Ernst Jünger.⁵⁵

General Franz Halder, the current Chief of the OKH, submitted his draft *Barbarossa* plan to Hitler in December 1940. Halder's plan created three Army Groups

advancing east with the intent of penetrating and isolating the array of forces on the border. His plan placed the heaviest weight of armor in the center with the express purpose of advancing upon the Soviet capitol, Moscow.⁵⁶ Hitler largely adapted Halder's plan, but with a significant difference. The OKW plan approved by Hitler was intended to: to destroy the mass of the Red Army by deep penetrations in order to prevent a strategic withdrawal; push eastward far enough to prevent Red Air Force raids on Germany; lastly, establish a defensive barrier against Asiatic Russia. The concept of the operation initially planned to the main effort by Army Group Center to destroy the Red Army forces in Belorussia. Army Group Center would then shift the main effort to the north to capture Leningrad. Moscow was mentioned only as a follow-on objective after the seizure of Leningrad. Hitler also restricted the operations order only to select members of the OKH, with most officers granted only compartmentalized access to the necessary details of the plan.⁵⁷

While the senior leaders worked through the *Barbarossa* operational plans, the Army rested, refitted and trained for the next operation. Sustainment training for officers was a particular concern, since the operations in France had shown many of the newly commissioned officers were inadequate to the task of leading soldiers. Battalion and regimental commanders stressed the importance of thoroughly training lieutenants on combined armed tactics, as well as tactical staff duties.⁵⁸ Many officers had fought the Russians in the Great War, and knew they faced a far tougher enemy. Accordingly, their training focused on conditioning, close combat, night operations and operations in dense forests. Rear echelon units were given training and extra weapons for rear area defense, since non-contiguous operations in the vast Russian land mass would be the norm.⁵⁹

The overall German mood before the start of *Barbarossa* was confidence bordering on arrogance. Many believed that the Soviet Union was incapable of defending against the German's well practiced operational maneuvers. Stalin's ruthless purge of the Red Army's senior commanders in the late 1930s left the Red Army with politically reliable, but operationally inept leaders. Russian blunders and obvious incompetence in prosecuting the Russo-Finnish war of 1940 lent credence to the German beliefs.⁶⁰

When *Barbarossa* opened on 22 June 1941, the initial results seemed to confirm the belief of a quick and easy victory. The Red Army had been in the midst of a reorganization to create mechanized units capable of maneuvering against the German Army. Additionally, the Red Army was in the process of redeploying its forward forces from the pre- September 1939 border to the new frontier, and the bulk of the best mobile forces were massed in the south away from the *Schwerpunkt*. The attack gained operational surprise against the Soviets; intelligence pointed to an imminent attack, but Stalin hoped to appease Hitler long enough to complete the reorganization. Despite the frantic Soviet resistance, Army Group Center closed the first major encirclement of Soviet forces on 01 July 1941 which secured the Belorussian region while causing over 417,000 Red Army casualties. This first encirclement battle triggered the first of many disputes between Hitler and his operational commanders. Hitler, still bearing a Great War positional warfare mindset, wanted to stop the Panzer units to allow time for the infantry units to consolidate the encirclement. The Panzer group commanders--in keeping with Hitler's original intent to destroy the Red Army in place--wanted to maintain their momentum and continue to advance on Moscow.⁶¹

German tactical flexibility in fighting a meeting engagement was well displayed by the XXXXI Panzer Corps, which was part of the Army Group North drive towards Leningrad. The lead German elements collided with a massive counterattack by the Red 3rd Mechanized Corps. The Germans had difficulty at first handling the Red units equipped with heavy KV-1, tanks which outgunned German tanks, and were impervious to the light German antitank guns then in use. However, the inexperienced Soviet commanders could not adequately coordinate their maneuvers; they relied instead on uncoordinated mass attacks to blunt the German spearheads. In contrast, the German tactical commanders quickly analyzed the tactical problem and used an ad hoc task force of combat engineers and 8.8cm Flak (*Fliegerabwehrkanone* = Antiaircraft) guns to halt and fix the Red armored attack. The Germans then counterattacked and destroyed the enemy formation.⁶²

As the *Wehrmacht* forces pushed eastward during July 1941, the widening expanse of country forced the Army Groups to move on widely separated axes. The Germans simply did not have enough force to adequately cover the gaps, which gave the Red Army forces time and space to regroup and launch counterattacks against German lines of communication. Many generals, OKH Chief General Halder, the Army Group Center's commander (General von Bock) and his key commanders (Hermann Hoth and Heinz Guderian) advocated driving forward regardless of the enemy, believing that maintaining the initiative and tempo was more important than flank security. Bock and his lieutenants also believed in making Moscow the ultimate goal of Army Group Center's advance and wanted to continue their attacks to penetrate the Soviet resistance centered on Smolensk. Hitler disagreed, and wanted to continue destroying the Red Army

forces before moving on Moscow; he also wanted to secure oil and grain in the Ukraine and Caucasus regions. So while Hitler and his officers debated, Army Group Center remained static west of Smolensk. Following a heated conference with Bock and Guderian, Hitler issued new directives late in July which redirected Hoth's Panzer Group to reinforce the Leningrad fight, while Guderian was to reinforce Army Group South.⁶³

The period of debate and indecision in July served to increase tension and distrust between Hitler, OKH and the Army Group Center leadership. Guderian took advantage of his operational independence to precipitate engagements intended to draw German forces toward what he believed was the enemy center of gravity--Moscow. However, Guderian's actions were in violation of the intent (if not the letter) of Hitler's directives--so apparently Guderian (and others like him) felt no guilt (despite his oath of loyalty) in clearly disregarding Hitler's intent, this despite their obligation of obedience and oath of loyalty to the *Führer*.⁶⁴

By September 1941, the Germans believed they were on the verge of complete victory. The main effort in the South had destroyed many of the best formations still left to the Red Army and captured the vital Ukraine region, while Army Group North had isolated Leningrad. Despite severe losses in both men and equipment, the German forces were still lethally effective. The high quality of the German junior leaders was one of the key factors to their battlefield successes. These leaders maneuvered independently on the battlefield to bypass and encircle the clumsy Red forces; their skill in combining organic weapons with supporting artillery and aircraft fires would often inflict casualties on the Red Army in a ratio of 20 or even 30:1.⁶⁵

In October 1941, after a short redeployment and refit phase, the Germans launched Operation *Typhoon* to destroy the Red Army blocking forces and capture Moscow. At first all seemed to go as planned. Another huge encirclement caused almost a million Red casualties, while Panzer spearheads further isolated Leningrad. However, a combination of wretched fall weather, dogged Soviet resistance and logistics shortfalls forced the *Wehrmacht* to a culmination point, well short of Moscow, by the end of October.⁶⁶

Army Group Center launched another effort in early November to take Moscow--on Hitler's personal order--despite the open reservations of the senior commanders. Hitler timed the attack after temperatures had dropped enough to freeze the ground and restore mobility. However, the severe temperature drops dramatically affected the ill equipped Germans. The conditions completely negated German advantages in initiative and flexibility, and forcing them to rely on costly frontal attacks which further sapped their strength.⁶⁷

By the end of November, the German generals were plainly alarmed at the horrible conditions at the front and asked Hitler to suspend the attack and assume a defensive posture until spring. Hitler refused, and he ordered yet another series of attacks to envelop Moscow. The effort was too much for his hungry and freezing soldiers. Worse, the Red Army struck the Germans with a major counteroffensive timed to strike when the Germans had culminated. At this point, the commander's instincts to exercise operational independence collided with the man of action--the leader who believed the indomitable will could overcome any obstacle. Hitler had seemed to tolerate his commander's exercise of operational independence. But when faced with apparent

disaster, Hitler allowed his commanders no flexibility--those that disobeyed or failed were relieved and sent home in disgrace. The sick and ineffective Brauchitsch resigned; instead of appointing a replacement, Hitler combined the duties of the *Heer* Commander in Chief with his position as Fuhrer and head of the *Wehrmacht*.⁶⁸

Hitler's decision to stand fast and hold ground was probably the right one, given that local withdrawals by soldiers already demoralized and under pressure could have degenerated into a rout. But the decision to stand fast cost the *Heer* dearly: Hitler fired many of his best operational talent, while many of the junior leaders needed to fight an operational war of maneuver were sick, wounded or dead. Even worse, Hitler had attained a moral ascendancy over the entire officer corps. He would feel even less need to rely upon the General Staff for their intellectual talent, needing them only to transmit his orders to the field. As for his field commanders, Hitler would allow them even less operational flexibility, and would increasingly interfere in tactical decisions.

Of course, the war did not stop in December 1941; a combination of Hitler's fanaticism combined with the staying power of the German soldier served to prolong the war for another 3 ½ years. Several factors, traceable to the *Reichsheer*, helped to contribute to the German powers of resistance. First was the high level of unit cohesion engendered by group identity. All German soldiers, once inducted, generally served with the same unit throughout their entire career. The soldier became bound by the expectations of his comrades, grew deep attachment them through years of shared hardships; so he fought not only for personal survival but the survival of his group. Tied to this factor were the close bonds between officers and soldiers. Officers, having served several years in training and troop assignments as an NCO, had a deep appreciation for

his soldiers and would routinely shared the same privations with his soldiers.⁶⁹ One other key factor was the junior leader's dedication to honor and a strong will to overcome adversity— key components of character as articulated by Hans von Seeckt. The *Wehrmacht* oath of loyalty, like that of the *Reichsheer*, tied the soldier's honor to following orders to the letter. The final factor was the still pervasive influence of the *Reichsheer*-era leaders within the *Wehrmacht* leadership corps. Even with the high casualty rates typically experienced among combat leaders, more than half of the *Wehrmacht* senior NCOs in 1943 consisted of *Reichsheer* veterans. Therefore, the *Wehrmacht* still had a core of well trained and dedicated professional soldiers who were capable of quick battlefield improvisation.⁷⁰

One of the most persistent questions in studying military history is whether or not the German forces could have “won” the war. Gallons of ink and reams of paper have been consumed in the debate over the question. This thesis does not propose to answer the question, but to merely highlight key strengths and weaknesses in the German army, and their influence on the course of the war. Operationally and tactically the German performance was unmatched in the world, a superiority they retained to the end of the war. Strategically, the German General Staff, and senior commanders, were blinkered by operational focus. Hitler understood military objectives (destruction of the Red Army, for example) but also considered political and economic factors when making his strategic decisions. He did not order a full industrial and social mobilization of Germany in order to maintain the civilian morale. Some of Germany's subsidiary moves before *Barbarossa*, Norway and Rumania serve as excellent examples, were intended to secure strategic natural resources.⁷¹ Hitler's reasoning in securing Leningrad and the Ukraine

before capturing Moscow was in keeping with his goal of securing enough resources to support an indefinite defense. He also recognized the need to destroy the massive Soviet forces in the Ukraine in order to secure Bock's flank.⁷² Yet instead of quickly obeying Hitler's directives, Bock and his lieutenants deliberately delayed executing the orders for almost a month; thereby placing their operational goals above strategic goals.⁷³ Hitler was proven right in destroying the Red Army forces in the south. Bock's panzer spearheads met little resistance when they resumed the drive on Moscow in October, but the delay in July had left too little time before the onset of the fall rains and freezing weather.⁷⁴

One key German failure was in intelligence. Intelligence gathering, interpretation and dissemination had been largely neglected in the *Reichsheer*, and the efforts before *Barbarossa* were sadly inadequate. Maps were inaccurate, while the condition and location of roads, bridges and railroads were discovered only by reconnaissance teams. The German's greatest tactical failure was in not divining the existence of the T-34 and KV-1 tanks and the numerous mechanized corps in the Soviet first echelon.⁷⁵ Even worse was the strategic intelligence failure to divine the Soviet mobilization strategy. The Soviet ability to create and mass new forces, seemingly out of thin air, forced an attritional war upon the Germans, a war which they could not win.⁷⁶

In the end, a *Reichsführer* who demanded inflexible resistance to the enemy, coupled with highly cohesive combat units led by competent well-trained officers imbued with a high sense of honor, served to perpetuate Germany's military resistance beyond any reasonable hope of victory.

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⁷⁶Glantz, 214.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis studied the German *Reichsheer* of 1919-1933 to determine how a military organization can develop and articulate an organizational vision (based upon a specific war fighting philosophy), transmit that vision to the organization, and internalize that vision with the purpose to create effective change. The primary research question was: how did the *Reichsheer* transform their warfighting doctrine following the Great War? Necessary subordinate questions were also considered. What was the organizational philosophy of the *Reichsheer* leaders? How did the *Reichsheer* leaders articulate this philosophy and vision to their junior leaders? How were junior leaders selected, trained and developed? And lastly, how did the *Reichsheer* contribute to the German armed forces expansion, and the early World War II campaigns? This chapter will present some observations for each question, followed by a conclusion section.

Organizational Philosophy

The key component of the *Reichsheer* organizational philosophy was the focus on *Bewegungskrieg*, a war of operational maneuver. Key to *Bewegungskrieg* was the German belief, dating from Frederick the Great, which held that a decisive operational victory would lead to strategic collapse of the enemy. *Reichsheer* also focused on operations and tactics because of treaty constraints which prevented realistic strategic war planning or preparation. This reality enforced the already existing German affinity for operations to the exclusion of coherent strategy.

Articulation and Transmission of Vision

The greatest part of the *Reichsheer* philosophy was articulated by General Hans von Seeckt. Seeckt's wartime service had convinced him of the primacy of maneuver warfare. In future wars, Seeckt envisioned battlefield success would go to the side with a well-trained, professional army equipped with modern arms. Seeckt's vision imbued everything he did during his tenure: policies, unit organizations, doctrine and training. The Versailles Treaty limited Seeckt's ability to reorganize and rearm a modern professional combat force, so he largely concentrated on building the conceptual base of the Army, and training all soldiers as leaders for the day when Germany could openly expand and rearm.

Although he projected an icy and often sarcastic manner with his peers and government officials, Seeckt was an articulate and effective writer. He outlined his philosophy and vision in clear directives, the first of which set out his guidelines for using expert committees to update the doctrinal framework of the *Heer*. By creating expert committees, Seeckt hoped to harness the brainpower of his best officers to come up with effective solutions. This widespread participation in this process helped to create a sense of ownership among his officers. Underpinning the process was the perception of Seeckt's credibility. Seeckt emerged from the war with an impeccable war record; his avoidance of political entanglements left his reputation and integrity intact. As a result, the officer corps largely trusted Seeckt and supported his reform efforts.

Following this extended process of analysis, the *Reichsheer* published new doctrine in order to teach and guide operational commanders. Seeckt reviewed and approved each document before publication, thereby ensuring each conformed to his

vision of operational maneuver. He even wrote the foundational principles for the Army's new leadership manual in order to clearly explain his philosophy. The new doctrine particularly stressed the need for a decisive commander who could quickly assess and issue mission type orders, and junior leaders who would flexibly and aggressively seize the initiative in executing these orders.

Seeckt, and his branch chiefs, visited units to observe, coach and provide feedback on unit training efforts in order to reinforce the future vision. Seeckt also published annual Observations to provide systemic feedback for the previous year, and to outline his training guidance for the next year.

Leadership Selection and Training

Faced with strict limits on manpower and equipment, the Reichswehr focused most of their efforts into creating qualitatively excellent soldiers who could serve as leader cadres for a future army. Faced with the difficult choice of how to downsize the officer corps, Seeckt chose to emphasize the intellect of the General Staff officer over the experience of the combat leader. His intent was to build an officer corps with the intellectual capacity and abilities necessary not only to command but to also serve as staff officers.

The *Reichsheer* went to great efforts to select only the best candidates, using education, character and aptitude as screening criterion. Additionally, the regimental commander personally interviewed each candidate, and made the final decision in any induction; a factor considered important to creating unit cohesion and regimental esprit de corps.

Entry level training courses were lengthy and designed to create well conditioned, technically capable and tactically sound soldiers and leaders. All officer aspirants entered as enlisted soldiers and completed a lengthy education process, including a minimum of eighteen months as a NCO troop leader, before receiving a commission. All officers had to pass proficiency tests, a process designed not only to cull marginal officers, but identify the best candidates for promotion and selection for General Staff training.

General Staff training focused on creating a small group of intellectual elites capable of planning and executing modern war. The three year course was extremely challenging, and largely focused on operations and tactics. During Seeckt's tenure, officers received general education and cultural experiences designed to broaden their strategic outlook, thereby avoiding military narrow mindedness. The *Heer* also enrolled many of their General Staff trainees in civilian college courses and degree programs in order to ensure enough officers were capable of developing and employing modern technology in warfare. Seeckt intended this broader education to create a more intellectually balanced officer corps capable of understanding the strategic and economic aspects of waging war.

Leader development continued after formal school completion. Commanders used sand table and map exercises to further refine creative problem solving skills in their junior leaders, as well as train them for future duties as company and regimental commanders. The *Heer* used a series of progressive field maneuvers which culminated in large scale summer exercises to give their officers the opportunity to practice combined arms maneuvers, and to generate observations and feedback to help commanders in planning the next training year.

Contribution to the *Wehrmacht*

The importance of the *Reichsheer* to the expansion and early successes of the *Wehrmacht* cannot be overstated. The reorganization and doctrinal efforts done in the 1920s ensured that the Army possessed a sound conceptual and leadership base to expand in the 1930s. Despite the massive absorption of former soldiers, reservists and police officers in an effort to expand the officer corps, officers still comprised only 2.5 percent of the total *Wehrmacht* force.¹ Therefore, the former *Reichsheer* NCOs became the leadership backbone of the new force and provided continuity and tradition to the newly inducted replacements. Even with the massive battle casualties suffered as the war progressed, over half of the *Wehrmacht* leaders in mid-1943 were former *Reichsheer* NCOs.²

The doctrine the *Wehrmacht* fought World War II was largely the *Reichsheer* doctrine, including minor updates in the early 1930s to account for technological updates. The German warfighting method depended on the synergistic actions of combat operating ly within the context of the commander's mission intent to accomplish a given task. Leaders, whether combat arms or a support branch, were trained to understand how to combine effects of all arms to fix, disrupt and encircle enemy units. Lastly, the *Wehrmacht* continued the *Reichsheer* practice of post campaign analysis to capture weaknesses and lessons learned in order to improve for the next operation.

Another key carryover was the concept of subordinate independence. Most officers had internalized the concept of aggressive, independent execution of mission orders and would attack and seize opportunities without waiting for permission from higher. This concept stands in marked contrast to Germany's opponents, who too often

relied upon centralized control to direct tactical actions. The calculated risks taken by these junior leaders positively influenced the outcomes of the early *Wehrmacht* campaigns.

Only after Hitler's fatal overextension of the Wehrmacht in the East did the concept of operational independence come under serious attack. Hitler gradually constrained the General Staff from directing strategy and policy, and became deeply involved in operational decisions during the Barbarossa campaign. The dispute over operational control culminated in December 1941 during the Battle for Moscow, when Hitler purged his most outspoken commanders, and assumed operational control of the Army. Yet, due to the high level of training and cohesion inherited from the *Reichsheer*, the Germans maintained tactical supremacy on the battlefield, and continued to inflict disproportionate losses on the Allies to the end of the war.

Observations for Today

As articulated in FM 3-0, three key components of Army Battle Command are the commander's ability to visualize, describe and direct. Seeckt displayed an exceptional ability to visualize and clearly describe his vision of the *Reichsheer*. His vision served to guide the *Reichsheer* through fourteen years of reorganization, preparation and training for the next European war. Seeckt's success points to the importance of a commander's clear visualization and description of his intent and desired end state. The commander's vision should include a detailed explanation (to the subordinate) of how the commander arrived at his vision so the subordinate can fully grasp it.³

Leader accession and initial entry training is of critical importance to ensuring battlefield success. At a macro level, the Army should include combined arms

synchronization training in junior officer and NCO training courses. The German experiences also point to the importance of mandatory NCO troop time as part of the pre-commissioning training program. The current Army officer procurement system allows for quality NCOs to attend Officer Candidate School (OCS) to obtain a commission, but OCS is a relatively minor accession source. The majority of today's Army officers come from the Reserve Officer Training Course (ROTC). ROTC cadets have limited opportunities to gain troop experience with either with an Active or Reserve Component (RC) unit. Therefore, most ROTC cadets report to their first duty assignment with very little relevant leadership experience. This policy worked during the Cold War era where lieutenants had time to learn their trade under the guidance of a seasoned platoon sergeant. In today's operating environment, this means that a large proportion of inexperienced second lieutenants will deploy into a hostile environment. In comparison, the Reichswehr officer aspirant had four years of progressively more responsible experience and education as an NCO before receiving his commission. The four year process also helped to build strong bonds of respect between the officers and soldiers which led to high levels of unit cohesion even during extreme combat conditions.

Leader Development at the unit level is also crucial. Every army in the interwar period conducted training, but the German army really trained. Regimental and company commanders used the majority of their weekly training schedule to conduct small unit drills and maneuvers in the garrison area. Even classes during the winter months consisted of hands on skill practice for the troops, while the officers and senior NCOs practiced their leadership skills in map exercises and sand table exercises. Commanders strove to keep administrative tasks like barracks and garrison duties to a minimum. Lack

of modern equipment did not serve as an excuse to avoid training; inventive leaders created mock up tanks and artillery pieces and incorporated the dummy items into their field exercises. US Army commanders can use sand table and map exercises, and similar techniques in training and developing their junior leaders. The unit commander should also routinely inject “fog of war” elements into training in order to teach his junior leaders how to adapt and improvise when technology fails or outside forces impact their tactical operations.

One of the key ingredients to making mission orders work is the building of a teaching and coaching relationship between commander and junior. Effective execution of a mission order assumes the junior leader fully understands the commander’s intent and envisioned end state, while the commander has to understand how his subordinate thinks and acts in order to in order to anticipate his actions. The *Reichsheer* was able to build these relationships due to the relatively stable regimental environment which kept leader turbulence to low levels. The US Army replacement system makes relationship building more difficult, but not impossible. Only a commander who understands the critical trust and understanding link, and actively works to develop it with his leaders, can correctly make the mission order concept work . To do so, the commander must allow his subordinates to make mistakes and learn from their experiences. The commander must also be willing to accept some risk in allowing his leaders to exercise initiative in mission execution. However, the commander must also train the junior leader to know how to balance risk and initiative.⁴

The ability to expand is another key lesson to learn from the *Reichsheer*. Seeckt and his successors determined to develop every soldier to assume the duties of his

immediate superior. American units have historically suffered disproportionate casualties among junior officers and NCOs; a fact which points to the utility of training each soldier one level up. Army leaders can easily adapt the *Reichsheer* training methods to train soldiers as team leaders, corporals as squad leaders and section chiefs. Training of this sort would prove easy to integrate into an already existing field or situational exercise, and is limited only by the commander's creativity and motivation in developing future leaders

Warnings and Cautions

The *Reichsheer* experience points to the absolute need for a moral and ethical component in character training. Emphasis and training on ethical decision making was an area which Seeckt completely neglected. As a result, the *Wehrmacht* inherited an officer corps possessed of iron will and determination, but lacking a moral compass (or a code of conduct) to refer to when given blatantly illegal orders.⁵

One practice the Germans avoided was the use of school training units as “dumping grounds” for lackluster officers. Period literature points to the *Reichsheer* routinely assigning their best officers to teaching assignments both at the branch schools and the *Wehrkries* schools for the General Staff candidates. Certainly troop and staff experience was viewed as important, but the Germans attached great importance to the quality of educational training given to leaders; therefore, assignment as a troop instructor was not viewed as a “career killer” for an ambitious young officer.

A commitment to excellence is a good thing, but commanders must maintain a sense of balance in pursuing excellence in order to avoid unhealthy competition. For example, Seeckt wanted every leader to have a baseline education, but recognized the

need to allow exceptions to the policy, both to allow promising NCOs to become officers, but also to adjust to recruiting realities. His policies also reflected that most officers and NCOs would remain within the regiment for their entire careers, so having a large pool of leaders capable of meeting minimum standards was still desirable and necessary.

The *Wehrmacht* experience also shows the danger of failing to integrate all warfighting operating systems in executing operations. The Germans were excellent at planning maneuvers, conducting combat engineering, protecting their forces with air defenses and coordinating fire support. However, their intelligence gathering services depended almost entirely on HUMINT (Human Intelligence) and lagged dangerously behind the Allies in Signals Intelligence and imagery gathering. Furthermore, their neglect of careful logistics planning for extended campaigns led to disaster in North Africa and Russia.⁶

Another pitfall which the US Army has yet to fully escape from is the copying of a good method of warfighting without fully understanding the underlying philosophy. In the post-World War II years, the American Army eagerly copied large portions of German doctrine (as contained in the *Truppenführung*) in the capstone FM 100-5 Operations manual. However, the early editions still contained large portions of prescriptive doctrine which ran counter to German philosophy. Subsequent editions of FM 100-5 came closer, but still neglected key points of the German philosophy of mission type orders. The current FM 3-0 Operations contains an excellent construct of the visualization, description and direction portions of leadership necessary to execute mission type orders. However, the manual neglects to account for the intangible but important element of trust and risk assumption inherent in mission order execution.⁷

In conclusion, the ability to promote and create excellence in turmoil is a particularly relevant lesson given the operating environment of 2006. Seeckt's vision of a resurgent *Reichsheer* gave his leaders a worthy and desirable goal to devote their time and efforts towards attaining. His example underscores the importance of a clearly articulated vision in affecting change within any organization. His vision not only led to the creation of one of the finest military forces in modern history, but led to the creation of military doctrine which is still largely in use by the American Army today. Army leaders today can also provide a similar vision to empower and motivate their subordinates in accomplishing their assigned duties.

¹Citino, *Roots*, 201. In comparison, the US Army officer corps comprises roughly 16% of the total Active Force. See <http://www.asafm.army.mil/budget/fybm/FY07/mpa.pdf> for a summary of the Army manpower budgets for FY05-FY07.

²Shils and Janowitz, 284.

³Lawrence G. Shattuck, "Communicating Intent and Imparting Presence," *Military Review* (March-April 2000): 24, 71.

⁴John T. Nelson, "Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralized Combat Leadership," in Lloyd J. Matthews, and Dale E. Brown, eds., *The Challenge of Military Leadership* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's, n.d.), 35.

⁵Clark, 57.

⁶*Ibid.*, 5-15. See Glantz, 211-212, for a thoughtful review of German weaknesses and strengths.

⁷Department of the Army, FM 3-0, *Operations*, 5-18; see FM 7-0, *Training the Force*, 2-12, for a similar discussion on the need for commanders to develop and empower subordinates to make independent decisions.

GLOSSARY

Arbitur – A secondary school certificate from a *gymnasium*, which was equivalent to a American high school diploma.

Auftragstaktik – Mission oriented command system. A key component of the German command system was the wide latitude given to junior officers in executing a tactical mission. The senior commander would issue an oral mission order which clearly defined his intent and desired end state, while leaving the means of executing the mission to the junior leader.

Bewegungskrieg – Operational or campaign level war of maneuver.

Freikorps – Irregular forces used by the Republican government to maintain order within Germany and fight Bolshevik and Polish threats in the east.

General Staff – The *Reichsheer* was legally forbidden by the Versailles Treaty from having a General Staff. The Germans simply changed names to camouflage the General Staff. The *Truppenamt* (Troops Office) assumed the General Staff functions, while the General Staff officers were called *Führergehilfen* (Leadership Assistants). The term General Staff is used to maintain clarity.

Gymnasium – A German secondary or high school.

Heer – The German Army after May 1935.

Junker – The noble class of Imperial Germany.

Kaiserheer – The Imperial German Army from 1871 to November 1918.

Kriegsakademie – The General Staff training academy outlawed by the Versailles Treaty.

Reichswehr – The defensively oriented armed force of the German Republic from 1919 to April 1935. The *Reichswehr* was composed of the *Reichsmarine* (Naval Forces) and the *Reichsheer* (Army Forces).

Stellungskrieg – Static or positional warfare, especially that seen on the Western Front during the Great War.

Wehrmacht – The German Armed Forces from May 1935 to May 1945.

APPENDIX A

OFFICER ASPIRANT PROCESS

Table 1. Officer Aspirant Process				
Date	Major Milestones	Service Grades	Location	Duration
April	Induction, basic training, service as an enlisted soldier.	Private	Home Regiment	15 months
July	Officer Aspirant exam, service as an Officer Aspirant (junior NCO)	Officer Aspirant	Ibid	3 months
Oct 1st - Aug 15th	Basic course of instruction at Infantry, Artillery, Cavalry, Engineer Schools. Ensign examination	Sergeant, Ensign	Rotating attendance at Branch Schools	10 1/2 months
Aug 16- Sep 30	Midcourse leave			
Oct 1st - Aug 15th	Second course of instruction at Branch Schools, Final academic exams.	Ensign, Senior Grade	Rotating attendance at Branch Schools	10 1/2 months
Aug 16 until Selection	Final troop duty as a Senior Ensign. Promotion to Lieutenant subject to vacancy and approval of Regimental commander		Home Regiment	A minimum of 7 1/2 month

1. Total time from enlistment to commissioning was a minimum of 48 months.
2. The aspirant was required to pass an end of phase exam before advancing to the next phase. Failed aspirants were normally discharged from the Army.
3. The aspirant completed a total of 21 months of service schooling and a minimum of 10 months of troop time as a NCO leader prior to his commissioning.

APPENDIX B

GENERAL STAFF EXAM SUBJECTS

Table 2. General Staff Exam Subjects			
Exam subject	Number of problems	Score weighting	Knowledge requirement
Formal tactics	One	3	General knowledge of <i>F.u.G</i>
Applied Tactics	Three	3	Examinee had to solve three tactical problems using Regimental combined arms, and issue a complete written Operations Order
Arming and Equipment	One	2	Combat Arms officers displayed technical and tactical knowledge of different weapon systems. CS/CSS officers would solve a branch specific question
Engineer Services	One	2	Demonstrate how to use field engineering to support a combined arms fight
Map Reading	One	3	The Candidate conducted a map recon of a certain piece of terrain, and had to provide a tactical analysis of the terrain
Sketch	One	1	The candidate had to draw a 1:25,000 two dimensional sketch of a piece of terrain in order to graphically illustrate the tactical importance
History	One	2	Demonstrate cause and effect linkages for key historical events of a given period of European history
Economic Geography	One	2	The candidate had to articulate his knowledge of economic and geographic considerations for a certain part of the world
Foreign Languages	One	French or English = 2, Russian, Polish, Czech = 3	The candidate had to provide a written translation of a military related article both from and to German. Greater weight was placed on knowledge of a more difficult language
Civics	One	2	The candidate displayed his knowledge of key parts of the German Federal civil code
Mathematics	One	3	The candidate had to solve a written problem at the high school (<i>abitur</i>) level
Physics	One	3	The candidate had to solve a written problem at the high school (<i>abitur</i>) level
Chemistry	one	2	The candidate had to solve a written problem at the high school (<i>abitur</i>) level
Physical Exercise		2	The candidate had to perform a variety of gymnastic exercises, distance running, track and field events

APPENDIX C

GENERAL STAFF COURSE CURRICULUM

Table 3. General Staff Course Curriculum	
First year course	
Subject	Hours per week
Tactics of the Reinforced Infantry Regiment	6
Military History	4
Logistics	Incorporated in Tactics
Air Defense	0.5
Technical Instruction of Support Arms	0.5
Artillery Tactics and Techniques	0.5
Combat Engineering	0.5
Motor Transport	1
Signal Communications	1
Preventive Medicine and Field Sanitation	10 hours total
Veterinary Services	10 hours total
Legal	10 hours total
Foreign Languages	2
Physical Training	2
Horsemanship	3

Second year course	
Subject	Hours per week
Divisional Tactics	6
Command Techniques	2
Military History	4
Army Organization	1
Logistics	1
Army Transport Service	0.5
Air Defense	0.5
Chemical Warfare	8 hours total
Motor Transport Service	0.5
Signal Communications	0.5
Army Administration	12 hours total
Foreign Languages	2
Physical Training	2
Horsemanship	3

1. The course generally ran four days per week, with the fifth day devoted to staff rides or map exercises.
2. First year students had to pass an end of year exam in order to continue in the second year course.

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