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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

HITLER'S POLITICAL OFFICERS: THE NATIONAL
SOCIALIST LEADERSHIP OFFICERS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
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degree of
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BY
ROBERT LEE QUINNETT
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HITLER'S POLITICAL OFFICERS: THE NATIONAL
SOCIALIST LEADERSHIP OFFICERS

APPROVED BY

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

PREFACE

When the Convention ruled France, the revolutionary government instituted représentants en mission. The task of these representatives on mission was to organize the new provincial governments and to supervise the French revolutionary armies and their generals in the field. Given wide latitude, they were largely on their own. If revolutionary France was to have an army capable of meeting the forces of Europe, she had to entrust the army's leadership to former officers of the king who could not be fully trusted. Thus, the representatives on mission had the duty to oversee the loyalty of these officers. As to the success or failure of these first political commissars, historians have ever since differed. To some, they were meddling civilians who knew nothing of military affairs; to others, they were champions of liberty, democracy, and the rights of the common soldier. It seems unlikely that the controversy can be adequately settled, since France's revolutionary armies were victorious as well as defeated both with and without them. A similar statement can be made concerning the Red Army's on-again off-again experiments along the same path.

When the bolsheviks created the Red Army during the Russian Revolution, they instituted a system similar to that of revolutionary France over 100 years previously. They either had to use old Tsarist officers in the Red Army, men of doubtful political reliability, or face a crushing defeat at the hands of the professionally-led counterrevolutionary forces. Trotsky's solution resembled that used by the French Convention. He assigned a political commissar, called a Politruk at lower levels, to every commander in order to monitor his activities and to ensure his loyalty to the communist regime. No operational order held validity unless countersigned by the commissar who stood virtually on the same level as the commander. The officers were to train the army and lead it into combat while the commissars watched their conduct, prevented treason, and educated the rank and file politically. After 1934 these commissars only supervised troop morale and political indoctrination, but after Stalin's purge of the army in 1937, they again regained their former status. During the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the commissar (hereafter called the Politruk for the sake of simplicity) again took up his "co-commander" duties, but in October 1942, as part of Stalin's appeal to Russian nationalism, he once more reverted to the role of political advisor and propagandist. The Politruk is the foil in this study which concerns a pale German version of the Politruk, the National

Sozialist Führungs Offizier (NSFO--National Socialist Leadership Officer). The NSFO had the duty of ensuring the final nazification of the German army. German conditions were both different from and yet similar to those which called forth the NSFO's precursors. The German army had a strong officer corps in being which followed age-old military and social traditions; however, Hitler questioned the loyalty of those in the higher ranks of this officer corps. Still, tradition dominated the officers, and the nazi party was not strong enough to assert its own absolute domination through the activities of the NSFO. When first established in late 1943, the NSFO served as a staff advisor to his commander for the indoctrination of the German troops in nazi ideology. However, in the last few months of the war he more and more began to resemble a Politruk as Germany appeared headed for total defeat, and certain members of the nazi party tried to give him full Politruk-like powers. Yet in the last few weeks the party failed in an attempt to take over the NSFO system in its entirety. Thus the NSFO never became a Politruk. Although the evaluation of his success or failure is clouded by the defeat of the Third Reich in 1945, enough evidence is at hand to pronounce the NSFO a failure.

This study will investigate the reasons for the establishment of the NSFO system and the way it worked; it will also evaluate the accomplishments and failures of this

system within the Wagnerian mists of the last months of the war and assign reasons, and blame where appropriate, for its failure.

This work arose out of an interest in nazism dating back to my youth and from my twenty years of military service as a regular officer in the U.S. Army. Two things sparked this interest. The first was two periods of army service in Germany where I met and talked with people who had lived through the nazi period and where I visited many of the "shrines of nazism." The second was a graduate seminar conducted by my major professor in German history at the University of Oklahoma, Dr. Gordon Drummond, who assigned me the task of presenting a review of a documentary article by G. L. Weinberg on the NSFO. (See sources consulted.) Looking for a suitable theme at that time for a master's thesis, the NSFO seemed to offer a challenge and a possible solution to my dual interest in nazism and the military, especially since it was an untried subject. Professor Drummond suggested the value of using the same subject for both the master's thesis and my doctoral dissertation and recommended that I conduct research on the party side of the NSFO question in Germany. I was not exactly thrilled with incorporating information on the party because I had conceived the thesis and dissertation as military works. To this end, for my thesis I used The Captured German Records Filmed at Alexandria, Virginia

which I purchased from the National Archives on microfilm. His rationale finally enthused me, and for my dissertation I conducted research in the records of the N.S.D.A.P. in Germany. This led to significant results. The records in the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz provided startling answers to some of the questions I had tried to answer in my master's thesis. Thus, this work is a political-military study of one facet of the nazi era--the party's attempt to nazify the German army. Those who expect a history of nazism or a biographical sketch of leading nazi or military personalities will not find it here. There are countless excellent studies of this nature for those who are interested, and some of the best are listed in the sources consulted. Wherever I thought that information concerning a man's character or past was important for understanding a particular event, it is, of course, present. Also, the elements of the so-called nazi ideology are interwoven throughout the study.

The two main primary sources for this study are the National Archives microcopies of the Captured German Records Filmed at Alexandria, Virginia, referred to in footnotes as NAM (National Archives Microcopy), and documents contained in the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz, Germany, referred to in footnotes as BAK (Bundesarchiv Koblenz).

I especially wish to acknowledge Professor Drummond, Dr. Elisabeth Kinder for the valuable assistance she gave

me at the Bundesarchiv and since, Professor Harold J. Gordon, Jr. of the University of Massachusetts who showed a deep and definite interest in this study, and, of course, my wife Jean who helped with her time, assistance, encouragement, infinite patience, and love.

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HITLER'S POLITICAL OFFICERS: THE NATIONAL
SOCIALIST LEADERSHIP OFFICERS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Compromise

In 1938 General Ludwig Beck said that although the basis for the German army at that time was national socialism, the nazi party should not be allowed to infiltrate the army since this could only lead to the disruption and eventually the destruction of the army.¹ Beck, who would lose his life in the abortive July 20, 1944, coup d'etat against Hitler, showed a duality in the thinking of leading German generals which would haunt them to the day of the final destruction of the German army--and beyond. Granting a need for nazism while attempting to resist the nazi party's

¹Karl Demeter, The German Officer Corps in Society and State 1650-1945, trans. Angus Malcolm (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965), p. 203. Cited from Beck's papers in the Bundesarchiv--Militararchiv, Koblenz. Beck was appointed Chief of the Truppenamt, cover name for the illegal General Staff, on October 1, 1933. He became Chief of the General Staff when Hitler brought that institution into the open in 1935 and resigned in August 1938 in protest over Hitler's policies. He then became a leader of the resistance movement.

penetration into the army, the German generals fell into a trap largely of their own making. Beck's concept proved impossible of fulfillment as nazism progressively stalked its prey with the purpose of at least controlling political matters in the army. The German army attempted to preserve the Prussian traditions of honor and obedience and the Seecktian² ideals of political non-involvement within a nation which increasingly surrendered its freedom and conscience to the N.S.D.A.P. (National Socialist German Worker's Party--the nazi party). Starting with Hitler's assumption of power at the beginning of 1933, the soldiers and the party both compromised, but on the military side the generals could never seem to solve their duality in thinking. Within eleven years the total victory of nazism over the German army would lie in sight for the party with the institution of the National Socialist Führungs Offizier (National Socialist Leadership Officer). The NSFO represented the strong arm of the party within the ranks of the army itself,³ and through the NSFO the party tried to gain a larger share of control over the German army. However, the new institution itself manifested a compromise--a pale image of the Soviet political commissar, the Politruk,

²General Hans von Seeckt was head of the Reichswehr (the name of the German army during the Weimar regime) from 1920 to 1926. Seeckt was often referred to as the father of the Reichswehr.

³The NSFO was established in all of the armed forces, but this paper primarily concerns the army.

blended with the traditional Prussian system. The NSFO, having no veto power over commanders, had as his responsibility the fanatical nazification of the German soldier. This study will trace the struggle between Prussian military ideals and the nazification of the German army and will evaluate the significance of the NSFO within this battleground.

Tradition in the German Army

When Hitler assumed power as Chancellor in January 1933 the Prussianized German army had strong traditional customs, but even these practices allowed for the political indoctrination of soldiers. In the Prussian reform period of the early nineteenth century, the army's training task, as indicated in rather primitive textbooks, included awakening young men to a Christian and patriotic spirit. In October 1896 Emperor Wilhelm II decided to present a medal to every soldier, sailor, and civil servant to commemorate the centenary of the birth of his grandfather, Wilhelm I. His chancellor, Hohenlohe, objected, saying that socialists among the soldiers would not appreciate the decoration. The Kaiser, as Supreme War Lord, took this as a serious insult to the army and claimed that the army had the capacity of converting the overwhelming majority of "'potential socialists because of its grand ideals, its educational influence, and the ethical and religious vitality which it

provides."⁴ In 1905 the commanding general of the XVIII Army Corps, General Hermann von Eichhorn, instructed his officers and noncommissioned officers that they must open the eyes and the thoughts of soldiers to the surrounding world. This, he ordered, would include instruction in German history and the great men of the Fatherland as well as political questions of state.⁵ During World War I "Officers for Fatherland Instruction" carried out an indoctrination program to counter enemy propaganda efforts,⁶ and during the German "revolution" after the armistice in November 1918, the High Command instituted "Education Officers" (Bildungsoffiziere) to offset the revolution's disruptive tendencies in the army.⁷ Thus even before Hitler's dictatorship the army had used methods for implanting ideas in the minds of the troops in order to increase their effectiveness. Before World War I the army's leaders carried this idea to such extremes that they feared technology and

⁴BAK, Boetticher Papers, Folder 23, Kaiser to Hohenlohe, December 6, 1896.

⁵Otto Graf zu Stolberg-Wernigerode, Die unentschiedene Generation: Deutschlands konservative Führungsschichten am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1968), p. 335. Cited from Demeter, Das deutsche Offizierkorps, p. 291ff and Höhn, Die Armee als Erziehungsschule, p. 413ff.

⁶NAM, T78, Roll 135, Frame 6064910.

⁷Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939), p. 289. This English version translated "Bildungsoffizier" as "Instruction Officer."

rearmament would irreparably damage the spirit of officers and men; they expected everything from the spiritual forces of the soldiers and above all from the highly developed sense of honor of the officers.⁸

The historical concept of a German officer's honor was medieval, aristocratic, and linked with monarchism. However, the heavy sacrifices in World War I, followed by the experience of the 1918 revolution, exerted strong forces toward raising the principle of absolute obedience to a level higher than the concept of honor. The struggle for life and death turned absolute obedience into a supreme and unqualified value, and officers from the old Imperial Army, led by General Hans von Seeckt, based their whole thought and feelings as soldiers on a directive from Seeckt which based honor on obedience.⁹ Little by little after 1918 officers fixed their devotion more and more on authority--first that of Seeckt and then that of Field Marshal Paul von Beneckendorff und Hindenburg when the latter became President of the Reich. When Hindenburg died and the generals acquiesced in Hitler's assumption of the supreme office of Germany, it became highly probable that obedience to Hitler would soon override all else--including the

⁸Stolberg-Wernigerode, Generation, p. 321. Cited from L. Rüdiger von Collenberg, "Fürst Bülow und die Entwicklung der deutschen Wehrmacht," in Front wider Bülow, p. 159ff.

⁹Demeter, German Officer Corps, pp. 147-48.

personal and collective honor of the officer corps. When the army took its oath of loyalty to the person of the Führer, it became even more probable. Nonetheless, the officer corps expected to retain its traditions.

The officers, led by their generals, wanted to maintain the army's position as the pillar of the state.¹⁰ Their traditions and prejudices had changed little since the days of the unification of Germany, and aristocrats still dominated the corps.¹¹ The officers' traditional contempt for the lower classes and civilians in general caused much of the ensuing difficulties between them and the nazis. In addition, they wished to be left alone to run things in the traditional ways they knew and loved. Through the teachings of Seeckt the army prided itself in remaining nonpolitical, and this factor helped it to fall easy prey to a thoroughly political animal like Hitler.¹² Some of the officers never accepted the nazi weltanschauung as a way of life while others never grasped that something really different had perhaps occurred with the advent of nazism,¹³ and there existed in the collective thinking of the officer corps an incredible duality.

¹⁰Telford Taylor, Sword and Swastika: Generals and Nazis in the Third Reich (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), p. 371.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 16-19.

¹²B. H. Liddell Hart, The German Generals Talk (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1948), p. 18.

¹³Demeter, German Officer Corps, pp. 360-61. From

In spite of the apolitical stance of the officers, they still considered the army as the central basis for the state and the educator of German youth.¹⁴ Leaning on past glory and customs, the officer corps was not prepared to meet the challenge of nazism; however, others saw the basic problem. As early as 1931, Dr. Julius Leber, a parliamentary specialist of the Social Democratic Party and later a leading member of the resistance against Hitler, said that he feared that Seeckt had made an enormous mistake in believing that discipline and obedience were enough to make an army function properly. He did not think that any unit at that time placed itself without reservation in its commander's hands. Nazism had found strong support in the army, he said, because the nazis offered them something the Republic had not offered.¹⁵ Such a statement, two years before Hitler's assumption of power, indicated that the nazis had already made remarkable inroads into the Reichswehr.

a photographic copy of a document supplied by Dr. H. A. Jacobsen, original in the so-called "Kaltenbrunner Papers" on the attempted assassination of 20 July 1944 (Washington: Microfilm [Demeter failed to define his source further]). General Hans Oster made this statement to the Gestapo (Secret State Police) during an interrogation.

¹⁴Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 371.

¹⁵Demeter, German Officer Corps, p. 195. Cited from Dorothea Gröner-Geyer, General Gröner, Soldat und Staatsmann (Frankfurt a.M.: n.p., 1955), p. 276f.

Nazi Inroads into the Reichswehr

Nazism had already captured many of the rank and file as well as receiving support from some Reichswehr leaders. Army commanders in Bavaria had launched Hitler on his road to political demagoguery in 1919 when, looking for "political officers" to bolster soldiers' morale during the Red panic there, they made Corporal Hitler an "Education Officer." Hitler claimed that he brought "many hundreds, probably thousands" of soldiers "back to the Fatherland" through his lectures.¹⁶ As the years progressed, he also made inroads into the officer corps. For example, in 1923, shortly before Hitler's attempted putsch in Munich, many young officers attending the Infantry School in the Bavarian capitol adhered to the nazi movement. A Lieutenant Leist, a young Prussian officer from Magdeburg, wrote his battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Freiherr Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord (a future successor to Seeckt and Commander-in-Chief of the Army for the first year of the nazi regime), of the conflict of conscience he suffered between his nazi sympathies and his sworn duty; he described the passionate and vehement debates which had occurred over the revolt against Seecktian policies by pro-nazi officers in Bavaria. By openly supporting Hitler in his threats against the Berlin regime, the Bavarian Reichswehr had

¹⁶Hitler, Mein Kampf, pp. 289-90.

fallen under an edict pronounced by Seeckt at a time when the Bavarian government also stood in near revolt against Berlin. When Leist and a couple of companions made known their unqualified support for the Chief of the Reichswehr, the vast majority of officers present broke out into "child-like enthusiasm" for the Bavarian regime and the nazis and called Leist and his friends "red dogs" who sympathized with the "Jewish regime" in Berlin. Leist explained to Hammerstein his own national sympathy for nazism as the expected salvation of the Reich but held it as his honorable duty, because of his oath, to support the Berlin regime even though he detested the entire Weimar system. Pitifully he asked his commander to either suggest a way out of his dilemma or to recall him to his battalion. Hammerstein's telegraphic answer: "Obey Prussian principles" (i.e., Obey Seeckt).¹⁷ Allegedly garrisons existed even before 1933 where every officer espoused nazism. One of these was the Potsdam garrison, the very heir to the traditions of the Prussian Guards; and the Berlin War Academy, commanded by a nazi sympathizer, contained a large group of passionate supporters of nazism. Even many officers of the older generation felt an attraction for the nazi movement.¹⁸

¹⁷ Thilo Volgelsang, "Die Reichswehr in Bayern und der Münchner Putsch," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte (January 1957), pp. 95-97. Document from Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Nachlass Schleicher, Bd. 17/1, fol. p. 9ff.

¹⁸ Demeter, German Officer Corps, p. 196. Cited from Oster's interrogation.

Regardless of the contemptuous attitude of most leading generals toward the nazis, Hitler offered something which even they could not ignore--the possibility of expansion of the army and the resurrection of Germany as a dominant power in Europe. Also there were certainly some who were not immune from the attraction of conquest or even the nazi racial theories. Seeckt himself had written a memorandum in 1915 urging Germany's expansion at Russia's expense--even if it meant expelling twenty million Jews and Slavs and losing a million of the best German soldiers. Whether Seeckt retained this attitude during the time of the Weimar regime or not is unimportant; it approached Hitler's theories of lebensraum, anti-semitism, and a German master race and showed that even a Prussian general might go along with Hitler's ideas. The main point of departure between Reichswehr leaders and Hitler at this time appeared to be in methods and timing.¹⁹ Secure in the thought that they held the upper hand, and believing they were safe from any nazi infringement on military traditions, the leaders of the army encouraged Hindenburg to appoint Hitler Chancellor of Germany.

Army Leaders and Hitler

On January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor, but before he could subordinate the army to his will,

¹⁹Louis Fischer, Russia's Road from Peace to War: Soviet Foreign Relations, 1917-1941 (New York: Harper &

he had to secure its loyalty since the soldiers had the power to oust him if they so wished. His first real opportunity arose from the Röhm affair. Ernst Röhm (Chief of Staff of the Sturm Abteilung--SA) wanted to continue the "nazi revolution" and reduce the army to the status of a people's militia while his politically indoctrinated storm troopers became the elite bearer of German arms. This presented Hitler with a dilemma. He needed the army's support while he consolidated his regime, but he also owed his status in Germany, at least in part, to those members of the SA who had loyally served him during the difficult days before the Machtergreifung (seizure of power).

Whether Hitler basically opposed Röhm's plans is difficult to say, but if he did agree with the SA Chief the time had not yet come. Hitler apparently felt it more expedient at the moment to maintain the traditional army as a pillar of the state since he needed professionals to rearm and expand the army--to ready it for war. Besides, it was questionable whether the rank and file of the SA wanted to serve as the arms bearer of the nation anyway, and it was perhaps more questionable whether they were capable of acting in that capacity. If an SA Standarte (unit) in the lower Rhineland is any guage of the SA at that time, the answer would be a resounding no! In the entire Standarte only one

Row, Publishers, 1969), p. 181. Cited from Francis L. Carsten, Reichswehr und Politik: 1918-1923 (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1964), p. 257.

SA Leader had had a military career in the Reichswehr. The world war veterans were either too old or had secure civilian jobs which they would not have traded for a military career. Further, many SA men were unmoved by the assassination of Röhm.²⁰ In any event Hitler, perhaps fearing that the army might overthrow his regime or conceivably because of his own devious reasons, offered to subdue the SA in return for the presidency upon Hindenburg's death which was expected soon. Senior members of the armed forces were concerned over the SA revolutionary threat, so they agreed unanimously to the proposal.²¹ On June 30, 1934, Hitler acted. In a bloody purge of the SA, Röhm was murdered. The leading generals and Hindenburg approved of the Chancellor's action, and on August 1, 1934, when Hindenburg died, Hitler claimed his reward. On August 2 he combined the offices of President and Chancellor, and on that day members of the armed forces swore a personal oath of unconditional obedience to the new German Führer. After the purge Hitler reportedly said that he would end the external aspects of the revolution while it would continue covertly until he was able to proceed more openly.²²

²⁰Letter, Captain of Reserves Karl Ducoffre, a.D., September 21, 1972. Ducoffre was the leader of the SA in Dormagen, Niederrhein.

²¹John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945, Viking Compass ed. (New York: The Viking Press, 1967), pp. 312-20.

²²Alan Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny,

Publically, however, he announced that only the army would bear arms and that it would stay out of politics.²³ Nearly all Germans now acclaimed the Führer as the savior of Germany, and a plebiscite overwhelmingly approved his assumption of Hindenburg's office; however, he still needed the support of the generals.²⁴ He believed that Hindenburg, who had been patronizing and unfriendly, had appointed General Werner von Blomberg as Defense Minister in order to guard the state against the nazis,²⁵ and he must have known of the contempt most generals showed for politics, especially nazi politics, and for him personally since Heinrich Himmler's Gestapo maintained a discreet surveillance over the generals. The army had real power and would have even more after it rearmed, so before imposing his will, Hitler had to tread carefully and win over the generals by giving them what they wanted: a large and powerful army; freedom from the Versailles Treaty; faster promotions; prestige and respect; and a rightful place in Europe for Germany.²⁶ Meanwhile Hitler acted respectably

rev. ed., Harper Torchbooks (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 774. Cited from Hermann Rauschnig, Hitler Speaks (London: n.p., 1939), p. 176.

²³Ibid., p. 307

²⁴Liddell Hart, Generals Talk, p. 281.

²⁵Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis, p. 289.

²⁶Taylor, Sword and Swastika, pp. 113-14.

and played the waiting game with complete success until he felt strong enough to make his first assault on the army.

For the next few years Hitler wooed the armed forces with daring political moves, shrewd military personnel policies, and an air of respectability. In 1935 he denounced the Versailles Treaty and unveiled the Luftwaffe, and the following year Germany occupied the Rhineland. On his forty-seventh birthday in 1936, Hitler bought the souls of several leading generals; he gave Blomberg the baton of a field marshal, made Freiherr Werner von Fritsch (the Commander-in-Chief of the Army since Hammerstein's resignation in January 1934) a colonel general, and during the next two days he distributed honors reminiscent of imperial splendor.²⁷ By this time the age of field grade officers had fallen to 1914 levels; several thousand retired officers had been recalled; the number of generals had quadrupled; and the number of colonels had tripled. Meanwhile, rearmament sped ahead while open and latent opposition to Hitler withered. Many of those who had maintained a cool reserve or a "wait and see" attitude publically avowed loyalty.²⁸ The Führer left promotion of officers, judgments of courts-martial, planning, and operations completely in army hands until January 1938, and he

²⁷Taylor, Sword and Swastika, pp. 115-17.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 113-14.

received briefings on exercises without comment or criticism while showing complete confidence in the generals. He gave the impression that he looked on the earlier days of terror and gangsterism with repugnance.²⁹ The generals truly believed they held the upper hand and felt they had little to lose in making concessions to the nazis. Besides, they had much to gain. However, the game could be played two ways.

Rearmament and expansion decreased the ability of the army to withstand the nazi onslaught by weakening the stable base of the former unanimously professional Reichswehr.³⁰ The rapid introduction of universal military service and the expansion of the army allowed Hitler to base the army on a broader class of society than previously and more readily allowed him the opportunity to align it with national socialist ideas. This began in the lower ranks but worked its way upward into the higher ranks especially during the war. The generals, out of touch with the revolutionary spirit and fanatical faith of youth, stood for tradition which isolated them from public affairs, and their discipline and loyalty to their oath checked any real

²⁹Robert J. O'Neill, The German Army and the Nazi Party: 1933-1939 (New York: James H. Heineman, Inc., 1966), pp. 15-16, n. 15. Information provided by General Friedrich Hossbach, Hitler's army adjutant between 1934-1938.

³⁰Liddell Hart, Generals Talk, pp. 87-89. Based on remarks made by General Röhricht after the war.

move to counter the nazi Führer.³¹ After World War II General Günther Blumentritt admitted that the generals might have been fools when it came to politics, but he felt that tradition had made them that way and they should not try to be anything else.³² Attitudes of this nature assisted the advance of nazism.

The key figures of Hitler's army from 1934 to 1938 were Blomberg as Defense Minister, Fritsch as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and Beck, the Chief of the Army General Staff. Blomberg, after a visit to Russia in the late 1920s, had admired the prestige the Red Army held in the eyes of the Soviet proletariat. What impressed him most was that the Soviet generals got what they wanted. As early as 1930 he perceived in Hitler a man who could do for the German army what Stalin had done for the Soviet army, and Hitler and his doctrines made a deep imprint on him. Though Blomberg thought he was taking the army--like Seeckt before him--out of the political arena in which Schleicher had placed it,³³ he would nonetheless allow enough nazi indoctrination to strengthen the army's spirit

³¹Demeter, German Officer Corps, pp. 5-6.

³²Gordon A. Craig, "Army and National Socialism 1933-1945: The Responsibility of the Generals," World Politics 2 (April 1950): 437. Blumentritt's comments were made after the war.

³³Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis, pp. 296-300. General Kurt von Schleicher was a former Chancellor whom the nazis murdered during the SA purge.

and discipline.³⁴ Fritsch considered himself as the chosen guardian of the Seeckt tradition. Contemptuous of nazism, he nevertheless admired its achievements; his contemporaries widely considered him as the one who would toss out the nazis if their experiment failed. The Commander-in-Chief of the Army attributed nazi excesses to their youthful vigor, and the end of the SA threat meant for him an end to nazi lawlessness. He believed the army could stand above and remain immune from the nazi experiment; meanwhile it could lay the groundwork for a new German order based on Prussian traditionalism.³⁵ Not beyond allowing some nazification to placate the Party, Beck, a future leader of the German resistance to Hitler, had shown as early as a trial of young nazi officers from his regiment in 1930 that, although no nazi himself, he might allow the nazis to conduct their political experiment.³⁶ The obedient General Wilhelm Keitel fell completely under Hitler's spell and received the rank of field marshal. General Walther von Reichenau, Blomberg's chief of the Armed Forces Ministerial Office and a democratic-minded aristocrat, strongly supported Hitler and like Röhm openly favored a nazi-indoctrinated people's army.³⁷ However, even he was upset

³⁴NAM, T77, Roll 797, Frame 5528470.

³⁵Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis, pp. 302-4.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 296-300.

³⁷Ibid., p. 301.

over Röhm's ideas of using the SA as the foundation stone for such an army.³⁸ He would later receive his reward in the form of a field marshal's baton. Blomberg and Reichenau cooperated with Hitler, and Keitel did as he was told; Hammerstein (before his resignation), Fritsch, and Beck maintained a cool reserve. The stance of these officers reflected the divided opinion throughout the officer corps which hindered any decisive policy vis-à-vis the nazis, yet under their leadership, nazification of the army had started even before the purge of the SA.

Preliminary Moves

Nazification began in February 1933, within thirty days after Hitler became Chancellor. With Hindenburg's approval, Blomberg made plans for the adoption of the nazi party eagle and swastika as insignia on Wehrmacht uniforms. The donning of the new insignia on May Day 1934 publically identified the army with national socialism.³⁹ The military ceremony at the Potsdam Garrison Church on the occasion of the opening of the new Reichstag on March 21, 1933, though meant to publicize the strong place of the army in the nazi state, had already signified to the rank and file that the army leaders accepted nazism to the fullest extent. At this ceremony Hitler showered profound deference and

³⁸Taylor, Sword and Swastika, p. 76.

³⁹Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis, p. 312.

respect on Hindenburg, the army, and the absent Kaiser.⁴⁰ But when the army donned the swastika, a veritable avalanche of instructions, intended to placate the nazis and strengthen the army's spirit and discipline, poured forth from the High Command. Regardless of intent, these directives showed the more far-reaching effect of allowing the party to get its foot in the door. On May 25th Blomberg issued a decree to all the armed forces on the "Wehrmacht and National-Socialism" which, he directed, would form the basis for instruction in all service schools. It directed a sweeping away of class barriers, more democratic contacts between officers and men, and identified the fate of the German people with nazism.⁴¹ That same day Fritsch issued a new version of "The Duties of the German Soldier," signed by Hindenburg, which made it clear that the army identified itself with nazism.⁴² Regardless of these public avowals of loyalty to the nazi cause, however, there was a clear distinction in the minds of some officers between the person of Hitler and national socialism.

As early as August 1934 this distinction was being made. Colonel Franz Halder (later Chief of the Army General

⁴⁰O'Neill, German Army, p. 63.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 64-65.

⁴²Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis, p. 314. For the text see Karl Demeter, German Officer Corps in Society and State 1650-1945, trans. Angus Malcolm (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965), app. 33, p. 363.

Staff) wrote a letter to Beck in which he called Hitler's acts pure and idealistic; however, he believed that Hitler was being betrayed by the incompetent and useless party organizations. He thought that the Röhm revolt was not the only sickness the army would have to face.⁴³ Halder's prophetic voice was lost amidst the public declarations by members of the High Command, and he would later discover that he had sadly misjudged Hitler. This devotion to the person of Hitler while denigrating or showing contempt for the party would exist as a constantly recurring theme in the minds of thousands of soldiers and officers until the very end in 1945.

While the High Command was willing to use nazism to enhance military discipline and spirit, to Hitler, nazification signified a full indoctrination of the armed forces for ideological reasons as a means to gain total obedience to his will; furthermore, the Führer and the party did not oppose each other as Halder believed. When Rudolf Hess, the Chief of the Party Chancellery until 1940, opened the nazi party Congress in September 1934, he said that "the law of totality" (i.e., total submission to the party) would guide all future nazi policy. Hitler himself informed the congress that he had unlimited power and that only tactical, personal, and therefore temporary motives

⁴³Demeter, German Officer Corps, p. 203. Cited from Beck's Papers.

would inhibit his future actions.⁴⁴ Both nazis thus made it clear that neither Hitler nor the party would accept anything short of total domination of Germany and her institutions, and the Führer revealed that he would play a waiting game or even disguise his intent while the party drove onwards toward the nazi goal of domination.

Confident that they would retain military control and their traditional command and staff structure, the generals continued to cooperate. In 1935-36 the army established reading rooms for the troops, and the state allotted funds for stocking them with the Völkischer Beobachter (the official party newspaper) and other "approved" periodicals. The reading rooms also contained large numbers of books and pamphlets published by Joseph Goebbel's Propaganda Ministry.⁴⁵ On January 30, 1936, Blomberg ordered expanded political instruction in service schools and army units, and the party assisted with the program and gave the military teachers special instruction. This would later prove to be a significant precedent when the NSFO came along. By 1937 party officials conducted courses for army units⁴⁶ and constantly extended their

⁴⁴Karl Dietrich Bracher, The German Dictatorship: The Origins Structure and Effects of National Socialism, trans. Jean Steinberg (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 246. Cited from Der Kongress zu Nürnberg vom 5.-6. September 1934 (München: n.p., 1934), pp. 18, 22-24.

⁴⁵O'Neill, German Army, pp. 73-74. Information on reading rooms from Wehrkreis VII, file 2306.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 71.

influence. Each year Hitler, Himmler, and other party leaders spoke to officers attending political courses, and the party occasionally succeeded in quietly getting rid of uncooperative generals.⁴⁷ By the end of 1937 many SA and SS (Schutzstaffeln--Defense Detachments) personnel in the army reported to party superiors on their company commanders and officers until Blomberg succeeded in persuading Hitler to order that such practices cease.⁴⁸ Successful protests against party violations of traditional military concepts seemed to lull the generals into a false sense of security, and they retired more and more from involvement in political questions. This cost them severely; in 1938 the Führer struck, and the generals learned quickly that their control of the army was no longer absolute.

⁴⁷Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff: 1657-1945, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1953), p. 304.

⁴⁸NAM, T77, Roll 707, Frames 5527586-87.

CHAPTER II

NAZIFICATION AND THE WAR OF IDEOLOGY

The Blomberg-Fritsch Affair and the Reorganization of the Wehrmacht

Until early 1938 Hitler had lulled the generals into thinking they held the upper hand, but in January he began to stamp his personal imprint on the armed forces. Suddenly he procured Blomberg's resignation because of a "disgraceful marriage." The generals accepted this since the Defense Minister had all too willingly played the Nazi tune and had tarnished the honor of the officer corps by marrying a woman of questionable background. Then nearly simultaneously the other shoe fell when Hitler relieved Fritsch for alleged homosexuality. While the supporters of the army's Commander-in-Chief waited indignantly for the announcement of Fritsch's innocence by a Court of Honor, Hitler incorporated Austria into the Reich. In the joyous hullabaloo which followed, Fritsch's innocence hardly mattered in a nation which considered its leader a latter day Charlemagne, Luther, Frederick the Great, Napoleon, Bismarck, and perhaps Christ, all rolled into one. Upon Blomberg's departure, Hitler personally took over command

of the armed forces, reorganized them to his own satisfaction, appointed General Walter von Brauchitsch as army Commander-in-Chief, relieved sixteen high ranking generals from their commands, transferred forty-four others plus a host of other senior officers, and distributed promotions left and right. Sixteen higher generals and twelve more at lower levels received promotions.¹ Brauchitsch himself became a Colonel General.² It was a policy of using the carrot and the stick. Now the army was lowered to the same level as the navy and the air force under the direction of a joint headquarters, Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW--High Command of the Armed Forces), commanded personally by Adolf Hitler. The belated but quiet restoration of Fritsch's honor appeared to satisfy the supporters of the ex-Commander-in-Chief, and Hitler's prestige stood at an all time high.

Further bloodless victories added to the Führer's prestige. The deliverance of the Sudetenland to Germany that same year coupled with Hitler's victory over Britain and France at Munich in spite of dire warnings from timorous generals, secured another victory for Hitler over the military. Under the circumstances, the generals found

¹Telford Taylor, Sword and Swastika: Generals and Nazis in the Third Reich (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), pp. 168-73.

²John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, The German Army in Politics 1918-1945, Viking Compass ed. (New York: The Viking Press, 1967), p. 372.

themselves trapped by Hitler's proven success, his prestige among the people and within the army itself, and by the sacred oath they had personally given the dictator. The year 1938 had shown the officer corps that the army no longer dominated the state.

Hitler had prepared the ground well during the first five years of the nazi regime, and he could now increasingly stamp his personal mark on the army while Himmler and Martin Bormann (Deputy to Rudolf Hess until the latter's flight to England in 1940, whereupon he became Chief of the Party Chancellery) waited in the wings. Himmler, the real victor in the SA purge, had risen rapidly in influence and at the time of the Blomberg-Fritsch affair already appeared as a future challenger to the army's position. Bormann's day would arrive with the institution of the NSFO, but now Himmler's SS loomed as the immediate threat to the army.

Halder had indeed shown perception in August 1934 when he foresaw danger to the army from sources other than Röhm and the SA. As early as June of that year, the SS Chief had started the movement toward creating his own military force. The views of Röhm, Himmler, and Bormann differed little insofar as each aimed to increase his personal influence in the armed forces. Where Röhm failed, Himmler would largely succeed through the Waffen-SS (Armed-SS) and his own growing importance. Bormann, the last man

standing in his way, would play his card with the NSFO. Meanwhile Himmler, using the theme that the army had held itself aloof from direct participation in the 1934 SA purge, convinced Hitler that several regiments of SS troops should be created to carry out domestic police actions. The Führer obtained Blomberg's concurrence easily since the army had no wish to perform such duties, and thus the direct ancestors of the Waffen-SS, the SS-Verfügungstruppen (SS General Service Troops), came into being as a possible Trojan horse for SS invasion of the military sphere. By 1938 the Waffen-SS had become a separate military force--theoretically equal in status to the army. Himmler's part in the Fritsch affair spurred General Beck to try to stop the SS Chief's activities, but he got nowhere when Brauchitsch, the army's new Commander-in-Chief, refused to back him.³

The choice for Commander-in-Chief in 1938 fell between Brauchitsch and Reichenau, but the senior generals opposed the latter as being too closely attuned to nazism. Even Keitel, according to General Alfred Jodl, felt that Reichenau's appointment would constitute "the third, and most intolerable, shock to the army" after the Blomberg-Fritsch scandals; both Jodl and Keitel believed Brauchitsch could help the army pass through the shock to its honor.⁴

³Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis, p. 392.

⁴Taylor, Sword and Swastika, pp. 168-70. Cited

The officer corps trusted Brauchitsch, and Hitler probably appointed him to inspire confidence after the army's recent degradation--he would also be easy to handle.⁵ In return for his new job, Brauchitsch agreed to the reorganization of the Wehrmacht which downgraded the army, to the retirement of tradition-minded generals, and to the promotion of high-ranking officers who were either pro-nazi or friendly to Hitler. The officer corps, still in shock, failed to recognize the situation for what it was--a power play by Hitler.

The years between 1938 and the invasion of Russia brought German domination of Europe, glory and prestige for Hitler, and an increasingly subservient officer corps. The conquest of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and France took place as Hitler prodded the generals along--often against their own ideas of what was feasible. Some of the generals saw that Hitler was leading Germany into a war she might lose, and they began making secret plans for a revolt, but their plans always fizzled as time and time again Hitler's judgment proved correct. Ulrich von Hassell, a noted German diplomat destined to lose his life after the "20th of July revolt" (July 20, 1944, when an attempted assassination of Hitler failed which set off a string of executions

from the unpublished Diary of General Alfred Jodl, 1937-1942.

⁵B. H. Liddell Hart, The German Generals Talk (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1948), pp. 31-32.

and nazi revenge), knew many of the generals personally. In January 1939 he commented that Brauchitsch carried little weight with Hitler. Brauchitsch told Hassell on January 26, in reference to the SA, SS, and the army, that only time would tell which would gain the upper hand.⁶ His statement ably described his thought processes--he would take things as they came but would not intervene to change fate. In October Hassell said that Halder, Beck's replacement as Chief of Staff, held little power, and that he had the jitters.⁷ During the battle in France in May 1940, the aristocratic diplomat wrote perceptibly that the army leadership was not getting proper recognition for its contribution to the military victories and declared that this would mean the end of the old tradition.⁸

The generals would not willingly overthrow all of their principles in favor of nazism, but if they could combine both, the army could have the best of two worlds --a disciplined force inspired by a political ideology. For the moment this suited Hitler and would provide a basis for the forthcoming NSFO concept; however, the marriage of Prussian tradition and nazi ideology still had a long way to go. In the spring of 1939 Hermann Göring (the

⁶Ulrich von Hassell, The Von Hassell Diaries: 1938-1944 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1947), pp. 34-35.

⁷Ibid., p. 68.

⁸Ibid., p. 139.

Head of the Luftwaffe and Hitler's designated successor), as senior officer of the Wehrmacht, even felt it necessary to upbraid the army in a speech to high-ranking military leaders for its non-nazi traditions,⁹ and even on Hitler's OKW staff after the 1938 reorganization of the armed forces, the only department head who wholeheartedly supported nazism was General Hermann Reinecke of the General Army Office (Allgemeines Heeresamt). Other department chiefs had misgivings of some sort, felt anger at the nazis, or had outright anti-nazi sentiment.¹⁰ Reinecke's reward came later with his appointment as Chief of the OKW National Sozialist Führungs Stab (National Socialist Leadership Staff--part of the NSFO system). Hitler was determined, however, to force his will on the generals.

The Führer increasingly made his views known after the Blomberg-Fritsch affair. On January 30, 1939, he delivered a speech to senior generals in which he strongly criticized the frequent pessimism in the Army High Command concerning his military plans. He also attacked the intellectualism which had existed in the army since the days of Field Marshal Graf Alfred von Schlieffen, the famous Chief of the General Staff at the turn of the century. He

⁹Field-Marshal Erich von Manstein, Lost Victories, trans. Anthony G. Powell (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1958), p. 77.

¹⁰Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff: 1657-1945, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1953), p. 323.

demanded an immediate and complete change and said that only men who had faith in him should receive commissions as officers. He further stated that he had charged Brauchitsch with giving the officer corps a new purpose.¹¹ Hitler's remarks could not have fallen on deaf ears. An attack on Schlieffen, a man revered by German officers, could only signify the Führer's desire to downgrade Prussian military traditions and establish nazism as the basis for German military life. The speech also brought into the open his distrust of the generals and his distaste for their caste arrogance. Hitler's prestige, and thus his increasing ability to dominate the army, increased daily as he triumphed at Munich, entered Prague as a conqueror, defeated Poland while French and British soldiers faced a small German defensive force in the west, prostrated France in six weeks, and ran the British off the continent of Europe. The criticisms and dire warnings of some of the generals made them look ridiculous even in their own eyes. Above all, however, Hitler's diplomatic and military success caused planned revolts to collapse time after time. Hitler's long gift of being right overwhelmed opposition in the army and gave him an advantage over his military advisors.¹² Nazification now moved to a new phase; so far,

¹¹Walter Goerlitz, ed., The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Keitel, trans. David Irving (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 246.

¹²Liddell Hart, Generals Talk, p. 4.

warfare had followed traditional lines, but now a war of ideologies began.

The Invasion of the Soviet Union

Hitler's mind frequently turned toward the Soviet Union because he believed that in the future, Europe would be dominated by either Germany or the Soviet Union. Although admiring and respecting Stalin for his accomplishments, he nevertheless believed that either he or Stalin must crush the other. Russia had had her revolution, and an elite, the communist party, ruled the Soviet Union and controlled the Soviet army; Hitler saw the advantages of such a system and desired a similar one for Germany. A war between the two nations meant for him a battle of ideology with the annihilation of the loser. The war--a fight to the finish without quarter--would decide who would rule the weakened capitalistic Europe, and a millenium would result.¹³ On March 17, 1941, Hitler summoned his generals to the Chancellery and laid down the rules for "Operation Barbarossa," the invasion of Russia. He announced that the days of chivalry had ended; the coming war with the U.S.S.R. would be one of ideology. Insulting those present by saying that such ideas were incomprehensible to generals, he demanded that they rid themselves of

¹³H. R. Trevor-Roper, Introduction to Hitler's Table Talk, by Adolf Hitler, trans. Norman Cameron and R. H. Stevens (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1953), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

their obsolete theories of warfare and carry out his orders to the letter. He then ordered the liquidation of captured Soviet army commissars (the Politruk) and suspended military law concerning responsibility for war crimes by German soldiers.¹⁴ No one present openly objected, but privately after the conference, several generals reproached Keitel for not preventing Hitler's issuance of these orders. Yet, they themselves had said nothing. Keitel claimed that if he had resigned over such an issue, Hitler would have replaced him with Himmler which would have produced even more disastrous consequences for the army.¹⁵ As it was, Himmler became deeply involved.

On May 13, 1941, Keitel signed an order, in the name of Hitler, entrusting the SS Chief with the administration of the rear area.¹⁶ In this sealed off area, after the German army had stabbed deeply into the U.S.S.R., the SS carried out the nazi racial policies and the terror

¹⁴Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis, p. 513. See p. 512n as to the controversial date of the conference; also see Goerlitz, Keitel, pp. 134-36.

¹⁵Goerlitz, Keitel, pp. 249, 252.

¹⁶William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), pp. 831-32. Keitel issued several directives on May 13, 1941, one of which was the order suspending courts-martial in the case of summary executions and other offenses committed against enemy civilians in the U.S.S.R. Text of directive contained in U.S., Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, 8 vols., 2 supps. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), vol. 3, pp. 409-13. (Nuremberg Document 447-PS.)

ordered by Himmler. Knowledge of these acts, plus the scattered acceptance of the commissar order, made the German officer corps a collective fellow traveler if not an accessory to some of the worst excesses of national socialism; they committed the army to nazism, for better or worse, as no other previous nazification measure had done. In this affair, Prussian chivalry, honor, and morality suffered a heavy defeat at the hands of the nazis. Hitler brushed aside Keitel's objections with the comment that the field marshal should not be concerned; he was not responsible--only Hitler was!¹⁷

Hitler as Commander-in-Chief of the Army

By December 5, 1941, the German offensive had stalled. Although the German army stood on a line from Lake Ladoga to the Sea of Azov, Leningrad, Moscow, and Rostov still remained in Soviet hands. Soviet resistance had stiffened; then temperatures dropped to minus forty degrees Fahrenheit, and the German troops suffered severely from frostbite because of a shortage of winter clothing. Hitler had already publically claimed the destruction of the Soviet army. Even so, he reluctantly called off the German offensive, and the Teutonic armies settled down for the winter.¹⁸ Hitler used this first setback as an

¹⁷Goerlitz, Keitel, p. 28.

¹⁸Colonel Vincent J. Esposito, ed., The West Point Atlas of American Wars (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1959), vol. 2, maps 28-29, World War II.

opportunity for dismissing Brauchitsch as a scapegoat and to assume direct, supreme command of OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres--the Army High Command). As Commander-in-Chief of the Army, he relieved anyone who objected to his policies or who opposed him. Nazism now had the opportunity to infiltrate as never before, and the spectre of the SS loomed larger than ever.

That winter the struggle for military manpower began. Waffen-SS requirements climbed, and the "Black Order" siphoned off the cream of German youth while the army's protests to Hitler proved fruitless. As early as the Polish campaign the Waffen-SS Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler and at least one or two reinforced SS regiments had fought under army command, and the German forces initially invading Russia included at least two SS divisions,¹⁹ while others were newly organizing in the homeland or serving elsewhere. An OKH order of March 21, 1941, listed Hitler's goal for the Waffen-SS at 5-10 per cent of the peacetime strength of the army.²⁰ This limit, however, was far exceeded by the end of the war. Keitel claimed that many army replacements were untrained men who were rounded up

¹⁹Manstein, Lost Victories, pp. 34, 178, 210.

²⁰Karl O. Paetel, "Die SS: Ein Beitrag Zur Soziologie des Nationalsozialismus," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte (January 1954), pp. 10-11. Cited from OKH, Gen. St. D.H., Nr. 137/3.41g (I) dated 21.3.41 in International Military Tribunal, vol. 35, p. 355f.

anywhere they could be found.²¹ Hitler himself believed that volunteers at that time had to be enthusiastic national socialists and that they preferred to follow the spirit of national socialism in the SS or the Air Force instead of in the tradition-minded army.²² Clearly the Führer hated the Christian ethics and Prussian tradition of the professional soldiers. At the moment, however, he still needed them, and he frequently bemoaned the fact that he had insufficient SS leaders, whose spirit he liked, to replace the army leaders.²³ This attitude gives an inkling of his concept of command.

Hitler demanded nazi spirit as the main prerequisite for German leadership. When Hitler took over direct leadership of OKH, he told Halder that anyone could direct military operations, that the real task would be to train the army in nazism, but the Führer said he did not know of any general who could do this; that was why he had decided to take over command of the army himself.²⁴ To make the transition from an army based on Prussian tradition to one organized on nazi lines, the direct hand of Hitler was

²¹Goerlitz, Keitel, pp. 169-70.

²²Franz Halder, Hitler as War Lord, trans. Paul Findlay (London: Putnam, 1950), p. 7.

²³Ibid., p. 9.

²⁴Halder, Hitler as War Lord, p. 49. Hitler made this statement in a private conversation with Halder on December 19, 1941.

needed. Although some generals opposed his direct intervention and others plotted against him, most followed his orders without question. Those who did not slavishly follow his commands were dismissed. Within the next few months as the military setbacks in the U.S.S.R. continued, the Führer purged several higher commanders, to include field marshals and colonel generals plus lesser fry, and vented his uncontrollable anger on those closest to him in the military hierarchy--Keitel, Jodl, and Halder. After a stormy scene in September 1942, he replaced Halder as Chief of the General Staff with Colonel General Kurt Zeitzler. The toll included Field Marshals von Witzleben and von Bock, Colonel Generals Guderian and Hoepner, and more than thirty-five divisional and corps commanders returned home in disgrace.²⁵ Following his customary practice, Hitler would bring some of them back on active service once he felt they had learned their lesson, or, as more often happened, when he needed them. On dismissing Halder, the Führer told him privately that nazism would count more than military skill in the future and that he could not expect this from the traditional officer.²⁶ Once again Hitler had given a preview of the future.

²⁵Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis, pp. 525-26.

²⁶Halder, Hitler as War Lord, p. 58.

Stalingrad

On May 8, 1942, the Germans opened a new offensive in Russia. One of its main objectives was Stalingrad. Although the offensive began with great success, it ended nine months later in disaster. To begin with, the German army of 1942 was not the same army which had invaded the Soviet Union the year before. Losses had been heavy, and the army had suffered horribly through the winter of 1941-1942. In addition, the German army labored under the Führer's erratic and irresponsible leadership. His "military genius" and German supply problems soon came to Stalin's rescue, and by October the German momentum had withered. By November 7-8 the German troops had reached Stalingrad and the battle for the city was raging furiously. Two weeks later with the tide turning against the Germans, the commander of the 6th Army, General Friedrich Paulus, requested permission to break out of his encirclement at Stalingrad. Hitler refused. By February 2, 1943, the Russians had destroyed the 6th Army of approximately 300,000 men, leaving a gap in the German army which could never be refilled.²⁷ Catastrophes for German arms continued in North Africa and Sicily, and Göring's vaunted Luftwaffe, conspicuously absent in the European skies, could not

²⁷Esposito, West Point Atlas, maps 30-35. Goerlitz in the German General Staff lists the strength of the 6th Army at 320,000 men, p. 426.

prevent the Anglo-American air forces from dropping their bombs on the Reich in ever increasing numbers. Himmler's star (second now only to Bormann's) waxed in influence, and doubt and despondency settled upon Germany while a wave of arrests of Jews and dissidents took place.²⁸ The army conspirators accelerated their planning and believed they could count on the troops to follow them; yet they could not be sure since no one really knew to what extent nazism had infiltrated the ranks. So whether the troops could be counted on to support a military coup remained an open question.²⁹ Between September and December 1943 the conspirators attempted at least six times to kill the Führer, but each time fate intervened to save him and the war dragged on. Hitler had not expected a long war and consequently had never prepared for it. As a result, the German war machine slowed down because of critical shortages of raw materials, especially fuel;³⁰ Hitler, however, blamed the generals.

The military disasters held dire significance for the army. After the fall of Mussolini, Hitler, raging

²⁸Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis, p. 539. Cited from Ruth Andreas-Friedrich, Berlin Underground, 1939-1945 (London: n.p., 1948), pp. 78-81; and Hassell, Diaries, pp. 295-96.

²⁹Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis, p. 584. Cited from Fabian von Schlabrendorff, Offiziere gegen Hitler (Zürich: n.p., 1946), pp. 88-91.

³⁰"Playboy Interview: Albert Speer," Playboy, June 1971, p. 92.

against the international conspiracy of aristocrats, expelled most members of princely families from the army and, naming Himmler Minister of Interior, began a crack down on defeatism. Hitler labeled generals who presented him correct estimations of enemy forces as defeatists, and as a result, pro-nazi officers moved to positions of high rank in increasing numbers.³¹ This appeared to signal an attack on Prussian traditionalism. In fact, after the Allied invasion of Italy, Himmler confirmed in a meeting of SS-Group Leaders in Posen that a general attack on the officer corps had started. Stalin, he said, had shown shrewdness in executing Red Army generals, and the source of Russian strength, he believed, arose from the influence of the communist Politruk.³² In this war of ideology, the nazi ideologist par excellence, Alfred Rosenberg, had already inserted himself, and one of the definite steps toward the NSFO system now began.

Alfred Rosenberg

In 1934 Adolf Hitler had named Rosenberg as "Deputy of the Führer for the Supervision of the Entire Spiritual and Weltanschauung Schooling and Training of the N.S.D.A.P." This grandiose title apparently convinced its bearer that his ideological duties should extend beyond the ranks of

³¹Goerlitz, German General Staff, pp. 442-43.

³²Ibid., p. 446.

party and state and should also include the armed forces. On April 14, 1934, Blomberg fell in with this idea by asking Rosenberg to oversee the ideological training of the Wehrmacht. In practice, this invitation only resulted in Rosenberg's attendance at a few "national-political" speeches and in his office examining books and literature; nevertheless, he was looking to the future. When war broke out, he prepared a plan to exert a stronger influence in the armed forces, but the military services closed ranks against him. Part of this plan included getting Hitler to give him the new title of "Deputy of the Führer for the Safeguarding of the National Socialist Weltanschauung." Another part was to have OKW appoint someone to act as a kind of censor in questions of ideology. After he failed to convince the generals, especially those in OKH, he managed to see Hitler in the fall of 1939 and received the Führer's approval, in principle, for him to administer the ideological mandate for party and state. Where his 1934 title had restricted him to activity within the party, Rosenberg now freely interpreted his task as including the Wehrmacht under the classification of the "state"; accordingly he set out to win support in extending his activities.³³

³³Volker R. Berghahn, "NSDAP und 'Geistige Führung' der Wehrmacht 1939-1943," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 17 (1969): 19-22. Cited from BAK, Kanzlei Rosenberg, NS 8 vorl. 108. "Begründung des beiliegenden Wortlauts eines Entwurfs [zu einem Führer-Befehl]," January 2, 1940, with Rosenberg's handwritten corrections. Also

In early 1940 Rosenberg solicited Hermann Göring's support as he began a campaign which lasted for several years and which showed his ultimate desire of directing all aspects of nazi indoctrination of the armed forces. In a letter to the Luftwaffe Chief, dated January 16, 1940, Rosenberg revealed that he and Keitel had worked out an arrangement for a program of indoctrinating the armed forces in the nazi weltanschauung. Some differences existed in Keitel's and Rosenberg's concepts. Keitel wished to call the program "Ideological Leadership" while Rosenberg preferred the designation, "Ideological Training." Both, however, wished Göring to assume overall responsibility, in Hitler's name, for the indoctrination program.³⁴ It is not clear what Göring's response was; however, Rosenberg continued to appeal for his support. In another letter, dated July 8, he informed Göring that although he and Rudolf Hess had agreed that ideological schooling of armed forces personnel should take place on party territory, the Wehrmacht was adamant that courses of instruction had to be held on military property. He asked for Göring's help and recommended the Hess-Rosenberg solution so that the party people would not find themselves guests of the Wehrmacht.

Rheinhard Bollmus, "Das Amt Rosenberg und seine Gegner: Studien zum Machtkampf im nationalsozialistischen Herrschafts-system" (Ph.D. dissertation, Heidelberg, 1967), p. 220ff.

³⁴BAK, Kanzlei Rosenberg, NS8/167, pp. 83-84.

The Air Force Chief did not answer until August 3, and then he smoothly blasted Rosenberg's ideas. Göring wrote that he was very happy that the latter had been able to establish his proper influence in the armed forces. He also agreed on the necessity for ideological training but said that it was a basically false idea that the Wehrmacht, "as sole arms bearer of the nation," was only responsible for training in arms while the party was responsible for the "spirit of the troops." The latter responsibility, said the Air Force Commander-in-Chief, belonged solely to the service Commanders-in-Chief; dividing such responsibility was impossible since the spirit of the troops was decisive in battle. In closing, he warned Rosenberg that "training in discipline" was not within the nazi thinker's purview.³⁵

This was all Rosenberg needed to hear. Immune to rebuffs and able to cling unswervingly to a basic idea, Rosenberg set out to placate Göring who had at least conceded a strong need for ideological training and had approved his contacts with OKW. On September 9 and again on September 10, 1940, he wrote Göring agreeing with everything the Air Force Chief had said; he added that he had merely failed to express himself properly in his earlier letters. In the second letter, he casually mentioned that he had talked to Hitler and that the Führer had liked his ideas.³⁶ Apparently Rosenberg interpreted this to mean

³⁵Ibid., p. 66.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 63-66.

that he had Hitler's full support, but it is more likely that Hitler gave his consent in principle and, as was his practice, left it to his underlings to negotiate the means to achieve the desired end. In this case Rosenberg simply began to bargain and negotiate with other nazi leaders in order to stake out his area of influence and control. There is no evidence that Göring responded to this initiative; nevertheless, Rosenberg continued undaunted by following up his opening into OKW.

On November 9, 1940, he and Keitel signed an agreement on ideological training in the armed forces. Briefly, Rosenberg agreed to furnish literature and schooling material to OKW on a continuing basis, to establish training courses for officers and Wehrmacht officials who would in turn conduct instruction within armed forces installations, and to furnish speakers to Wehrmacht courses of instruction. OKW, for its part, would take care of all details, schedules, and orders.³⁷ The army initially turned down the entire agreement; OKH had already started its own program and wanted no interference from OKW. Therefore, OKW began to apply pressure on the Army High Command and pointed out that Hitler himself had commissioned Rosenberg with the duty of overseeing ideological training and that this would in no way interfere with the army's new program. On

³⁷BAK, Kanzlei Rosenberg, NS 8/236. Abschrift, pp. 14-15.

January 19, 1941, OKH stated flatly that the army could only accept that part of the Keitel-Rosenberg agreement which provided that the Amt Rosenberg would provide literature and schooling material to the armed forces. This left little of the agreement in effect as far as the army was concerned, and the invasion of the U.S.S.R. plainly showed OKH that the soldiers needed no ideological spurring. Victory over the primitive Russians appeared easy.³⁸

The army's new program was termed spiritual Betreuung.³⁹ Spiritual Betreuung in the army was conducted exclusively by the unit commander and received no special emphasis since the German soldiers had been everywhere victorious. Such troops needed no special gimmicks to make them fight harder or better. The program stressed normal military matters, such as discipline, success in combat, example of superiors, and concern for the well-being of subordinates--a traditional leadership program with a fancy name.⁴⁰

³⁸Berghahn, "NSDAP und 'Geistige Führung,'" pp. 29-31.

³⁹Betreuung cannot be directly translated; it concerned all measures involved with the physical and emotional well-being of the troops in order to improve their fighting spirit. Since it will be used extensively in this study, henceforth it will be used in its German form but not italicized.

⁴⁰Berghahn, "NSDAP und 'Geistige Führung,'" p. 26. Cited from Militärgeschichtliche Forschungsamt, Freiburg, WO1-6/345 (OKW 1511). Auszug aus der Verfügung des Genstab d. H./Abt.z.b.V. (O QU IV), January 26, 1940; verbal information to Berghahn from Prof. Dr. Hess, October 14, 1965.

CHAPTER III

STEPS TOWARD THE NSFO SYSTEM

The Betreuung Officer

For the next year and a half the status of ideological training and Betreuung remained basically the same; nevertheless, events were forcing a change. The winter of 1941-1942 had been harsh, and the German soldiers had suffered terribly after their offensive had bogged down. The old assumption that the German soldier only needed proper leadership to be victorious was being questioned; in addition the leadership itself fell under scrutiny.¹ In the 4th Army, it was reported that the troops were completely apathetic and incapable of carrying their weapons or of doing their jobs.² By June 1942 Army Group South had begun its drive toward Stalingrad and the Caucasus; Army Group

¹Volker R. Berghahn, "NSDAP und 'Geistige Führung' der Wehrmacht 1939-1943," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 17 (1969): 32. Cited from Gustav Harteneck, "Die 2. Armee zieht sich aus dem Schlamm," Foreign Military Study (Historical Division, Hq. U.S. Army, Europe), p. 22.

²Ibid., p. 33. Cited from Militärgeschichtliche Forschungsamt, Freiburg, W01-6/326 (OKW 732), extract of a report by Major Oehmichen on his visit to the 4th Army at the front from February 9-24, 1942, undated.

Center was in a see-saw battle in front of Moscow; and Army Group North was besieging Leningrad and mopping up partisans behind the lines. As a result of the deterioration of morale and in order to spur the spirit of the offensive, a double impetus for strengthening the army's Betreuung activity occurred nearly simultaneously from two different directions--from Army Group Center and from Field Marshal Keitel.

One such proposal for ideological training came from a major of reserves, Wilhelm Freiherr von Lersner who was serving in Army Group Center. Lersner had joined the Intelligence Section (Ic) in April 1942 at a time when the memory of the harsh conditions of the previous winter was still fresh in everyone's minds. Ever since World War I when he had been a prisoner of war, Lersner had thought a great deal on the leadership question and officer-soldier relations. Because of his experiences, he had worked after 1918 as the President of the Federation of former Prisoners of War (Reichsbundes ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener), and in connection with this function he had caught the attention of the high command just before war broke out. He was serving at that time as Rittmeister (Captain of Cavalry) in Wehrkreis XX in Danzig and spent much of his time in the inspection of training and education for which he traveled extensively and delivered speeches at military schools.³

³Ibid., p. 35. From verbal information to Berghahn from Herr von Lersner, August 21, 1965.

In June 1942 Lersner presented a paper to his Chief of Staff, General Otto Wöhler, on the importance of new measures in the sphere of spiritual Betreuung.⁴ This impressed the Chief of Staff who sent Lersner to the 3rd Panzer Army to investigate methods for implementing these measures. It wasn't long before Lersner realized that a position would have to be created--a Division Betreuung Officer (DBO)--to supervise the entire Betreuung and propaganda program and to work with the unit commanders. Also, a Betreuung officer at field army level would have to oversee the entire program. The DBO would also have to serve as a teacher and distributor of Betreuung material and would have to stress to unit commanders that the noncommissioned officers had the principal duty of presenting a national socialist image and example for their men to follow. The commander of the 3rd Panzer Army, where the experiment began, soon gave a hearty approval to the new program,⁵ and that summer many divisions established the new positions.⁶ Although certain difficulties were associated with Army

⁴Ibid. From a letter to Berghahn from Herr von Lersner, March 21, 1966.

⁵Ibid., pp. 35-37. Cited from NAM, T77, Roll 1039, Frames 6513257-69.

⁶Ibid., p. 37. Cited from NAM, T77, Roll 1039, Frames 6513217-20. Although Lersner's DBO would make a good theme in itself, it was only part of the picture and need not be investigated thoroughly here. For more details, see Berghahn's excellent article.

Group Center's new program, what counted was that the DBO program was a child of the army itself.

A second initiative came from Keitel. On June 1, 1942, he wrote the senior army commanders stating that Hitler had assumed supreme command of the army in order to bring the officer corps and the basic conception of state leadership into harmony; the field marshal saw his primary duty as furthering this goal by bringing the officer corps closer to Hitler and in deepening understanding for the Führer's acts. He then said he would soon transmit Hitler's personal ideas concerning nazi ideology to the senior commanders in the form of orders and instructions.⁷ On June 11 OKH, clearly working closely with OKW for a change, directed field commands to appoint Offiziere für Wehrgeistige Führung (Officers for the Leadership of Spiritual Defense; the short title was, as in Army Group Center, "Betreuung Offizier" or B.O.) in the staffs of all commands down to regimental and battalion levels. They would perform their duties as B.O.s in addition to regularly assigned duties, and OKH charged them with overseeing both Betreuung and nazi ideological training.⁸ This latest nazification measure had first appeared on the daily

⁷Waldemar Besson, "Zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialistischen Führungs Offizier (NSFO," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, doc. no. 1 (January 1961), p. 84.

⁸NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frames 1526319-20.

calendar of the Chief of Staff of the Army in March 1942 before the German Summer Offensive of that year,⁹ so it did not develop in a spirit of defeat as it could have after Stalingrad, but during a period of expected triumph. Nevertheless, it was conceived during the period of great trial of troop morale during the horrible winter of 1941-1942. In conception, therefore, it was undoubtedly a morale measure. Further, this date preceded Lersner's use of "Betreuung Officer," so it cannot be claimed that OKH borrowed the idea from Army Group Center. The reverse is more likely. Undoubtedly, the establishment of the B.O. was also an ideological measure since Hitler considered the war with the Soviet Union as one of ideological struggle. Accordingly, the Führer would want to stamp a firmer ideological countenance on his own army. Such a move would not have been necessary until the Wehrmacht met the politically oriented Soviet army since the campaigns in Poland and in the west took place on more traditional lines. Besides, Hitler, always an opportunist, had assumed direct command of the army in December 1941; thus the B.O. may have served as a measure for imprinting the Führer's personal mark on his army since he now was in a better position for getting what he wanted. Previously, the army had its own Commander-in-Chief which may have deterred Hitler from direct involvement in an army which had

⁹NAM, T78, Roll 134, Frame 6063615.

attained easy victories without showing total homage to nazism. Now the army had let him down in combat by failing to defeat the Soviet Union before the onset of winter. This too must have precipitated the establishment of the B.O. Furthermore, the actions of Hitler and the party had demonstrated since 1933, and especially since 1938, that the trend toward a thoroughly nazified army always took place in progressive moves. Seen in this way, the B.O. was just another step toward party infiltration of the army and the smashing of continued resistance to the Führer's desires which demanded complete subservience from his underlings. Hitler's continued success in the past, in spite of objections by many generals, progressively opened more paths to nazification, and he always stood ready to take advantage of any opportunity. The still remaining prospect of total defeat of the Soviet forces gave him such an opportunity, and his army needed a shot in the arm. It had ground to a halt without taking Moscow and Leningrad, and the rigors of the Russian winter had taken its toll of the morale of the German fighting men. OKH instituted the new B.O. in an army inferior to that of the previous year and during the struggle for manpower. Conceived to bring the officer corps into line, staff officers now expected the program to also bolster sagging morale and to make up for lack of training and efficiency by increasing the nazi outlook of the dispirited soldiers.

In early June, Keitel spent considerable time on the subject, and OKW and OKH nazi staff officers told him that the Wehrgeistige Führung program was essential, especially within the officer corps. They expected commanders to get personally involved, to emphasize the program, and to cooperate closely with the Gauleiter (Party District Leaders) through the Ic (Intelligence Officer) of their staffs. During this period the OKH staff worked on a new regulation for the training of the troops in the nazi weltanschauung and researched the measures used by the Soviet Politruk¹⁰ while Keitel's promised orders and instructions went out in series. On July 3 he forbade commanders from assigning clergymen as B.O.s.¹¹ On July 15 he wrote the commanders again and established the absolute prerequisites for officers selected as B.O.s: they must have spiritual alertness, self-reliance, good judgment, an appreciation for political activity, and a strong belief in questions of nazi ideology.¹² From April to December of that year staff work in OKW and OKH concentrated on courses of instruction for B.O.s,¹³ and soon good nazi generals in the field jumped wholeheartedly into the program.

¹⁰Ibid., Frames 6063587, 6063603.

¹¹Ibid., Frame 6063574.

¹²Besson, "NSFO," doc. no. 2, pp. 84-85.

¹³NAM, T78, Roll 134, Frames 6063597-98, 6063603.

On February 1, 1943, General Ferdinand Schörner, Commander of the XIX Mountain Corps on the Russian front and a devoted supporter of nazism, published a lengthy order of the day concerning the conduct of Wehrgeistige Führung. He proclaimed to the troops that Hitler and nazism were the means to victory and placed the German-Soviet war squarely in the arena of ideology. Declaring the conflict a struggle for existence between the Reich and the U.S.S.R., he demanded that officers stress that soldiers fought for their homes and families and explained that the campaign in Russia was totally different from previous battles since communists led their troops fanatically and the Soviet army fought bestially. Alluding to the need of lebensraum for the future of the German people, he said the weakest of the combatants would not survive--the one which possessed the strongest faith in the legitimacy of its cause and which ruthlessly followed its beliefs would win. It was a case of victory or death, and no officer had better quit or place himself "outside" of the nazi weltanschauung. Schörner expected all officers to make good use of the long winter nights by conscientiously establishing soldierly comradery with the troops in the bunkers--to answer their questions and instill in them nazi confidence in victory. Precluding Soviet-style methods, he also added:

The officer as the leader of his men in battle is also the bearer of nazi training. . . . There is no

division between military and spiritual leadership.
. . . The iron discipline of the old army isn't
enough to win the war--[we] also need weltanschauung.

He then pointed out that several divisions and groups had already seen results from using party personnel in their units as block and cell leaders in bunkers and strong points--just as Hitler had done in the earlier days of the party. He apparently felt it necessary to also state that the troops did not consider these party members as secret police agents. Nazi training, said the general, could not begin or end with weekly company instruction; on the contrary, it had to be conducted on a full time basis everyday. He directed that the most capable officers, those with youthful energy, must conduct weekly periods of nazi instruction for the troops, and he expected regimental commanders to instruct their battalion and unit commanders once each month on the execution of nazi training. Schörner also rebuked the divisions of his corps for their reluctance in complying with his nazi training requirements.¹⁴ OKH considered Schörner's thoughts so important that the Army High Command distributed copies of the letter to B.O.s throughout the German army as an outstanding example of nazi leadership,¹⁵ and his correct nazi attitude would lead to his appointment

¹⁴Besson, "NSFO," doc. no. 3, pp. 86-90. Quotation on p. 88.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 78.

as Chief of the National Socialist Leadership Staff of OKW on March 14, 1944.¹⁶ The thoughts expressed in the letter undoubtedly formed the embryo for future NSFO concepts and methods.

A different spirit, however, existed in the Replacement Army;¹⁷ it was not until May 14 that its C-in-C, Colonel General Friedrich Fromm, got around to implementing the Wehrgeistige Führung program. Even then he gave his subordinate commands until July 1 to report the names of B.O.s to his headquarters, and his order outlined the program briefly, without rhetoric.¹⁸

In September and October an angry dispute developed between OKW and Field Marshal Erich von Manstein's Army Group South while the Army Group, then withdrawing, made desperate attempts to get behind the Dnieper before the Russians could crush its overextended divisions. The III Panzer Corps and the 8th Army, backed by the field marshal, complained that OKW furnished out of date, erroneous, untopical, if not spurious, information in its printed Betreuung instructions. Within OKW, staff officers bitterly

¹⁶Karl Demeter, The German Officer Corps in Society and State 1650-1945, trans. Angus Malcolm (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965), app. 34, p. 365. This appendix contains a copy of the directive issued on "National Socialist Leadership in the Army" by Schörner two weeks after assuming his new post.

¹⁷NAM, T78, Roll 134, Frames 6063597-98, 6063603.

¹⁸Besson, "NSFO," doc. no. 4, pp. 90-93.

attacked the complaints point by point and charged the 8th Army (furiously pressed by the Russians) with not doing its job in the realm of nazi weltanschauung. The field commands felt that OKW under the circumstances expected too much and failed to give them the proper tools to do a proper job. Keitel himself wrote Manstein a sarcastic letter, but both the commander of the 8th Army and Manstein replied immediately with detailed proof of OKW's failure to provide indoctrination materials.¹⁹ This dispute may well have caused the Armed Forces High Command to henceforth pay closer attention to its propaganda publications.

The B.O. of the 1st Panzer Division published the concept and methods to be used in that division on September 16, 1943. He gave the goal of Wehrgeistige Führung: to instill energy, belief, and faith in the troops, and he declared that any officer who failed to work toward these goals with all of his vigor was irresponsible. Simple conversation between officers and men, without expansive rhetoric and great style, he said, worked best. The unit commander himself should talk to the troops during instructional periods (and not mere weekly periods!) concerning topical questions, the situation at the fronts, the life of the people and their faith in German leadership and victory, and questions of nazi weltanschauung. The commander should also discuss important political, economic, and

¹⁹NAM T78, Roll 134, Frames 6063648-56.

cultural questions, give the troops unlimited national socialist instruction and training, and must remain optimistic and not delegate this duty. The more lively the discussion, the better the results. The division B.O. cited several tools available to the commander: maps, newspapers, OKW information sheets, and the regularly issued Wehrmacht Bericht (Armed Forces Report). Above all, behind the words officers must show deeds; they must set a national socialist example for the troops to follow.²⁰ The Betreuung Officer evidently felt that not all officers were setting the proper example or serving as fit models, and there were examples which bore out such feelings.

In April 1944, a Captain Walter Hergel reported to the Party Chancellery about his visits to field units over an extended period from about February 1943 to March 1944. Commenting on the B.O.s in the Southern Area Command, he reported that General Friderici, the Commander-in-Chief, had selected his personal aide, Captain of Reserves Dr. Ameln, as the B.O., and Hergel termed him, as a political type, an "absolute nonentity." Ameln's predecessor, Cavalry Captain Kirstein was allegedly worse. Kirstein, "a rich landowner," supposedly occupied the position just to remain on the staff. Actually, Hergel reported, Kirstein was in charge of the Officer Club which to some extent he managed successfully. His only B.O. duties were in spending

²⁰ Ibid., Frame 6063658.

some time every day with "the effeminate actors in the Kharkov theater." He was simply "too lazy" to distribute the Betreuung material supplied to him, and the C-in-C himself had had to go from Kharkov to Konotop where to the shock of everyone, several boxcars were unexpectedly found containing games, playing cards, books, and so forth. To reduce the congestion, they had to be unloaded with a hay fork! Hergel also reported that despite warnings that those with religious allegiances should not be appointed as B.O.s, he knew of a pastor, a Captain Hünlich, who was B.O. of a unit. This sixty-year-old minister in uniform was called in officer circles the "Ehrgeistige Pastor" ("Ehrgeistige" was a play on the word Wehrgeistige and is translated as "ambitious"), and Hergel said that he was certainly no nazi or political leader. Party Member Willy Ruder of the Party-Chancellery, upon hearing this, directed that Hünlich would be relieved of the duty at once.²¹ Despite reports of this kind, a giant step toward the NSFO had been made through the institution of the B.O. and the influence of nazi generals like Schörner, but more party involvement was needed to cross the barrier of Prussian military tradition.

²¹BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 360, Hauptmann Dr. Walter Hergel, Wehrgeistige Erziehung, April 14, 1944. Captain of Reserves Hergel also held the party rank of Gauhauptstellungsleiter and the SS rank of Hauptsturmführer. He was at this time assigned to a unit in Minsk.

Rosenberg Keeps Trying

On May 14, 1943, Martin Bormann, Rudolf Hess's replacement as Chief of the Party Chancellery (P-K), suddenly countered the attempts which Rosenberg had been making for several years to control the nazi indoctrination of the Wehrmacht. Bormann informed him that it was the task of the P-K to supervise the relationship between all party offices and the Wehrmacht and that in the future, approval had to be obtained from the P-K on questions between Rosenberg's office and the military before they could be taken up with the armed forces.²² This began Bormann's deep involvement with the ideological question in the Wehrmacht, and his direct intervention should have given Rosenberg sufficient warning that his days of independence had ceased. This would not be the last time that Bormann would intervene strongly in Rosenberg's activities, and the P-K Chief's growing influence with Hitler would place him in a critical position to move far ahead of all other contenders for the job of influencing the armed forces. In fact, a few months later, on November 17, 1943, Rosenberg, undoubtedly because of Bormann's influence with the Führer, would see Hitler for the very last time.²³ Nevertheless, Rosenberg failed

²²BAK, Kanzlei Rosenberg, NS 8/188, Bormann to Rosenberg, May 14, 1943, Betrifft: Gestaltung des Verhältnisses Partei-Wehrmacht, p. 43-44.

²³Berghahn, "NSDAP und 'Geistige Führung,'" p. 63n. Cited from Alfred Rosenberg, Letzte Aufzeichnungen (Göttingen: n.p., 1955), p. 250f.

to take the hint and he stayed in the fray. However, since he could not match Bormann's influence with Hitler, he decided to make a show of cooperation rather than to compete. For his part, Bormann appeared perfectly willing to allow Rosenberg to work with the armed forces, but only if he did so under the former's supervision. From this time onward, Bormann retained his supremacy over party-Wehrmacht activities.

On September 18, 1943, Bormann demonstrated his newly increased power by inserting himself into a minor agreement between Rosenberg and Keitel. A conference of commanders-in-chief of the armed forces units stationed in the homeland was to be held between the 11th and 15th of October, and Keitel had asked Rosenberg to talk to the participants about "The World Struggle, a Struggle of Ideologies" and "Eastern Policy and Eastern Problems." Bormann saw this as an opportunity to politically activate the conference attendees, and on September 18, 1943, he requested that Rosenberg also mention the importance of a politically oriented Wehrmacht and the need for the armed forces to cooperate closely with the party. He added that "Wehrmacht and party must be absolutely one in their 'dynamics' and political cooperation."²⁴ Rosenberg not only complied with Bormann's request, but on October 13 at the

²⁴BAK, Kanzlei Rosenberg, NS8/130, Bormann to Rosenberg, September 18, 1943, pp. 40-41.

conference at Bad Schachen, he even went beyond Bormann's desire. He declared that Germany now was a revolutionary state; "the German armed forces [were] a revolutionary army" and "Hitler's revolution was the revolution of the idea of duty against the absence of honor and duty of the former democratic time period."²⁵ Regardless of Rosenberg's show of cooperation, however, he had not lost sight of his desire to control the nazi indoctrination of the armed forces if he could.

After a conference on November 17, 1943, with Keitel, Rosenberg presented Hitler with a draft of an order designed to amplify the terms of the Keitel-Rosenberg agreement of November 9, 1940. (As stated earlier, this was the last meeting that he ever had with the Führer.) Apparently Hitler approved the order in principle but wanted it rewritten in a more military style. On November 22, Rosenberg wrote Keitel and said that when he and General Rudolf Schmundt (Chief of the Army Personnel Office) could agree on a final wording of the order, he would send it on to the field marshal. He also informed Keitel that he had submitted various possibilities for the name of a new ideological officer to Hitler and that the Führer had decided on the title "Officer for National Socialist Weltanschauung." With this decision, he believed that the "frequently agitated" subject was settled and was convinced that Hitler

²⁵BAK, Kanzlei Rosenberg, NS8/168, pp. 31-32.

subscribed to the idea that the officer--the future NSFO-- should be independent of the Ia (Operations Officer and Chief of Staff) and the Ic (Intelligence Officer) and would report directly to the commander. It looked as if Rosenberg still believed that he might conduct the forthcoming program since he reminded Keitel that the field marshal had agreed to release thirty officers to his office for the purpose of intensifying ideological training. Rosenberg did not seem to be in any big hurry--he promised to furnish the names of the officers he wanted "as they came to mind."²⁶ This showed a basic failure in Rosenberg's thinking. He did not appreciate the value of speed while Martin Bormann did. Another basic fault of Rosenberg's was that he could not see the possibilities in the fast approaching NSFO program; his draft of a Führer Order was innocuous. It merely stated that Hitler approved the Keitel-Rosenberg agreement of November 1940, that the ideological training of the Wehrmacht was important and urgent, and that the Führer ordered the continuance of the training on the same basis as before but with a stronger emphasis.²⁷

Rosenberg thought that a name for the new political officers "appeared to be" of the utmost importance. On

²⁶BAK, Kanzlei Rosenberg, NS8/174, Rosenberg to Keitel, November 22, 1943, p. 142.

²⁷Ibid., Entwurf, p. 144.

November 17 he and Keitel had agreed that he would recommend to Hitler either "Officer for National Socialist Training" or "Officer for Weltanschauung Training" as the new title for the B.O. At that time, the Führer had decided on the name, "Officer for National Socialist Weltanschauung," but now Rosenberg discovered that "after a talk with Reichsleiter [Reich Leader] Bormann," Hitler had decided on the title, "Officer for National Socialist Leadership." This disturbed Rosenberg, and on November 26 he asked Keitel to try to talk to the Führer about it; he did not believe that a "leadership" task could be assigned to someone subordinate to the commander; it belonged to the commander alone. On the other hand, the title "Officer for National Socialist Weltanschauung," could freely belong to an officer placed completely and directly under the commander because he would only concern himself with nazi training--something to which the commander had little time to completely devote himself.²⁸ That same day he wrote Hitler.

Reviewing for the Führer what had recently happened to the new title, Rosenberg admitted that he did not know the reasons for Hitler's change of mind, but he attempted nevertheless to convince his nazi boss that the officer would be involved only in training. Just as he had told

²⁸Ibid., Rosenberg to Keitel, November 26, 1943, p. 141.

Keitel, he again stressed that the leadership function belonged only to the commander. He complained that he and his co-workers had worked for many years in this area, and he requested a personal interview to discuss the question further. Finally, he stated that if the decision was made for reasons unknown to him, he requested that another officer, an "Officer for National Socialist Weltanschauung," be appointed on staffs to carry out the nazi training task.²⁹ The obvious reason for Rosenberg's stubbornness was a question of principle. For years he had been able to work with the armed forces independently. Now with the involvement of Bormann and Hitler himself, he was in danger of losing this independence. With a strong stand backed by traditional military concepts concerning the status and duties of commanders, perhaps he could gain military support against Bormann's "infringement" of his established "rights" which he had built up over the years. As proof that this was in essence a campaign against Bormann, he also wrote the P-K Chief that same day. Rosenberg said he was astonished to learn that on the basis of the party chief's intercession with Hitler, the title had been changed, especially since Bormann had made no comment when he, Rosenberg, had informed the party boss of Hitler's

²⁹BAK, Kanzlei Rosenberg, NS8/176, Meldung an den Führer (Rosenberg to Hitler), Betrifft: Weltanschauliche Erziehung der Wehrmacht, November 26, 1943, pp. 21-22.

decision. He requested that both he and Bormann go to see Hitler together.

Four days later Bormann responded to Rosenberg's letter and admitted that the Führer had changed his mind after talking to him. "Moreover," he wrote, "I must observe that the recommendation you made to the Führer was submitted without previously checking with me; I had to deliberate independently and immediately." Bormann warned that Hitler wanted to make it very clear that ideological schooling was only a part of political leadership. Therefore, the Führer had chosen the new name and let the other one, which signified only part of the entire task, fall by the wayside. He added that the P-K had concerned itself "for some time" over these officers "whose creation and development resulted from its inspiration." [Emphasis added by the author.] He already had developed the general principles for the NSFO, he said, and the NSFO would be responsible to the commander for the entire national socialist leadership in the unit just as the Ia was responsible to the command for tactical leadership. Besides, it was "self-evident," he added, that the commander held the overall responsibility. Then Bormann described his concept of the NSFO's duties. Only one part of the officer's work was concerned with indoctrinating the troops in the nazi weltanschauung; there was also the extensive task of providing political instruction and orientation, answering questions

of the day, and discussing topical themes. Above all the NSFO would have to politically activate the troops and instill in them a nazi "will" for victory. The political officers would have to explain political questions for soldiers and their families and combat enemy propaganda through "preventive political explanation." They would constantly handle practical questions such as "fashioning party-armed forces relationships; party activity in the homeland, cooperation between party and Wehrmacht for the conduct of the war, etc." Bormann reminded Rosenberg that many political suggestions and demands had been sent out by the P-K which had been weakened by military orders and regulations; in the future the NSFO would distribute them to the officers and the troops. Then in a more personal vein, Bormann pointed out some of the practical problems involved in the nazi direction of the program.

The P-K must represent all party offices in armed forces matters. Where would we end up if, in addition to you, Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels, Reichsleiter Dr. Ley and the remaining concerned Reich Leaders, Reich Ministers, and other political leaders of the Reich, side by side, and all too often in opposition, would deal directly with the High Command of the Armed Forces and with the individual High Commands!

Bormann appealed to Rosenberg for his understanding and said that only one official could answer to the commander for political activity. The P-K could not accept responsibility for the double apparatus Rosenberg had suggested-- one for political leadership and the other for schooling in nazi weltanschauung. It would cause conflicts of competence

in the Wehrmacht like those repeatedly occurring in the party. To soften the blow somewhat, the party chief assured Rosenberg that the ideological orientation and development of the NSFOs would be the latter's responsibility within the limits of the Keitel-Rosenberg agreement of 1940 and that he would personally support the effort "as before." Nevertheless, and in spite of the agreement, the P-K "obviously" had to have responsibility for the entire party-armed forces relationship and this would include issuing suggestions and instructions for moderating the politically guided orientation of the troops and for the management of current political factors. Further, the P-K would help OKW in the orientation of the officer corps and especially of the NSFOs. Finally, he revealed that he had been sitting on Rosenberg's letter to Hitler of November 26 by asking whether, after this explanation, Rosenberg still wanted it to go to Hitler.³⁰ Although most people would have probably surrendered at this point to the brutal Bormann, apparently Rosenberg was not the type to give up so easily; he became a constant thorn in Bormann's side on the subject until months after the NSFO had been instituted by Hitler.

³⁰BAK, Kanzlei-Rosenberg, NS8/189, Dormann to Rosenberg, Betrifft: Offizier für nationalsozialistische Führung (abgekürzt: NS-Führungsoffizier), November 30, 1943, pp. 31-35. To the author's knowledge, this document was the first in which the initials NSFO were used.

On December 8, 1943, Rosenberg wrote Bormann in an attempt to salvage some of his lost prestige. He said he had no doubt at all that the P-K should serve as the central representative between the Wehrmacht and the party offices and asked the party chief to question Party Member Hermann Passe of the P-K to ascertain that on every occasion Rosenberg's office had cooperated fully and had always shown consideration to members of the P-K. Further, he did think that he should only be held responsible for what his office did and not for what other offices did. After all, he had only done what Hitler had commissioned him to do and had only followed the Keitel-Rosenberg agreement of 1940. Then he moved to the attack. "In any case," he wrote, "I fail to recognize that an abundance of other questions have [to be] treated by the P-K with OKW." He complained that an entire month had been given over to a very concrete designation for the officer concerned with ideological training. Various names had been recommended and turned down and the subject had been a constant topic of conversation with Passe. Insofar as his work was concerned, Rosenberg merely wanted to answer the questions which officers had about the significance of the war, the nature of the enemy, and the German national ideal in the struggle with other ideologies.

After touting his past successes and services to the party chancellery and the military, he said that it

appeared to him that the questions which the P-K had settled with the Wehrmacht were those pertaining almost exclusively to matters concerning the Party Chancellery and OKW; they had hardly any relation at division and certainly not at regimental level. He conceded that the P-K should serve as a clearing house between the armed forces and party offices and added that this would certainly be the P-K's frequent function in questions of employing "Officers for National Socialist Weltanschauung." (He just could not give up the use of this title.) He believed that if a special OKW Propaganda Staff could work closely with the Propaganda Ministry and in a "personal union" with the Reich propaganda leadership, the nazi ideology itself would be sufficient to enable the already existing "Wehrgeistige Betreuung" officer to handle the job under the guidance of Rosenberg's office. The man who showed such a stubborn concern for proper titles seemed to be confused on the proper title of the B.O., and this mangling of the full title with the short title indicates that perhaps Rosenberg actually knew very little about the program in effect at that time. It surely could not have raised his prestige in the eyes of Bormann who prided himself on exactness. After this obvious attempt at gaining support from Dr. Joseph Goebbels, the Propaganda Minister, Rosenberg turned to his last conference with Hitler. It was not his fault, he said, that Bormann had

not been present. He had wanted to talk to the leader of the P-K, but it had not been possible; therefore, he had asked Field Marshal Keitel for his views. As far as he knew, his various recommendations to the Führer contained no prejudgment on any question relating to current cooperation between the P-K and the Wehrmacht. He reminded Bormann that they had discussed these points before and that the leader of the P-K had not said anything which would indicate that any misunderstanding had taken place. Finally, he recommended again that they both go to see Hitler on the question.³¹

Ignoring Rosenberg's desire to see the Führer, on December 12, 1943, Bormann sent Rosenberg a telegram which stated that the nazi thinker's assumption that the interview with Hitler on November 17 had settled the entire matter was "false." "Instead," the message continued, "the Führer, as I already told you, had not definitely chosen one of the original designations and not even one [recommended] by you." Bormann made it very clear through repetition that Hitler made the final decision on the NSFO title and that OKW had already communicated this decision to the armed forces. "To stress it again," Bormann wrote tersely, "the title was not chosen by Hitler because of

³¹Ibid., Rosenberg to Bormann, Betrifft: Ihr Schreiben vom 30.11.1943, Offizier für nationalsozialistische Führung, December 8, 1943, pp. 26-28.

the distribution of tasks which exist outside the armed forces but only to make the all-embracing mission clear within the armed forces.³²

On December 13 Bormann and Hitler had a philosophical talk on the subject of "Wehrgeistige" versus "National Socialist" Leadership. Rosenberg had apparently come up with the idea of an Academy for Wehrgeistige Research and Training, and the Führer flatly turned down the concept. He told Bormann that the entire party had to get involved in the new NSFO program and said that his position on Wehrgeistige leadership was the same as that published by Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler on October 20, 1942--a publication which he himself had approved. This publication by Himmler stated that the term "Wehrgeistige" was not national socialist, but liberal in thought, content, and origin. It had come forth from bourgeois class society and furthered a class concept. Class consciousness also related to the military profession which for 200 years had created great prestige for itself through its accomplishments; however, these accomplishments found their expression in a special social form and decorum. The armed forces became politically and ideologically neutral and laid no special duty on the individual other than maintaining the prescribed social form. Without prejudice to

³²Ibid., Telegram, Bormann to Rosenberg, Betrifft: NS.-Führungs Offizier, December 12, 1943, 14.37, p. 20.

this form, wrote Himmler, one could still be liberal, clerical, "unbiological," and unsocialistic. As long as princely houses were at hand and approved of this form, the military profession could retain this neutrality. However, the officer corps forgot that the liberal portion of its membership had destroyed its inner structure and that, through difficult political exactions on each individual professing political neutrality, the entire military profession was shattered. A second way to be "fashionable" in the manner of the bourgeoisie was secured through membership with or nearness to the "intellectuals" (Geistigen). At the same time, the intellectual profession of faith demanded nothing from them in the bourgeois period since they were pronounced as "free." In particular, one could remove oneself, in the name of the "geistigen" profession of faith, from the hard and ugly political struggle with "sub-humanity." When the new nazi state was created in Germany, Himmler continued, many people who were apathetic or even opposed to nazism saw the possibility of cooperating with the new state when their special interests were involved, but they held themselves completely aloof from the state's ideological demands. Those people who had still not realized that the Third Reich was totalitarian in its ideological concept should now realize it, he wrote, because the war with the Soviet Union made it profoundly clear that liberal, ideologically neutral individuals could

not survive in a conflict with an enemy like the fanatical bolsheviks. The communists and their sub-humanity could only be beaten by a better ideology which was sufficiently totalitarian to fanaticize and permeate its adherents to the last fiber of their bodies with its essence. He wrote that Hitler had prophesied that "No bourgeois state will survive this war." Himmler concluded by prophesying also. He said that in the future no bourgeois, ideological neutral soldiery would exist anymore and that the future belonged to the political soldiers; "Wehrgeistige" concepts in the liberal sense were not sufficient. Hitler's unqualified support of this fuzzy theory, of course, definitely meant the end of the army's "Wehrgeistige Führung" program. Bormann notified Rosenberg about the Führer's decision, and to make his point stronger, he sent him a copy of Himmler's publication.³³

It was not until December 29, 1943, that Bormann answered Rosenberg's letter of December 8. Apparently he had done some checking. He told Rosenberg that, according to reports by some of his underlings, several instances of agreements between Rosenberg's office and the Wehrmacht had taken place without the approval of the P-K. Further, some of his people had told Rosenberg that the P-K could not

³³Ibid., Bormann to Rosenberg, Betrifft: Vereinbarung über die Akademie für wehrgeistige Forschung und Erziehung, December 13, 1943, pp. 13-14. Also Abschrift, "Anlage zum Befehl des Chefs des SS-Hauptamtes vom 20.10.1942," pp. 15-18.

accept the titles suggested by the nazi thinker, and Pässe had informed staff members of the Amt Rosenberg on one occasion, before Hitler made his decision, that the P-K intended to push for the title of "Officer for Political Leadership." He then reminded Rosenberg that at Bad Schachen the nazi ideologist himself had recommended to the Chief of the General Armed Forces Office that this title should be expanded into "Officer for Political Leadership and Weltanschauung Training." After this, the sudden recommendation to Hitler on November 17 had been completely new and previously unknown to either himself or Pässe. Furthermore, Bormann said, he had never advanced the idea that Rosenberg's office would have any say in the selection of NSFOs; only the P-K could make such recommendations.³⁴ Thus, by the end of the year Bormann had clearly established his predominance over Rosenberg in the question of party-armed forces relations. In the meantime, however, Rosenberg and Bormann were not the only ones interested in the nazification of the armed forces.

Colonel Huebner and the SS

The Führer also got involved in the ideological indoctrination of the armed forces through the medium of a pamphlet written by an army colonel. Colonel Huebner,

³⁴Ibid., Bormann to Rosenberg, Betrifft: Offizier für nationalsozialistische Führung, December 29, 1943, pp. 1-2.

while an army regimental commander associated with an SS division on the Russian front, had become acquainted with the literature used for the ideological and political indoctrination of Waffen-SS units. Impressed with this material, he turned to Obergruppenführer Gottlob Berger of the SS Main Office with the request that the SS place some of its chief publications and collected materials at the disposal of his regiment. Berger complied with the request.³⁵ Then on September 1, 1943, Huebner went to see Berger personally to ask for assistance in composing a memorandum on the training of the German officer corps, specifically a text for ideological indoctrination. The army colonel had already explained his project to General Schmundt, and the general agreed with the plan. At that time the new Waffen-SS service regulations on this subject had not yet been published, and Himmler had them in his possession. Berger, "out of a little vanity and also some personal egoism" wanted to wait until the SS published the regulations first so that the "Black Order" would receive credit for the ideas. Therefore, he maintained a cool reserve at first, but after considering "the ideological distress in which the army in particular finds itself," Berger decided to cooperate. In this way Huebner and the SS Main Office collaborated in writing the pamphlet, Wofür

³⁵BAK, Sammlung Schumacher 367, Abschrift, Berger to Himmler, June 3, 1944.

kämpfen wir? (What Are We Fighting For?). When completed, Berger sent a copy to Himmler with a comment that the SS Chief would very often find his own phrases and reasoning in the document. Huebner submitted the work to General Schmundt who first discussed it with Himmler and then presented it to the Führer. On the express desire of Schmundt, the cooperation with the SS was never mentioned, except perhaps to Hitler, so as to obtain an easier acceptance of the work by the armed forces.³⁶

Huebner himself revealed some of the concepts and reasons for the memoir. He had sent an early treatise of his ideas, dated "Russia, May 1943," through military channels to Generals Schmundt and Burgdorf (Burgdorf also worked in the Army Personnel Office), and both generals liked it. At that time Huebner lacked full confidence in his ability to convert his ideas into a concrete training program. He believed that an assignment to the "Truppenbetreuung" Office in OKH in Berlin was imminent and wanted a chance to put his ideas into action--a thing he felt about most strongly. His faith in nazism appeared emotional and mystical; he declared that "his nazi image of the world" was strongly established at the moment he discovered that nazism was an inherent element of German

³⁶ Ibid. See also: BAK, Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer SS, NS19/neu 750, Berger to Himmler, Betrifft: Denkschrift über die Erziehung des deutschen Offizierkorps von Oberst Dr. Huebner, September 11, 1943.

history. This was the heady stuff on which the nazi leaders thrived, so he had a good opportunity to receive their support if he could only put his ideas down on paper. He believed that ideological schooling in the army should make it clear to the soldiers that nazism was not only a time-conditioned political demand which one could fathom with the intellect, but "national socialism must be felt with the heart, with the soul . . . and bring one consciousness of his ancestors, ancestor worship, etc." With the promulgation of such ideas in the army, he believed the existing differences between the Waffen-SS and the Wehrmacht would vanish. In his mind the SS stood as a "solid block" which should play the main role in the permeation of the German nation with nazism. Naturally, this would interest Himmler, but Huebner did not want his SS connections known since this might cause him to encounter difficulties in the army. Therefore, he wanted to submit his text to the SS Chief in an unofficial and personal way.³⁷ His method was to work through Berger, and he kept the SS-Obergruppenführer fully informed.

On October 1 Huebner wrote a lengthy progress report for Berger which demonstrated how fanatical an idealist can

³⁷BAK, Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer SS, NS 19/neu 750, Chief of Amt W VII, SS Wirtschaft-Verwaltungshauptamt to RFSS, Betrifft: Oberst Huebner, July 15, 1943. See also: *ibid.*, Denkschrift (Entwurf) über die weltanschauliche Schulung in der Wehrmacht (Heer), von Oberst. Dr. Huebner, Kommandeur Grenadier-Regiment 529, Mai 1943.

be when he sets out to convince others of his ideas. He had given a copy of the report to Schmundt the previous day, and the general had given it his heartiest approval; Schmundt also agreed to present it to Hitler whom he had already briefed on the subject. Now, however, Huebner worried about how to introduce his ideas to the army. He thought that the only profitable way was to issue an uncompromising order to all officers requiring them to engrain vigorously the various themes, especially the ideas regarding the nazi weltanschauung, into every soldier. Musing over the various officers who would have a responsibility in the matter, he thought some of them lacked sufficient energy to force an ideological breakthrough; others had little conviction, if any, of the need for training the troops in nazi ideas. Thus, only an order by Hitler himself which unmistakably spelled out the duty of each officer to be a fertile and active bearer of the nazi weltanschauung would work.

Huebner knew quite well that traditionalist attitudes dominated the army, but he expected no serious resistance since the officer corps lacked unity on the subject. The young officers, to include even members of the general staff, would support the effort, he believed, and would be glad finally to hear a clear word on nazi indoctrination. As for older officers, he predicted that not one of them had sufficient courage to risk disturbing the

nation's fighting strength by opposing the indoctrinational effort. After all, he thought that the officer corps' opposition to nazism existed because of a misunderstanding anyway; up to now the officers had just not received proper instruction. The Seecktian inheritance had turned the officer corps into a "pure, military monkdom," he decided.

Asserting that General Schmundt had charged him with the preparation of an order to accompany the nazi treatise, he declared to Berger his intent to draw up a Führer Order because of his conviction of the "greatness of our national socialist world." He asked if Himmler, his "great hope," could obtain the sanction for such an order and asked Berger to approach the Reichsführer-SS in his behalf. At the moment Huebner was waiting for Hitler's decision. Berger, eager to help, asked Himmler to speak to the Führer as soon as possible.³⁸ Berger also told his SS Chief that he had assured Huebner of the fullest support and that he had told him the Reichsführer-SS would "attend to this matter in particular and would never leave him in the lurch." At this time Berger also expressed his attitude toward the army generals. "This entire monstrous situation in which the higher officer corps finds itself" originated, he said, in the fact that for the first time in recent history an officer corps existed which did not

³⁸Ibid., Berger to Himmler, Betrifft: Brief des Obersten Huebner, October 10, 1943. Enclosure: Huebner to Berger, October 1, 1943.

align itself with its highest commander--Adolf Hitler. Berger noted that all officers had sworn a personal oath to Hitler, but he had a strong conviction that although they had done it with "sober and pure consciences," they lacked an "inner affection for the ideas of their highest commander." As a result, he judged that they lacked the strength demanded by an unprecedented bitter and unrelenting war.³⁹

On October 13, 1943, Huebner reported to Berger that Hitler had passed judgment. The Führer gave the pamphlet (Wofür kämpfen wir?--What are We Fighting For?) his "greatest approval" and had decided to establish it as the foundation for ideological instruction in all three military services. He further declared his willingness to write a personal introduction in which he would explain "the biological development of national socialism." The Army Personnel Office would publish it in 300,000 copies for the officer corps, and a Führer Order composed by Huebner would accompany it. After outlining the plans for his next work, Huebner demonstrated a messianic complex buttressed by egotism. He wrote,

I am extraordinarily happy in the realization that now the lofty and holy world of Adolf Hitler will stride forth in the numerically strongest fraternity of men [namely] in the German officer corps!

³⁹Ibid., Berger to SS-Obersturmbannführer Dr. Brandt, Betrifft: Brief des Obersten Huebner, October 10, 1943.

. . . The spirit of Horst Wessel and the heroes of the 9th of November, 1923 will now step out bravely in the army also and accompany our army in its titanic struggle! Now victory cannot be denied us.⁴⁰

The pamphlet was based primarily on the compendium of ideas Huebner wrote in Russia in May 1943. This earlier work shows without doubt that Huebner's ideas were influential in some of the NSFO thinking and structure, and thus it is even more important than Wofür kämpfen wir? to this study.

The central idea of the May 1943 memorandum was that Hitler had resurrected former deeply rooted German ideas which Rome and the Jews had suppressed and that most of the German people, generals, the officer corps, and troops did not really understand Hitler's weltanschauung. Nazism had taken very slow root in the Wehrmacht because most officers saw in it only a political movement. The distaste of the officer corps for all politics, especially for socialist parties, created a strong inner defense against the National Socialist German Workers' Party. The words "socialist," "workers," and "party" automatically created distrust. Accordingly, the officer corps fell back on neutrality and indifference as their defense against

⁴⁰ Ibid., Abschrift, Huebner to Obergruppenführer (presumably Berger), October 13, 1943. See also: BAK, Sammlung Schumacher 367, Abschrift, Berger to Himmler, June 3, 1944. Horst Wessel was a nazi hero killed in street fighting with communists before Hitler came to power, and the heroes of the 9th of November, 1923, were those nazis killed in the abortive "Hitler Putsch" in Munich on that date. The text of Wofür kämpfen wir? can be found in Sammlung Schumacher under the title of Inhaltsverzeichnis.

nazism. "The officer corps lived in the world of Frederick the Great," not realizing that the "German way of living" (i.e., nazism) had received a strong impetus from Frederick's reign. As a result, the officer, although honored for his character and readiness for combat, became separated from the nation. "In spite of universal military service, the army was still no peoples' army," and the officer corps failed to realize that nazism was not only a political movement, but above all, it was a German way of looking at the world conditioned by blood; it had the goal of renewing all aspects of German life. Especially the older officers, Huebner warned, had to be filled with enthusiasm and must be convinced of this idea. However, this could not happen just by sending higher party leaders to deliver speeches in officer circles. It amazed Huebner that the older officers continued their neutral stance even when Hitler himself was the supreme military commander of the armed forces. The only solution to the problem was that the party and the armed forces, "uniting in a single weltanschauung," had to provide an extremely strong impulse for imbuing the armed forces with nazi idealism. Within the Wehrmacht, it was "the great and holy task of each officer, from the commanding general down to the youngest lieutenant" to further this task. The noncommissioned officers also had to get involved to build a nazi Wehrmacht. He wrote:

An army of millions was fighting for the great German cause of Adolf Hitler against the old, perpetual ancestral enemies. And only a small number of soldiers know [anything] about the deepest significance of this struggle. . . . This struggle can never be decided with weapons alone. At the front always stands the idea . . . We have set ourselves the task of wanting to recover German Europe, while the majority of our nation still does not know much about the German world.

Huebner also criticized the sporadic ideological training of the past when unit commanders had used methods and content according to their own opinions. This alone created danger, and uniform concepts were needed. He cited a case of 100 recruits of whom not one had a clear understanding of national socialism; they could only spout meaningless phrases. On the other hand, Soviet deserters and prisoners of war reported a very intensive ideological schooling program in the Soviet army while the German army had little, if any. A first lieutenant of Huebner's regiment reported on his return from a company commander's course, that in addition to one single lecture on an ideological theme, a clergyman spoke to them once.

The colonel wrote that the majority of the soldiers had an interest in the nazi weltanschauung and desired instruction in it. Thus, the only requirement was to make the instruction interesting and to do it properly. To carry out a uniform program, he recommended the assignment of a Betreuungsoffizier to "every regiment, independent unit, military school, course of instruction, garrison, etc." The B.O. should be an older qualified officer (First

Lieutenant or Captain) who was not confessionally committed. If the supply of officers permitted, these officers should have full time B.O. duties on the regimental staff. Under supervision of the commander, they would be responsible for ideological schooling and Betreuung and could offer valuable assistance to commanders in officer and noncommissioned officer training. He recommended that B.O.s should attend three to four week courses at army or army group level within the homeland where party and SS speakers would participate. Their task would include indoctrinating the entire officer and noncommissioned officer corps as well as the troops in the nazi weltanschauung and "to enthuse them for the world of Adolf Hitler." He warned that the B.O. should not follow the example of the Soviet Politruk; instead he should act as an assistant to the commander who had little time to devote to ideological indoctrination. He would forward an experience report through normal service channels quarterly. Huebner laid great emphasis on making nazi literature available to the officers and troops and specified certain books and information which should be readily available at company level. Every newspaper at the front should contain at least one article of ideological or historical significance, and above all, articles should appear about "our German ancestors." He conceded that a great number of soldiers would exhibit indifference and lethargy but believed that this would no doubt arise partly because

of a "lack of racial substance," partly through religious commitment, and partly through "an almost traditional indifference" inculcated in the family and school system. After the war, the state would have to conduct a Kulturkampf,⁴¹ he said.

The party itself would have to give a new and much stronger impulse to the indoctrinational effort, and it would be "the great mission of the Wehrmacht" to be the handmaiden of the party. "Wehrmacht, party and its organizations, and SS have to become one single ideological block," he wrote. Again referring to the Russian example, he cited communist party members and functionaries as the single support for the moral fighting strength of the Soviet army; he noted that each Soviet company always had fanatic party people who upheld the communist idea. Although the Soviet example showed how only a couple of men could affect others, it would "obviously" not apply to the German circumstances "since the German people and the German Wehrmacht exhibited an essentially higher compactness." Huebner believed that the officer corps, especially the younger officers, showed a deep interest in the nazi weltanschauung, and even the noncommissioned officers were ready for it.

⁴¹Kulturkampf--cultural battle--was the name given to Bismarck's attempt to eliminate the influence of the Catholic Church in Prussia in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

He concluded, therefore, that the men would surely follow.⁴²

The Threads Converge

So far, the threads leading to the NSFO had included: the army's own initiatives in Army Group Center through the ideas of Lersner, in OKH with the backing of the Army Personnel Office, and through the ideas of a solitary army colonel with SS backing and help; the Keitel-Rosenberg thread at OKW where the two contracting parties showed unmistakable signs that each wanted to control the nazi indoctrinational effort with his own hands; and the intervention of Bormann and the Party Chancellery. It was the latter thread which loomed as the most ominous. Eventually, Bormann would be able to shove the others aside and have his own ideas adopted as the basis for the creation of the NSFO, but in the meantime the army continued its cooperative attitude.

On October 24, 1943, the subject of Wehrgeistige Führung filled the greater part of Field Marshal Keitel's daily calendar, and he had the OKW and OKH staffs busy coordinating with Bormann's Party Chancellery on how to either turn the B.O. into an "officer for political leadership" or start from the beginning. Military staff

⁴²BAK, Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer SS, NS 19/neu 750, Denkschrift (Entwurf) über die weltanschauliche Schulung in der Wehrmacht (Heer), von Oberst Dr. Huebner, Kommandeur Grenadier Regiment 529, Mai 1943.

officers now looked into creating official positions for political officers and in giving them extensive schooling.⁴³ Considering the political inexperience and naivete of the general staff officers, it is doubtful whether many of them, even the most nazi inclined among them, knew the potential of what they were spawning.

⁴³NAM, T78, Roll 134, Frame 6063557.

CHAPTER IV

ESTABLISHMENT AND CONCEPT OF THE NSFO

Hitler and Bormann Set the Guidelines

In a June 1943 address at Breslau to Commanding Generals in the Replacement army, Hitler had emphasized the urgent need for stronger political-ideological leadership of the soldiers, and as seen earlier, he personally made the decision to entitle the officer charged with this task, "Offizier für National Socialist Führung"--short title, NSFO. On December 8 OKH, not waiting for a formal announcement from OKW, showed its independent spirit by formally announcing the new name and by stating that the change decidedly widened the former concept of military leadership. To the normal job of leadership, the announcement stated, the Führer had now added the building of a political will to increase the striking power of the entire Wehrmacht by making all soldiers national socialists. Not mere speeches, but a clear knowledge of what Hitler had given the German people in his ideology would be necessary for national socialist leadership (NSF) work. Wehrgeistige Führung had had a basis in ideology, OKH "mistakenly"

declared, and this would continue, but now the Supreme War Lord demanded a more grandiose goal--to awaken the deepest energy of the nation which was embodied in every German soldier.¹ The OKH announcement could only have been a formality, since the very next day the Commanding General of Wehrkreis VII published two letters to his command on the new program and announced that a Wehrkreis "primer" for weekly NSF instruction had gone to the publisher that same day.² This indicated that the move toward the new program had been no great secret and that subordinate army commands must have known of the new program before its formal announcement.

Despite the army's immediate response to the Führer's desires, the real driving force in the creation of the NSFO program was the Chief of the Party Chancellery rather than military men. In a series of handwritten notes which he drafted on December 21, 1943, Martin Bormann made it clear that he had no intention of letting each individual military service operate its own NSFO program. Instead, he wanted a central office to be created in OKW to supervise and control the entire scheme. Bormann, however, was concerned about finding the right man to head the office. Keitel was not the one because his authority was insufficient, and the field marshal was already causing

¹NAM, T77, Roll 1039, Frames 6512892-93.

²NAM, T79, Roll 80, Frames 615-16.

problems. Keitel had told Bormann that there were already 5000 people in OKW and that, because of the need for economising on personnel, no more "leadership officers" could be added. Bormann felt that the field marshal's attitude was "characteristic" and wrote that Keitel was "much too anxious, too overworked, [and had] too little drive!" In fact he doubted the competency of both Keitel and Reinecke and complained that it often took months to get an order published because of the weakness and political unreliability of these two generals. In Bormann's opinion, the main problem was that orders published by Keitel and Reinecke lacked "striking force." He added that within the competence of the service personnel offices, neither the Inspectorate for Educational Matters (Inspektionen für Bildungswesen) nor the military schools had adequate influence. He also doubted the efficiency of the air force in general and called Admiral Rogge of the navy a "hybrid." With such unreliable people to deal with, Bormann concluded that a new office with new people--an "extraordinary instrument" as Reinecke called it--would have to be created; it should be the sole focal point for all political matters in the Wehrmacht.

Bormann expected opposition from the army to his plans for establishing an NS Leadership Staff in OKW. Commanders had always considered themselves independent in this sort of thing, and he doubted even if orders would

change the situation. He felt that the Army Personnel Office was the center of this opposition, but strangely enough Bormann was considering General Schmundt, the head of that office, as one of the candidates for the position as chief of the new leadership staff. This strange factor arose time after time in party-Wehrmacht relations; party members often saw those like Schmundt who did the most to further the nazi cause as obstructors or as anti-nazi. It may well have been that these military individuals would accept nazism only so long as the military could stand independent of the party and rule in its own realm. When the party appeared to endanger soldierly tradition, a military bulwark went up. To overcome this opposition from the army, Bormann considered that the chief NSFO in OKW should answer directly to Hitler; if farther down the chain, he would probably encounter political opposition. Still, he doubted that Keitel could endure Reinecke, or whoever else got the job, reporting directly to Hitler. Because of the opposition, a party liaison office would have to watch over the armed forces.

Bormann was determined to shape the new program, especially when it came to the NSFOs themselves. They should definitely be commissioned officers, he felt, and only those who had been previously active in the party should be selected. With the Soviet Politruk idea obviously on his mind, he decided that the NSFOs should not

conduct investigations "as [Ministerial Director] Pässe wanted [them to do]." Also Reinecke was getting "skittish"; the general believed that the authority of the new NSF Chief had to be settled before personnel could be selected to fill the NSFO positions.³ Since Reinecke's actions presented a danger to the speedy implementation of the program, Bormann had to see Hitler quickly. As proof that the Party Chancellery Chief succeeded, the very next day a Führer Order, based largely on Bormann's ideas officially established the NSFO program in all three of the armed services.

Establishment of the NSFO

On December 22, 1943, Hitler, in his capacity as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, legitimized the new name for all services and established a powerful organization to oversee the NSF system. To carry out the leadership and training of the troops in political ideology, he ordered OKW to cooperate with the party chancellery in order to establish uniform handling of the NSF task, and he instituted a new NSF Staff in OKW, the Chief of which would have direct access to him and would work closely with the party, "the bearer of the political will." He authorized the Chief of the NSF Staff to dictate instructions to NSFOs, high level officers and officials of the armed

³BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 151, Unterhaltung (3 pages) and General Reinecke (2 pages) in Bormann's handwriting, December 21, 1943.

forces, and to conduct or supervise courses of NSF instruction. By directing the NSF Chief to confer with officials of the NSF Staffs of the army, navy, and air force high commands in filling personnel positions in the new OKW staff, he automatically created the requirement for similar staffs in the three services. The OKW Staff Chief, in cooperation with Bormann, had the right of approval or veto in selecting NSFOs nominated by field units and the party. Lastly, the Führer appointed General Reinecke as the new Chief of the NSF Staff/OKW and instructed the three services to comply with Reinecke's personnel requirements in filling the newly created positions.⁴ The Führer Order, used as the basic authority for the program throughout the short history of the NSFO, gave Bormann a huge share in the Wehrmacht program, but it still left much unsaid, so Hitler called a conference for early January 1944 at his headquarters in East Prussia--the Wolfsschanze (the Wolf's Lair).

On January 7 Hitler met with Reinecke, Keitel, Schmundt, and Bormann to hammer out the details. The importance of the meeting lay in the fact that the NSFO stopped far short of becoming a true political commissar. All of Reinecke's ideas met with full approval from the

⁴Waldemar Besson, "Zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialistischen Führungs Offiziers (NSFO)," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, doc. no. 5 (January 1961), p. 94. Also in NAM, T84, Roll 160, Frames 1526902-03.

Führer who immediately decided that the NSFOS would conduct their work through normal military channels instead of through a separate NSF channel of communication. Hitler placed tactical and personal leadership on the same level--one held as much importance as the other--and declared that NSF personnel must have strong nazi convictions as well as combat experience. The Nazi War Lord stressed that he wanted no intellectuals in the program and that all schooling for NSFOS must have a uniform quality. Reinecke reported that combat veterans--all men with nazi experience (old political fighters, or young fanatics)--would comprise his staff which would remain small. The general also reported that Bormann had already furnished a list of nazi officers for OKW's NSF Staff, and they all had distinguished combat records and wore the Iron Cross, First Class. Reinecke, holding the Waffen-SS up as an example for the NSF system to follow, informed Hitler that Himmler had offered his full support for the program. The Führer agreed to the establishment of official NSFOS positions down to division level and directed the OKW NSF Staff to ensure that these positions were constantly occupied. The conferees decided that some of the current B.O.s of the former Wehrgeistige Führung program could be used, but only if they were purged of all intellectuals and undesirables. Because of the shortage of officers, regimental and battalion NSFOS would have to perform NSF work as an

additional duty. Above all, Hitler would hold the commander --advised by the NSFO--responsible for the NSF program, and Schmundt added that the commander, rather than the NSFO, must himself perform commissar duties. This decision definitely held the NSFO back from the Politruk concept.

Predicting resistance or indifference from the officer corps, Hitler referred to his own experience as an Education Officer in the Reichswehr, and this precipitated a discussion concerning the relationship between the commander and NSFO and how both would handle their jobs. The Führer recalled how commanders had always squashed indoctrinational efforts whenever they so wished and thus showed his lingering distrust for the officer corps. Keitel believed that field inspections by High Command representatives and the proper selection of NSFOs in cooperation with Bormann's P-K would help forestall any efforts aimed at scuttling the new program, and Hitler threatened to punish any grumbling about the NSF task. No one dare criticize any order, he said, since experience showed that such actions by commanders lowered unit morale; criticism of this nature would cost the culprit his position and his neck. Reinecke stressed that the NSFO must work closely with the other staff officers and keep the commander fully informed, and Schmundt added that the NSFO should advise the commander in the NSF sphere just as the Intelligence Officer or the IIa (Adjutant for Officer Personnel) advised in theirs. In other words the generals present insisted on

maintaining traditional staff procedures. Reinecke commented that the NSFO must see his goal as imparting ideological skill to officers and actively leading soldiers to a nazi political consciousness--not as a preacher or receiver of complaints, but as the commander's advisor. All conferees, Hitler included, agreed that the NSFO must not be a Politrुक. The Führer desired that NSFOs assigned to armies, corps, and divisions should receive an eight or fourteen day course of instruction, and those present attempted to work out a way of calling higher field commanders in for NSF schooling. Wehrmacht schools would have to establish uniformity in their weltanschauung instruction, and Bormann, inserting more party involvement, stated that Goebbels had offered his assistance in this endeavor. Conspicuously, he never mentioned Alfred Rosenberg. Hitler defined his goal as one of permeating the entire Wehrmacht with national socialist thought so that a man who gave his last breath in battle would know why he did so. The ideological struggle, he said, involved the principle of the very existence of the German nation, and the German fighting man had to know that the war centered around either the destruction or continued resistance of races. In closing the conference, both the Führer and Keitel praised General Schörner as a fanatic--as the ideal model for a nazi general.⁵

⁵Gerhard L. Weinberg, "Adolf Hitler und der

The records of the January 7 conference fail to reveal why those present so adamantly refused to establish a Politrुक system. It is unclear whether Hitler agreed with the generals for tactical purposes or whether he actually preferred to retain the traditional supremacy of the commander. If Hitler is considered as a pure opportunist, as he is by many historians, he was probably searching for a way to increase the combat effectiveness of the armed forces and/or to intensify his own control of the officer corps by means of the NSFO. Since even nazi generals opposed any stronger measures by stressing traditional command and staff methods, he probably preferred to take what he could get at the moment to further his own purposes. He would face tomorrow when it came. If aware of various plans by members of the Army General Staff to arrest or kill him or attempt to limit his power, the War Lord may have decided to go slowly, but his decision to establish the NSFO as only an advisor to the commander definitely fit in with his own Führer Prinzip (leader principle) through which he established a leader--follower relationship within the party and state, very much like leadership principles in the military services. Furthermore, his normal tactics of divide and conquer by which he allowed his underlings to establish their own

NS-Führungs--offizier (NSFO)," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte (October 1964), pp. 445-56. Cited from NAM, T120, Container 2621, Serial 5489, Frames E381869-99.

empires under his supervision and thus ensured their competition with each other rather than with himself may also have had a bearing on the authority given to the NSFO. If the party had gained control of the army by means of a fully-empowered NSFO, Bormann would have exercised more power than Göring's air force, parachutists, anti-aircraft units, and air force units fighting as infantrymen or Himmler's Waffen-SS, police network, and terror squads. Any individual or group holding immense power unchecked by similar strength would always stand as a threat to Hitler's own position as supreme arbiter and leader. Such a stand by Hitler could still account for later changes in the NSF concept which brought the NSFO closer to the Politrुक idea since Himmler's power also grew exorbitantly in the last months of the war. Also an imminent threat of defeat would push an opportunist to any measure which might forestall an ignominious end to his own power. On the other hand, if Hitler truly believed in the nazi ideology, he would take any step he could get away with to ensure the security of that ideology, and the NSFO would represent a step to further it; NSFO authority then could increase whenever the Führer saw safe clearance for such a move. Although many events in Hitler's life showed his willingness to cast ideology aside in favor of opportunism and personal power, the establishment of the NSFO did fall within the pattern of the nazi attempts to permeate the army with its ideology.

Hitler was quite willing, for example, to use existing technicians, such as the state civil servants, but he would cover them with nazi watchdogs. Thus it cannot be stated that the institution of the NSFO differed from the normal Hitlerian pattern or that it was not an ideological move. In view of his prediction of resistance to the NSFO program within the officer corps and the insistence of the nazi generals that a Politrुक system should not be established, there is more support for the view that Hitler, whether an opportunist or an ideologist, refrained from establishing a Politrुक system at least partially because of such resistance. This concept would also coincide with the all out propaganda effort soon unleashed by OKW and OKH to sell the NSFO idea to the officer corps as an expression of the true German military spirit. In any event, the Führer established an NSFO with limited powers.

At the conclusion of the conference the participants set to work to carry out his orders. That same day Bormann notified the party members of the new program⁶ and set up a "work staff" in the Party Chancellery to handle it.⁷ The next day Hitler directed schooling in the nazi weltanschauung for all soldiers,⁸ and in the following

⁶ Ibid., p. 443. Cited from Der Sammlung der Partei-Kanzlei: Verfügungen, Anordnungen, Bekanntgaben, Bd. VI (1944, Teil I) (München: n.p., 1944), p. 256.

⁷ Ibid., p. 444. Cited from Verfügungen, Anordnungen 6/44, pp. 258-59.

⁸ Ibid. Cited from Max Domarus, Hitler: Reden und

weeks he assembled the senior generals to discuss nazi training in the army.⁹ By early February the NSFO program began to assume shape, and OKW busily published a newspaper for indoctrination purposes.¹⁰ On February 6 Keitel briefly informed the military services of the appointment of General Reinecke as Chief of the NSF Staff of OKW (NSF/OKW) and directed the establishment of a similar staff in OKH and the other services. He sketched the relationship between commander and NSFO, gave out the guidelines as laid down in the conference the previous month, stressed proper selection of NSF personnel, provided basic prerequisites for their selection, and said that OKW would soon publish regulations for execution of the December 22 Führer Order.¹¹ The NSF system did not go into effect throughout the Wehrmacht simultaneously; this showed either the soundness of Hitler's prediction of resistance from the officer corps or that the German armed forces had poor administration and communication. The former, in view of the evidence, was more probable. One Air Force Anti-Aircraft Division did not announce the program until late June 1944.¹²

Proklamationen, 1932-1945, Bd. II (Würzburg: n.p., 1963), p. 2078f.

⁹Field-Marshal Erich von Manstein, Lost Victories, trans. Anthony G. Powell (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1958), p. 511.

¹⁰Weinberg, "Hitler und NSFO," p. 444, 444n.

¹¹Besson, "NSFO," doc. no. 7, p. 96.

¹²NAM, T84, Roll 160, Frame 1526902.

On February 23 Bormann defined the program in a speech to party leaders in Munich and closed with the statement that the creation of a national socialist "revolutionary army" expressed the desire of the Führer and showed the nazi will in action.¹³ That same day Hassell made a diary entry which showed that the NSFO program received publicity outside of military circles. He wrote that Soviet success with propaganda among German soldiers, especially those captured at Stalingrad, had made a deep impression on Hitler. Now the Führer would institute his own grandiose program for indoctrinating the armed forces from top to bottom with the nazi ideology.¹⁴

The Führer's Thoughts

To adequately understand the goals actually set for the NSFO, it is first necessary to understand Adolf Hitler's own conception of national socialist leadership. The Führer believed that in the future, an "officer who does not educate and lead his troops politically in this struggle is just as much in the wrong place as an officer who fails in the tactical leadership of his troops."¹⁵ He publically proclaimed Colonel General Eduard Dietl as

¹³Besson, "NSFO," doc. no. 11, pp. 104-12.

¹⁴Ulrich von Hassell, The Von Hassell Diaries: 1938-1944 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1947), p. 338.

¹⁵NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frame 5597678.

the epitome of the nazi officer on the occasion of the latter's death on June 23. The eulogy contained the core of the nazi leader's concept of the nazi officer: Dietl had loved the German soldier and always took the trouble to care for him, yet the general used ruthless hardness when necessary to get the job done. Dietl considered no sacrifice too great, but he remained a true friend and father to his subordinates. He did not pay mere lip service to national socialism but showed his nazism with his entire will and heart, and, understanding his men's anxieties, he inspired trust.¹⁶ On January 27, 1944, Hitler, as discussed in the January 7 conference, called all eastern front Army Group and Field Army commanders plus a large number of other senior officers to his headquarters to address them on the need for nazi education in the army. He demanded faith as the necessary ingredient for victory --particularly when the going got rough--and stated that nazi schooling had now become a prerequisite for high command.¹⁷ Hitler must have meant what he said since Hassell noted in his diary that General Enno von Rintelen had to attend a course in nazi indoctrination before he could take over an Army Corps.¹⁸ The Supreme Leader frequently emphasized how the permeation of the Soviet army with communist

¹⁶NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frame 1526383.

¹⁷Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 511.

¹⁸Hassell, Diaries, p. 339.

ideology impressed him and said he wanted something similar; he told General Jodl that he wanted to train general staff officers of the Tito variety.¹⁹

Hitler was aware of the officer corps' attachment to Prussian military traditions, and therefore he was not prepared to provoke any greater opposition than that which already existed; so he moved slowly. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to express his extreme dislike for these traditions and to express his opinions. This showed clearly after the attempt on his life on July 20, 1944, when he accused the Army General Staff of weakening combat officers who joined its ranks and of spreading pessimism whenever general staff officers visited combat troops.²⁰ After the 1940 campaign in France, the Führer had spoken unmistakably about creating a nazi revolutionary army. Many times he declared to commanders that a soldier must enter the realm of politics since the soldier must execute the political mandate and lay down his life for a political aim--the nazi idea and its leadership in Europe. The nazi chief said that the armed forces existed only as the strong

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 420-21. See also NAM, T84, Roll 175, Frame 1544152--Hassell incorrectly said that Hitler made his "Tito" comment to Keitel. Tito was the pseudonym used by the communist leader of the partisan forces who fought the Germans with guerrilla tactics in Jugoslavia.

²⁰Felix Gilbert, ed., Hitler Directs His War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 106. The book is a compilation of the secret records of daily military conferences.

arm of the political leader who led a nation which had embraced nazism in its entirety; he expressed disbelief that nazi training which began in the home, which took place in school and in the Hitler Youth, and then continued with party or nazi organization membership should cease when a young man became a soldier. One who divested himself of this potential, he declared, gave up a strong instrument of force, and he added that drill and obedience could no longer suffice for the job at hand. An officer had to show his loyalty to the party and also devote himself fanatically to the nazi state.²¹ On July 29, 1944, Hitler, referring to the U.S.S.R., told an assembled group of NSFOs that since Germany was struggling against an ideologically aligned enemy which had discipline and obedience, the German army must also have ideological training. Whoever failed to put his whole heart into the task, he added, must "disappear"; whoever did not would be exterminated.²² It was obvious in all of Hitler's comments concerning the NSFO that the army's resistance to nazification stood uppermost in his mind. Searching for a cause of this resistance, he no doubt felt that the Prussian military

²¹Besson, "NSFO," doc. no. 11, pp. 105-6. From a speech by Hauptbereichsleiter Willy Ruder at the Party Leader Conference in Munich on February 23, 1944.

²²NAM, T79, Roll 80, Frame 603. Present were Keitel, Bormann, and von Hengl, plus NSFOs of all Army Groups, several Armies, and units of the Replacement Army.

tradition still barred the way toward a thoroughly nazi army. Therefore, until resistance died out or was totally smashed, the German political officer would have to try and blend tradition with nazism instead of serving as a Politruk.

NSFO versus Politruk

The political commissars of the Soviet army had at various times held so much power that a commander could not issue an order unless the ranking commissar countersigned it.²³ The German political officer did not serve as a Politruk since the NSFO could not judge or overrule his commander. If he encountered difficulties with his commander, he had to turn to the Chief of Staff or the Adjutant for Officer Personnel for assistance. Of course, this did no good if the commander overruled them also. General Ritter von Hengl, after he became Chief of the NSF Staff of OKH on May 15, 1944, told military commanders to handle such problems themselves and not trouble him or neighboring units with their problems.²⁴ NSF propaganda told the German soldier that the Russian method of spiritual leadership differed completely from the German system because the Soviets placed the commissar above traditional

²³Cornelius Ryan, The Last Battle (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), p. 246.

²⁴NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frame 5597676. From a speech by von Hengl at Sonthofen on May 15, 1944, shortly after his appointment as Chief of the OKH/NSF Staff.

military leadership while all German officers combined both political and military leadership in themselves²⁵-- this was the key to the difference between the German and Soviet systems. Hengl declared that two ideologies clashed in the war--the one of the Politruk and the one of the German officer, but the latter must embody nazi ideology since mere obedience and knowledge of combat drill were no longer sufficient in an ideological war. The Chief of NSF/OKH also said that faith was more important than knowledge and that if the NSFO ever became a Politruk he would dig the grave of the German army. The nazi German army needed no Politruk, he added, and the Führer himself refused to establish such a system--the commander would retain his traditional role. Thus, no special NSFO channel would bypass the commander on special questions nor would the NSFO pass judgment on his commander. Hengl believed that troop leaders and political officers would encounter no insuperable difficulties and that Prussian military tradition would not only continue but find its raison d'etre in nazism.²⁶ These could hardly have been soothing words for generals who found their comfort in Prussian military traditions. There were some military and party leaders, of course, who cooperated in the blending of tradition and nazism. Keitel, naturally, played Hitler's game completely

²⁵NAM, T78, Roll 135, Frames 6064282-90.

²⁶Ibid., Frames 6064897-910.

by trying to show that there was too much reliance on tradition. On July 29, 1944, nine days after the attempt on the Führer's life, he said:

We speak too much of tradition and have too little workable tradition. . . . We talk of unconditional obedience, but the higher up we go, we hear less of that. We have become writing officers --officials in uniform--instead of fighters and doers. . . . We've gone too far away from old, sound, soldierly qualities. . . . We've become too intellectual.

Keitel believed that the officer corps, wrapped up in its traditions, had forgotten why a man with a machine gun fought obstinately, and he felt that the officer corps did not place enough worth on energy and hardness which comprised the core of the comradeship needed between officers and men.²⁷ Nazism, of course, could supply the "energy and hardness" needed by the soldiers. A few days earlier, Party Member Passe from the party chancellery had already told NSFOs that the party and the Wehrmacht must both have the same ideology and determination--this meant that the armed forces must become political minded. The nazi concept of leader (Führer) and follower (Folgender) must now supercede the traditional command (Befehl) and obedience (Gehorsam). The long term goal, he stated, demanded consistent ideological alignment while the short term goal called for an increase in the readiness to act through strengthened "political dynamics."²⁸ Thus Passe revealed

²⁷NAM, T79, Roll 80, Frames 607-08.

²⁸NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frame 5597561.

not only that military tradition was insufficient for the task at hand but also that the party considered the NSFO as a temporary phase in a longer process. The party, à la Röhm, wanted to permeate the army with nazism from the bottom up. Now, however, the nazis would work through the NSFO system; they had long since given up on the higher ranking officers whom they expected to simply obey during the period of transition. General Hasso von Manteuffel, a Hitler favorite, gave substance to the beliefs of party members who thought that senior members of the army stood in their way. He commented that the higher generals never did understand the thinking of the troops under the new conditions of the nazi state.²⁹ So to capture the military minds, NSF propaganda urged the army to align itself with the prevailing mood of the nation.

Historically the Prussian/German army had accommodated itself to a point with the prevailing mood, so nazi propaganda tried to instruct the military in the meaning of a nazi nation. From the era of feudalism the officer corps developed a close, corporate spirit based on the medieval concept of loyalty--the chivalric fidelity owed by vassals. In the age of absolutism the officer learned absolute obedience to the representative of the absolute state--the monarch as a person. In the modern era, under a

²⁹B. H. Liddell Hart, The German Generals Talk (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1948), p. 298. Manteuffel made this statement after the war.

constitutional regime, the corps subscribed to the intense nationalism fostered by liberals but learned to reject or remain aloof from liberal ideas.³⁰ Under nazism Adolf Hitler expected German officers to render unconditional obedience to an idea embodied in his own person. No one was expected to stand aloof from this idea which included the Volksgemeinschaft concept--the theory that all Germans --civilian and military--belonged equally to a national community through bonds of blood, fatherland, and history. As early as May 25, 1934, Blomberg had cooperated in furthering the concept by publishing the circular, "The Wehrmacht and National Socialism," which explained that the nazi weltanschauung derived from the needs of the nation and that it was "the bond of blood and fate which binds all Germans together." He declared that the nazi ideology must form the basis "for the whole of a soldier's service" including his off-duty time and social activity. Advising officers to establish social contacts with party officials in keeping with the idea of the Volksgemeinschaft, he also furthered this common tie of "togetherness" by ordering a closer comradeship between officers and men.³¹ NSF propaganda carried these thoughts to extremes and

³⁰ Karl Demeter, The German Officer Corps in Society and State 1650-1945, trans. Angus Malcolm (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965), p. 159.

³¹ Ibid., p. 368. Cited from Part II, "Political Handbook," printed in 1938 by the Reichsdruckerei; Berlin-Militärarchiv.

blasted out in speeches, letters, proclamations, regulations, radio addresses, handbills, newspapers, pamphlets, and regular instruction periods for the troops with the purpose of overwhelming all resistance to the nazification of the armed forces.

Leading figures in the army called for military cooperation with the nazification effort by using a combination of ideological, emotional, and rational appeals. Among these figures the Chief of the OKH/NSF Staff, General von Hengl, stood in the foreground. Hengl believed that the nation having the strongest ideology would win the war and demanded therefore that soldiers learn to hate and annihilate their enemies. The old Reichswehr, he said, produced unpolitical thinkers, but remnants of that Weimar army must receive education in the nazi spirit. The army must win them over and make them active, and youth and time would bypass those who would not listen to appeals by heart or reason. Aiming at the hard-core resisters, he warned that whoever consciously sabotaged the Führer's NSFO order would deserve the hardness of the law. Hengl attempted to show that the nazi and soldierly spirits were really the same by stressing that the army had developed in the thoughts of nazism during the years of peace. Giving credit to the idea that the establishment of the NSFO was an opportunistic act, he announced that only total war now demanded the stringent measure of the NSFO. This was

the first real admission that the basic reason for establishing the NSFO was opportunism; it was a means for winning the war. The Führer, he said, had faith in the German soldiers and knew that true German fighting men could only think like nazis because he himself had been a soldier. Hitler established the NSFO, Hengl continued, only because the commander could no longer do everything himself. Now the army needed the NSFO simply because the task of indoctrination demanded specialization.³² Even Gerd von Rundstedt, the very model of the traditional Prussian field marshal, told his troops during the Ardennes offensive at the end of 1944 that "training for the political soldierly spirit in which the best traditions of the past are combined with the idea of national socialism is the challenge of the hour."³³ Much of the new propaganda went deeply into the past in an attempt to win over non-political officers.

A recurring NSF theme emphasized that the nazi ideology had been deeply rooted by history in the German army and in the German nation. The propaganda pronounced the blending of the soldierly spirit with nazism, and the leading of the former to the latter, as the most important single thing for the German soldier since the Thirty Years' War. For two hundred years, according to the teaching, the

³²NAM, T78, Roll 135, Frames 6064897-910.

³³NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frame 1526047.

world saw in Prussian/German militarism only a war machine and failed to observe the political side of that militarism. The German officer could now combine the soldierly spirit of the past with nazism; he could lead Germany out of the political weakness of the Thirty Years' War and the disunity of the following religious battles to the new community of the Volk and a greater German Reich. It was the NSFO's duty to make this clear to German soldiers.³⁴ The NSF concept, as opposed to the Politrुक system, grounded German military tradition in the Völkisch nazi belief which supposedly had its roots in German history. Frederick-William I of Prussia had led a Völkisch-political revolution which changed the concept of fighting for pay to one of fighting for honor, and both he and Frederick the Great, said the nazis, stirred the soul of the nation by laying the basis for the resurrection of the Reich. This meant the achievement of the soldierly spirit in the form of the Volksgemeinschaft. The Wilhemian era had forsaken this line of development by undermining the Völkisch-political instinct in the people and partly even in the armed forces, but the vigor of the German people then re-established itself through the experiences of World War I and Adolf Hitler's struggle to save the Reich. The Reichswehr, burdened by its roots in the Wilhelminian time, had stood apart from the national movement, and nazism, therefore,

³⁴NAM, T78, Roll 135, Frames 6064282-90.

had to come to the army as a gift. Knowledge of the historical oneness of the soldierly spirit and nazism could only serve as a bridge toward the innermost fulfillment of the German soldier. The fissure between front and homeland in 1918, according to the NSF doctrine, arose because both soldiers and civilians saw only the military task. Hitler, observing this, made the German soldierly spirit basic to nazi ideology and led the martial tradition into a new era of development; therefore, the spirit of the soldier formed the very idea of nazism since both exhibited the will and life of the nation and were interdependent. Accordingly, opposition to nazism by soldiers only showed ignorance, mangled pride, and mixed-up feelings of responsibility to their own martial development.

To overcome military resistance to nazism, the NSFO preached that Providence bestowed the ties of blood, nation, and historical duty on the Germans and that the German soldierly spirit exhibited nothing else but nazism in action; failure to understand this caused older officers to stand aloof and some younger ones to sink into frivolity. The NSFO theme cited the Prussian War of Liberation against Napoleon as an historical example of a political uprising which moved the Volk to action and showed the nazi movement as a reaffirmation of the former German spirit which appealed to humanity, the energy of Germans, and the ability of the Volk to strike down

Untermenschum (gangsterism or those races which nazis considered sub-human). The doctrine proclaimed that the German soldier had become a fighter through the influence of national socialism and charged that the officer corps had failed to bear the nazi weltanschauung in the beginning only because the officer caste had separated itself from the political life of the nation. The NSFO, therefore, had to lead the officers back to the German Volks-gemeinschaft because God gave the genius of Hitler to the German people to rediscover what lay within them. The German lines would always remain thin, and the Reich would always have less material than its enemies and would fight on two fronts, but German will, grounded in the past and reinvigorated by Hitler, would win.³⁵ The NSFO made these typical nazi views of the German army and its community with the Volk basic to the NSF concept in an attempt to make his nazification efforts more palatable.

Under the influence of the idea of the Volks-gemeinschaft, the former strict separation between officers and men began to disappear even before the war. The flood of lower classes into the officer ranks helped remove social distinctions, and even before the war foreign observers had noted with surprise that off-duty officers and men frequently met on equal terms, often eating in the same restaurants--even at the same table. Nazism officially

³⁵NAM, T77, Roll 1039, Frames 6512882-91.

encouraged this general comradeship of all bearers of arms and devoted considerable attention to the physical and psychological needs of the troops. Many competent observers believed this stood as one of the most powerful factors in maintaining morale despite the grueling experiences on the Russian front.³⁶ Under the impact of the NSF system, the trend toward the leveling of rank distinctions could only continue, if not increase. Although the NSF idea emphasized comradeship and the army's closeness with the people, it also stressed the will to fight.

In January 1944 an OKH pamphlet entitled "Unterlagen zur Wehrgeistigen Führung der Truppe" (Data for Troop Leadership in Spiritual Defense) received its new NSF title, "Unterlagen zur nationalsozialist Führung der Truppe" (Data for National Socialist Troop Leadership). The pamphlet, distributed to NSFOs down to division level, gave credence to the fact that one of the reasons for the institution of the NSFO was opportunistic. Because of the bitterness of the struggle, it explained, Hitler had to place the spiritual guidance of the troops in the foreground. Since this guidance should have the nazi idea as its base, a new and clear name for the program--NSF--had become essential. The pamphlet, with a new flair, listed the essence of NSF:

(1) A steady will to fight had its roots in the profession

³⁶Herbert Rosinski, The German Army (Washington: The Infantry Journal, 1944), pp. 138-39. This book was originally published in Great Britain in 1939.

of arms based on World War I experience, and the will to attack and the tough obstinacy of the soldiers now also depended on politics. (2) Unshakable faith in the soldierly and spiritual achievement of the German Volk came from the same methods used by the leaders of the War of Liberation and by the kings of Prussia for two centuries. Faith in nazism attained the same importance as powder and lead. Through faith and training, the resolute forces of the will to fight, courage, community, comradeship, loyalty, tenacity, exactness, and sobriety of belief would drive away all doubt, but the German officer must show the nazi way. (3) The preparedness and ability of Germans glorified the German soldier, and only the master race had the ability to fight to the death for its Volk. (4) Völkische Gedanke (the idea of the people) reached for the highest goals of life by working for the entire German nation rather than for the individual. NSF based this organic concept on the idea of blood, race, and the will of the creator rather than the will of men. No higher ideal could exist than to sacrifice blood for the Volk.³⁷

Nazi ideology had come a long way in infiltrating the army. Although the army's leaders had tried to anticipate the wishes of Hitler by instituting a program of their own liking, they did so under pressure from the ever-encroaching nazi party. Without the party's,

³⁷NAM, T78, Roll 135, Frames 6064132-4292.

specifically Martin Bormann's, intervention, the army would not have accepted as much as it did. Certainly without pressure from the party, there would have been little direct nazification of the army and certainly no NSFO.

CHAPTER V

THE PARTY ORGANIZES

The Position of the Party

While leading nazis expressed antagonism toward the army and wanted to exercise total control over it, military leaders acted as if they were oblivious to the nazis' long-range goals and continued to cooperate with the party. Dr. Robert Ley, Leader of the German Labor Front, was one such leading nazi. In the spring of 1940 he delivered a speech before the Gau (district) propaganda chiefs of the party which best summarizes the contempt party officials held for the traditional army. He downgraded the army's efforts in Poland and said the SS had done everything worthwhile there. The army, he said, retained too many Christian principles and did not know enough about nazism.¹ Regardless of statements and attitudes of this nature by party officials, the military saw only that the commander controlled the program and believed this would preserve time-honored Prussian traditions.

¹Ulrich von Hassell, The Von Hassell Diaries: 1938-1944 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1947), p. 124 (entry dated March 19, 1940).

Hengl was one of those who confidently continued to cooperate. He paraphrased Schörner by saying that party members in the army must now support their commanders as block and cell leaders just as they did before entering service;² he also instructed commanders and NSFOs in the Replacement Army to cooperate closely with the party District Deputies for Armed Forces Questions (Gaubeauftragten für Wehrmachtfragen) in order to utilize party help in obtaining speakers and literature.³ Reinecke was another member of the oblivious military hierarchy; he instructed all services to furnish the names of NSFOs to the local District and County party leaders (Gauleiter and Kreisleiter).⁴ The reason for the confidence shown by generals like Hengl and Reinecke was that the military looked to the commander for responsibility for the NSFO program while only using the party's expertise as an aid to military functions. This view held that the army was safe as long as the commander retained his supremacy over the NSFO. Any threat to this traditional structure, of course, might precipitate resistance to nazism by even those who now cooperated. For their part, however, party members often saw beyond this view. To some of them the activities of the NSFO previewed the final subjugation

²NAM, T78, Roll 135, Frames 6064897-910.

³NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frame 5597714.

⁴Ibid., Frame 5597662.

of the army, and for Bormann the institution of the political officer implied a stepping stone to greater personal power.

In his order of December 22, 1943, Hitler had designated the party as the bearer of the political will for the NSF program, and on June 19, 1944, he stated that Bormann alone held responsibility for the party's activities within the NSF structure. Hitler went even further by making Bormann the supreme arbiter concerning questions which should go to him for decision and regarding what bound the military services, and the Führer also forbade subordinate Reich offices from presenting party views to the Wehrmacht without Bormann's consent.⁵ Through the issuance of these orders, Hitler theoretically handed over the NSFO program in its entirety to the party and specifically to Bormann with only himself to serve as a check. He had placed the Prussian/German army in the hands of an alcoholic and given direction of the program to the most vulgar and cruel man in the top level of the N.S.D.A.P., to a man who lacked culture and social graces, and to a man who bullied his subordinates. Admittedly, however, Bormann was a very capable bureaucrat, and as Leader of the Party Chancellery, he was the only man who could open

⁵Waldemar Besson, "Zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialistischen Führungs Offiziers (NSFO)," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, doc. no. 9 (January 1961), pp. 98-99.

Hitler's door--or close it as he saw fit--to a petitioner.⁶ Completely amoral, Martin Bormann often wrote his wife love letters and discoursed in detail over a love affair with another woman.⁷ Bormann obviously had little use for the traditional officer corps which loudly proclaimed its strong belief in Christian ethics. Married in a nazi ceremony and believing in the principle of polygamy, he exemplified the new national socialist man and could hardly support traditions of any kind unless directed to do so by his lord and master. In the end only Hitler could prevent him from using the NSFO for his own purposes, but for the moment Bormann was relatively free to direct the program in whatever direction he might choose.

On February 28, 1944, the Leader of the Party Chancellery published his instructions to the Party District Leaders concerning the political activation of the armed forces and the cooperation he expected between the party and the Wehrmacht. Calling for close cooperation between the party and the military, Bormann gave the District Deputies for Armed Forces Questions responsibility (under supervision of the District Leader) for the party's share in

⁶"Playboy Interview: Albert Speer," Playboy, June 1971, p. 84.

⁷H. R. Trevor-Roper, ed., The Bormann Letters. The Private Correspondence Between Martin Bormann and His Wife from January 1943 to April 1945, trans. R. H. Stevens (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1954). The book is replete with letters by Bormann and his wife concerning his extra-marital love affair.

the NSF program. He directed each deputy to establish a working commission composed of the District Propaganda Leader (Gaupropagandaleiter), Rosenberg's representatives at district level (Gauvertreter des Beauftragten des Führers für die Überwachung der gesamten geistigen und weltanschaulichen Schulung und Erziehung der N.S.D.A.P.), the District Schooling Leader (Gauschulungsleiter), the District Press Leader (Gaupresseamtsleiter), District Officer Leader for Racial Policy (Gauamtsleiter für Rassenpolitik), the District Guardian of Culture (Gaukulturwart), and the "Strength through Joy" Guardian (Kraft durch Freude Wart)--a Labor Front official. He added that other offices would provide representatives as needed on a case by case basis and that the P-K would provide instructions for the joint work with the armed forces. In most cases, Bormann said, only the Deputy District Leader (Stellvertreter Gauleiter) or the District Staff Office Leader (Gaustabsamtsleiter) could serve as Deputy for Armed Forces Questions, and he ordered those so designated to report to him no later than March 15, 1944.⁸

On May 21 the party boss requested his District Leaders to expeditiously forward evaluations by telegraph of those officers nominated as NSFOS. He cautioned them to recommend only officers who qualified equally in soldierly and political expertise. NSFOS already serving

⁸NAM, T78, Roll 135, Frame 6064895.

with troops as well as those newly nominated by party officers would have their qualification checked while attending ten day schools; this would also help the party and the Wehrmacht determine the level (battalion, regiment, or higher) at which an NSFO should serve.⁹ Although the Chief of the Party Chancellery did not make it clear who would conduct the courses of instruction, the party or the military (in fact both did), this latest order showed most clearly that the party (i.e., Bormann) would involve itself sufficiently to either veto or approve the selection of military officers as NSFOs. Thus, the party, not the Army Personnel Office, now theoretically dictated the assignment of officers selected as NSFOs. Bormann, obviously seeing his opportunity to gain political power over the armed forces, had already galvanized other party members to action. He appointed one of these, Willy Ruder (a high official in the Party Chancellery), to head the P-K work staff, and Ruder quickly set to work within a week of the December 22 Führer Order.

On December 30, 1943, Ruder explained his ideas about the work staff in a note to Helmuth Friedrichs, one of the office leaders in the Party Chancellery and a high official in the SS. The work staff, as Ruder explained it, must constantly provide suggestions and party know-how on training and schooling procedures to the OKW NSF Staff and

⁹Besson, "NSFO," doc. no. 12, pp. 112-13.

provide speakers and instructional materials. He also declared that the party must place itself in a position to provide a new political impulse in the leadership and training of the Wehrmacht and to activate the nazi alignment within the services. The work staff would also serve other party and governmental offices which would in turn provide representatives to the staff. He also predicted resistance from a great part of the military, especially older officers who disliked political training and who had consistently worked against systematic nazification of the armed forces.

Ruder correctly believed that some commanders who had refused to allow nazi indoctrination would not recommend known political activists as NSFOS. Instead they would tend to nominate officers who agreed with their own views rather than officers who would further the cause of the party. No doubt they would merely rename the B.O.s as NSFOS, and these officers did not possess the necessary qualifications. Most B.O.s in the Wehrgeistige Führung program, he continued, had never been suitable, and too many of them came from the teaching profession; therefore the party must find soldierly and political persons--party leaders in the service--who had a bent for nazi indoctrinational work. It would be useless to order someone to do the job; they had to be volunteers. Accordingly, the NSF Staff of OKW and the P-K would have to look at nominations

from the field very carefully, and Ruder mistakenly expected worthwhile nominations to come from all District Leaders and party members.

Ruder wanted NSFOS to be young and of the highest type of German men, and he claimed that in most cases only reserve officers fell into this category. The party should strive to win over more of the professional officers, however, since the troops should not get the impression that the NSFOS came to the Wehrmacht as commissars from "foreign sources." Also, the danger existed that the departure of reservists from the service after the end of the war would bring an end to the NSF program. This statement showed that some party members, at least, did not necessarily see the NSFO as an opportunistic measure necessitated by the severity of war; once they achieved party dominance over political matters in the armed forces, they would never give it up. Ruder, like Röhm before him, did not envision any halfway goal; he openly desired to create a revolutionary army "to carry out the will of the Führer."¹⁰

In a speech to leading party members in February 1944, Ruder expanded on his ideas for the creation of a revolutionary army. The party would, of course, have to play the leading role in the NSF program. Ruder believed that the former B.O. system could never have been

¹⁰Ibid., doc. no. 10, pp. 99-104.

instrumental in building a revolutionary army because the staff Intelligence Officer, not selected for his political views, had not worked exclusively in political training duties. But now the establishment of a political and ideological office (the NSF Staff) in the Wehrmacht signified something new to Ruder, and the direct access of the Chief of the NSF Staff of OKW to Hitler gave the program special significance and importance. In Ruder's mind there was a clear link between nazi ideology and a revolutionary army. For example, nazis fortunate enough to have taken part in the battle of France, he claimed, had seen the victory as the breakup of western liberalism, but non-nazis never understood this deep significance; not until the invasion of Russia did the meaning of the ideological struggle become clear to everyone. The revolutionary bolsheviks had taught the Germans that a victorious army had to be fanatically inspired and ideologically indoctrinated. Non-political commanders found it difficult to answer political questions from troops engaged with bolshevik power, and up to now the Wehrmacht had not understood the necessity for political training. As a result, Ruder announced that Hitler had instituted the NSFO to create revolutionary soldiers, and he expected that officers entrusted with the task of turning soldiers into nazi fanatics would be dedicated nazis with outgoing personalities who could talk clearly to commanders on a man to man basis and thus secure

their trust. As a means of training such officers, Ruder's plans included having NSFOs work at times in party offices to accumulate experience; in this way party and military could learn more about each other. In addition the Führer planned to talk to commanders to emphasize the program and overcome their resistance to it. Thus, Ruder acknowledged the power of the Wehrmacht and showed his own caution by warning his listeners concerning their relations with the military.

Ruder took special pains to inform the party officials that the generals had especially emphasized that the party should not intrude in the military sphere and that only the work staff should serve as the official point of contact. Nevertheless, he told the Party's District Leaders to establish liaison offices with subordinate Wehrmacht commands within the homeland while cautioning them not to flood the military services with so much indoctrinational material that it would end up in the trash can. This material had to stay clear, simple, and to the point, and furthermore, active party members should maintain contact with party members in the service so that nazism could reach and capture each man. He failed to mention that "back door reports" would also provide important information for Bormann.

Ruder's formula for carrying out Hitler's orders and to create a revolutionary army was highly idealistic. Everyone would simply work together and address the hearts

and political thinking of the men in the trenches, create love for the Reich, Führer, and nazism, and instill hate for the enemy. Through imparting the party's experience and methods to the Wehrmacht, he believed that the nazis would bring about less military formality and stiffness which he believed "killed the spirit." Drill and obedience could not suffice in an ideological war, he said, and the senior and subordinate relationship must level off and develop into one of leader and follower in accordance with the idea of the nazi community. Calling for an end to the "officer club spirit" and the privilege of rank, Ruder pronounced the nazi aim for the German military leader: the officer should hold himself up as a teacher and as a model for youth to follow. The nazi army, he concluded, must only execute the nazi will and the desires of Hitler.¹¹ In this speech Ruder revealed that he was a fanatical idealist who believed in the so-called "nazi revolution," and as Chief of the Party Work Staff, he was in a position to be a real danger to traditional military methods.

The Party Work Staff

Through close cooperation with NSF/OKW, Ruder expected his staff to stand in a position to provide an "always new political impulse in the Wehrmacht's leadership

¹¹Ibid., doc. no. 11, pp. 104-12.

and training" and to make the armed forces "toe the nazi line." After organizing itself, the work staff had to find and evaluate party literature for use by the military services and to assess the value of material already published by the armed forces for officers and soldiers. This had previously been Rosenberg's task, so a possible confrontation between Rosenberg and the Party Chancellery became probable. For the present, however, the biggest and most important job was to appraise the qualifications of NSFOs recommended by the District Leaders and to recommend nominees to Bormann.¹² This would be a frustrating task. As early as January 23, 1944, Party Member Passe was already complaining to Friedrichs that as a result of the request to all Gauleiter for suitable nominees for NSFO positions, the results so far had been meager. Most of them reported very little on the personalities of the officers, and fully half of the Gauleiter had not even responded. The only thing that Passe could assume from this was that the party leaders had lost contact with former party members who had gone into the armed services in spite of an April 14, 1943, directive from him that party officials should maintain close personal contact with former party members in the Wehrmacht. He also believed that these comrades in uniform themselves were partly at fault; through their long years of military service, they

¹²Ibid., doc. no. 10, p. 99.

had become more or less politically disinterested. Not that they were no longer nazis, but they were so involved with military duties that they could not see the importance of concentrating on political matters.¹³ But selection of NSF0s was not the only task of the work staff; the training of NSF0s was also important.

So that the staff could begin preparations for a training conference with NSF/OKW and the NSF staffs of the three services to ensure proper cooperation and military uniformity, Ruder established what he called "constant measures"--tasks of long-range importance. The first of these included bringing NSF0s into alignment with the party through nazi courses of instruction, speeches by Hitler, conferences, and nazi literature. For this purpose lesson plans and schooling material were required, and thus the work staff would have to coordinate the production of these materials by Rosenberg's office and the Main Schooling Office (Hauptschulungsamt), the latter of which had an interest in officer courses, recruit training, and various other schools under military jurisdiction. Another long-range measure included: the arrangement for speakers to address recurring courses, conferences, and troops; and the establishment of schools for speakers--another former responsibility of Alfred Rosenberg.

¹³BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 150, Vorlage für Pg. Friedrichs, Betrifft: NS.-Führungsoffizier, January, 23, 1944, IIW, signed: Passe.

Ruder pointed out that OKW already published several usable propaganda items and that they were distributed down to company level. They included: Manual for the Armed Forces (Richtheftte für die Wehrmacht); Soldier Newspaper for Celebrations and Off-duty Time (Soldatenblätter für Feier und Freizeite); Information for the Officer Corps (Mitteilungen für das Offizierkorps); and Information for the Troops (Mitteilungen für die Truppe). OKW also published for officers "What stirs us"--Questions of World Outlook, Politics, History and Culture--Knapsack Writing from OKW ("Was uns bewegt"--Fragen der Weltanschauung, Politik, Geschichte und Kultur--Tornisterschrift des OKW) and distributed it to battalion commanders. From Rosenberg's office Ruder selected Speaker Service, Reich Teacher Association, Party and Armed Forces Schooling (Rednerdienst, Reichslehrgemeinschaft, Partei-und Wehrmachtsschulung). Ruder also listed several appropriate sources from the party. The Main Schooling Office published Political Selections from Books and Journals (Politische Auslese aus Buch und Zeitschrift), The Nation's Schooling Letter (Der Reichsschulungsbrief), and several other publications such as Our Nation (Unser Reich), Hitler --His Life--His Work (Der Führer--sein Leben--sein Werk), The Face of the Party (Das Gesicht der Partei), and Man and Community (Mensch und Gemeinschaft). Rosenberg's office published "Thought and Deed," Instructional Subject Matter

for the Common Ideological Training of the Nazi Party
("Idee und Tat," Lehrstoff für die gesamte weltanschauliche
Erziehung der NSDAP). The party also furnished material for use in organizing the free time of the soldiers; for this the work staff especially recommended the use of nazi songs. Then Ruder turned to his favorite subject, the resistance to nazism in the armed forces.

Ruder hoped through his staff's suggestions to NSF/OKW to make a breakthrough in the nazi principles of troop leadership and thus stop the "guerilla warfare" which "too many people" always seemed to wage against ideological indoctrination. The noncommissioned officer corps, he believed, produced an obnoxious barracks-square training which deadened the spirit of soldierly youth entering the service from the Hitler Youth, and therefore a strong hand was needed to show noncommissioned officers that more worthwhile things existed than drill and the NCO Club, namely building personality through spiritual, political, and ideological training. The head of the party work staff also believed that "guaranteed suitable" officers and noncommissioned officers must receive responsibility as far down as company level to distribute indoctrinational material.¹⁴ (NCOs used in this capacity were called Richtmänner [men to arrange things] and frequently

¹⁴Besson, "NSFO," doc. no. 10, pp. 99-103.

belonged to the party.)¹⁵ Still wary of offending the Wehrmacht, he added that the use of these assistants in this manner would not detract from the troop leader's responsibility for NSF. If an NSFO, however, observed an officer not using nazi indoctrination in troop training, he should go to his commander and ask for the removal of the officer.¹⁶ Thus right at the beginning, the party encouraged the NSFO to influence personnel policies and to strike fear into the officer corps.

On January 2, 1944, Bormann formally announced the establishment of his work staff and ordered several party offices to provide permanent representatives to it. These were: Rosenberg's office; the Main Schooling Office; the "Strength through Joy" section of the German Workers Front (for Troop Betreuung purposes); the Reich Propaganda Leader; the Reich Press Chief; and the Leader of the Racial Policies Office. Occasionally, the P-K Leader directed, other party offices would furnish representatives when so ordered, and he would invite representatives from governmental offices to attend conferences as needed. However, he reserved to himself the sole right to invite representatives from the NSF Staff/OKW. In a statement obviously aimed at Rosenberg, Bormann declared that any existing agreements between party

¹⁵NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frame 1525966.

¹⁶Besson, "NSFO," doc. no. 10, pp. 99-103.

offices and the armed forces remained valid provided they did not conflict with the party-military cooperation directed by the work staff.¹⁷ It did not take Rosenberg long to recognize the threat to his influence in indoctrinating the armed forces, and on January 21, 1944, he wrote to Borman, as he had on earlier occasions, complaining that he was being shunted aside.

Rosenberg Loses to Bormann

Upon receipt of Rosenberg's complaints, Bormann reacted quickly. On the same day that he received Rosenberg's letter, he telegraphed his response:

Today I received your letter of 21 January and must retort that you have completely misunderstood me. I must therefore emphasize: Your influence on the armed forces is without doubt indispensable, however, as even the Führer repeatedly said, it represents merely one part of the entire work of the party. Therefore, the Führer has also pointed out that a special agreement between you and the Chief of OKW is superfluous. . . . The order of the Führer dated 22 December 1943 places the entire work in a completely new framework and in completely new paths.¹⁸

This must have caused a certain amount of indecision on Rosenberg's part because he wrote at least one letter to Bormann which he never dispatched from his office. It also caused him some consternation since he also began attempts

¹⁷BAK, Kanzlei Rosenberg, NS8/190, Abschrift, Anordnung Nr. . . . 143, Betrifft: NS.-Führungsoffizier, January 2, 1944, signed: Bormann, pp. 267-68.

¹⁸Ibid., Telegram, Bormann to Rosenberg, Betrifft: Erlass des Führers über die Tätigkeit der NS-Führungsoffiziere, January 22, 1944, 22.40, p. 214.

to arrange a meeting with Bormann through the good offices of Friedrichs in the P-K. Friedrich's only recorded reply was that he wanted to know why Rosenberg wished to speak with Reichsleiter Bormann. Among the points Rosenberg apparently wished to make--and he had already beaten most of them to death--he complained that the P-K had not given him the understanding he had hoped for. He even agreed that the Keitel-Rosenberg agreement had now become unnecessary; therefore, Hitler should issue a Führer Order to clarify his duties. Even after a string of defeats, he still believed he should have a share in the selection of NSF0s. To reiterate, these thoughts never left his office.¹⁹

By February 10 the nazi thinker had developed a new approach. Writing Bormann he said it pleased him that his work had received a new basis as a result of the Führer Order of December 22, 1943! As he saw it "in summary form," he held the responsibility on the party side for questions of ideology and political schooling in the Wehrmacht in addition to his old duties of furnishing speakers and supervising ideological schooling material for the armed forces, to include such material published by other party offices. He also conceded a final right of "imprimatur" to Bormann whenever the P-K boss so desired to exercise it.

¹⁹Ibid. See the documents at pages 209, 212, and 241. See also the draft on NSF0 thoughts at page 158 which was also never mailed and which adds to the idea that Rosenberg was getting skittish.

Finally, he committed a faux pas by stating that it was his understanding that his office would organize the courses of instruction for the basic ideological orientation of NSFOs at the conclusion of which his judgment regarding their suitability would be taken into consideration.²⁰ This time Rosenberg went too far, and Bormann smoothly put him in his place. On February 24 the party boss replied that he and Reinecke would handle nominations and final assignments of NSFOs. Likewise, the orientation of the service NSF Staffs and the NSFOs fell under the same competence. Patiently reiterating the new NSFO concept, he then graciously conceded the necessity of Rosenberg's strictly ideological work with schooling materials and speakers; but the supervision of political activity belonged to him alone. Further, from now on the P-K work staff would supervise and coordinate all of Rosenberg's work, and it would set the requirements.²¹ Rosenberg should have remained quiet, but by now he apparently had received the message. Rosenberg's files contain a draft copy of a most conciliatory letter to Bormann dated March 10, 1944, with Rosenberg's handwritten corrections, but it is unclear whether he ever sent this reply to

²⁰Ibid., Rosenberg to Bormann, February 10, 1944, p. 173.

²¹Ibid., Bormann to Rosenberg, Betrifft: Führerbefehl vom 22.12.1943; hier: Ihr Schreiben vom 10.2.1944, February 24, 1944, pp. 151-55.

Bormann's letter of February 24.²² After this, Rosenberg appeared wary of the P-K and Bormann.

Rosenberg suffered another setback to his ambitions when Field Marshal Keitel reneged on their earlier agreement. On September 20, 1944, Keitel tersely told Rosenberg that the NSFO had now brought forth an entirely new situation; therefore, their 1940 agreement was now obsolete. He enclosed an order from OKW to the military services which informed the services of this fact.²³

Rosenberg replied, but feebly. Nevertheless, he made obvious efforts to ingratiate himself with Keitel. After all, the field marshal was a potential ally against Bormann. As usual, he reviewed his accomplishments over the years, and he noted that the order of December 22, 1943, and Bormann's January 2, 1944, order to the party which set up a work staff had now spread the work load which he had formerly carried himself. Ignoring Bormann's telegram which declared the Keitel-Rosenberg agreement a dead issue, he instead latched onto the P-K Chief's January 2 order which honored agreements between party offices and the Wehrmacht as long as they fell within limits set by

²²Ibid., Entwurf, Rosenberg to Bormann, Betrifft: Ihr Schreiben vom 24.2.1944, March 10, 1944, p. 158.

²³BAK, Kanzlei Rosenberg, NS8/174, Keitel to Rosenberg, Betrifft: NS-Führung der Wehrmacht, draft orders enclosed: Abschrift/K, Der Chef des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht to OKH, OKM, OKL, Betrifft: NS-Führung der Wehrmacht, September 20, 1944, pp. 45-46.

the P-K work staff. "On careful re-examination," he believed strongly that the agreement fell within the limits of Bormann's order; therefore, abrogation of the agreement was unnecessary. Pitting Keitel against Bormann, he recommended the possible publication of an order defining the cooperation between party offices and the Wehrmacht. He failed to state who would publish such an order, but he probably hoped that Keitel would and that the field marshal would present Bormann with a fait accompli. He finally warned Keitel that if the agreement was fully abrogated, the functions previously performed by the Rosenberg Office might no longer be performed.²⁴ Apparently, the agreement remained until the end of the war as it was on November 22--dead in Bormann's and Keitel's thinking and alive in Rosenberg's. Except for occasional speeches to the armed forces and a brief appearance toward the end of the war, this is the last we shall hear of Rosenberg. During this period, he seems to have done what he was told while firmly believing the work staff should cooperate closer with his office.²⁵ While Rosenberg tried to fight the problem before finally capitulating, Keitel put his military house in order.

²⁴Ibid., Rosenberg to Keitel, Betrifft: NS-Führung in der Wehrmacht, November 22, 1944, pp. 19-20.

²⁵BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 360, Abschrift, Vorlage, Betrifft: Rücksprache mit Reichsleiter Rosenberg, October 20, 1944, IIF, signed: Ruder.

CHAPTER VI

THE ARMED FORCES ORGANIZE

NSF Staff Organization

Although fearful of party intrusions into the military sanctuary, OKW and OKH, like the P-K, also set the NSFO program into action. They had much to define, foremost being the place of the NSFO in the staff structure and his relationship with his commander. But first, like the party, they had to organize their own staffs.

OKW established its NSF Staff under General Reincke on February 9, 1944, and instructed the new organization to be operational by February 12. Built out of the General Armed Forces Office (Allgemeinen Wehrmachtamt),¹ OKW structured the NSF Staff into groups and sections. NSF Group 1 (NS-Führungsabteilung 1), which worked with the Party Chancellery in planning political guidance and regulations, examined all laws and decrees for political and ideological importance and coordinated the selection of NSFOs with the party work staff. NSF Group 2, with the duty of planning, organizing, and conducting courses of

¹NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frame 5597694.

instructions in coordination with the three military services and the party, also planned and produced basic and topical political and ideological literature for the Wehrmacht in cooperation with the party, army, navy, and air force; it also supervised the organization of lectures and speakers in the armed forces. The Office Group for Domestic Affairs (Amtsgruppe Inland--Ag Inland) had two subgroups: I-1 and I-2. I-1 (Abteilung Inland 1) handled individual political offenses in cooperation with the Armed Forces Judge Advocate (Wehrmacht Richter). It also managed all questions relating to the German Labor Front, political handbooks, Volkstumangelegenheiten (matters pertaining to German nationality, i.e., racial matters), political measures concerning the German population, marriage of Wehrmacht members, and church matters; holding the power of censorship and imprimatur for all printing of armed forces books, brochures, and illustrations, I-1 had strong authority. I-2 held responsibility for the well-being of soldiers (Truppenbetreuung), and the distribution of nazi literature, libraries, and book shops for the troops also came under its jurisdiction. The NSF/Gruppe z.b.v. (zur besonderen Verwendung-for special projects), placed on the same staff level as NSF 1, NSF 2, and Ag Inland, supervised the public relations of the Wehrmacht plus armed forces participation in winter help measures (Winterhilfsmassnahmen--a party charity for relieving civilian hardship

during cold weather). The NSF Staff also furnished various Wehrmacht liaison officers to party organizations such as the SA and the Hitler Youth.² The three service NSF Staffs organized themselves similarly. In the army the General for Special Projects/Army Affairs Group (General z.b.v/Heerwesen Abteilung) formed the nucleus of NSF/OKH by transferring its Groups I and II to the new staff.³ This reorganization, however, was not without some friction between OKH and OKW.

The real problem was that General Reinecke, the Chief of the NSF Staff/OKW, was not respected by members of the NSF Staff of OKH. In mid-March 1944 Colonel Sprengel of the army's NSF Staff told SA Brigadeführer Girgensohn that General Schörner would never serve under General Reinecke. Sprengel had said that he did not think Schörner could subordinate himself to Reinecke because Schörner had many years of experience as a division and corps commander in the east while Reinecke "at least in this war was only a 'deskbound general.'"⁴ Party Member Sotke, Rosenberg's representative on the P-K work staff, heard of the remark and concluded that there would be opposition to the NSF

²Waldemar Besson, "Zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialistischen Führungs Offiziere (NSFO)," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, doc. no. 6 (January 1961), p. 95.

³NAM, T78, Roll 135, Frame 6064336.

⁴BAK, Kanzlei Rosenberg, NS8/236, Aktennotiz für Stableiter Dr. Stellrecht und Pg. Sotke, March 8, 1944, signed: Dr. W. Koeppen, p. 39.

Staff of OKW on the part of the NSF Staff/OKH's Army Affairs Group which had formerly been responsible for the Wehrgeistige Führung program,⁵ and he passed on Sprengel's remarks to Party Member Passe.

Passe informed General Reinecke about Sprengel's remarks and also sent a report on it to Bormann in which he unloaded his complaints against members of the Army Affairs Group. Passe had previously warned Bormann about that group's unresponsiveness and opposition to party recommendations and endeavors. He had the impression that this army staff group believed it had already done everything there was to do to politicize the army. He had also informed Bormann about Colonel Radke's attitude (Radke was another member of the NSF Staff/OKH); now officers of the staff group were extending their influence to the NSFO School at Krössinsee. Colonel Sprengel, Radke's assistant, had stood before a group of NSFOs there and had announced that the present program had developed directly from an order published by Field Marshal von Brauchitsch when he was C-in-C of the Army; he added that the Führer Order of December 22, 1943, which legitimized the NSFO was merely one of the last "links in the chain of developments." Passe knew personally that the same Colonel Sprengel had previously made remarks which indicated that the Army

⁵BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 150, Aktenvermerk, Betrifft: NS-Führungsstab; hier: Oberst Sprengel, March 12, 1944, signed: Passe.

Affairs Group looked on the Führer Order as not only embarrassing but even superfluous. Passe correctly observed that Sprengel's remark about Schörner and Reinecke involved professional jealousy and arrogance; he also believed that the real reason for the hostile attitude to Hitler's NSFO order was that it set up an NSF Staff in OKW which could dictate to OKH. As he saw it, the direct placing of the NSF Staff of OKW under Hitler and the right of its chief to issue orders in the name of the Führer created a golden opportunity for many people to criticize this special command structure. He reported that General Reinecke now had his eyes on Sprengel. He also said that he had told Reinecke that the real culprit was Radke since Sprengel would not have dared utter such remarks unless they also expressed the feelings of his chief.⁶

The next day Ruder reported to Bormann that Reinecke had asked General Schmundt of the Army Personnel Office to replace Sprengel. Ruder believed that Hitler's December 22, 1943, order gave Reinecke every right to do this as long as he maintained cooperation with Bormann. Accordingly, he now asked his party boss to approve Sprengel's removal and to press also for the removal of Radke and von Lersner since these two officers, perceiving the strong cooperation between OKW and the P-K, had refused to accept the leadership and growing influence of

⁶Ibid.

OKW. Both officers, he wrote, should go since they held the same prejudice against the party and the OKW NSF Staff as Sprengel. Bormann saw this report the same day it was written and ordered Ruder to arrange a conference with either Reinecke or Schörner to discuss the two army staff officers.⁷ Apparently, this accomplished nothing since the P-K was still complaining several months later about these army staff officers, and the friction between OKH and OKW continued to grow. Most of the problem, regardless of ideas in the P-K, seemed to focus on Reinecke personally.

General Meisel of the Army Personnel Office had heard General Reinecke's May 15, 1944, speech at Sonthofen on "The Duties of the NS-Leadership Staff of OKW and the Purpose and Objective of NS-Leadership," and he criticized it strongly. He thought Reinecke's speech was not sufficiently suitable in either content or form to have any lasting effect on his listeners. Meisel's remarks showed clearly that he had a personal dislike for Reinecke; he listed the NSF/OKW Chief's sins as his disgusting tone and the affected style of his Berlin jargon. Also, Reinecke failed to show any conviction in his words that the idea involved in NSF was eventually to create a new type of officer; he thought that Reinecke overlooked entirely the fact that "Nat. Soc. [was] born out of the combat life of

⁷BAK, Sammlung Schumacher 367, Vorlage, Betrifft: Oberst Sprengel, March 13, 1944, II, signed: Ruder.

the first world war and therefore [was] a product of German-Teutonic militarism in the truest sense of the word." In Meisel's judgment, the OKW NSF Chief also failed to realize that nazism joined old values with new understanding and that it rejected the errors of the epoch of "Jewish liberalism." To sum up, he wrote that Reinecke failed to speak with and to "the heart of the combat soldier." This was really a low blow; Reinecke's lack of combat experience always stood in the way of his acceptance by the Army General Staff. Meisel did not even have the decency to keep his personal thoughts about the top NSFO of the Wehrmacht to himself. He wrote a memorandum to his chief, General Schmundt, and openly expressed his feelings about Reinecke. In turn, Schmundt sent a copy to Bormann asking that it be held in the strictest confidence. Bormann wrote on the copy: "Strictly Confidential. Gen. Schmundt gives it to me--provided it's handled strictly confidential--a memorandum of his General Meisel! Don't give it to Pg. [Party Member] Passe." By his exclamation point and tone, Bormann was evidently either amazed at the break in ranks of the officer corps, or he was being derisive. Why Passe should not see it is unknown, but perhaps Bormann liked to keep his own counsel. Schmundt's reasons for forwarding Meisel's remarks to the P-K Chief were very clear; he could curry favor with Bormann at OKW's expense.⁸

⁸BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 157, Abschrift,

Perhaps in self-defense, there were frequent occasions when the upstart OKW complained about OKH to members of the P-K. For example, in early August 1944 Major Ihkert, a favorite of the P-K and a member of the NSF Staff/OKW, complained to Party Member Beringer that the Army Personnel Office resisted the idea of giving preference to NSFOs for promotion in rank. Consequently, he intended to apply appropriate but sudden pressure on General Burgdorf of the Army Personnel Office. Turning to the question of personalities, he also commented on members of the army's NSF Staff. At the end of April, Colonel Radke at OKH had received a list from OKW of army officers who had been rejected as NSFO candidates. For a full month OKH failed to act on the list. Finally, Radke told General Reinecke that the list could not be acknowledged because OKW had given no reasons for the non-acceptance of the officers. According to Ihkert, Radke had still--more than three months later--done

Chef AgP2, Vortragsnotiz für Amtchef, Betrifft: Tagung Sonthofen, May 11, 1944, signed: Meisel. An interesting story concerns General Schmundt. He must have been very much aware of his role in the Army Personnel Office in catering to nazism. While visiting Army Group Center (ca. 1942), he got very drunk in the Officer Club and told the people there that they probably thought he was a "political Arschloch." Another general replied, "No, only an Arschloch!"; and with that Schmundt fell from the table. No one knew whether he remembered the event when he left the army group headquarters early the next morning, but his vulgar statement showed his role in the nazification of the army and his uneasy conscience with it. Letter, Professor Harold J. Gordon, Jr., February 24, 1973, as related to him by "a friend."

nothing more about it. In another situation, on May 16 Reinecke had directed that all NSFOs down to Corps level had to pass through the NSFO course at Krössinsee by July 15 at the latest. Radke, again according to Ihlert, had sabotaged the order; Radke had claimed that General von Hengl had decided that these particular NSFOs could not go to Krössinsee at that particular time because they were indispensable. On the other hand Ihlert had good words to say about Colonel Huebner while simultaneously casting suspicion on the other members of the NSF Staff/OKH.

Huebner had established a so-called Richter-Abteilung (Justice Section) in which former party members expeditiously handled cases involving sabotage of the NSF program. Previously, almost without exception, these cases, reported Ihlert, had been allowed to come to a dead stop. He also managed a petty barb against army Captain Dr. Schumacher who worked for Brigadeführer Hans Jüttner in the SSFHA (SS-Führungshauptamtes--SS Main Leadership Office--the Command Headquarters for the military leadership of the Waffen-SS).⁹ He called Schumacher a braggart and claimed that SS Obergruppenführer Berger had told him that Schumacher would be replaced as soon as possible by an SS leader.¹⁰

⁹Hans Buchheim, Anatomie des SS-Staates, Band I (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH & Co., KG, 1967), pp. 210-11.

¹⁰BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 360, Aktenvermerk

Regardless of all the personal recriminations between OKH and OKW, from February to April the NSFO staff relationship continued to take shape. NSFO field offices in staffs down through division level were termed Main Offices while those at regimental and battalion level were called Sub-offices since NSFOs in the latter performed the work as an extra duty to their normal jobs. Formerly the B.O. performed his duties from the Intelligence Office, and at first the NSFO often worked for the Intelligence Officer.¹¹ This procedure, however, lasted only a short time. An undated OKW "Provisional Instructions for the Officer for National Socialist Guidance" placed the NSFO subordinate to the Chief of Staff for disciplinary purposes in higher staffs and to the commander at division or lower level. The Intelligence Officer only allotted personnel and equipment to the NSFO. The NSFO, operating from and living with the Operations Echelon (Führungsstaffel), reported directly to the commander or the Chief of Staff in all NSF matters.¹² On March 28, 1944, Schörner, as Chief of NSF/OKH, merely stated that the NSFO belonged to the Operations Group (Führungsabteilung) without clarifying his relations within that group which also included

für Pg. Ruder, Betrifft: Besprechung bei Major Ihlert am 3.8.44, August 4, 1944, II F, signed: Beringer.

¹¹NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frame 5597672.

¹²NAM, T77, Roll 1039, Frame 6512850.

the Ia (Operations Officer), the Ic (Intelligence Officer), and the Id (Training Officer). He further blurred the picture by declaring that the NSFO must have close and trusting cooperation with the Operations Group and the Adjutant for Officer Personnel in the Personnel Group (Adjutantur).¹³ These attempts to explain the staff position of the NSFO must have caused considerable confusion. By May 15 Hengl had replaced Schörner, and shortly thereafter he swept the problem aside. He announced that it made little difference whether the NSFO reported to the Operations Officer or the Chief of Staff since the important thing was that the NSFO should always have personal access to the commander and that NSF work should be on the same level as tactics and training. He conceded that different opinions prevailed on the subject.¹⁴ In any event he then defined the staff responsibilities and the cooperation required.

Hengl stated that the conduct of the NSFO's duties demanded an especially strong cooperation with the Intelligence Officer, the Adjutant for Officer Personnel, and the Operations Officer. The Intelligence Officer, working with the OKW intelligence establishment (the Abwehr), collected enemy propaganda and various political questions which he used to keep the NSFO informed. The Adjutant, having staff responsibility for all questions of training in nazi

¹³NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frame 5597699.

¹⁴Ibid., Frame 5597673.

principles, especially of officer and noncommissioned leaders, acquainted the NSFO with his actions. Likewise, the NSFO informed the Adjutant of the practical experiences gained in his sphere which concerned the officer and noncommissioned officer corps.¹⁵ The Operations Officer kept the NSFO abreast of the combat situation and tactical plans, and the NSFO obtained other valuable material for evaluation from mail censorship reports, reports of sedition, desertion, and poor morale, plus courtmartial verdicts.¹⁶ With all the differences of opinion which existed at the top of the NSFO system, it was no wonder that subordinate units often created their own staff procedures.

Sometimes a staff had its own way of doing things which depended on the personalities of those involved. For example, the Ia of one infantry division during the latter half of 1944 related how he, in his capacity as Chief of Staff, carefully gave his NSFO unpopular assignments, such as selecting men from non-combat assignments for transfer to combat duty. He claimed that this considerably reduced the NSFOs impact; besides, he said, it gave him something useful to do, thus saving other officers for more important tasks. This, however, cannot be construed as typical because the division was so reduced

¹⁵NAM, T77, Roll 1039, Frames 6512850-51.

¹⁶NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frame 5597565.

in officer personnel that everyone apparently had to wear more than one hat. For some time during this period, the division did not have a functioning commanding general; he had broken down early in the White Russian offensive. For all intents and purposes, therefore, the Ia was in command.¹⁷

As an example of a division NSFO Main Office, the 19th Panzer Division headquarters had two officers assigned and on hand. The "First NS Leadership Officer" headed the section while the "Second NS Leadership Officer" served as his deputy and handled troop Betreuung matters. The section's tasks were broken down as follows:

- A. Political-ideological leadership
 - 1. Division news sheet
 - 2. Information for unit commanders and NSFOs
 - 3. Assignment of speakers
 - 4. Control of "non-spiritual" Betreuung material (games, musical instruments, etc.)
- B. Non-spiritual Betreuung material
 - 1. Procurement
 - 2. Distribution
 - 3. Legal advice
 - 4. Division Rest Camp

¹⁷Letters, Professor Harold J. Gordon, Jr., February 13 and 24, 1973, based on testimony to Dr. Gordon of a former German army colonel who prefers not to disclose his name or the division concerned.

- C. Spiritual Betreuung
 - 1. Films
 - 2. Theater
 - 3. Vocational assistance
- D. Publications
 - 1. Division news sheet and reports
 - 2. Assembly of material
 - 3. Distribution of national socialist literature and newspaper
 - 4. Lending Library
- E. Pictures
 - 1. Picture reports
 - 2. Amateur photography
 - 3. Passport pictures

To provide an understanding of personnel and equipment of a division NSFO staff section, Table 1 shows the status of the 19th Panzer Division as determined by its "First NSFO." The authorized column appears to be on a par with requirements of a military staff section, but the 19th Panzer Division NSFO would seem to have been building an empire--a typical failing in any bureaucracy--and his requirements for four typewriters and five clerks (typists) signified without doubt that the staff section conducted a "paper war."¹⁸ On a higher level, the NSFO Staff Section of the Replacement Army headquarters, after Himmler became

¹⁸BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 374, Aufgabengebiete innerhalb der Abt. NS-Führung (19.Pz.Div).

its commander-in-Chief, had four officers. The section leader was a major, and he had a captain as a deputy and two first lieutenants.¹⁹ Much attention was directed at staff organization, but even more was aimed at clarifying the commander-NSFO relationship and the duties of the NSFO. Indeed, the ultimate goal was to involve every German officer with the NSFO program.

TABLE 1
PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT

	Authorized	On Hand	Needed
Officers	2	2	-
Noncommissioned Officers	1	3	-
Clerks	1	5	-
Drivers	1	4	3
Assistant Drivers	-	1	-
Film Projectionist	-	1	-
Automobiles	-	5	-
Motorcycle with Side Car	1	-	-
Trucks	-	2	1
Buses	-	-	1
Typewriters	2	3	1
Reproduction Machine	1	-	1

¹⁹Dr. Manfred Messerschmidt, Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat: Zeit der Indoktrination (Hamburg: R.v. Decker's Verlag-G. Shenk, 1969), pp. 464-65. Cited from Militärgeschichtliche Forschungsamt, H20/107, Akte Heeres-Sanitäts-Inspekteur (NSF).

Responsibility of the German Officers

Almost every order or regulation on the NSFO stressed the responsibility of the commander at all levels for the NSF program. This served Prussian tradition and erected, so the military believed, the highest barrier against the introduction of the Politrुक principle into the German army. As long as Hitler supported this concept, tradition would hold the reins. The "Provisional Regulations for National Socialist Guidance in the Armed Forces," published by NSF/OKW on February 9, 1944, stressed the commander's sole responsibility as "the bearer of national socialist leadership in the Wehrmacht." The NSFO was responsible to the troop leader for the training of subordinate NSFOs, for NSF work in subordinate units, and for making recommendations and offering assistance to senior level NSFOs. Under special circumstances, and then only in the presence of the unit commander, the NSFO could directly influence troops, but otherwise he had to depend on the troop leader on the spot.²⁰ The NSFO, ordered to stand by the commander and strengthen him through advice and deed and never overshadow him, generally limited himself in regiments and battalions to convincing talks with officers and left the NSF work in companies to company commanders. Regulations warned him not to become a

²⁰Besson, "NSFO," doc. no. 8, pp. 97-98.

"Wanderprediger" (wayside preacher)²¹ and forbade him to interfere in the activities or responsibilities of subordinate commanders. Nevertheless he had to inform the troop commander of his experiences and of the results of troop visits, especially in cases where complaints or difficulties concerned that commander.²² In the spring of 1944, Hengl cautioned the NSFO not to smother troop commanders with a paper war since troop leaders could not begin to look at the mass of papers they received. Company commanders, especially, would simply throw away what they did not care to read. Deviating from the February regulations, Hengl now declared that the main work must consist of personal contact and speaking with the troops.²³ By this Hengl added more confusion to the program, and the NSFO now had to judge when, how, and if he should be a wayside preacher. The confusion would last until the NSFO disappeared along with the German army. As for prerequisites and selection of NSFOs, the military hierarchy passed out clearer instructions.

Although much slowness and resistance took place in fully complying with the set standards and in filling NSFO positions, OKW followed the party line in establishing the criteria for selecting officers to become NSFOs.

²¹NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frame 5597565.

²²NAM, T77, Roll 1039, Frame 6512851.

²³NAM, T78, Roll 135, Frame 6064910.

In January 1944 Lieutenant Colonel Freiherr von Lersner, now promoted and assigned to NSF/OKH, after an inspection trip to France, Belgium, and Holland, complained of the slowness in those places in setting up the program; even some of the highest echelons had not appointed NSFOs, and many of those appointed were unsuitable.²⁴ Lersner's report may have prodded OKW into action for on February 6, 1944, Keitel published uniform requirements for the selection of NSFOs in all services. The field marshal termed proper selection as crucial in politically activating the armed forces. He called an NSFO's rank (as an officer) unimportant but listed certain prerequisites which were important for his selection. Primarily, an officer had to have unconditional nazi convictions, but he should also have a worthy personality and a distinguished combat record so that the troops would have faith in what he told them. Keitel listed membership in the party and active experience as a political leader as desirable, but he recognized that such people would not always be available. At least NSFOs needed practical experience in ideological guidance and training.²⁵ Keitel ordered that if a staff officer was unavailable below division level, the troop commanders of Heavy Weapons Companies should have the additional duty of

²⁴NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frames 1526634-41.

²⁵Besson, "NSFO," doc. no. 7, p. 96.

NSFO provided they had the necessary ability.²⁶ Regardless of Keitel's requirements, however, the army had difficulty meeting them.

When Hengl delivered a speech at Sonthofen that spring, he accused the army of failing to follow orders on selection and prerequisites. "Based on my short activity in this business," he said, "I don't believe the greater part of the NSFOs I have met are qualified. They must be removed." In such cases, he said, the Adjutant for Officer Personnel must assert himself to find and nominate better men. NSFOs should at least have soldierly qualities and a proven combat record; they must be activists and have the ability to convince others through clear attitudes and speech. Hengl singled out the Replacement Army as having done a good job in a short time, but it too had a long way to go.²⁷ He asked those present to pick out suitable officers themselves to send to NSFO schools as a means of obtaining better political officers and to find officers among doctors and hospital officials to do NSFO work under the Chefarzt (Chief Physician).²⁸

Lersner, after a tour of inspection of Army Group North in Russia in February 1944, gave his impression of his visits to the 18th Army, L Corps, 11th Division, and a

²⁶ NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frame 5597694.

²⁷ NAM, T78, Roll 135, Frames 6064897-910.

²⁸ NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frames 5597674-76.

Battalion Command Post of the 126th Division. They had survived some hard battles during which some NSFOS had become casualties. He felt that NSF work there needed strengthening during crisis situations and observed that NSFOS had frequently performed duties as troop commanders. Calling for immediate replacement of the casualties, he noted that NSFOS should not command troops except in special circumstances. Lersner recommended that NSF/OKH provide some of its own officers to replace those NSFOS who had become casualties. This would help, he said, to improve the status of the NSF Staff in the eyes of the troops during the initial stages of the NSF program.²⁹

The Commander-in-Chief of German Forces in the West, Rundstedt, added additional requirements for his NSFOS. They should show manly tact, have a flair for NSF work, and speak from "the heart rather than a cool brain." Emotion apparently held more importance than reason, but this fell directly into the methods used by Hitler and the nazis during the party's rise to power. The Commander in the West also passed on OKH instructions that any changes of the NSFO incumbent down through division level had to have the approval of NSF/OKH; below that level the next superior headquarter had to authorize a change.³⁰ Thus

²⁹NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frame 1526623.

³⁰Ibid., Frames 1526051-52. From the manual, "National Socialist Leadership of the Troops," printed and distributed by Oberbefehlshaber West.

the highest echelon of the army, subject to Bormann's approval, controlled the selection and replacement system for Main Office NSFOs, but OKH itself did not always follow the established procedures.

On April 24, 1944, NSF/OKH asked the Westmark Gauleiter directly for his opinion on the qualifications of Captain Max Schuler as an NSFO. By chance the P-K learned of it and informed the NSF Staff/OKH that Schuler was in no way suitable to be an NSFO and politely asked the army staff officers to refrain from direct contact with party District Leaders on such matters. It seemed that Schuler, before the nazi era had belonged to a Freemason Lodge in which he had served as Master of Ceremonies. Also he had served in the Stahlhelm (Steel Helmet--a rightist veteran's organization) before it was taken over by the SA, and he was not a member of the party. The Gauleiter reported these facts to the Party Chancellery and declared that Schuler obviously was not sufficiently grounded in the nazi weltanschauung.³¹

On October 16, 1944, the Army Personnel Office, over General Burgdorf's signature, belatedly tried to clarify some of the confusion which existed regarding the NSFOs and tightened up the rules for nominating them. Henceforth, NSFOs had to be fully combat tested officers who

³¹BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 370. Beringer to NSF/OKH, Major Ihlert, Betrifft: Hauptmann Max Schuler, June 16, 1944, and following documents.

were models of military and nazi behavior and bearing and who were capable of passing on their uncompromising beliefs to both officers and men. Although OKH did not want to establish length of service and age restrictions, Burgdorf specified that "in general" the attempt had to be made to nominate new NSFOs whose birthyear was 1900 or later. A decoration for bravery now became an absolute requirement with the proviso that it had to be awarded for "the present war." If reserve officers were nominated, they now had to be party members, and no officer after being recommended as an NSFO could then become subject to current regulations which gave priority to combat assignments. In other words, nomination as an NSFO automatically superceded any other priority of assignment. Whenever possible, the NSFO of a unit should be an officer selected from that unit, and only the best troop leaders--those most difficult to replace--had to be selected. Regardless of need in the unit, the best men, up to the grade of colonel, had to be nominated to the Army Personnel Office of OKH on a special form, and the nominations had to be accompanied by a short efficiency report on that officer. The suitability of each nominee would be checked out in an NSFO course of instruction, and those found not qualified would be sent back to their units.

The Personnel Office estimated that it would take about three months for the NSF Staff/OKH and the Party

Chancellery to confirm the appointment of a nominee, and Burgdorf warned that any officer disapproved in the process would not be allowed to serve as an NSFO. If any such people were so serving, they would be relieved at once. Furthermore, the reason for disapproval would not be divulged; however, he cautioned that the judgment of the NSF Staff/OKH pertained only to qualifications of an officer to be an NSFO --it had no bearing on the suitability of an officer for other duties. Burgdorf's order, although it stiffened considerably the prerequisites for new NSFOs, did not appear to be retroactive.

All changes in assignments of Main Office NSFOs, since they required the prior approval of OKH, had to be requested through NSF/OKH to the Personnel Office on a special form. Likewise, losses through death, wounds, sickness, or extended sick leave had to be reported through the same channels. Wounded and sick NSFOs would, as a rule, be assigned to the Leader Reserve (Führerreserve/OKH), and Burgdorf forbade their assignment elsewhere. After they were reported to OKH and until assignment instructions were issued by the Personnel Office, however, they could be utilized as additional NSFOs within the commands of army groups and independent armies. This may have sounded like a policy of "once an NSFO, always an NSFO," but this was not the case--at least in policy. Burgdorf announced that a goal of the program was to

assign all physically fit NSF0s to troop commander duties in combat after they had served eighteen months as NSF0s. At this time, Burgdorf also allowed the possibility of preferential promotion for NSF0s; commanders could include the initial NSF0 probationary period--the estimated three month time frame during which the NSF Staff/OKH and the P-K checked out the nominee's qualifications--as time on the job.³² The highest levels also spelled out and controlled tightly the duties of the NSF Staffs, all officers, commanders, and NSF0s within the program, and the Führer himself, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, directed the scope of the duties of the Chief of the NSF Staff of OKH.

Hitler clarified the duties of General Ritter von Hengl shortly after the general's appointment on May 15, 1944, as head of the NSF/OKH. On May 28 Hitler announced the appointment in a Führer Order. Placing Hengl directly under him, he authorized the new appointee to conduct his NSF duties in the name of the Führer and ordered Hengl to maintain close personal contact with the Chief of the General Staff and the Commander of the Replacement Army by informing them concerning all fundamental questions regarding his functions as head of the NSF Staff. Instructed to work in close cooperation with the Army Personnel Office,

³²BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 142, Abschrift, Oberkommando des Heeres PA/Ag p 1/1. (Zentral--) Abt. (IIe), Betrifft: NS-Führung, O.U., October 16, 1944, signed: Burgdorf.

Hengl had to follow the orders of its chief concerning officer training since such directives were also issued on Hitler's behalf as Commander-in-Chief. The Führer outlined Hengl's primary duty: to build a political will in the army and activate it toward a uniform political and national socialist weltanschauung according to the Führer Order of December 22, 1943. Finally, Hitler authorized Hengl to inspect and investigate the status of NSF work throughout the field and replacement armies and to issue orders, admonishments, and instructions concerning NSF in the name of the Führer.³³ The Nazi War Lord was not alone in prescribing duties; the military hierarchy also prescribed NSF duties for every German officer.

Schörner, Hengl, and Himmler added their ideas. On March 28, 1944, General Schörner, Hengl's predecessor as Chief of NSF/OKH, had ordered every army officer to work toward the goal of an unshakable nazi fighting team. An officer's faith and belief in victory should shine out as a source of strength to his soldiers. According to the will of the Führer, Schörner observed, the officer corps had the responsibility for building political determination in the troops; therefore, each officer had to show his nazi conviction by words and deeds and demonstrate unconditional faith in victory and loyalty to Hitler. Every officer of the nazi army had to understand that he must oppose any

³³NAM, T78, Roll 135, Frames 6064889-90.

criticism at every opportunity.³⁴ Clearly this comment and others by the military and political hierarchy showed that widespread criticism of the NSF program existed and demonstrated that resistance to total nazification of the army continued. Records of mail censorship, even when soldiers were aware of the lack of mail privacy, confirmed this and showed the confusion in some soldiers' minds as to the purpose of the NSFO program.³⁵ Hengl paid tribute to Schörner and said he had been an outstanding nazi even before NSFOs appeared on the scene. Holding him and General Dietl up for emulation, he tried to show that the officer corps should not need NSFOs to activate them. Citing his own Corps on the Murmansk front where it lost 2000 dead during two polar winters, he said that his soldiers fought magnificently and held fast only because the command possessed an officer corps which took the trouble to educate the soldiers politically. He also pointed to General Specht who had organized his NSF program in a model manner and who had declared that no officer cadet lacking in the nazi ideology would receive an officer's commission.³⁶ The officer corps had received its warning, and after the

³⁴Ibid., Frames 6064891-94. Schörner was appointed Chief of the NSF/OKH on March 14, 1944, and served in that capacity until given a combat command in May.

³⁵NAM, T78, Roll 134, Frames 6062771-2844. Many more frames follow on the same subject showing attitudes on nazism, Hitler, the NSFO, morale, and officers.

³⁶NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frames 5597672, 5597677-78.

July 20, 1944, attempt on Hitler's life, Himmler added his words. Appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Replacement Army on the day of the plot, he used the occasion of the NSFO conference at Hitler's headquarters on July 29 to expound his views within the concept of the Volksgemeinschaft. Each officer, the Reichsführer SS said, held the lives of his troops in his hands and had to consciously remember his responsibilities to the Reich and the nation which entrusted German soldiers to him. Each officer had a responsibility to the mothers of sons who died in his care. He said that Germany would win the war because of the historical law of better hereditary factors, but German officers had to understand the facts involved in a people's war.³⁷ Himmler also referred to the assembled NSFOs as the "select corps of the Führer."³⁸ This corps, above all, had its duties spelled out.

The Duties of the NSFO

Everyone--Führer, party members, and generals of the Wehrmacht--had ideas as to what constituted the duties of the NSFO. Basically Hitler directed the NSFO to make nazi fanatics out of the soldiers, but it was easier to give the order than to carry it out. Accordingly, the political officer's province received considerable

³⁷NAM, T79, Roll 80, Frames 609-12.

³⁸Ibid., Frame 611.

attention. Ultimately a soldier normally follows the last order he receives or the orders of his immediate commander unless instructed otherwise. The NSFO presumably followed this universal military custom and no doubt performed his duties differently in various commands because everyone seemed to have different ideas on the NSFOs' duties. The NSF/OKW regulations of February 9, 1944, called the NSFO the commander's official expert for ideological matters and made him responsible to his commander for the political activation of the troops. So as to recommend necessary political measures, the NSFO had to understand the tactical situation at all times. OKW forbade him to perform tasks other than NSF work at division level and higher, and ordered regimental and battalion commanders to provide their part-time NSFOs with sufficient time and opportunity to devote to NSF work. Having no right of inspection on his own responsibility, the NSFO conducted courses of instruction and made speeches when ordered by the troop leader, but he nevertheless had to take advantage of every opportunity to visit the troops. Assumedly, this meant that he, like any other staff officer, accompanied his commander on troop visits or secured permission from his commander and the troop leader concerned to see or talk to the troops, as is the custom in most armies. The regulations encouraged NSFOs to talk to soldiers on leave, to visit Soldier's Homes, and especially to talk

to the sick and wounded in hospitals,³⁹ but in particular NSFOs had staff duties in the headquarters.

Administrative staff duties consumed much of the NSFO's time. The NSFO created, processed, and distributed NSF indoctrinational material and then supervised its use by the troops. He assisted other staff officers or the commander by explaining topical questions and measures taken by the Reich and party leadership, by clarifying orders with political meaning, and by cooperating in personnel matters pertaining to schooling and training of officers, cadets, and noncommissioned officers. Regardless of attempts to keep the NSFO free of such things, in special cases he handled political investigations and acted as counsel. To spread his propaganda he used his unit's newspapers, provided speakers who delivered addresses to the troops on the nazi weltanschauung, and ensured a continuous improvement and replenishment of a "hand library" for nazi guidance. To utilize every waking moment for the cause of nazism, the political officer assisted in organizing the troops' off-duty hours, planned national anniversary celebrations especially of the nazi era, and published instructions for Gemeinschaftsempfänge (community receptions--military receptions for civilians of the local community).⁴⁰ After OKH issued these basic instructions,

³⁹Besson, "NSFO," doc. no. 8, p. 97.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 98.

NSFO duties began receiving the personal touch from members of the military hierarchy.

These personal ideas, however, must have caused considerable confusion. As could be expected, Schörner stamped his own flamboyant personality on the NSFO during his tenure. "This is a war of weltanschauung," he thundered, ". . . The only decisive things are the nation's highest qualities: bravery, iron discipline, [and] honor. . . ." The NSFO's task was to "mobilize these qualities for victory, . . . to make every man a fanatical national socialist soldier." Schörner, echoing Hitler, proclaimed that a German fighting unit inspired by the nazi idea could accomplish anything. The NSFO should act as a leadership officer, he declared, not as an organ for troop Betreuung or welfare (Fürsorge). The NSFO had a warlike duty to perform, not the spiritual duty (Seelsorge) of a chaplain, and his job stood on the same level as tactics and training. Above all, he must avoid giving the appearance of a Politruk. The regimental NSFO, especially, had to influence every single soldier, and Schörner instructed all officers and NSFOs to stay alert and fight any slackness or indifference. Such work, he announced, held special importance in isolated units. Cautioning the NSFO not to perform his job by remaining in headquarters or try to win over men by beautiful and spiritual speeches, Schörner insisted that the NSFO set a personal example

through sober leadership and soldierly conduct. No course of instruction, he said, should take place without NSFO influence, and it was especially important to begin NSF work with recruits. He called for less words and more deeds and warned that NSF orders had to be executed wholeheartedly, just like tactical orders.⁴¹ In May 1944 a Captain Hoffman from OKW, addressing an NSFO group at Krössinsee, stated that the NSFO at division level and higher should concern himself only with ideological leadership. The NSFO's work, he said, did not include welfare, but did include morale measures and material care of the troops (Betreuung). However, Betreuung should not distract the NSFO from his primary task.⁴² Either a change had taken place since Schörner ordered the NSFO not to act as a B.O., or else OKW and OKH disagreed on the matter. One of the groups of NSF/OKW (I-2) had responsibility for Truppenbetreuung, so it is more probable that the issue merely reflected a difference in emphasis between the ideas of Schörner and OKW. Also, in May Lersner hinted at the probability of this difference in a report concerning an inspection trip to Italy. Complaining that NSF work there had reduced itself solely to Truppenbetreuung in some

⁴¹Karl Demeter, The German Officer Corps in Society and State 1650-1945, trans. Angus Malcolm (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965), app. 34, pp. 365-67 (quotations from p. 365). For the complete text in German see NAM, T78, Roll 135, Frames 6064891-94.

⁴²NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frames 5597564-65.

units, he compared units where the NSFOs concentrated only on the well-being of the troops with those in which NSFOs and commanders stressed the nazi will to victory. The latter, he said, performed better. Overemphasized concern for the troops' material well-being, he reported, too often emphasized indecent pictures and bordellos to keep officers and troops happy while decent Germans complained of the obscenities. To Lersner, this approach seemed too much like that used by former filthy Jewish newspapers and smacked too much of Americanism. Since Hitler never used obscenities even among his circle of friends, he continued, the Wehrmacht should forbid obscene pictures and films and bring back naturalism and beauty.⁴³ Moral measures, he recommended, must be proper and should be done with good material. An NSFO reading Schörner's directive, attending Hoffman's lecture, and then reading Lersner's report must have been confused as to what extent he should concern himself with the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of the soldiers. In August 1944 a mail censorship report showed that a soldier in Italy commented in a letter home that his unit never knew the real object of the NSFO's visit to his company.⁴⁴ Comments of this nature were rare since letter writers normally took precautions through fear

⁴³NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frames 1526602-04.

⁴⁴NAM, T78, Roll 134, Frame 6062786.

that negative comments would get them into trouble.⁴⁵ The confusion showed unmistakably in Grenadier Regiment 917 where the true title of the NSFO did not settle down until the summer of 1944. In January the political officer still called himself the B.O. Two days later his title became Ia (Operations)-NSFO, but in April he was the Ic (Intelligence)-NSFO. In May one of the regiment's battalions reverted back to the title of B.O.⁴⁶ However, most of the negative comments came from officers.

Lersner pinpointed the reason for the officer corps' resentment of nazism after a June trip to France. Based on his troop visit, he reported that officers resented any intrusion into their handling of the war; they considered any transgression into their traditional military responsibilities as an obstacle to success. Such interference, he continued, demonstrated to them a lack of faith in their leadership and efficiency, and officers did not want "novelties" nor directions coming out of OKW on how to do their jobs.⁴⁷ The odd part of all this was that Lersner himself was charged by the Party Chancellery with some of the same attitudes which he reported after his inspection trip to France. Before Hitler established OKW, the army had traditionally held sway in all military

⁴⁵ Ibid., Frame 6062807.

⁴⁶ NAM, T84, Roll 160, Frames 1526745-58.

⁴⁷ NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frame 1526595.

matters, and at one time an army general had been in charge of the navy. The army's fall from preëminence no doubt explains why much of the resistance or indifference to the NSFO program occurred. Tradition had allowed the officer corps to run the army, but the NSFO carried a danger of party interference in the officer corps' business. Further, the upstart OKW was deeply resented. Keitel, the Chief of OKW, clouded the issue on duties just a little more in his July 29 address at the NSFO conference at Hitler's headquarters. He said that the NSFO must stand for the troops like an immovable pillar of strength and should not become entangled in daily events.⁴⁸

Special Duties and Super NSFOs

One of the special duties of an NSFO was to serve as on-call advisor to so-called "Mixed Commissions." These commissions, composed of military, Waffen-SS, police, and party members at local levels, examined and coordinated the activities of the represented organizations. Toward the end of the war, Ruder suggested that NSFOs should be assigned as permanent representatives to these commissions, and Party Member Herrmann of the P-K discussed Ruder's idea with OKW and the three military high commands. At first none of the military staff officers raised any objections

⁴⁸NAM, T79, Roll 80, Frame 605.

to the idea, but then considerable difficulties arose over the formulation of the orders which would be required and the manner of notifying party District Leaders. As will be seen, this technique appeared to be a favorite military way of frustrating the party. The OKW representative also feared that if the NSFO served permanently on the commissions, it might call attention outside of the military of shortcomings in the military units. The NSFO reported detected shortcomings through normal military channels, he added, and they should not be aired elsewhere; it could even undermine the NSFO's position of trust. In the end, Ruder agreed that the NSFOs would merely be called in for committee deliberations by the commander involved.⁴⁹

Again the commander had retained his status against party intrusion.

Another part of the NSFO program included the assignment of professional military officers to party offices. Ruder was in charge of this, and he outlined its main purpose as letting the regular military establishment get to know the party better and acquire the party's "art" of leading men. After this experience, Ruder felt that an officer could better answer questions from other officers and soldiers about daily life and work of the party. It

⁴⁹BAK, Sammlung Schumacher 367, Vermerk für IIF-Pg. Ruder, Betrifft: Überprüfung der Wehrmacht, Waffen-SS und Polizei; hier: Beteiligung der NSFO an den gemischten Kommissionen, March 20, 1945, III STK, signed: Herrmann.

was an eight week assignment at three levels: three weeks at Landkreis (county); three at Stadtkreis (larger cities); and two at Gauleitung (District). In the Landkreis the officer became acquainted with political leadership questions in the party block, cell, and local branches through visits, inspections, conferences, and attendance at local party functions; special emphasis was placed on the situation of the farmers. The cooperation between local party leaders, mayors, and farm leaders was especially pointed out to the officers. At the Stadtkreis, they were expected to see the real influence of the party on the people and observe the many functions the party performed for the welfare and benefit of the inhabitants. At Gauleitung level, the officers spent most of their time in conversation with Gau officials.⁵⁰ Ruder required a short report from the District Leaders on the visits which had to include an evaluation of the officers themselves and their nazi attitudes. Ruder used the reports as bases for appropriate recommendations to OKW on the officers in case some of them might be nominated as NSFOs.⁵¹ Among other special duties and assignments was one in which some NSFOs had more power than a Soviet Politruk.

⁵⁰BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 150, Anlage für . . . , Betrifft: Kommandierung von aktiven Offizieren zu Parteidienststellen, August 15, 1944, IIF, signed: Ruder.

⁵¹Ibid., Ruder to Gauleiter, Betrifft: Kommandierung activer Offiziere zu Parteidienststellen, November 11, 1944.

As the war became more grim and when there was imminent danger of a battle front collapsing, the nazis employed groups of Super NSFOs on special assignment (Sondereinsatz) to stabilize the front. The first indication of Super NSFOs discovered in the meager party records of Sondereinsatz was a document dated November 30, 1944, which mentioned that Super NSFOs had been previously employed on the western front.⁵² The next was on January 1, 1945, when forty-nine selected army officers set out for special assignment in Army Group Harpe on the eastern front. At Oppeln the Army Group NSFO, Major Hess, instructed them in their duties.⁵³ By February the special program began to receive more attention, and Sondereinsatz was ordered on a case by case basis when deemed absolutely necessary, but even then only as a temporary measure.

On February 17, 1945, Ruder recommended to Bormann that special groups of activists and individuals should be selected for special assignment on the eastern front to stabilize those areas which had collapsed due to a Soviet breakthrough. He complained that the soldiers did not fight any more as they had in the past and declared that

⁵²BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 135, Vorlage, Betrifft: 12. Lehrgang der nationalsozialistischen Führungsoffiziere in Krossinsee vom 14.11.bis 28.11.1944, November 30, 1944, IIF, signed: Beringer.

⁵³BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 360, Vorlage, Betrifft: 14. Lehrgang der nationalsozialistischen Führungsoffiziere in Krossinsee vom 5.-18.1.1945, January 19, 1945, IIF, signed: Beringer.

previous examples of "special commands" had shown that often one energetic man was enough to organize a fanatical resistance to the enemy. Section II P of the P-K had informed him that "1500 political people" stood at the disposal of the party for this work. They should all be volunteers, he reported to his chief, and should be brought to Berlin for selection of the best men. Ruder did not want them placed under Wehrmacht command. Instead, they should work with "full powers" directly behind the front of threatened areas as agents of Bormann and Himmler to mobilize and organize "the strength of the entire nation." Sections II V and II F of the P-K were ready to supervise their induction into special groups, and their equipment would be supplied by Berger from the SS Main Office. Ruder also recommended that part of the group should be sent to the western front to "prevent" a situation similar to the one which had occurred in the east.⁵⁴ Bormann approved the recommendation, and these special groups were used both in the west and the east.⁵⁵

After the collapse of German forces in France, the NSF Staff/OKW ordered Sondereinsatz of NSFOs under the

⁵⁴BAK, Sammlung Schumacher 367, Vorlage, Betrifft: Sondereinsatz Politischer Leiter an Brennpunkten der Ost- und Westfront, February 17, 1945, IIF, signed: Ruder.

⁵⁵BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 135, Aktenvermerk, Betrifft: Mündlicher Bericht des Gefreiten Helmuth Vogel, 9. Pz. Div., Feldpost nummer 19980A, March 2, 1945, IIW, signed: Stosch.

leadership of a Lieutenant Colonel Schulz to work toward the stabilization of the western front. They were vested with the total authority of OKW and the Reichsführer SS, Heinrich Himmler. After accomplishing their mission "with good results," the group was disbanded except for a few who were retained for assignment in Holland where they conducted "special missions" in association with representatives of the Party Chancellery. These Super NSF0s had checked all signs of disintegration through the ruthless use of their special powers backed by credentials issued to them by Himmler. With such identification, they could even exert pressure on civilian officials--a thing which normal military identification made difficult. The special credentials were made out as follows:

(Name, rank, serial number) acts on my behalf. He has full powers in everything, his order will be executed.

Himmler
Reichsführer SS

"Basic Suggestions for the Special Assignment of NSF0s," composing five typewritten pages, were apparently written around January 1945 by a Captain Knaak of the Lehrstab (Teaching Staff) of the NSF Staff of the Wehrmacht. It was written in the second person singular familiar (du) --a very unusual thing in the German language where even old friends often retain the polite (Sie) form of address. Thus, the "Basic Suggestions" strike the reader as directions to a family or as instructions within a brotherhood

or secret order. They shed more light on Sondereinsatz than any official report could, and the following is a condensation of Knaak's catechism for special NSFO assignments, shed of its direct address. The "Special Assignment" of NSFOs was a measure of leadership used only in crisis situations where the normal leadership means appeared insufficient and enemy superiority either directly threatened the military or governmental structure or might lead to the dissolution of the front. In such situations, selected NSFOs were given the political task to intervene and take drastic measures to boost the willingness to fight. These NSFOs were told that their own example created the basis for success and that they had to persevere to their last breath. They were to consider themselves as the personal representatives of Hitler and "handle things in accordance with his will." Nevertheless, they were cautioned to use their full powers only where other measures no longer produced the desired results. They were told not to intervene at all if a strong leader led a unit since this was seen as a waste of power--a thing which could not be tolerated. In working with troop commanders, the Super NSFO was to represent the party and state leadership but should act as a "friend and helper." Regardless of the rank and position of all concerned, Super NSFOs were required to employ brutal and drastic action whenever they encountered "abuses, dereliction of duty, and malevolence."

In each such case, they had to act "lightning quick" and with surety since the question of competency would not arise until the danger was past. Super NSFOs were not to act as executors or administrators since this would waste their powers; they were to provide the first impulse, supervise the execution of their orders, and satisfy themselves with the end result. Whatever they did they only had to answer to themselves as national socialists--presumably, they were infallible so long as they spoke and acted ex cathedra. The final and sole judge of their correctness would be the results they achieved.

They had to keep in mind that they were assigned to help win the war and not to gratify someone or relieve someone of responsibility. Therefore, they always had to keep the total situation in view and not follow their own passion or professional background alone. This was one of the few times that a cool head was considered more important than emotion, but nazis could not resist tempering this with passion. By being the best oriented man on the spot, the NSFO on special assignment could then rely in most cases on his political instinct and the strength of his intuition. These NSFOs had to guard against the tendency of getting bogged down in units and had to remember their main task of working politically to strengthen the will to fight--to dig in and hold! Their method was to constantly talk to the troops wherever they found them

and to be "psychologically clever and tactically resourceful." Measures of propaganda and explanation should be flexible--only what was topical and directly strengthened the will to fight was necessary. The Super NSFO, as a political leader of men, was supposed to be able to adequately answer any question in a tactful manner. Defense against enemy propaganda was another main task, and the Super NSFO was told to denounce openly all enemy agitation by showing how the degeneracy of the enemy nullified his words. He had to consider every person a comrade. He could make use of every office, but the Super NSFO was cautioned not to impinge upon its inner structure except in an acute emergency. He also was required to emphasize the status of commanders and officials as organs of state and party authority since "the unity and indivisibility of leadership is a national socialist principle!" Although the party would try to violate this principle later, it was not his job now to take over someone else's duties. Instead he should work with others to eliminate lost motion. Super NSFO was not to act as a spy or informer, and he was to remember in dealing with German men that they were basically respectable. Still, the troops had to be told that if one might lose his life to the enemy, certain death awaited the one who bolted to the rear. The Super NSFO's catechism repeatedly stressed that the main goal of his assignment was the results he achieved and that his part

was only a small bit of the big picture. In crisis situations it was not crucial whether he was "'humane' or 'nice!'" ; it was crucial only that the line should be held. There was no doubt that their full powers included the power of life and death. The catechism concluded with the statement:

Do not shrink from drastic measures. It doesn't harm the prestige of the armed forces at all, as many falsely think, if once in the course of intimidating measures a deserter is hanged to the nearest tree with an appropriate sign around his neck.⁵⁶

Super NSFOs, however, were not commonplace. Most NSFOs were ordinary officers who had the duty to train the army in the nazi weltanschauung.

⁵⁶BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 360, Knaak, Hauptmann, NS-Führungs-Stab der Wehrmacht, Lehrstab, Grundsätzliche Hinweise für den Sondereinsatz von NS-Führungsoffizieren.

CHAPTER VII

TRAINING AND SCHOOLING

Unit Training

Both Generals von Hengl and Reinecke attempted to impress their training ideas on the army, and neither of them liked the traditional method of imparting information to soldiers--the lecture. When General von Hengl talked to the generals at Sonthofen in May 1944 he said that the best way to get through to the troops was through a few informal words on every occasion on the part of the leader. The worst possible way of all, he declared, was trying to get the soldiers attention from 11:00-12:00 on Saturday morning. Hengl obviously preferred the personal approach in training,¹ and so did General Reinecke. On September 29, 1944, Reinecke wrote the three service NSF Staff Chiefs concerning his training concepts which went into considerably more detail than Hengl's. His main fear was that the longer duty hours which had been recently decreed for the armed forces would be filled in with "make-work" just to keep soldiers busy. He cautioned that it would be much more logical

¹NAM, T78, Roll 135, Frames 6064897-4910.

to set the extra hours aside for NSF instruction. He saw "the entire service operation" standing under the NSF influence; therefore, it could not exhaust itself in just a few lectures on political themes. The general wanted NSF training to be integrated into the normal operations of the unit--to use "NSF aspirations" as illustrations to explain and support everyday operations. NSF training had to be integrated into everything the soldier did. Lectures, he wrote, made a mockery of the subject if things close to the soldier were ignored. What the soldier really wished to see was the elimination of injustices, and Reinecke listed several: inequity in the distribution of canteen items; the use of radios only in officers' quarters or the company orderly room; the assignment of enlisted servants to officers; the distribution of movie and theater tickets only to officers and ranking sergeants; endless and secluded sojourns of the officers to their officer club; and the excess of formal exercises such as meaningless close order drill held under the cloak of "training in hardness." Eliminate these things, Reinecke implied, and a big step would be taken toward winning the troops to the support of NSF. Reinecke also wanted to bring the noncommissioned officers into the program. Since the NCOs always handled "the trifling things," they had to be trained in handling these things properly. He wanted NCOs, especially First Sergeants, to attend NSFO courses of

instruction which, in addition to indoctrinating them in ideological matters, would teach them to handle the personal problems of the troops.² Regardless, however, of what Hengl and Reinecke wanted, the old, formal instructional periods continued in general use, but methods differed from unit to unit and from place to place.

The 19th Army combined the use of lectures and the personal approach desired by Hengl and Reinecke. In January 1945 unit commanders in the 19th Army were required to conduct two "NSF periods" each week. Main Office NSFOs had to give lectures to officers and hold personal discussions and office conferences with staff officers while Sub-office NSFOs were expected to help the unit commanders in lining up the NCOs politically. In battle, simple and direct measures were directed to make the troops "spiritually hard," but when the 19th Army NSFO spelled these measures out, they merely boiled down to a scheme for improving morale.³

The C-in-C West, Field Marshal von Rundstedt, published an NSF manual for his command which stated that direct discussion with individual soldiers was always the best way for NSF training, but the manual also outlined how the "NSF Period" would be conducted. The NSF Period

²BAK, Kanzlei Rosenberg, NS8/174, Reinecke to Service NSF Chiefs with a copy to the NSDAP work staff, September 29, 1944, pp. 24-28.

³NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frames 1525995-97.

would begin with a quotation of Hitler's and would end with a nazi song. In between, a lively discussion on topical political questions would be held. During this discussion the troops were to feel they were not being manipulated by propaganda, and officers were to conduct the discussion not as officers to men but as men to men. Lectures on German history in relation to the nazi weltanschauung and winning the war were also allowed. To reach the emotional side of the men, Feierstunde (Ceremony Periods) were prescribed to make the troops conscious of the greatness of the German people through music, poetry, art, and "meaningful speeches." The formality involved with such periods, of course, was not within the personal approach concept preferred by either Hengl or Reinecke.

Wehrkreis VII (an area command with headquarters in Munich) directed the content of the Feierstunde in considerably more detail and placed it on a more soldierly basis. Nevertheless, it was still more formal than personal. Festive music whenever possible should introduce the ceremony, and a quotation from Hitler should follow. Then came a "speech, which must be a blazing appeal," so "the hearts of the men could grasp it and lift themselves upward." The highpoint of the speech had to be at the end with an unreserved accolade to the Führer. A combat song (while standing) should close the ceremony, and the

Wehrkreis NSFO specified that it should impulsively rush from the mouths of the men. Most of the time, he wrote, "we shall be satisfied with one or two verses." Nothing could be more unbelievable, he charged, yet it was true that at the end of the Führer's words and in the same breath the speaker sometimes said, "We shall now sing the song 'Our Lives Only Belong to Freedom,' small song book, page 17. . . ." Besides, he added, there were far better songs than that one.

In January 1945 in Army Group "B" on the western front, its C-in-C, Model, was deeply concerned with NSF influence and morale in the rear areas, and his method for solving the problem was the personal approach. Since units behind the lines were usually spread out, it became difficult for commanders and NSFOs to get around and speak to all of them in large groups, so leaders of small units were told to talk to their men, individually or in small groups, wherever they happened to be--in forests, houses, or taverns. Another personal approach included the use of handbills. They were scarce, warned Model's NSFO, so they had to be used to good advantage. They should be stuck on walls, telegraph poles, road sign posts, and trees on the street. Paste or glue was not available and neither was assistance. So the NSFO suggested:

Make the walls or trees wet and put the things on there. It works superbly; it is proven. Activate the driver; give him a pair of handbills and let him put them up when he has to stop. . . . Use slogans.

Make posters (in so far as camouflage allows) in bunkers, living rooms, etc. . . . If ink runs use pencil. Beauty is not the object. The main goal is to beat the drum. Cover everything; improvise; . . . paint slogans on the wall. . . . Lime (for white-wash) can be found in destroyed villages. . . . One can make letters out of a fragment of a wall or brick. It works! Do not first request paper and drawing ink; they are not available. . . . Write slogans in the snow on inclined places or trample them--it will remain until the next snow fall. One can lay out tree branches. . . . These measures are not in jest; they were used to good effect during the struggle period of the party; they produced results.

The NSFO also suggested several slogans: "Victory or Siberia"; "Idlers are Traitors"; "What are You (du) Doing for Victory"; and "Believe, Fight, Win." In writing areas there should be slogans asking soldiers if they had written home.⁴ Everything, of course, was not so informal.

Unit Schools

Schooling in NSF was always on a more formal basis than were the methods used in indoctrinating the troops in nazism and encouraging them to fight. Units conducted their own programs, and the courses were temporary, specialized, and aimed at a particular audience. For example, the 19th Army held a short three day course for commanders and staff officers to instruct them concerning the NSFO program. The Army NSFO conducted the course, and participants included one regimental commander, three battalion commanders, and sixteen unit commanders and staff officers.

⁴NAM, T77, Roll 1039, Frames 6512753-57.

Corps and division commanders were invited if they saw fit to attend.⁵ Not all courses were designed strictly for commanders, of course; above all they were constructed and operated according to the needs of the unit itself, but they followed the overall guidelines published by OKH and OKW.

The Replacement Army held a course of two days length on February 3 and 4, 1945, for selected officers. On the first day, the schedule included three one-hour lectures: "The National Socialist Leadership of Troops"; "Soldierly Spirit and National Socialism" (delivered by Lieutenant Colonel Freiherr von Lersner from the NSF Staff/OKH); and "How Does the Officer Speak with His Soldiers." In addition seventy minutes were set aside for discussion, and that evening a social get-together was scheduled. The next day called for four and a half hours in the morning for discussion, presumably over the themes of the preceding day.⁶

On February 17, 1945, the NSFO of Army Group "B" established the guidelines for unit schools which had been ordered by the NSF Staff of OKH in order to ease the burden of the unit commanders. It would be in three parts. "Basic schooling" under the control of unit commanders would be based on thirteen themes taken from Wofür kämpfen wir (What

⁵NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frame 1525994.

⁶NAM, T77, Roll 1039, Frame 6512840.

Are We Fighting For?--the pamphlet written by Colonel Huebner). "Continuous schooling" would be held on monthly themes established by the NSF Staff/OKW in cooperation with the party; Sub-office NSFOS would be in charge of this part. The theme for February was "The Movement" (i.e., The Nazi Movement). The third part was called "political schooling of pressing importance at the present time." This mouthful of a title included coverage of several pamphlets which included What Are We Fighting For?, Officers of the Führer, and The Political Soldier plus newspapers, leaflets, speeches of Hitler, and various literature provided by information services of the armed forces and the Propaganda Ministry. For this last part, commanders, Main Office NSFOS, and Sub-office NSFOS would be jointly responsible.⁷

In March 1945 the 98th Infantry Division NSFOS announced his "Special Instructions on NSF, Nr. 8/45." It listed the anniversaries which would be celebrated and the school themes for April. The two anniversaries were Bismarck's and Hitler's birthdays. Even the troops in the front lines had to be addressed concerning the significance of these days, and celebrations were prescribed for troops behind the lines. There were four themes for April: The Movement (published by the OKW NSF Staff); Chapter 28, "What Do We Understand about Socialism," and Chapter 33,

⁷NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frame 1525977-78.

"Wherein Lies the Meaning of This Difficult Struggle," from What Are We Fighting For?; and the last theme was "Only a German Victory Insures a German Future." The Special Instructions also pointed out that units had so far not set up "NSF Charts" as ordered. These charts were intended to serve as corollaries to the themes and consisted of situation maps, newspaper clippings, writings on NSF, contributions to the division newspaper, and NSF hints.⁸ Those familiar with the U.S. Army's "Troop Information and Education" boards will recognize the German version entitled "NSF Charts."

During the summer and fall of 1944, Wehrkreis XI, headquartered in Hannover, conducted two-day courses three times monthly. The headquarters announced quotas for different units which then had to report the names of attendees. The area command tried to spread attendance to different types of people, but mainly the courses were aimed at company and battery commanders. For example, the course for July 18 and 19 contained ten captains from the 411th Division and twenty captains and lieutenants from the 471st Division. On August 8-9, each division sent ten officers and the Hannover Medical Office sent ten, and courses beginning on September 11 and September 25 were strictly for nurses. The local party District Leader of the South Hannover-Braunschweig Gau, on request of

⁸Ibid., Frames 1525928-29.

Wehrkreis XI, cooperated in providing speakers⁹ and in schooling NSFOs. In addition to holding schools for its own party personnel, this party district, during the period September-December 1944, held one course per week, lasting from Monday through Thursday, for the NSFOs of the Wehrkreis.¹⁰ All of the units training and schooling, formal and informal, were, however, insignificant compared with the tremendous effort in the courses conducted at Krössinsee.

Krössinsee

Krössinsee was a former party school located near Stettin in Pomerania; it was taken over by OKW during the war and became the main center for training NSFOs and for determining the suitability of officers from all services who were nominated as NSFOs. It was the object of very close observation by the P-K work staff which kept a permanent liaison man there. One could almost call this man a spy, because some of the best information and criticism of individuals and the operation there come from reports to Bormann from these liaison men. Their reports are also significant in showing the party's views of the officer corps.

The first NSFO course at Krössinsee took place between March 8-21, 1944, with 227 officers attending.

⁹Ibid., Frames 1526251-314.

¹⁰Ibid., Frames 1526261 and 1526307.

Nineteen of these men were selected as Work Group Leaders. Of the total, the army provided 147 officers. The majority of all attendees fell in the 30-40 age group, and most wore war decorations and were already active in NSFO positions. At the end of the course, the Work Group Leaders rendered efficiency reports on the officers in their groups which placed 30 per cent of the officers in the above-average category and listed 53 per cent as average; 17 per cent were judged unqualified to be NSFOs. Instruction at Krössinsee was by means of lectures by party members and staff officers from OKH and OKW plus discussion in the work groups.¹¹ In the work groups the lecture themes were discussed during the afternoon after the morning lectures. Each theme was covered intensively, and suggestions and recommendations were solicited. Allegedly open criticism was demanded and was not taken amiss when offered. Of course there were always officers who invariably maintained a rigid silence during these discussions. One of the work group goals was to further the working together of the three military services and to allow the members of one service to experience the outlook of the others. Apparently, the navy and air force representatives had higher numbers of professional regular officers in their

¹¹BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 360, Vorlage, Betrifft: Lehrgang für NS-Führungsoffiziere in Krössinsee, Erfahrungsbericht, March 23, 1944, signed: Ruder. See appendix A for the first course lecture schedule of speakers, subjects, and times.

midst than did the army, and regulars were rarely party members.¹²

A complete critique of each course held at Krössinsee is not necessary and could comprise a study in itself; however, a condensed version of Ruder's report to Bormann for the first course with certain excerpts from other course reports will be significant in showing the pessimism of Ruder and other leading nazis concerning individuals, the Army General Staff, and the effectiveness of the entire NSFO program in general. There is little doubt that the nazi view engendered by events at Krössinsee was instrumental in causing developments toward the Politrुक idea in the last few weeks of the war, especially since Ruder himself was deeply involved.

Ruder attended the first course at Krössinsee as the representative of the P-K and lectured on "The Historical Mission of the party." He felt that many of the lectures could be shortened since several speakers tended to repeat themselves; he also wanted less talk and more discussion. Several party offices had tried to get as many speakers as possible scheduled for the course and thereby lost sight of the big picture; accordingly Ruder thought the P-K should exercise a more rigid control over the assignment of speakers. Besides, he charged, several

¹²Letters, Captain of Reserves Karl Ducoffre, a.D., May 20, 1972 and September 21, 1972.

of the speakers were "weak." One of these was General Reinecke whose remarks lacked the "striking force and power of conviction" required for an introductory address at Krössinsee. The fact that Ruder used nearly the same words as Bormann when the latter had pondered who should be the Chief of the NSF Staff/OKW showed that the two must have already discussed Reinecke at length. If this is so, then from the very beginning Reinecke had little chance for success, as will become clear later in this study when the P-K attempted to abolish his job. According to Ruder, who commented on other speakers as well, the remarks by the general's assistants, Captains Kölle and Presting, were "tired and weak" and not "clear and convincing." Generally Ruder believed that some of the topics discussed by the speakers could have been eliminated since they covered the same ground as others. The talk by Lieutenant Ziervogel did not seem to set well with the students because of its dryness and the lieutenant's lack of personal involvement; his comments on "The Military Situation" gave a resigned impression, and, in Ruder's opinion, it was entirely too pessimistic. On the other hand, Ruder thought that the interest in the work groups was very animated; the participants had the opportunity to comment on the lectures and those questions which still remained "open." As a result, the Work Group Leaders had an excellent opportunity to evaluate the students, and their

reports were forwarded to the High Commands of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. To maintain uniformity among and within the work groups, the leaders met every day with General Reinecke to discuss all questions and develop guidance for their work.

The course did not fail to utilize the students' evenings (after 8:30 P.M.) for cultural and propaganda purposes. On one of the evenings, Party Member Cerff of the Main Culture Office in the party's Propaganda Office organized a celebration under the title of "Great Examples in a Difficult Time." In this case even a party official was not spared Ruder's criticism. Cerff delivered a speech which Ruder termed "too long and confused." All was not bad, however. The students were also treated to a musical portion of the festivities; the Gau orchestra from Pomerania played Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and it was well received. Several films and a comic opera ("La Serva Patrona") were greeted with approval, but a comedy ("Vitamin L") did not go over at all well. On other evenings, the students enjoyed a choir and a puppet show. To secure the active participation in evening singing, the course participants received new songs to practice each morning. At the close of the course, an evening of "comradery" (Kameradschaftsabend) was held, but Ruder, showing a straight-laced attitude, thought it was "an undignified closing of the course." There was no clear leadership

given to the evening, and the bounteous flow of alcohol resulted in some drunkenness and a few breaches of propriety.

Ruder had comments about two other generals also. General Voig-Ruschewegh of the NSF Staff/OKW had been in charge of quarters, accommodations, transportation, and rations for the course. This general presented such a "dejected appearance," Ruder wrote, that he soon became a focus of everyone's derision. Because of this, he said, the general was a burden on General Reinecke and his staff. On the other side, General Schörner had shown up on March 21 to talk to the army officers in attendance. Ruder was very impressed with the robust combat experienced general and reported to Bormann that Schörner laid out the task of the NSFO in an unmistakable manner--he left no doubt as to how the job had to be done.¹³ Appearances were apparently very important to a believer in the nazi "superman" theory like Ruder. However, there were other nazis like a Dr. Krüger, the District School Leader of Southern Westphalia, who were more interested in the functioning of the work groups.

Krüger, after assisting with the first NSFO Course at Krössinsee, complained to Ruder that all of the Work

¹³BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 360, Vorlage, Betrifft: Lehrgang für NS-Führungsoffiziere in Krössinsee, Erfahrungsbericht, March 23, 1944, signed: Ruder. See also NAM, T77, Roll 1039, Frames 6512796-99.

Group Leaders there were not political leaders at all, regardless of their former party membership. One of them did not lead the ideological discussion himself, but rather allowed a civilian party member to handle it. Krüger said this showed that men who lacked a clear comprehension of the nazi weltanschauung and who did not have much political experience were not qualified to lead a work group and to pass judgment on participants in the course. In this first course, the way those attending the course were evaluated was at the complete discretion of the Work Group Leaders. In the future, he suggested, the NSF Staff of OKW, in cooperation with the P-K, should hold a detailed consultation with the Work Group Leaders before allowing them to fill out the rating sheets. He also bemoaned the fact that only 10 per cent of the Work Group Leaders had been party members before Hitler's assumption of power in Germany. As it was, only 60 per cent of them were party members, and apparently 30 per cent had religious affiliations. Krüger placed the fault on commanders who thought the "old" party members were too radical. At least, it should be possible to find such types to serve as NSFOS in units larger than divisions, he believed. He, like Ruder, also suggested that the P-K should have a greater say in the selection of speakers and themes for the course.¹⁴ Ruder agreed fully

¹⁴Ibid., Gauleitung Westfalen-Süd, Der Gauschulungsleiter, to Ruder, April 17, 1944, signed: Dr. Krüger.

with Krüger, and assured him that the second course was completely different. The Work Group Leaders now had the experience behind them from the first course, and thus they did a better job. He assured Krüger that he personally talked with Major Ihkert of OKW before an officer was either accepted or rejected as an NSFO.¹⁵

The second course at Krössinsee from March 17 to 27, however, convinced Ruder that the military services were not giving sufficient care to the nomination of NSFOs. Some of the participants had openly announced that they did not want to be NSFOs, and, unfortunately in Ruder's view, a proportionally high number was composed of teachers and scholars. In this course, nearly 19 per cent were found to be unsuitable for NSFO jobs. Ruder talked to Major Ihkert again, and the major promised to apply pressure on the three services for a better selection process. Ruder also revealed that cooperation between the party and OKH was not as good as that between the P-K and the other two services. Further, General von Heikendorf, who spoke to the students about the "eastern troops" (Ukrainians and Russians) serving in the German army, offended Ruder when he said that Germany could only win in the east with the help of these Slavic troops. Ruder was also getting exasperated with General Reinecke

¹⁵Ibid., Ruder to Dr. Krüger, May 3, 1944.

for repeated failures in the schooling program, and he asked Bormann to talk to the general on its importance. The services were trying to set up their own independent NSFO courses, and if Reinecke failed to intervene as he should, Ruder reported, then the party would have to take a hand in running the service courses as it had at Krössinsee. Yet if it did intervene, he moaned, it would require a monumental effort which might fail.

Ruder also revealed that earlier complaints by members of the NSF Staff/OKW against members of the NSF Staff/OKH had had their intended effect on members of the P-K. Since Schörner's departure for a field command, Ruder told Bormann, no active nazi was running the army's NSFO program, and Colonel Radke in NSF/OKH laid all kinds of difficulties in the way of cooperation between OKH and OKW. (Hengl was not appointed until May 15, 1944.) This was not Ruder's first complaint against Radke, and he asked Bormann to get the colonel relieved from his job. Most of the problems with OKH, he said, involved personnel questions, so this was also an indirect slap at General Schmundt (and perhaps also Generals Burgdorf and Meisel). On the other hand, OKH complaints against OKW had also been effective. If Reinecke would only abandon "his diplomatic line" and "finally assert himself," Ruder complained, things would improve. Furthermore, some of Reinecke's people were not so good either; there were still

several politically unqualified people in his Amtsgruppe Inland.¹⁶

The fourth, fifth, and sixth courses were held before the attempted assassination of Hitler on July 20, 1944, which created a general nazi attack on the Army General Staff. Their significance was in the deepening distrust of the nazis for regular officers and the continued complaints about the army's NSF Staff. The fourth course, May 19-31, 1944, fired Ruder's ire regarding the regular officers who attended. They approached all questions very critically and constantly asked for "instructions and simple formulations" concerning the nazi weltanschauung. "Even in irrelevant things most of them showed a great insecurity," and they were virginal when it came to nazi thought processes. The students had leveled many criticisms at the speakers because hardly any of them had combat decorations, and the regular officers, especially, believed that no one who had not proved his nazism at the front could speak to them about national socialism. Ruder's pessimistic conclusion was that the course was too short to change these attitudes.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., Vorlage, Betrifft: Zweiter Lehrgang für NS-Führungsoffiziere in Krössinsee, Erfahrungsbericht, April 28, 1944, signed: Ruder.

¹⁷ Ibid., Abschrift, Vorlage, Betrifft: 4. Lehrgang für NS-Führungsoffiziere in Krössinsee vom 19.-31.5.44, June 1, 1944, IIF, signed: Ruder.

In June he aimed his barbs at the NSF Staff of OKH again. This time, in addition to Colonel Radke, he included Lieutenant Colonel von Lersner. Their lectures to the army officers in the fifth course, in his opinion, added nothing to the "enrichment" of the course or to the "strengthening of political activation." He reminded Bormann that both of these officers had been criticized previously by the P-K, and he proclaimed his intent to take up the matter with the new Chief of the NSF Staff/OKH, General von Hengl.¹⁸ In early July, Party Member Nill, instead of Ruder, made the reports to Bormann from Krössinsee, but he too criticized the regular officers' very strong prejudice against the party. Colonel Radke again spoke to the army officers of the sixth course, and according to Nill, Radke created on the part of almost all of the students a feeling of "rejection and disgust" for him. "As usual his remarks were 'correct'; however, they were without any positive attitude and personal sympathy for national socialist leadership."¹⁹

The seventh course closed the day after the "20th of July," and the reports by the Party Liaison Officer at Krössinsee reflected the bitterness against the Army

¹⁸ Ibid., Vorlage, Betrifft: 5. Lehrgang für NS-Führungsoffiziere in Krössinsee vom 5.-17.-Juni 1944., June 17, 1944, IIF, signed: Ruder.

¹⁹ Ibid., Vorlage, Betrifft: 6. Lehrgang für NS-Führungsoffiziere in Krössinsee vom 22.6.-5.7.44, July 6, 1944, IIF, signed: Nill.

General Staff for its hand in the attempt on Hitler's life. It was the youngest class yet; the average age was 32-1/2 years. Approximately half were not party members, and these, as could be expected, were mostly the professional officers. Although Nill was impressed with the younger officers, he felt they approached questions thrown at them with "too much intellect." He also felt that even those who had grown up in the Hitler Youth had lost much of their dedication to nazism since falling under the sway of the "Officer Club spirit." He thought that after leaving Krössinsee, they would return to another world which as a rule criticized nazism on an intellectual level. Further, the students, Nill reported, could not fathom why NSF/OKW tolerated the continued opposition in NSF/OKH, a subordinate headquarters; OKW should have prevented these officers from appearing at Krössinsee and should have them relieved of their duties. Nill blamed Colonels Radke and Käther in the army's NSF Staff for this state of affairs.²⁰

By October Party Member Beringer made these reports, and he also complained about the army. Out of a quota of twenty general staff officers, only seven showed up for a course, and they acted in a cool and temporizing manner. One general staff colonel did not want to conform

²⁰Ibid., Vorlage: 7. Jahrgang für NS-Führungsoffiziere in Krössinsee vom 7.7.-21.7.44, July 21, 1944, IIF, signed: Nill.

at all, and he complained about his quarters and ostentatiously shook his head during lectures. After two days, "supposedly because of military reasons," he just got up and left; General Reinecke was unhappy over this display of general staff arrogance and reported the colonel's actions to General Guderian, the army's Chief of Staff.²¹

The twelfth course at Krössinsee caused a small furor when general staff officers began to express their reaction to the widespread criticisms aimed at the Army General Staff. Their actions and remarks resulted in Bormann's ordering Ruder to inform General Burgdorf of the Army Personnel Office and the SS-Chief, Heinrich Himmler, about the events. Beringer reported that 182 members of the War Academy from Hirschberg attended the course scheduled for November 14-28, 1944; their commandant, General Späth accompanied them, and they departed as scheduled after the first eight days. From the beginning Späth's general staff officers caused considerable difficulty. They arrived showing visible aloofness and prejudices and exhibited little inclination to conform. Not wanting to get involved, they refused to take part in work group discussions, and they could not tolerate the fact that the Work Group Leaders had fewer years of military experience than they. One general

²¹Ibid., Vorlage, Betrifft: 9. Lehrgang für nationalsozialistische Führungsoffiziere in Krössinsee vom 19.9. bis 2.10.1944; IIF, signed: Beringer.

staff colonel called this situation "grotesque," and most let it be known on the first day that they already had a very good mastery over "the stuff" and were only attending for informational purposes.

The general staff members also held themselves aloof from the other officers, so no free discussion was possible. They critically scrutinized every speech, and work groups degenerated into fruitless debates. Anytime they could manage to get a speaker to point out or confirm changes which had taken place in the conduct of "practical national socialism," they appeared very happy, and they felt personally attacked by lectures delivered by General Reinecke and Party Member Eckhardt because both speakers talked about the events of the "20th of July." After hearing some of the ideological speeches, they told Beringer that they felt like removing their beloved uniforms and forsaking the military profession forever. Concerning the Sondereinsatz of NSFOs on the western front, one participant openly displayed regular officer arrogance; he commented that such a state of affairs was made necessary only because reserve officers who had not been selected properly had "unfortunately" been brought into the army. (In the margin of the report next to this statement, Bormann showed his bias against regular officers; he wrote: "Typical attitude!") Many of the general staff officers demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the staff structure of the NSFO program;

they demanded that NSFOS of division staffs should be made subordinate to the Ia (Operations Officer and Chief of Staff), just like any other staff officer, since the Ia had the best information about the spirit of the troops and could best judge the kind of national socialist leadership required. Many considered the NSFO as something temporary--something born only out of an emergency. Accordingly, they subscribed to the idea that the purpose of the NSFO was not ideological; it was only designed to improve the spirit of the troops in order to increase their combat effectiveness.

Beringer believed the cause of all this was the training system at the War Academy where nazism was considered only as a subject like any other--a subject for the mind but not taken to heart. He also thought that the Commandant of Krössinsee, Lieutenant Colonel Herschel had artificially widened the chasm between the Hirschbergers and the NSFOS by offending the former with crude remarks which gave the impression that he thought they were all reactionaries. Beringer, without comment, attached a note by Party Member Derr who had been informed by Colonel Langmann, on behalf of General Späth, that the members of the War Academy, without exception [underlined by Bormann twice!], had returned in an enthusiastic spirit, thankful that they had had the opportunity to visit Krössinsee. General Späth had questioned them again, and

they, without exception [underlined by Bormann twice!], had answered positively. All of the participants [underlined by Bormann three times!] confirmed that Krössinsee had been a good experience for them. Späth would ensure that in the future all general staff officers would attend the entire course. A few officers [Bormann: "??"] and an arrow drawn to here from the thrice underlined "All of the participants" above!] had spoken derogatorily about the Work Group Leaders and the course, but after this was divulged, General Späth punished them; he sent them back to Krössinsee to apologize to the Course Leader and Work Group Leaders. "Consideration," Langmann added, was being given to their removal from the general staff. The general requested that these exceptions should not be generalized and affirmed that Krössinsee had been an experience [Bormann: "??? of what kind!?!"] and that he expressed his thanks in the name of all participants.²² This was still not the end, and Späth continued to clean up his reputation by writing a note to Ruder. In the future, he declared, "it was foreseen" that every general staff course would begin first with an NSFO course in order to place general staff officers on a political

²²BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 135, Vorlage, Betrifft: 12. Lehrgang der nationalsozialistischen Führungsoffiziere in Krössinsee vom 14.11.bis 28.11.1944, November 30, 1944, IIF, signed: Beringer, with enclosure: Anlage, zur Vorlage, Betrifft: Lehrgang Krössinsee, November 30, 1944, IIF, signed: Derr.

and ideological level and build up the NSF work at the academy.²³

The previous day, November 31, the general's NSFO had prepared a letter for him to the Chief of the Army General Staff in which Späth sang the praises of the twelfth NSFO Course at Krössinsee and its beneficial aspects for the participants. However, he complained that the long speeches there caused "mental overfatigue" and that "some inept speakers" (of course Guderian could check and find that Reinecke was one of these inept speakers) had used the "20th of July" to split apart a "resistance" which, he added, did not even exist. The participants objected, he wrote, to having this always thrown in their faces or to having always to prove their loyalty to nazism, Hitler, and the German nation. Of the 183 members of the general staff who took part in the course, Späth listed 12 with the Knight's Cross and 60 with the German Cross in Gold. Eight had been named in dispatches, 142 had been wounded in combat--81 repeatedly--and 10 were amputees. To further prove his point, he said that 114 had even belonged to the Hitler Youth, and of these 85 had been Hitler Youth Leaders. He also sent a copy of this letter to Ruder.²⁴

²³Ibid., Späth to Ruder, December 1, 1944.

²⁴Ibid., Kriegsakademie Abt. NSFO, Hirschberg an den Chef des Generalstabes des Heeres. Erfahrungsbericht über den 12. NSFO-Lehrgang im Krössinsee vom 16.-22.11. 1944, November 30. 1944, signed: Späth.

The stiff reaction by members of the Army General Staff did not stop all of the attacks on the regular officers, but it did convince the P-K that better party-Wehrmacht relations were needed. During the fourteenth course, from January 5-19, 1945, Major Lindenberg spoke to the army and upset the regulars by chiding them for waiting too long to come around to the nazi weltanschauung. In addition, Party Member Krämer, a replacement speaker for General Reinecke who was conspicuously absent, alienated his audience through the use of "inaccurate and dangerous formulations." One example was: "If the armed forces had not lived it up for three to four years in France, it would not have come to a catastrophe in the west and the 20th of July as well." As a result of this and other derogatory remarks, several students, mostly regular colonels, complained to the school commandant and requested a conference with Krämer and Beringer. "For better or worse," Beringer reported to Bormann, "Party Member Krämer had to eat several of his own remarks." Nevertheless, even then he tried to make himself look important "in absurd ways." Beringer, supporting the regular officers for a change, reported that he would never allow Krämer to appear at Krössinsee again. Again supporting the students, he also complained about the new School Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Schulz of Sondereinsatz fame. Schulz was

malassigned, Beringer said, because he could not speak well and had "preposterous" ideas on cooperation between party and Wehrmacht. Many officers had complained to Beringer that the commandant censured them like school children. The Wehrmacht NSF Staff, Beringer reported, intended to replace him with a Colonel Weller after the end of the fifteenth course.²⁵

On February 17, 1945, Party Member Derr reported to Bormann that Krössinsee had had to close down because of the Soviet break-through on the eastern front. The teaching staff and the Work Group Leaders were placed at Himmler's disposal to be assigned to his Army Group Weichsel which was being driven back in the vicinity of Stettin. War Schools and Battalion and Unit Leader Courses were also halted for a short time, but they later resumed. Döberitz (Olympic Village), a secondary NSFO school, would carry on with Krössinsee forever out of the picture.²⁶ Krössinsee and Döberitz, of course, were not the only formal schools; NSF instruction was conducted in all armed forces schools. Thus, the major schools were also frequent targets of the criticism leveled by the P-K work staff.

²⁵ BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 360, Vorlage, Betrifft: 14. Lehrgang der nationalsozialistischen Führungsoffiziere in Krössinsee vom 5.-18.1.1945, January 19, 1945, IIF, signed: Beringer.

²⁶ BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 135, Vorlage, Betrifft: Lehrgänge für NS-Führungsoffiziere, February 17, 1945, signed: Derr.

Other Schools

Inspection visits to some of these other major schools showed that the nazis believed that, in general, the NSFO program had not yet been very successful. The greater part of the instructors in the Infantry Cadet school in Neuenburg, near Prague, Czechoslovakia, acted as if they did not know the aims of NSF, one party report charged, and they gave the impression that they did not believe in the themes they themselves taught--they taught them perfunctorily in accordance with orders.²⁷ Also Derr made several visits to schools after Krössinsee closed. He called the Commandant of the Army Noncommissioned Officer School in Mittenwald, a Major Schiller, a "somewhat pig-headed, intellectually inflexible" man who admitted that he had never heard of NSF until four weeks previously (February 1945!). Derr asked the Office of the General Inspector for Leadership Training, Captain Bötzelin, to remove Schiller. At a school at Lüttensee, Derr found that the commandant was "young, fresh, and enthusiastic," but the NSFO, "a kettle-drummer type," lacked any creative ideas and had to be replaced. On the other hand, he found everything to his satisfaction at the Cadet School at Mittenwald; the NSFO had a good reputation, his work was

²⁷BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vor1, 139, Bericht über Schule X für FJI . . . , March 16, 1945, signed: Schaumburg.

appreciated, and the commandant supported him.²⁸ An inspection by a Lieutenant Friedrich of the 6th Infantry Cadet School at Meseritz at the beginning of October 1944 revealed that the cadets lacked knowledge of the nazi weltanschauung. There was one NSFO there, but Friedrich saw him in an official capacity only once at an insignificant affair. Further, he complained that the younger cadets were only interested in jazz; they had no interest in ideological questions.²⁹

Even the local nazis got in the act. The Gauleiter and Reich Governor of Salzburg (Austria) reported to the P-K the observations of one of his underlings who took part in a course in January 1945 at the War School in Kitzingen. A young lieutenant there gave a lecture on "so-called 'NS-Themes'" which "was an unrivaled catastrophe. He was so clumsy handling questions and so insecure that his efforts had only negative results." The school NSFO spoke to the class only once, and the students never saw nor heard from him or a representative again.³⁰ Some reports, however, were highly favorable; one predicted that the greater part

²⁸Ibid., Vermerk für Pg. Ruder, Betrifft: Besuch der Heeres--Unteroffizierschule Mittenwald . . . , March 11, 1945, IIF, signed: Derr.

²⁹Ibid., Erfahrungsbericht über den Besuch der Fahnenjunkerschule 6. Inf. Meseritz . . . , March 29, 1945, signed: Leutnant Dr. Friedrich.

³⁰Ibid., Gauleiter of Salzburg to the P-K, Betrifft: NSFO. der Kriegsschule Kitzingen, March 19, 1945.

of the participants in the General Staff Officer Course in the NSFO Army School at Egerndorf would follow the NSF way.³¹

Oblivious to the possibility that most army officers were not prepared to commit themselves totally to nazism, the P-K believed that the reason for the many failures of NSF in the army's school system was in the person who supervised it. The solution, then, was to replace him. On March 27, 1945, Oberbannführer Griesmayr complained to Ruder that the Army's General Inspector of Leadership Training, Major General von Hellermann, was an obstacle in the way of the revolutionizing of the army because he was not a nazi. He recommended that the P-K press for the relief of Hellermann and his replacement by a Lieutenant Colonel Klüver who was an "old national socialist," political leader, trainer, and exemplary officer. Griesmayr added that he believed the C-in-C of the Replacement Army, Himmler, had already started some type of action against Hellermann.³² If so, the nazis had very little time to turn the army's training program into a new direction, and it appeared that many German officers were just not interested in nazi training even if it was their responsibility. In fact many resisted.

³¹BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 137, Bericht über meinen Vortrag vor dem Generalstabsoffizierslehrgang in der NSFO-Heeresschule Egerndorf, unsigned.

³²BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 139, Griesmayr to Ruder, March 27, 1945.

CHAPTER VIII

RESISTANCE

Passive Resistance

Much of the resistance to nazism and the NSFO occurred because of Prussian traditionalism in the army at higher levels, but much of it was based also on political apathy at the lower levels. A view by a Captain Walter Hergel on this subject is enlightening. In Hergel's view, the authoritarian state was founded by Frederick the Great. However, the Prussian king knew nothing about leadership, the nation, and the brotherhood of citizens; his system was based on authority at the top and obedience below. The king's subjects were not to involve themselves in state matters but were supposed to obey and carry out the desires of the king. This system was especially important in the Prussian army where iron discipline prevailed and no soldier dared to question an order of the king. In the Wehrmacht of the Third Reich, a large part of the officer corps still believed in this attitude as an ideal, especially the Prussian or "quasi Prussian" officers who had the experiences of the First World War

stamped in their memory. They found such an attitude not only useful but convenient, and Hergel believed it caused all of the "pig-headedness" in the German armed forces. Furthermore, he did not believe one could really think that way any more in the twentieth century. Yet the greater part of the officer corps had not grasped this fact, and they did not realize: that the 1914-1918 war was not lost because of military reasons but because of political reasons; that the very existence of the new Wehrmacht was the result of the political awakening of the German people; and that the present war would be, and had to be, conducted on both sides with those means appropriate for political struggles. Similarly, a significant part of the officer corps, and again especially the World War I generation, failed to have any understanding of the value and indispensability of ideological training. They saw it as something sinister and conducted a "more or less passive resistance" against it while others, recognizing its importance, wanted to conduct a program themselves without any cooperation with the party. They looked on the nazi party as a foreign influence. Hergel believed that it was only a short step from either of these attitudes to conscious political reaction, and the circles in the officer corps left over from the past would not admit the importance and the accomplishments of the nazi "revolution." At the same time, he declared, they

lived by its fruits and owed their military existence and "considerable possibilities for advancement" to this political revolution. Three months before the "20th of July," Hergel thanked God that the nazi movement was strong, and that no crystallization point existed for active opposition such as that provided in Italy by the king; otherwise, Germany would certainly have a similar situation to reckon with! In other matters, however, Hergel was more astute. He believed the passive and covert resistance had suffered considerable loss in momentum and perseverance and that the introduction of the NSFO prepared the way for the enforcement of ideological training. Still, he did not think the path would be easy; he fully expected the higher ranking and older members of the officer corps to use every means possible to oppose and lessen the impact of the introduction of the NSFO and to sabotage the program by every conceivable means. Above all, he predicted that they would try to avoid assigning active individuals as NSFOs and would attempt to shelve the entire program. He doubted seriously whether the NSFO program could ever work unless a decisive part of the "over-aged World War officer corps" was removed. Such a step would be a "blessing," but without it, as Hergel correctly predicted, the NSFO would remain only a "half-measure."¹

¹BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 360, Hauptmann

On October 17, 1944, nearly a year after Hitler established the NSFO program, Ruder, in a report to Bormann, wrote: "The NS-Leadership work today still stands in its infancy. . . . The selection of the NSFO has still not taken place adequately from a political point of view." The reason for this in Ruder's opinion was that commanders frequently resisted the program on two grounds: first, the NSFO had to take a position on nazism and therefore made himself unpopular; second, the NSFO in professing his nazi belief provoked resistance of those with confessional ties to the churches. This caused a cleft to develop in the officer corps; young officers and men who were responsive to nazism frequently stood in opposition to commanders who were strongly religious. This caused much frustration for party members because leading military figures, the latest being Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, always adamantly insisted that responsibility for national socialist leadership should remain in the hands of the commanders at all levels. They, Ruder added, would never share this responsibility with NSFOs.²

From the nazi side, the charge persisted that there were always "irresponsible" superiors who said they

Dr. Walter Hergel, Wehrgeistige Erziehung, Reichenberg, April 14, 1944.

²BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 140, Vorlage, Betrifft: Vortrag bei Grossadmiral Dönitz am 17. Oktober 1944, October 17, 1944, IIF, signed: Ruder.

had no time for national socialist leadership--consequently, they gave a higher priority to technical training, such as the use of a new weapon or piece of equipment, than they did to ideological training. A strong party complaint was that these commanders never understood that political and weltanschauung indoctrination was the basis for all other training. To many, the NSFO job was just another extra duty like Gas Officer, Communications Officer, or Supply Officer, and perhaps even less important instead of being a "holy thing."³ Not once, it seems, did nazis, whether military or party types, pinpoint another possible reason for passive resistance. It is one which strikes the reader consistently when he reads the thousands of pages of nazi propaganda and nazi thought. Reading nazi propaganda creates an immediate impression that it makes little sense and that it is boring; listening to it and its emotionalism must have been even worse. There is no doubt that it caused a few thinking officers and men to stop listening to the party's propagandists and to view the propaganda itself as alien to traditional Prussian military thinking. This passive or negative reaction to the party's propaganda efforts can be documented with some revealing testimony by former members of the German army.

³BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 137, Hauptmann Hauschild/Frau Köhne.

Testimony

August Knoll was a captain commanding a training company near Rennes, France, when a twenty-one-year-old lieutenant from army headquarters appeared one day through arrangement made by regimental headquarters. Previously, Knoll had paid little attention to the order for the establishment of the NSFO system. He believed the institution to be needless and thought such ideas were "only for party greats." Besides, he said his troops had no interest in politics. On the arrival in his unit of the NSFO, he assembled his company for a prepared speech of some forty-five minutes after which he disbanded the troops who had showed little interest in the entire presentation. For that reason, he reported, "they felt a closer warmth for their fifty-one-year-old captain." However, he retained the officers and noncommissioned officers for a discussion with the NSFO. During his address to the company, the political officer had said sixteen times, "'we must win.'" The captain now asked him, "How can we still win?" and referred him to the destruction of the 6th Army at Stalingrad. Shrugging his shoulders, the NSFO said that that was not his concern. In his speech he had said nothing about the need for discipline, so Knoll suggested to him that what was needed mostly was comradeship, loyalty, and obedience like in the first world war, and he compared, by way of example, the differences between the

two wars. He could not gain any agreement from the NSFO, and a senior sergeant turned the discussion back to Stalin-grad. Again the lieutenant shrugged his shoulder and said that it was not his business. Then Knoll pointed out that Russia had "three generals": General Winter, General Time, and General Space and asked the NSFO if God could grant the Führer success in winning against such formidable generals. To this the lieutenant had no response, and after a short thanks for his time and effort, Knoll released him with a military salute. The NSFO responded with the nazi stiff-armed salute and a "Heil Hitler," and then he left.⁴

A former professional soldier who joined the Reichswehr in 1930 and served as the first sergeant of an infantry air defense company on the western front during the last winter of the war said that the soldiers in his unit had "no worthy thoughts" regarding the NSFO--they laughed at the program and saw the NSFO as completely without influence. His unit, Fliegerabwehr-Kompanie DANKWARD, was newly activated in the early part of 1944 in Paderborn. After short stays on the Dutch island of Walcheren and along the Albert Canal in Belgium, the company moved back into Western Germany for the winter in the area south of Aachen. The unit was emplaced for air defense in the area eastward on the Rurhöhen near Nideggen

⁴Letter, Major of Reserves August Knoll, a.D., March 20, 1972.

while the battle between U.S. and German troops raged to the west. Toward the end of 1944, he, as first sergeant, was with the baggage train in Erp, on the road from Zülpich to Cologne. It was at this time--one year after the NSFO was established and nearly a year after the company was activated--that he heard for the first time about NSFOs! An order came from division headquarters stating that one officer in the unit would be appointed as NSFO and that his name would be reported to headquarters. The first sergeant laid the order on his company commander's desk. The commander, seeing the sergeant smiling, said, "not me!" There were only two other officers in the company; the commander reported this fact to division, and "that was the end of it." Some time later an older captain, a veteran of the first world war, showed up at the first sergeant's desk and asked where the company's units were located and whether he might have the opportunity to speak to the men. The sergeant complied and assembled some twenty noncommissioned officers and men "for a quiet afternoon" in a small village behind some gun positions. On the sergeant's advice, the captain had brought with him a bottle of cognac and some cigarettes. After a "pleasant afternoon," assumedly with some discussion, the captain departed leaving them various propaganda material. According to the first sergeant, "we were in need of paper of a certain kind to place in that location where a person had to go every day

alone, and there it was used." From then until the unit walked into the POW cages in March 1945 in Hessen, they never saw nor heard from any more NSF0s.⁵

A former corporal stated that soldiers, without distinction of rank, hardly ever thought about the party; as soldiers they were "removed from the clutch" of the N.S.D.A.P. He said it was well known that the armed forces practiced "a kind of defense function which, whenever it could, it placed crossways to the N.S.D.A.P." That toward the end of the war the NSF0s occasionally carried on a "'final victory psychosis'" was understandable, he said, because it was their job to do this even if many times the phrases looked transparent even to the common soldier. At all levels, he added, a "quiet war" took place between the party and the armed forces, and the troops successfully frustrated attempts by the party to nazify the soldiers. He thought that the "'flying drum head courtmartial' set up by the party and 'civilian SS' toward the end of the war permitted . . . the outflow of the party's hate against the armed forces . . . ," and he reported that "decent and decorated soldiers from the front, on account of some small offense such as a short absence from the troops or overstaying the length of their leaves, were ignominiously hanged 'for cowardice before the enemy.'" "Here," he observed, "seems to me the real distinction between the

⁵Letter, Oskar Bittner, March 16, 1972.

genuine soldierly point of view and the party-political concept in the view of the N.S.D.A.P."⁶

One former Sub-office NSFO provided information for this study but requested that his name not be published. In the spring of 1944, after a long illness during which he was assigned to the Replacement Army, he obtained the command of a company on the eastern front. Whether his predecessor had been the battalion NSFO or not, he did not know, but he was immediately pressed by his battalion commander to take over that job as an additional duty. He attempted to evade the task but finally had to bow to a direct order. His entire activity as NSFO involved distributing one single document from higher headquarters to the several companies. Whether he could or should have done more, he could "not say with certainty." To the best of his recollection after some twenty-eight years, the best he could remember about the document was that it had something to do with "certain 'hold-on' slogans." After the outbreak of the hard battles somewhere around 20 January 1945, he noted, hardly any time existed for such things as NSFO activity. "How far officers and soldiers still believed in the so-called 'final victory' or only acted like they believed it is still another question," he said. This officer believed that there was certainly plenty of opportunity

⁶Letter, Egon Denzel, April 6, 1972. Denzel is an official of the "Traditionsverband der Adler-Division--21. L.w. Felddivision."

for a nazi officer to preach the ideas of the party through lectures and discussions with the companies of a battalion, "however, that laid in the hands of individual personalities." As an afterthought, he theorized that if he had admitted on a questionnaire required for admission to university studies in 1955 that he had been an NSFO, he would probably not have been admitted. Since he is still employed by a West German university, he asked that his name not be used in this study.⁷

Major Walter Fellgiebel, presently Chairman of the West German Association of the Wearers of the Knight's Cross and son of the General Fellgiebel executed for his implication in the July 20, 1944, attempt on Hitler's life, related that NSFOs were frequently non-political and that some were anti-nazi. Those who did not appear to be 100 per cent reliable were sometimes sent in the course of a year to three, four, or more NSFO schools. He claimed that NSFOs at regimental and battalion level were generally "quite harmless people, especially if commanders could select the officers in question themselves." If, for example, a regimental commander was not a convinced nazi, he also looked for an NSFO with similar thoughts. However, if he was "a 150 per cent nazi," his NSFO would likewise be as radical. He told about a close friend of many years--an Austrian--who was selected as NSFO of the Artillery School but who "damned

⁷Letter, April 11, 1972.

and hated the nazi regime." Nevertheless, the Austrian had to keep up outward appearances; he gave a lecture every Monday morning for all soldiers and officers. Fellgiebel pronounced the NSFO program as unsuccessful and said that in most cases the NSFOs were hated very much by the officers and men if they took their duties at all seriously. He felt that the hour was simply too late for the NSFOs to have any effect on the war; the mass of soldiers had had enough and no longer believed in final victory. "Anyway, it was also clear that the war could only be ended if the nazi regime disappeared. On these grounds alone, the NSFOs could not change the course of the war as Hitler hoped."⁸

Before his army service, Sergeant Günter Stegelmann had been a District Main Officer Leader (Gauhauptstellenleiter) in the Hamburg District School Office (Gauschulungsamt), and at the beginning of 1944 he was assigned to the NSF Staff/OKW. By order of General Reincke, and with the sanction of the P-K, he had visited sections of the front and furnished important experience reports. Several of these reports had been brought to the attention of Bormann, and in two cases they were forwarded on to Himmler in his capacity as C-in-C of the Replacement Army. Party Member Stosch who wrote the report which provided this information did not believe that

⁸Letter, Major Walter Fellgiebel, a.D., June 23, 1972.

Stegelman had received any special assistance from NSF/OKW since he had become embarrassing to them because of his views and actions. In March 1945 Stegelmann was assigned to a replacement unit in Spandau and made the following self-congratulatory report to the P-K.

Stegelman's battalion commander, in the absence of a qualified officer, had asked him to take over the battalion NSFO work. The situation as he found it was that political instruction was not conducted because no time was available. Appropriate materials were not on hand, but occasionally the officers heard a lecture from the NSFO. The officers claimed they were not qualified to conduct political instruction and since they had just come out of combat, they lacked the material to work with. Richtmänner (men to arrange things) were still not assigned in the companies. His first recommendation to the battalion commander was to issue the order that each company would conduct political instruction three times weekly during the first duty period of the day; on the fourth day What Stirs Us would be discussed. He also recommended that the battalion commander assemble all company officers and the battalion staff each Friday so that Stegelmann could issue the guidelines for the following week's instruction. After long opposition and many excuses, the battalion commander finally issued the orders. The officers, Stegelmann claimed, were exceedingly happy and thankful for the manner

in which he instructed them and with the material he furnished them. They declared that they did not know political instruction could be made so easy. One afternoon each week the company noncommissioned leaders were assembled informally for political instruction on how to answer the questions of their men. Stegelmann declared that he could never end these sessions in less than two and a half to three hours because of the interest and emotion shown by the noncommissioned officers. At the conclusion of the sessions, the NCOs were required to go back and instruct their sections. Furthermore, they were required to discuss the Wehrmacht Report daily with their sections during pauses in training. It affected him bitterly, he said, that no one had used these methods earlier, and he declared that the prerequisite for such practical "little work" was an organized Battalion NSFO.

Stegelmann had taken part in one NSFO conference where only military things were talked about and the regimental and battalion NSFOs received no guidelines for the coming week. They departed as ignorant as when they arrived, he reported. But the main failure concerning political work in the armed forces as Stegelmann saw it arose from the fact that company commanders could not convey a speech which they heard or a sentence which they read in their own words; he suggested that this art should be taught to them in their officer training. In the

meantime he recommended that the regimental NSFO should be declared superfluous in organizational work. Instead he should be the schooling assistant of the division NSFO for the supervision and improvement of the political instruction of officers and noncommissioned officers so as to unburden the battalion NSFO in his schooling duties. Stegelmann felt that officers did more harm than good in giving political instruction. Therefore, the battalion NSFO must rigidly supervise them and critique them on their failures.⁹

That the NSFO program was not doing too well by the fall of 1944, at least at the lower levels where it counted, was well-known to former party members serving in the various military services. They bemoaned the fact in letters to party officials back home who in turn informed the P-K and gave their versions of what was wrong. The Kreisleiter of Berchtesgaden was one such official. He thought there were several things either wrong or needed. Men should be appointed in the armed forces, he said, who were empowered to act directly for OKW, and without interference from any intervening command or staff level, in order to watch over the conduct of national socialist schooling in any regiment, battalion, or company.

⁹BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 135, Vermerk für IIS, Pg. Hess, Betrifft: NS-Führung in der Truppe. Hier: Anregung des Uffz. Stegelmann, April 7, 1945, IIW, signed: Stosch, with enclosure: Gunter Stegelmann to the Partei-Kanzlei, Abtlg. W2, March 28, 1945.

The reason for the failure at these lower levels, according to many reports he had received, was because of those who were selected by the regimental commander to act as NSFOs. His remedy was simple--actually too simple--merely select qualified people,¹⁰ but there were more radical solutions offered.

Radical Solutions

There were always party men who pressed for radical solutions to the problem of resistance. Dr. Grässmann, an official in the Gauleitung of North Westphalia, reported that many individuals in the military service had written him about the NSFO. They believed that many NSFOs and commanders had the best will and eagerness for the task. However, there were others who, mostly because of confessional commitment, tried to sabotage the program. Too many catholic and protestant officers were called on to politicize their units, he reported, and these gentlemen were not suitable for such a task since they did not support the nazi cause to begin with. Grässmann thought that even if non-nazi commanders were outstanding soldiers, they should either be removed from the officer corps or have a political leader at their sides. He conceded that this Politruk-like method would be a radical solution, but in his opinion, the radical method was "always the simplest,

¹⁰BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 360, Kreisleitung Berchtesgaden-Laufen to Ruder, September 20, 1944.

the least painful, and the most effective."¹¹ Indeed, radical solutions could be used by both sides as the events of July 20, 1944, would demonstrate.

The German resistance movement and the story of the July 20, 1944, attempt on Hitler's life are too well-known to be taken up in this study. However, the "20th of July" shows without doubt that ranking members of the German army were willing to overthrow Hitler and his nazi gang, but it also shows that they were amateurs next to the nazi toughs who had learned their lessons in street battles where no one paid any attention to niceties or tradition. Where a field marshal like Erwin Rommel merely criticized Hitler in private with his son,¹² and a group of aristocratic officers bungled an attempted assassination and coup d'etat, top nazis were willing to take any means, quickly and effectively, to preserve their power.

Aftermath of the "20th of July"

On the day the announcement came over the radio that Heinrich Himmler had been appointed as Commander-in-Chief of the Replacement Army (Fromm, its earlier C-in-C was executed for complicity in the plot), officer cadet Hans Simon was listening in the writing room of his

¹¹BAK, Sammlung Schumacher 367, Grässmann to Stellrecht, Betrifft: NSFO-Arbeit, December 29, 1944.

¹²B. H. Liddell Hart, ed., The Rommel Papers, trans. Paul Findlay (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953), p. 496.

replacement company in Türken Barracks in Berlin. When he heard the announcement, he loudly exclaimed,

Thank God, now we have the right man to clear out all the shirkers in the [areas behind the front lines] and in the replacement troops. The war would have been over in 1943 if this treason had not been going on. . . .

With these words, his company commander, Captain Böhner, came out of the adjoining room and said in amazement, "But Simon, Himmler has never had any kind of tradition in the Wehrmacht."¹³ These two statements significantly show two highly different breeds of men which existed side by side, or perhaps above and below, in the German army; they also show the conflict between the two extreme views of nazism and conservative traditionalism. The young cadet represented that section of German youth which had accepted the nazi weltanschauung; most of these young men had swallowed the nazi drive and had little area of agreement with the older officers. They were ready to follow and support any action, criminal or otherwise, which Hitler and the party desired. On the other hand, the picture of Captain Böhner, as the representative of the older members of the officer corps, is a pathetic one; still tied up in tradition, he hardly knew what had happened. He failed to recognize the significance of Himmler's appointment or what might lay in store for the Prussian/German army. He probably

¹³BAK, Sammlung Schumacher 367, Notiz für Pg. Ott, Betrifft: Wehrmacht, December 14, 1944, signed: Rogler.

thought that nothing had really changed. Nazis, however, had other views of his archaic type.

A party member named Rogler who had served in the armed forces for four years told Party Member Ott of Section IIP of the P-K in a letter that "arrogance and bullying [was] the conspicuous picture of the officer class in the replacement troop units." Rogler felt that, for the most part, the officers in the replacement army had been removed from the front because of inefficiency. Officer cadet Simon had told him, he reported, that after the "20th of July," the officers began outwardly to play the game. They were very careful of their image in front of the men, but at political lectures some of them still "laughed with amusement." Simon believed that only a "Political Commissar" could bring about any change; he also felt that these commissars would have to be taken and bred predominantly from the ranks of the noncommissioned officer corps. In other words, he had written off the officer corps as hopeless and proposed a radical and revolutionary solution. Rogler agreed with Simon's view of the officer corps. He said that his many years of military experience had taught him that, from the company level up to the highest staffs, the place to find the "disease germ" was within the officer corps; it would be the officers, not the simple soldiers, who would force the party to create a political commissar system to put them "on a wire."

Rogler recalled that it had been no secret to the soldiers on the eastern front in 1942-43 that the strength of the Russian assault divisions had been due to the Poli-truk. These Soviet political officers liquidated unsuitable officers and thus prevented any symptoms of weakness or degeneration from arising. Just as the Germans had imitated the simplicity of Soviet weapons, he declared, they could also take over the successful Soviet political commissar system. "The common man," he wrote, "will certainly understand it!"¹⁴ Top nazis also had their views.

Passe, serving as liaison man between the P-K and OKW, made a series of comments and recommendations to his boss, Bormann, in the July 20 aftermath. What he proposed was a drastic housecleaning, and he had strong criticisms of the army general staff. On July 22 Bormann forwarded the information and recommendations to Himmler. He marked them "Very Confidential" and asked the new C-in-C of the Replacement Army to keep the information strictly to himself so as not to get Passe into difficulty with the armed forces. "An overhaul of the general staff's own orders and communication channel used up to now appears proper," Passe judged. In this same connection, he insisted that the NSFO must report directly to the commander and not to the Chief of Staff as many did. Furthermore, a readjustment of NSF on a purely political system of "will building"

¹⁴Ibid.

was now necessary in order to get to every single man. Passe's whole point was that something had to be emphasized, thus he intimated that NSFOs had spread themselves too thin in an effort to cover too many things and ideas. Still, however, party members like Passe hesitated from making the NSFO a pure Politruk.

He recommended that all NSFOs from the eastern and western fronts should be called in "suddenly" to have their spirits lifted in a short and blunt orientation after which they would return immediately to their military organizations with a definite mission. He did not identify this mission, apparently preferring to leave that up to Bormann. During the brief conference, qualified representatives of the party (like Himmler and Goebbels) along with trusted men of the Wehrmacht would "fanaticize" them "by referring to conditions and events."

Passe also proposed that the party conduct a grandiose investigation of the officer corps. All officers in key positions would be examined to discover whether they were for or against party efforts at indoctrinating the armed forces. This inquiry would especially strike deeply into personnel offices. Passe believed this was necessary because of the demands made by the party in the past which had never been fulfilled; he could furnish names, he said, of the people who had sabotaged party efforts. Further, he advised that up-to-date records should

be kept on individuals who failed to cooperate. He suggested the appointment of independent "inspectors" who, representing the Führer directly, would conduct inquiries into grievances reported by the troops. Also, a thorough combing out of the staffs and units in the homeland and the occupied countries by politically reliable and forceful military people vested with sweeping and full powers was needed, and the high living in the occupied countries and behind the front lines, he continued, had to cease. As an example, he cited the officer clubs; they should be abolished because they furthered the caste system and segregated the officers from the troops. Pässe advocated more democracy in the army. He wanted soldiers, noncommissioned officers, officers, German workers, clerks, and officials to commune with each other in starkly furnished "good fellowship houses."¹⁵

That same day the Commanding General of the 242nd Infantry Division, in his instructions on NSF, described what had happened on July 20. Naively, he announced that the clique which had tried to kill Hitler was rounded up in six hours "without bloodshed" and that now law and order reigned at home. All soldiers would have read to them: Hitler's speech to the nation about "the 20th of July"; Göring's speech; Dönitz' speech; and the speeches of the

¹⁵BAK, Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer SS, NS 19/neu 750, Bormann to Himmler, July 22, 1944, with enclosure: Abschrift.

Commanders-in-Chief. The troops would also be informed that each instance of insubordinate conduct would be punished by a disgraceful death. There would not be another 1918 "Dolchstoss" (stab in the back)! Then the division commander covered his own back--he ordered "again" that, as directed by the Führer on several occasions, pertinent national questions would be discussed by the unit commanders weekly with their troops.¹⁶ The tone of the letter was perfunctory; the general had done his duty.

The next day, July 23, 1944, Bormann sent the following message to all party leaders:

As a sign of unbreakable faith in the Führer and stronger affection between the Wehrmacht and the NSDAP the German greeting [nazi stiff-armed salute] has been adopted by the entire German Wehrmacht. Heil Hitler!

And on July 29 the new Chief of the Army General Staff, General Guderian, branded the general staff--the elite of the officer corps--with guilt for its involvement in the assassination attempt and directed that each general staff officer must henceforth become an NSFO. Anyone who objected could apply for immediate transfer.¹⁷

¹⁶NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frames 1526529-30.

¹⁷Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1953), p. 476. Source not given. Part of the text of this order can be found in John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945, Viking Compass ed. (New York: The Viking Press, 1967), pp. 678-79. Allan Bullock in his Hitler: A Study in Tyranny, rev. ed., Harper Torchbooks

A few days after the "20th of July," Bormann and Ruder met with Reinecke concerning Hitler's express desire that the NSF work had to be strengthened. The party leaders reported that the Führer was upset because Colonel Radke of the NSF Staff/OKH had issued an order, afterward rescinded by Hengl, which placed the NSFO under the Ia/Chief of Staff Hitler wanted to ensure that NSFOs would answer to no one but the commander.¹⁸ Then on August 2 General Reinecke dispatched an order. Pointing out that with the elimination of the "20th of July" traitors the last opponents of a resolute politicization of the Wehrmacht had disappeared, he declared that he expected no more obstacles to the NSF program. Reinecke ordered that NSFOs should not, in consideration of the current situation, intervene in the training of the troops; instead, they should concentrate their entire energy toward the utmost activation and fanaticization of the soldiers. He said he would accept no more schoolmasterly advice concerning long-range goals. On the contrary, NSFOs had to summon the troops to the highest achievement, and they could now disregard standing operating procedures. The XIII Army Corps took no chances with this directive;

(New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 752 also comments on this order, but he erroneously implied that the idea for the NSFO came only after "the 20th of July."

¹⁸BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 140, Vorlage an Herrn Reichsleiter Bormann, Betrifft: Führerbefehl für Verstärkung der nationalsozialistischen Führung in der Wehrmacht, October 10, 1944, IIF, signed: Ruder.

the headquarters distributed the directive all the way down to company level.¹⁹

At about this same time, Himmler, as Commander-in-Chief of the Replacement Army, told the NSFOs of a grenadier division:

I give you full authority to seize every fellow who dawdles and to throw him, tied up if necessary, into a baggage wagon. Take them to an Engineer Company and let them perform hard labor. . . . I give you full authority and the order to arrest anyone who rushes toward the rear.

He told them to put "the most brutal, most energetic, and the best officers of the division" in charge of capturing the mass of stragglers, and he gave the division's NSFOs permission to shoot anyone who opposed them.²⁰ The NSFO had come a long way, and it appeared that he might be unleashed since the July 20 traitors no longer openly opposed the program. Himmler also had come a long way. By July 1944 he had charge of military government in occupied areas and commanded the Replacement Army with its extensive responsibilities for training, supply, schools,

¹⁹Waldemar Besson, "Zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialistischen Führungs Offiziers (NSFO)," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, doc. no. 13 (January 1961), p. 113.

²⁰Karl O. Paetel, "Die SS: Ein Beitrag Zur Soziologie des Nationalsozialismus," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte (January 1954), p. 20. Cited from Stoffsammlung, Herausgeber Nationalsozialistischer Führungsstab der Wehrmacht, Führungsunterlagen Folge 3, part of the Sammelmappen "Der nationalsozialistische Führungsoffizier," p. 160. See also Gerald Reitlinger, The SS: Alibi of a Nation, 1922-1945, a Viking Compass Book (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p. 385.

and transportation for the entire German army. By the end of the war, he would also command an Army Group in combat, and his Waffen-SS would stand as a strong rival to the army with thirty-seven elite divisions, many of them armored.²¹ Even though he often cooperated with Bormann, he still remained, à la Röhm, in the race with the party boss for the subjection of professional soldiers within a nazi revolutionary army. On August 3, 1944, in a speech at Poznan, Himmler made his intent clear; he told party members that the generals had repeatedly frustrated nazi policy by their reservations and opposition. But once, he said, the army had been remade into a national socialist people's army and had been reorganized under SS direction, then it could reconquer the lands in the east.²²

Even OKW naturally opposed radical solutions like Himmler's but was willing to promote the NSFO concept. Typical of OKW's attitude was an article by Reinecke published in the October 1944 issue of Der Politische Soldat (The Political Soldier) which was published by OKW in cooperation with the party. Calling the NSFO the "reminding conscience of the Wehrmacht," he said that the German soldier should act as if Hitler himself stood always at his

²¹Ibid., pp. 1-33.

²²Karl Dietrich Bracher, The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism, trans. Jean Steinberg (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 412. Cited from Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 1 (1953): 357ff.

side. Reinecke cited belief in Hitler and the nazi idea as the inexhaustible source of confidence. He told NSFOS to give up the writing tables and offices; they should abandon trifles and get out and talk to officers, noncommissioned officers, and men as the only way to fulfill their task. He encouraged NSFOS to "let the songleaders sing" and to have the troops repeat their oaths of allegiance to Adolf Hitler. NSFOS should grab a sub-machine gun or rocket launcher when battle came and fight side by side with the troops.²³

The Commanding General of the 19th Army told his NSFOS at division level and above to always take part in the counterattack and to meet replacements and reinforcements as they came up from the rear to the point of battle. The NSFO should speak little, encourage through a few personal words, and guide the thinking and conversation of the troops, but he could not do this with paper instructions alone--he had to personally go to the focal point.²⁴ Hengl had previously encouraged this type of approach by suggesting that the NSFO could do the most after heavy fighting involving numerous casualties; he had also prescribed rest halts, awards ceremonies, and meeting troops in transit as occasions for the NSFO to talk directly to soldiers.²⁵

²³NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frames 1526572-73.

²⁴Ibid., Frame 1525999.

²⁵NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frame 5597674.

By January 1945 OKW admitted that NSFOs frequently had their own ways of doing things: some wrote articles for the use of troop leaders in haranguing the soldiers; some preferred to talk to the troops; and a third group concentrated in recruit instruction. All types, said OKW, worked with goodwill and energy. Stating that each NSFO had his own personality as an individual, OKW approved variety as long as it produced results.²⁶

The aftermath of the "20th of July" was highly significant for the NSFO program. The NSFO was expected to bring the officer corps into line and to exercise direct influence on the troops. Methods were no longer as important as the results achieved. The "20th of July" also seemed to panic the nazi hierarchy, and as a result, the party attempted to give the NSFO ever-increasing authority to overcome the remaining military traditionalism. It was ultimately a losing battle, however, because traditionalism and apathy were deeply entrenched in the German army, and most NSFOs were just average German officers.

²⁶NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frame 1526123, Die Politische Soldat (Issue dated January 1945).

CHAPTER IX

THE NSFO IN ACTION

The Reluctant NSFO

Karl Ducoffre, partly Belgian by ancestry but thoroughly German in manner and spirit, joined the nazi party in 1930 and soon became the SA leader in his adopted town of Dormagen in the Rhineland. Even before then, however, a uniform had always lifted his spirits. In 1922 he joined the Reichswehr as a volunteer and served for two and a half years in a Westphalian infantry regiment. During the 1930s he attended drills and summer exercises as a reservist while on vacation from his firm, the Farbenfabriken Bayer A.G., where he worked as a commercial employee. "I was a passionately interested soldier," he said; "I came back from each exercise in high emotional and physical form to my desk." When the war began, he was a second lieutenant of reserves and was called up for active service. He served in the French and the Balkan campaigns and then after eleven days of fighting in Russia, he was badly wounded in the leg.

In March 1944, after fifteen months' hospitalization and several assignments in replacement units in the

homeland, he was sleeping one night in his adjutant's quarters in a replacement battalion. At around two in the morning his telephone rang. It was the regimental adjutant who told Ducoffre that he had to leave for Krössinsee that morning to attend a course for NSFOs; the adjutant had already dispatched a motorcyclist to deliver his travel orders. He apologized that regiment had forgotten this all-important matter until now and said that the regimental commander, Count von Gengerski, requested that Ducoffre not embarrass them by making an issue over the late receipt of orders; would he please just go on to the school and accept their apologies! First Lieutenant Ducoffre did not resist too much on the phone but asserted his objections to his contemporaries before leaving. He decided that he would act so inept at Krössinsee that he could not possibly become an NSFO, and he set off for the first NSFO course there. It was not until after the war that he learned that Gengerski and his adjutant had not forgotten the date of the summons at all; they saw in Ducoffre "a delivering angel," and it was all a contrived performance; they wanted him as the regimental NSFO and knew that he would pull every string he could to scuttle the idea, so they waited until the last hour before the inevitable departure. Neither the Count nor Ducoffre realized that he would never return to the replacement regiment; instead, he would start his NSFO career as a Work Group Leader at Krössinsee.

When Ducoffre arrived, the work group to which he was assigned had no leader. There was, however, one first lieutenant in the group who upon being questioned stated that he had been an SA leader. For his part, Ducoffre refrained from disclosing his SA rank of Sturmbannführer; he still intended to play the "stupid game." This, however, only succeeded for one week. The other SA man always gave out with such drivel that Ducoffre began giving him tit for tat to show the other man's lack of intelligence. After this happened a few times, Ducoffre had to confess to being a true party member, in fact an SA leader. This virtually delivered the work group into his hands, at least during discussion periods after the morning lectures. He was soon officially appointed Work Group Leader, a job he held for three courses.

Meanwhile, one of Ducoffre's earlier regimental commanders, Colonel von Doehring, after receiving wounds in combat, had spent some time working in the Personnel Section of OKW; he was now the Adjutant to Field Marshal Kesselring and needed an NSFO for Kesselring's army group in Italy. Unknown to the reluctant NSFO, Doehring through his connections with the Army Personnel Office had arranged to have Ducoffre assigned to Kesselring's army group. So one day an air force major from OKW arrived at Krössinsee and methodically began to investigate Ducoffre's entire political and military past. Apparently finding everything in order, he told Ducoffre:

I want to be entirely open with you. You have been asked for by name as NSFO on Field Marshal Kesselring's staff, and you know that we cannot do it unless we ourselves are able to confirm you. But now everything is alright. You will receive your travel orders to Italy in the next few days.

He also disclosed that OKW was naturally suspicious of any individual asked for in this manner.

His orders did arrive quickly, and he traveled out of Munich by airplane. In Florence a car awaited him along with another old regimental comrade whom Doehring had requested as his assistant adjutant, and that evening they were both guests of Doehring for a bottle of wine. At this time, the colonel disclosed that a captain had been assigned as NSFO to the army group just a few days previously and that Ducoffre would move on down to the Ligurian Army--a joint German-Italian field army concerned with construction of the alpine Foreland Line in northern Italy. The next day he was the honored guest of Kesselring for lunch and was "naturally very impressed." However, he never received the answer as to why his orders had been changed. Reflecting on this years later, he assumed that OKW had either found "a hair in the soup cooked by Colonel von Doehring" or else had decided that a first lieutenant had too little rank to serve as an army group NSFO.

By this time Ducoffre was frustrated, and his period of service with the Ligurian Army did not help his morale. The Chief of Staff there, General Nagel, a former Military Attache in Moscow, "was anything but a friend of the

institution of the NSFO." The general had himself obtained an insight into it "by taking pains to play the role of a guest at Krössinsee." On Ducoffre's arrival at the army headquarters, on July 1, 1944, he was met by a lieutenant colonel from the staff with the words: "Oh--you are our NSFO? Colonel von Doehring at the army group has already notified us and said that we should be nice to you, you earned it!" Such a welcome in the German army was unheard of in the close officer brotherhood existing before the nazi era. All officers were assumed to be capable and of upstanding character and were received as brothers upon reporting in to a new assignment. In this case the welcome implied that they would try to be nice to Ducoffre even if he was an NSFO, but only because Doehring had asked them to! The army commander at that time was General von Zangen who shortly thereafter received a transfer so that the Italian Marshal Graziani "could be won over to the German cause by having an important command over German and Italian troops." Ducoffre learned later from the headquarters commandant that at least he had gained the sympathy, and with that the necessary confidence, from Zangen through his ideas, his initial interview with the commander, and his answers to questions posed by the general. Fate, however, stepped in again. Shortly after Ducoffre's appointment as army NSFO, his mentor, Doehring, was mortally wounded when the car in which he was riding was strafed by a low-flying

airplane. Ducoffre felt "utterly alone and ignored" without the colonel's protection and had several unpleasant experiences. When he first went out to give a talk to a large circle of officers in outlying units, he was received during the afternoon preceding the scheduled lecture correctly, but he felt the aloofness and coldness so much that that night he wrote one of his closest regimental comrades that he would rather go into hopeless combat than to give the scheduled address the next day. Nevertheless, the strong feeling of alienation helped him find introductory remarks by the morrow which apparently convinced his listeners that no Politruk stood before them. Such things happened time after time in Italy.

Ducoffre felt it was not at all easy to be an NSFO, not even if he took on the burden at the pressing wish of his superiors and was received cordially by his listeners. On another occasion he went to a battalion to give a talk. When reporting in to the battalion headquarters, the clerk there informed him that the battalion commander was absent; however, they had prepared an upstairs room for him in which to spend the night. The room was very spartan; it had an iron bed, a stool, and a small table--nothing else. He knew that the battalion commander could have easily found him a decent hotel room, and should have, but he accepted what was offered. A little while later, he was looking out of the window and saw a young captain wearing

the Knight's Cross entering the headquarters. He was absolutely certain that this was the commander. Shortly the captain left again and Ducoffre assumed that he had asked if the NSFO was there; when told yes, he immediately left because he did not want to talk to an NSFO. (It was considered correct military protocol for a commander to interview a visiting staff officer.) That evening, he gave his talk, but the commander did not attend; this was an unpardonable breach of military etiquette. If Doehring had still been around, Ducoffre knew that he could have reported the commander's discourtesy and that the colonel would have had a friendly and tactful conversation with the young captain without causing trouble for him. As it was, he reported it to no one since he did not want to cause problems for what appeared to be a capable and highly decorated officer. One day when visiting a division, the NSFO there, a very young lieutenant and former Hitler Youth Leader, requested that Ducoffre arrange to have his division commander relieved for defeatist comments and an anti-nazi stance. Ducoffre merely cautioned the immature NSFO not to be impetuous. He said, "You're just a young man. Let it pass and forget it." Such experiences convinced him to request a transfer to his old 16th Panzer Division where he was well-known and where he could expect no more unpleasantries, but meanwhile, he dutifully performed his assigned job.

Ducoffre asserted that when he joined the Ligurian Army, he at first performed Betreuung duties exclusively. This tallies with the Freiherr von Lersner's complaint from his Italian tour of inspection in May 1944 that entirely too much emphasis was placed on Betreuung in Italy at the expense of the NSFO's major job of indoctrinating the troops. Apparently, the emphasis there was still placed on the well-being of the troops rather than on the "nazi will to victory." Ducoffre had little help in his efforts to improve the well-being of the soldiers. He distributed schooling material for the NSFOs of subordinate units himself through the field mail system and wrote circulars, suggestions, and correspondence himself on an old typewriter placed at his disposal. Reproduction was done for him by one of the other staff sections. Since after a short while he thought he had better start visiting subordinate units, he finally asked for and received a corporal to do his clerical work. Because of the danger caused by partisan warfare in northern Italy at that time, he frequently combined his tours with courier runs.

Placed under him in accordance with regulations was the Army Rest Camp (Betreuungslager), which was installed in a villa on the edge of Verona and was administered by two sergeants who also had responsibility for the supply of Betreuung materials. These two highly qualified sergeants managed their supply function by making occasional

trips to the Propaganda Ministry in Berlin where they received in quantity: playing cards; popular games; record players; first-rate record selections of popular and classical music; musical instruments such as accordians, violins, flutes, and harmonicas; and printed material. Books were very hard to come by for the troops; therefore, Ducoffre saw to it that he would himself serve as a "floating library." Although the rest camp in Verona had a library, it consisted mainly of books for vocational improvement. The library contained very little popular literature and absolutely no books with ideological content because, as Ducoffre said, he felt that the "clever and ponderous" influence of Dr. Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry--"the ideological over-feeding"--would not interest the troops at all. Most of the Betreuung material went into the unit "rest homes" or was turned over to the divisions for distribution; he never distributed such materials personally because he felt that too much of the printed matter, such as Santa Claus spouting victory slogans, was too crude for his taste. He also exercised influence over the portable movie theaters the German army employed for its combat troops.

Ducoffre's visits to subordinate units stayed in his memory as one of the few pleasant recollections of his assignment as an NSFO. This was not only because they led him to some of the prettiest places in Northern Italy (and

later in the Carpathians) but mainly because they brought him into contact with the soldiers. After an evening of singing and of either serious or cheerful conversation, the next morning he would give his talk which never lasted longer than a half hour and which aimed at stressing the necessity to keep fighting. The allied demand for unconditional surrender provided the grounds for his strongest argument in these talks. After each such address to the troops, a discussion followed which most of the time was very lively since the open conversation the evening before had already prepared the troops and lightened the atmosphere. On many occasions, the troops let him know their desires and needs, and he then passed on the information to the appropriate unit or staff agency which could do something about it. One source for much of the content of his speeches came from excerpts from soldier's letters furnished by the censor to all NSFOs as far down as corps level. As a general rule, he said, no "discomforts" usually developed for the letter writers themselves for defeatist comments, but the soldiers soon learned of the censor's activities and "one no longer got an open picture of the situation." Ducoffre claimed that a recurring and constant theme appearing in the soldier's letters was "a downright emotional" belief in Adolf Hitler. Even when soldiers complained about their superiors or about cases of corruption, they would comment that if the Führer only

knew about it, he would take care of the matter properly! To this day, Ducoffre sees in this simple faith in Hitler the reason why the German soldier fought to the bitter end.

In October 1944 Ducoffre received his desired travel orders to rejoin the 16th Panzer Division on the eastern front; however, again fate stepped in. When he reported in to General Harpe's army group in Crakow, the NSFO of the army group judged that an NSFO who had been assigned to a field army headquarters could on no account serve as an NSFO at mere division level. Consequently, he received orders to the XXIV Panzer Corps of General Nehring. Meanwhile, however, Nehring had already decided to appoint a companion of many years who held the party rank of SA Brigade Führer as his NSFO, so again plans went awry. Ducoffre was finally assigned as NSFO of General von Büнау's XXXVII Corps. This too would not last long. Suffering from physical overexertion brought on by his old war wound, in January 1945 the reluctant NSFO was sent to the corps' "Front Recovery Home" where he was given the opportunity to rest. He was expected, however, to address the officers and men who passed through for medical treatment and recovery from illness and wounds.

At the end of February and the beginning of March 1945, he was on his way to the Leader Reserve in Berlin where he shortly received command of a Volkssturm company. Apparently, General Burgdorf's instructions that NSFOs

assigned to the Leader Reserve would be subsequently assigned again as NSFOs was not always followed (Chapter VI). In any event, this was the end of his NSFO career and would also be the end of his military career. Taking part in the battle of Berlin, he ended the war in a Soviet POW camp. Because of his war wound and a weakened condition brought on by hunger, on February 9, 1946, he was released. He returned to his defeated homeland, bedridden, age 43, and weighing 97 pounds. He would shortly face de-nazification proceedings for his pre-war SA activity, but this is another story. If it was any consolation for the reluctant NSFO, during the turbulent days of the battle of Berlin, he had been informed by telephone of his promotion to captain with rank from March 1, 1945.¹ A postscript occurred in the spring of 1973, when this writer discovered in the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz that Karl Ducoffre had been slated to be a member of Bormann's NSF Staff if that organization had replaced the NSF Staff of the Wehrmacht in the closing days of the war. If the plan had gone through, he would have found himself in Section 5, working for a Colonel Weller in supervising NSF courses of instruction in the three military services instead of leading a Volkssturm Company in combat against the Russians.² This showed, of course, that

¹Letters, Captain of Reserves Karl Ducoffre, a.D., July 25, 1972 and September 21, 1972, and interview April 22, 1973.

²BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 144, Entwurf,

he was well thought of by the party and that the reluctant NSFO performed his job well. He has never denied that he had been a loyal nazi, and he felt during the Hitler era that nazism offered a way out for a "tormented Germany."

Looking back on the institution of the NSFO, Ducoffre places it in historical perspective with its predecessors. The institution and duties of the NSFO, "except for the designation 'National Socialist,'" was not limited to the Wehrmacht of the second world war, he pointed out. In the first war, since the combat morale of the German soldiers threatened to crumble under the pressure of the powerful material and numerical superiority of the allies, the hunger blockade, and allied propaganda leaflets, the High Command assigned certain officers to talk to the troops in order to refurbish units even in the remotest places and to counter the destructive tendencies. These officers, he said, were called "Officers for Fatherland Instruction" in order to avoid the fatal designation of Propaganda Officers. Then in November 1918 when the navy mutinied in Kiel and the revolt threatened to spread over Germany and to exert influence on the soldiers returning home, reliable and simple soldiers were assigned to admonish their comrades to be sensible and to maintain discipline in the Soldiers' Advisory Councils allowed by the

Gliederung und Geschäftsverteilungsplan des NS-Führungsstabes der Partei-Kanzlei.

new socialist government.³ These "Bildungsoffiziere" (Education officers) included Adolf Hitler in their number. As Hitler described it in Mein Kampf, this was the beginning of his political activity.⁴

Ducoffre believed that the "unhappy N.S.-called F.O." was established in late 1943 on similar grounds as in 1917. The name itself, he said, caused discomfort to the troops and to even most of the officers assigned as NSFOs, and the institution was "not needed" to sustain the will to endure of the German soldiers and civilian population since, in opposition to 1917, there was no real hunger or no flu epidemic to cause morale to disintegrate. He felt (and other witnesses have made the same statement) that the activity of the NSFO did less to sustain the combat morale of the German soldiers and the endurance of the civil population to the bitter end than did the demand for unconditional surrender from the allies and the air attacks on German cities. He believed these facts caused front and homeland to hold out en masse and that the assassination attempt on Hitler did not change this. In fact, he pointed to an incredible faith in Hitler which lasted until the very end; even those who detested the party placed their faith in Hitler as an individual who would somehow lead

³Letters and interview, Ducoffre.

⁴Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939), p. 289.

them safely through the war. The purpose of the NSFO, as he remembered it, was purely military; he was not supposed to be a preacher of ideology but was supposed to strengthen the will to fight. Those who delved too deeply into the realm of the nazi weltanschauung, he claimed, only created resistance and perhaps sabotage; and they certainly brought on problems for themselves. This view was only partly correct since Hitler himself stated that a political will must be developed in the Wehrmacht and that all soldiers had to become national socialists. This may have been a most unrealistic goal since Hitler was quite aware of the resistance to nazism in the military services, but it is difficult to see how an NSFO could strive for it without trying to sell the nazi weltanschauung. In any event, Ducoffre saw the goal differently and avers that most NSFOs were realists who saw the task as he did. After all, he said, it was difficult to get the job done if the commander and the NSFO could not agree. Accordingly, one can assume that the goals of the NSFO program were watered down in execution. The NSFO, Ducoffre asserted, invoked the apprehensions of the troops and was viewed with scepticism from the beginning because of his "party-political designation." Accordingly, in courses of instruction it was always "hammered into the heads of NSFOs" that they must labor above all else to win the confidence of their sceptical superiors and that they could only fulfill their task if they awakened

trust through tact and exemplary deportment. Ducoffre believed that most NSFOs, although they might have been fine officers, were unqualified for their jobs. If an officer had been a party member, the chances were good that he would automatically become an NSFO. The prerequisites, he believed, did not stress sufficiently the character traits of tact and diplomacy. Fanaticism was deemed more important, and emotion was rated higher than reason. Basically, each NSFO was supposed to be a party man and an experienced combat soldier who was recognizable outwardly as such through his war decorations. Ducoffre himself wore the Iron Cross, first and second class, belonged to the party and the SA, and although highly intelligent, he often allowed his emotions to gain the upper hand even though he was a realist. A charming and immensely likeable man, he was perhaps a cut above the average NSFO.

Ducoffre believed that "little by little" the NSFOs gained the trust of commanders, staffs, and the troops and were supported by them. Nevertheless, the NSFO could not work in great depth if the combat troops had other fears, such as death, mutilation, capture, or air attacks on their families; furthermore, lower level NSFOs had enough to do with their primary duties. He believed that every NSFO had a difficult time ("Schwer hatte es jeder NSFO!"), especially those on higher staffs who had to give addresses to those who did not know them personally. Their first

task demanded that they demolish a considerable barrier of coldness, if not outright rejection, at the very beginning of their talk. Thus, success hinged strongly on the personality of the NSFO himself. Concerning statements from those who declared that people merely laughed at the NSFOs, Ducoffre said that that was "an old wives' tale." On the contrary, the NSFO "was taken seriously, since most NSFOs were conservative soldiers, conservative in the sense that most fanatical national socialists considered them reactionaries. . . . They never needed to be earnestly feared by the military--as it unfortunately happened." He conceded that some NSFOs were fanatics, but he believed these were exceptions. He referred to one of General Schörner's decrees which he said contained so much pathos that it failed to depict reality. "I observed no NSFO who was not painfully affected [by it]," he declared. "There were surely some who agreed with him, but only an imperceptible minority." Ducoffre gave an example of how some nazis felt about some aspects of nazism; a first lieutenant friend of his who was also an SA Leader told him sarcastically and in all frankness: "My son can become anything, even a thief, but if he comes home and says, 'I want to be an SS-Führer,' I'll strike him dead!" There were others, he said, who looked at the party as a substitute for their first love--Imperial Germany. As one of Ducoffre's friends, while comparing the old German National Party of the Weimar

period (which favored the restoration of the Hohenzollern Emperor) with the nazi party, told him: "With the [nazi] party, for me it is like a man whose first wife died. He then married again a very ordinary woman who also pleases him. But his first love is she who is no more." This, said Ducoffre, expressed his views also, since both he and his friend had been part of the German National Youth Movement before the advent of national socialism and the elimination of all other parties in Germany.

To properly understand the mentality of an assumed average or perhaps better than average NSFO and his feelings toward nazism and Hitler, his thoughts, although tempered by some thirty years, are instructive. Ducoffre wrote this author that:

. . . the Versailles Treaty . . . was the root of all evil. It above all made Hitler possible. It was not to be foreseen that he would lose . . . and finally succumb to megalomania. His inhumanity, which appeared more and more with the start of the war, has made us as a people barbarous before the whole world for generations. At least our people have still not been able to overcome its past. It sometimes incites agonizing and painful [results]. We did something more dignified and upright somewhere. We are inclined to be an unhappy people. From one extreme to another. And even so, I love this people. There can be grandeur in its accomplishments. Not only in warfare, but also in music and technology. We have a big load to carry in our nazi past. It still doesn't become any better because of it, since the entire world has still not learned, and there is still racism, extermination, and oppression. Even those who suffered under these evils employed them if they gained power.⁵

⁵Letters and interview, Ducoffre.

Ducoffre, of course, was not the only one with views on the NSFO.

Views from the Top

In the course of researching this study, the author corresponded with a number of civilian and military officials of the nazi era. These included: a high governmental official and friend of the German Führer who served twenty years imprisonment after the war in an allied prison; the most highly respected German field marshal in World War II; several well-known German generals; plus senior field-grade officers with years of combat experience. To a man, they all claimed that the NSFOs had little, if any, influence on the German troops. The overall impression gained from their comments was that the troops had little time and interest for nazism and the NSFO and that tradition, at least from the side of the more senior officers, played a strong role in the covert resistance which impeded the nazi efforts at indoctrinating German soldiers in nazism.

In July 1944 Albert Speer, Hitler's architect and armaments expert, delivered a lecture on mobilization at an NSFO course of instruction. Reporting afterwards to Hitler, he stated that his impression of the NSFOs was very negative. "Neither the selection qualification nor the deficient leadership qualification (decoration!) were suitable to expound the thoughts of nazism in the Armed Forces," he told the Führer. In January 1972, Speer mused over the

reasons for his negative impression of 1944 and theorized that the regimental commanders probably had "no great inclination to dispose of their good officers or perhaps there was also little inclination at hand for [the officers] themselves to volunteer for these posts." In any case, he said, NSFOs "were in no way fit for the arranged task."⁶

In January 1972 Field Marshal Erich von Manstein also commented on the NSFO program. Having been relieved by Hitler of his command of an army group in Southern Russia in April 1944, he admitted that he was unable to observe the functioning of the NSFOs at first hand; the NSFO appointed to his army group did not show up until the day he turned over the command to his successor, Model. Nevertheless, he said that he felt qualified to make general comments because of his knowledge of Hitler, other personalities, and the German soldier. He did not know for sure whether the idea of the NSFO was Hitler's or Bormann's, but it was "certainly not Keitel's." It seemed to Manstein that the program fell in line with Hitler's way of doing things since Hitler "wanted to directly imbue the army with nazi spirit because he believed that this would guarantee resoluteness under all the difficulties of the situation and even final victory." On the whole, the field marshal discounted the NSFO's influence on the troops and declared that they and

⁶Letter, Albert Speer, January 21, 1972.

commanders had other things besides national socialist instruction to care about.⁷

In January 1972 General Walther K. Nehring gave his personal thoughts on the NSFO based on his experiences as a corps and field army commander during the war. He believed that the date of the establishment of the NSFO--December 1943--was significant since the strategic turn of the war had occurred during that year. Thus, he labeled the creation of the NSFO as pure opportunism rather than nazi idealism. Nehring blamed Hitler for having denied victory to the German army because the Führer believed in the infallibility of his own leadership which in fact was faulty. He also asserted that Hitler suspected ill will or defeatism from the higher and middle leadership ranks of the army. As early as the fall of 1939, according to Nehring, Hitler had already turned against the army leadership because it had opposed the offensive against France. (As Chief of Staff to General Heinz Guderian, Nehring personally heard Hitler berate the generals in a speech to the assembled leaders of the entire Wehrmacht on November 23, 1939, in the Chancellery Office in Berlin.) He believed that Hitler intended to use the NSFO to instill in the minds of the troops the idea of fighting for final victory in the manner he and the party desired. From that idea, Nehring astutely

⁷Letter, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, a.D., January 17, 1972.

believed that it soon became a mere play with words-- with "ringing, windy rhetoric." However, the general said

it was too late. One cannot conduct any war at the greatest intensity for six long years without the armed forces and people suffering more and more damage. This fact was already discovered in the first world war. The thoughts of Hitler and the party to change this around through the NSFO were naïve.

The general added that through enormous losses of all kinds, especially among trained noncommissioned officers, the army became "a kind of people's army which Hitler wanted to shore up morally and [to] influence through the NSFO." He did not remember any particular problems arising because of the NSFOs. The reason for this was because

one did not take the NSFOs so seriously or because they, as soldiers, had sufficient understanding of military things. . . . A good NSFO did not limit himself to his theory but tried, within his province, to cooperate helpfully. . . . Ultimately, it depended mainly on the personal attitude of the NSFO and the satisfaction the commander and troops had in him and he in the troops.

General Nehring did not think that the NSFO helped the esprit de corps of the troops nor that the results strived for by Hitler and the party were in any manner achieved. The only reason the war was prolonged as long as it was, in his opinion, was because of the demand of the allies for unconditional surrender; everyone, from general to the youngest soldiers wished for the end of the war, he declared, but all Germans refused the allied demands as

long as any hope at all remained of negotiations which might rescue Germany from a menacing fate.⁸

General Heinz Guderian, son of the famous German tank leader of the same name and now one of the senior generals of the West German Bundeswehr, gave his interpretation of the NSFO in February 1972. From his experience during World War II, he recalled that he had seen the NSFO first and foremost as the advisor and intermediary in questions of spiritual leadership (geistige Führung); in his opinion, being an intermediary for the nazi weltanschauung and a catalyst to strengthen the will to resist was only a secondary task. At least Guderian believed that this reflected the concept of Hitler's military advisors. He conceded that some party members, and perhaps Hitler himself, might have cherished far-reaching thoughts in the direction of turning the NSFO into a political commissar. However, Hitler's military advisors definitely wanted no Politruk; and the NSFO never became one "except for a very few exceptions." Further, he believed that there was never much chance that a Politruk system could have ever come to pass in the German armed forces; Hitler was well aware of the opposition to such a system on the part of the military services and even feared himself to create a political commissar. Guderian thought that the NSFO was instituted

⁸Letter, General Walther K. Nehring, a.D., January 25, 1972.

because of the emergency at the front and discounted the idea that it was a welcome possibility for the party to gain influence in the Wehrmacht. He himself never experienced any difficulties with NSFOs and never heard of anyone who had--"at least not serious ones," he added. As for the influence of the NSFOs, the general believed that they did have some effect on the German soldiers' will to resist the enemy, "but it was not very great. The German soldier did his duty, partly with the support of the NSFO activity, partly also, however, in spite of this institution."⁹

In June 1973 General Albert Praun commented on the NSFO based on his experiences as division commander of the 129th Infantry Division with Army Group Center in Russia from August 1942 to October 1943 and as division commander of the 277th Infantry Division from April 1944 to August 1944 in France. He termed the "F" (Führungs--leadership) portion of NSFO "a confidence trick" (Hochstapelei) because the NSFO had nothing to do with leadership. He saw the job of the NSFO in the area of 'Betreuung' and added that before the NSFO was even thought of, the Ic had taken care of such matters. Further, combat leaders were too busy to concern themselves with party matters and the nazi weltanschauung. Commanders ensured, he said, that the NSFOs would not get overly involved in ideology by

⁹Letter, General Heinz Guderian, February 23, 1972.

appointing sensible combat veterans to the NSFO positions instead of simply relying on official party members. Praun did not believe that the NSFO exerted any influence on the German esprit de corps and the doggedness of the German soldiers. For this, "they had other sources in those days in training and tradition."¹⁰

In March 1973 General Praun expanded on this tradition. He said that to understand the mentality of the German officer, it was necessary to trace it back to the time of the monarchy when it was taboo for high society as well as members of the officer corps to discuss religion or politics. This mentality solidified during the period of the Weimar Republic when the 100,000 man army was forbidden to deal with politics. He left unsaid the obvious conclusion that habits of a lifetime could not easily be broken and that a naturally ingrained disdain for politics would carry over to the nazi era; but he did remark that it was not until the end of the war that he felt that he could talk frankly about such things even with old comrades, such as General von Hengl or General Guderian. He intimated that the Chief of the NSF Staff/OKH, the Ritter von Hengl, may have had deep reservations about his service to the nazi cause and that the last Chief of the Army General Staff, Colonel General Guderian, may have had tongue in cheek

¹⁰Letter, General Albert Praun, n.d., June 26, 1972.

when he warned all general staff officers, after the "20th of July," that henceforth they must all be NSFOs!¹¹

General Walter Carganico, based on his experiences on the eastern front during the war, echoed many of the comments of other former generals: "With the troops at the front, the NSFO played no significant role; at battalion or regimental level, a reliable officer who was not particularly sentimental over party ideology was usually appointed by the commander."¹²

Colonel Franz Schraml, a former regular officer, commanded several infantry regiments in Russia and the Balkans between April 1943 and the end of the war. In his opinion, the NSFO made himself hardly noticeable, if at all, to the troops. During periods of combat--"and these were without pause in the last part of the war"--there was no time for speeches or reading propaganda literature, he observed. However, he added that it differed little even in quiet times because of the severe shortage of officers and men. With companies down to forty to fifty men rather than three to four times that many, every man and officer had to do his job as well as other jobs, and no one had the time for NSFO work. Since soldiers were already attuned against a "paper war," they naturally opposed the

¹¹Ibid., postmarked March 16, 1973.

¹²Letter, General Walter Carganico, a.D., February 3, 1973.

deluge of paper created by the NSFO system. Even with good intentions, there was simply no time to read it, and frequently it remained in a file cabinet undistributed. Often if the material survived air attacks, train wrecks, mis-routed transportation, or a bad supply system, it was sabotaged by persons unknown. Commanders who opposed nazism, he declared, "did what they could (with the connivance of their adjutants, if these men were of the same opinion) to decrease the activity of the NSFO or to obstruct it entirely." He adhered to the view that the higher in rank, the greater number of officers there were who rejected nazism. The younger officers, however, were in his opinion predominantly for Hitler. He cited as an example the "20th of July" when not one single troop officer took part on the side of the attempt at a coup d'etat.

To Schraml's knowledge, those officers appointed as NSFOs were those who were well-known for their nazi inclinations and who had been active earlier in the Hitler Youth, the SA, and other party formations. These people, however, were not always persuasive speakers, so they were not always allowed to pursue a strong NSFO course. As a consequence, in many regiments one saw and heard nothing of them. Schraml once had the occasion to visit an NSFO at work in a neighboring unit behind the front. It was in November 1944, and the NSFO had the soldiers making Christmas toys for the children of war widows. In

general, he felt that the Germans were unpolitical; although they were hard workers, they were also revelers and dreamers. Accordingly, politics was hardly ever mentioned to the soldiers. They listened to the occasional speeches and "each thought on his own part of it. There was as little discussion in the Wehrmacht as earlier in the German army," he said. As the end of the war approached, Schraml believed the NSFO became even more insignificant.

A friend of Schraml's told him about a division commander who, because he was ordered to do so, appointed an NSFO who merely delivered a few lectures and said "nothing new." From this, the colonel concluded that those who heard political speeches only expected novelties, not a political indoctrination or a strengthening of the will to "stick it out." Even the latter would have been unnecessary, added Schraml, if each unit of the Wehrmacht had fought loyally and with a sense of duty to the last hour! Schraml emphatically stressed that a decided difference existed between the places "above" which "did their duty" by passing on an order which they in turn had received from a higher place and those "below"--the troops--who had to carry out the order. This explained why many of the orders on NSF contained remarks, such as "must not be hindered" or "must be supported." The other side of the coin was that such an order created indignation on the part of the recipients which thus undercut its effect.

Concerning anti-nazi officers and commanders, Schraml pointed out that open resistance to nazism could have been quite serious. It probably would not have resulted in a death sentence but certainly would have brought about the ignominious relief of a commander, his deportation to an insignificant position in the homeland, and perhaps public degradation. As a thief or a criminal never openly comments over his misdeeds, so it had to remain, judged Schraml, with the clandestine activities of those who sabotaged or hindered the NSFO program; even today "what the daylight has to shun, must remain hidden in darkness." The colonel termed such activity "cowardly" and "wretched," and charged that those guilty of such activity even today "must avoid giving their names away and revealing their crime." Thus, he obviously considered resistance to nazism as treason. Generally, he agreed with the view of this author that there were two sides to the NSFO program--an official side and an unofficial side. Officially, the program was stressed while unofficially it was neglected, ignored, or rendered lip service!

As to ways of hindering the NSF work, Schraml indicated time-honored ways which are common in any army. Propaganda and instructional material could disappear forever into a box somewhere in the baggage train in the rear. If found by accident, "one would have already found by this time an excuse for that!" If an adjutant did not fully

agree with his commander, it was easy enough to remove him and assign him as a company commander or in some other position. Further, "old school ties" were helpful. There were always friends or "connections" with higher echelons, and, of course, the higher the rank, the more connections an officer had. The younger officers, mostly staunch followers of Hitler, had no such connections; accordingly, they could make little headway against their superiors.¹³

Lieutenant Colonel Karl Kurz, a member of the West German Bundeswehr and a personal friend of the author, related that the combat troops were never bothered by the activity of the NSFOs. After the "20th of July," a friend of his was appointed as NSFO of his field artillery battalion, but until the last day of the war this Sub-office "NSFO" only concerned himself with his primary duty as a battery commander. Kurz, a Bavarian who won the Iron Cross for combat action in Russia, stressed that the attitude of the armed forces had its origin, not in nazism, but in the Reichswehr which carried on the Prussian spirit of Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, and Seeckt.¹⁴

The thoughts expressed by Speer and the former members of the Wehrmacht ring true for the simple reason that their judgments are in general agreement with the fears and

¹³Letters, Colonel Franz Schraml, a.D., May 25, 1972, and October 2, 1972.

¹⁴Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Karl Kurz, March 12, 1971.

apprehensions of members of Hitler's Party Chancellery. Officials in the P-K constantly expressed their doubts concerning the efficiency of the NSFO program and blamed the officer corps for its resistance to the program. There were, of course, moments when P-K members were optimistic concerning the program. This optimism arose when they considered the support for their cause from younger members of the officer corps and from fanatics like The Unreconstructed Nazi.

The Unreconstructed Nazi

Also while researching this study, the author was able to establish contact with an unreconstructed nazi who serves as an interesting counterpoise to other present-day witnesses. Because of his former nazi activities before the war, his NSFO performance on a high level staff, and his present belief that only national socialism still holds the correct answers to the problems confronting the modern world, this former Major of Reserves asked that he not be named in order to protect his family from possible harm. Nevertheless, he reported his beliefs and activities quite openly in correspondence and apparently hid nothing during a personal meeting with this author in the spring of 1973. This convinced nazi joined the N.S.D.A.P. in 1930 and served in several party offices to include: District Propaganda Leader; District Leader; County Leader; member of the National Socialist Municipal Council of his city; and

National Socialist Deputy to the Landtag in his Land (state). His last party function before his call-up to military service was as a leader in the National League of German Officials (Reichsbund deutscher Beamter); he had been a civil servant since shortly after the end of his World War I military service as an army officer. Because of his nazi past he was denied his former civil service position after the end of World War II until 1955 and served twenty-five months of this ten-year period in prison because of his pre-war party activities.

After his mobilization in August 1939, this officer served in several field campaigns. He was one of the first to be selected as a Betreuung officer of his division, and as a result of this activity and his experience in the party, he became an NSFO of an army group. In March 1944, he was sent temporarily to Krössinsee as a Work Group Leader, and he received several high decorations for his NSFO activity. His qualifications to be an NSFO were, of course, his experience in the nazi party, decorations from the first world war (which must remain unnamed since they might identify him), several party decorations, a citation for bravery in his World War I regimental history, and the recommendation from his Gauleiter.¹⁵

In comparison with other telegraphic recommendations from

¹⁵Letters, Major of Reserves P, a.D., February 14, 1973, and March 28, 1973; and interview, April 18, 1973.

the various District Leaders and party officials on file in the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz today,¹⁶ his is one of the more exceptional. His Gauleiter termed him "absolutely impeccable in character and politics." Thus, this NSFO appeared unusually well-qualified, and perhaps this fact speaks volumes concerning his present-day comments on the NSFO program. This author informed the unreconstructed nazi of Albert Speer's comment concerning the NSFO and received a blistering remark by return mail that Speer's comment was "not objective and in no way did it conform to the truth." Out of the 400 NSFOs from troop units I met at Krössinsee," he wrote,

all were splendid national socialists, and very qualified as NSFOs. That here and there were some who were unsuitable, I cannot dispute, since a few commanders, who had nothing good to say about Hitler, perhaps appointed enemies of national socialism as NSFOs. . . . It also does not seem believable that Speer expressed a negative opinion to Hitler on the NSFO. The overwhelming majority of commanders certainly appointed good officers as NSFOs, because one hoped to create through this a still better spirit in all troop units. . . . I found that the establishment of the NSFO was good, only, unfortunately, it came too late. I wanted this institution already in 1939 when I was with my regiment in the _____ --everything under the designation of Wehrgeistige Betreuung. I did not think about an NSFO. I had no objection personally, I had only reflections since there were certainly not genuine national socialists in the Wehrmacht. . . .

He claimed that he, as an NSFO, had the best possible contact with commanders and also with simple soldiers.

¹⁶BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 366.

He told about speaking to a battalion in an open field in the summer of 1944. After a two-hour talk, he realized what time it was, and dismayed at speaking so long, he apologized. Immediately, there rang from an unknown mouth the remark, "please go on!" Nevertheless, he stopped. He used to visit the troops in the front lines to converse with small groups in the best manner recommended by OKH. One time while speaking to the officers of a battalion in their officer club before a scheduled talk to the troops, the alert signal suddenly sounded. Grabbing his carbine, he ran out and talked to small groups of soldiers and individuals while they took defensive positions; then he laid down side by side with them to fight off an enemy attack. They appreciated his actions very much, he declared. On another occasion, a major commanding an engineer battalion tried to keep him in the officer club to prevent him from speaking to the troops. When this NSFO declared that he had a direct order from the army group commander and demanded to speak to the troops, the major conceded.

This former officer was quite upset and said that it embarrassed him that some people had termed the NSFO "a joke." He said that they must have been "former imperial officers" who did not want to answer for the NSFO today. The NSFO was certainly no joke, he said, and his "authority was an entirely natural sequel in a point of

time when Greater Germany had already been wounded bloodily and the danger was always growing." He admitted that even he had been pessimistic occasionally, but he insisted that he believed in Hitler until the very end. Conceding that "a few commanders" attempted to keep the NSFO work in check, he declared that--no matter what they say today--most of them were glad to have in the NSFO a support for improving the attitude of the troops! He added that the aftermath of the "20th of July" cut instances of sabotage of the NSFO program immensely. He agreed with others who said that the younger officers were for Hitler to an intensified extent but charged that the older officers, although to a smaller extent, were also supporters of Hitler because he wanted the best for Germany and was an idealist. "Only think what he did good for Germany and its people before the war," he said. "Hitler saw through the communist leaders as no other statesman."

The former NSFO agreed that conservative resistance elements of the officer corps carried on serious sabotage and declared flatly that this was why Germany lost the war. At one time in 1944, the Ia of a division, a lieutenant colonel, asked him if he knew that Hitler was wild and crazy and that he sometimes tore the epaulettes off generals who stood like ramrods in front of him. The former NSFO warned the Ia that he should not continue telling such stories. If he had continued, he would have reported him to the

commanding general. As it was, he let the event pass. Ultimately, he said, if anyone had fear of an NSFO, it must have been because he had good reason because of an anti-nazi attitude or traitorous actions.¹⁷

The evidence presented by Albert Speer and former members of the German army overwhelmingly give credence to the fears in the Party Chancellery that the NSFO program was in deep trouble. Even The Unreconstructed Nazi conceded that sabotage of the program occurred and that military traditionalism in the form of "former imperial officers" opposed the NSFO. He would have been right at home in the Party Chancellery where similar charges were hurled.

¹⁷Letters and interview, P.

CHAPTER X

DISINTEGRATION BEGINS

Red Tape and Recriminations

Shortly after the "20th of July," Hitler gave Bormann some guidance on NSF. At that time the Führer said that he wanted "abuses, defeatist remarks, offenses against national socialist principles, etc." to be reported to higher echelons of command so that offenders could be called to account. Therefore, he demanded that the NSFOS should have their own separate and direct channel for reporting and for issuing orders. Bormann and Ruder met with General Reinecke on this requirement and agreed on the wording of a Führer Order in draft form which would comply with Hitler's demand. Then, however, the Chief of NSF/OKW bound up the draft order in red tape, and the Party Chancellery started aiming recriminations at the military.

Reinecke sent the draft to the Chiefs of the three service NSF Staffs for their comments, and the army's Chief NSFO, Hengl, passed it in turn to various Commanders-in-Chief (e.g., Schörner and Model) for their points of

view; Himmler, as C-in-C of the Replacement Army, also received a copy. It was well-known that the SS Chief opposed giving an exceptionally strong position to the NSFO. In early October 1944 he had told Ruder that he thought it was very dangerous to create the suspicion that the NSFO might act the part of a political commissar. Advising strongly against instituting a special NSFO reporting channel, he pointed out the possibility that an NSFO could always and at any time write personally to the Chief of the NSF Staff of his service. In that way, situations which could not be settled locally could reach the highest leadership.¹ By December the order was still bound up in the bureaucratic process while signs of disintegration could be seen.

On December 16 Berger reported to Himmler that "all men who are concerned with the salvation of Germany" agreed that signs of possible breakdown had appeared in air force and army units. Officers had abandoned their combat positions prematurely, and frequently soldiers were found straggling far in the rear. In both military and civilian offices, a lack of activity and its resulting signs of lassitude were becoming obvious. Berger told his boss that several army officers had come to him asking that Himmler

¹BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 140, Vorlage an Herrn Reichsleiter Bormann, Betrifft: Führerbefehl für die Verstärkung der nationalsozialistischen Führung in der Wehrmacht, October 10, 1944, IIF, signed: Ruder, with enclosure: Der Führer, Führerhauptquartier, den September 44.

should see the Führer; he should ask Hitler to give the NSFO full powers. Berger conceded the difficulties in such a suggestion.² By January 24, 1945, Himmler had still not made up his mind on the proposal, but he told one of his aides that great difficulties stood in the way. He saw it as possible only in the manner in which it had been done in the past, namely for Sondereinsatz, and even then only for certain situations. The danger of slipping into a commissar-like system was just too great, the Reichsführer SS said.³

The reasoning of the various actors in this drama, except for Himmler's, was not divulged, but perhaps conjecture can approach the truth. Reinecke had a reputation in the military and the party as a "deskbound" general who delayed and weakened orders through his commitment to red tape; so his action was in character. Hengl, influenced by staff officers whom the P-K called obstructionists, anti-nazis, and anti-OKW may have used the red tape opportunity for two reasons: first, to tie up the order for awhile; and second, to send it to field commanders who thought as he did, namely that the commander must remain

²BAK, Persönlicherstab Reichsführer SS, NS 19/neu 750, Berger to Himmler, Betrifft: Einrichtung von NS-Führungsoffizieren mit Sondervollmachten, December 16, 1944.

³Ibid., SS-Standartenführer to Berger, Betrifft: Einrichtung von NS-Führungsoffiziere mit Sondervollmachten, January 25, 1945.

supreme. Himmler and Schörner had both expressed such beliefs strongly in the past, and they would no doubt support an OKH non-concurrence to the order. Model's position is unknown, but he had a reputation for disregarding Hitler's instructions and acting on his own judgment. A strange comment about Hengl was made by one of his close friends; if true, it places the NSF Chief of OKH as one of the staunch protectors of the traditional German army against the NSFO and the party despite his job as Chief NSFO. General Albert Praun, the last Chief of Communications for the Führer's headquarters after the execution of his predecessor, General Fellgiebel (because of the latter's implication in the "20th of July"), claimed that no "NSFO problem" ever developed because his good friend, General von Hengl, "took care of it!"⁴ As for Himmler's stand, he may have sincerely believed in the danger of a Politrुक in the German army, but he also remained in the power struggle with Bormann. Any great increase in the NSFO's power would automatically increase Bormann's at Himmler's expense. Naturally, the P-K was unhappy with the generals and the SS Chief for their actions.

On October 10, 1944, Ruder wrote a memorandum to his boss, Bormann, in which he condemned as "completely false" the idea of opening up a sacred Führer Order to such discussion as Reinecke and Hengl had done. He pointed

⁴Letter, General Albert Praun, a.D., June 26, 1972.

out emphatically that recent experience had shown that nearly all NSFOs were encountering great difficulties.

"Therefore," he wrote,

their position needs a special underpinning. Therefore, it is advisable to get a decisive order from the Führer as soon as possible so that the NSFO can report directly, if a report through his unit commander appears useless.

Ruder saw the danger that Himmler might institute his own arrangements on the subject for his units and the Volks-grenadier divisions which other commanders could then use as a precedent. Accordingly, he asked Bormann to talk to the SS Chief about it.

On the previous day General Reinecke had suggested that if the Führer Order could not be issued in the agreed format, a field mail number (similar to a zip code number) to which all soldiers could write could be set up. Ruder hardly thought this would solve the problem since all sorts of inconsequential complaints would flow in, and a large organization would have to be created just to handle the deluge of paper. There was an advantage in using a special NSFO channel, he wrote: many things could be settled locally, and furthermore, the validity of a complaint could be checked. The institution of a field mail number, he concluded, would mean the elimination of the NSFO from this type of work. Ruder asked Bormann to talk to Hitler to offset the other interpretations of the Führer Order. On October 24 Bormann did talk to the Führer on the subject,

but the content of the conversation remains unknown. Since the final version of this Führer Order was not published until March 1945--eight months after Hitler's guidance to Bormann--Hitler obviously backed off in face of foot dragging by his NSF Chiefs and known opposition from Himmler.

A comparison between the draft order which circulated at this time with the final version shows that Himmler's thoughts ultimately prevailed over Ruder's (and perhaps Bormann's). It also revealed a certain amount of compromise which muddied the water. The final version added that the NSFO "like all other members of the staff" was fully subordinate to his commander; it also added that the NSFO furnished his commander a copy of the monthly activity report which he was now required to send to the next higher NSFO and to the Chief of his service NSF Staff. NSFOs were also required to report difficulties which affected their work. A portion of the original draft order was eliminated; this part had stated that

in cases of special political import and [when] there is danger in delay--despite regular channels--they [difficulties] will be reported immediately and directly to the NSFO of the next higher command [and] up to the highest office.

An original statement that the Chief of NSF/OKW in cooperation with the Leader of the Party Chancellery would be responsible for the uniformity of the execution of the order also did not appear in the final version.⁵ While time

⁵BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 140, Vorlage an Herrn Reichsleiter Bormann, Betrifft: Führerbefehl für

passed and bureaucratic ensnarlements tied up the Führer Order until March 1945, other things, of course, were happening.

During these intervening months, the military situation deteriorated and the morale and will to resist of the German soldiers eroded. On July 10, 1944, Hassell wrote in his diary that there was evidence of disintegration among the soldiers; in East Prussia German troops were retreating in disorganization at a rate never seen in 1918.⁶ The next day he wrote that he had heard that the generals in the west were "doing their duty" with complete resignation.⁷ In August the mail censor report was enlightening. One soldier wrote that his unit was composed of men forty to forty-six years old and that they were treated like "dumb kids." A first sergeant described how his regimental commander won the German Cross in Gold when he had served nowhere near the front; and a Lance Corporal wrote that one did not know what to believe anymore. A corporal complained that political indoctrination

die Verstärkung der nationalsozialistischen Führung in der Wehrmacht, October 10, 1944, IIF, signed: Ruder, with enclosure: Der Führer, Führerhauptquartier, den September 44. For the final version, see Waldemar Besson, "Zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialistischen Führungs Offiziers (NSFO)," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, doc. no. 14 (January 1961), pp. 114-15.

⁶Ulrich von Hassell, The Von Hassell Diaries: 1938-1944 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1947), p. 350.

⁷Ibid., p. 355.

lasted a very long time; he also protested because the traditional military salute had been taken away from the army. In Army Group "E," the 14th Army, the 15th Army, the 16th Army, and the 20th Mountain Army, the rate of major offenses against breaking mail censorship regulations climbed somewhat from July to August.⁸ To add to the signs of disintegration, by September the Soviet armies had achieved definite superiority. Ratios between the Soviet and German forces stood at: divisions, 9:1; tanks, 6:1; guns, 10 or 15:1. German army tank divisions had only one-third of their personnel strength while, surprisingly, 70 to 80 per cent of the tanks were battle-worthy; but SS units were at full strength!⁹ In the west between the allied invasion of Normandy on June 6 and the fall of Antwerp on September 4, the allies claimed the destruction of fifty-three German divisions, and twenty-two corps and division commanders were either dead, wounded, or prisoners of war. The front had begun to crumble, and formerly unheard of scenes in the Prussian/German army occurred. Trucks with officers, mistresses, champagne, and brandy made it as far to the rear as the Rhineland, and it took the iron hands of Field Marshals von Rundstedt and Model, plus Special Courts-Martial, to

⁸NAM, T78, Roll 134, Frames 6062771-2842.

⁹Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff: 1657-1945, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1953), p. 482.

reform the army.¹⁰ The application of Sondereinsatz undoubtedly had some effect also. In the I Army Corps on the eastern front in December, the corps NSFO reported that the troops worried most about the safety of their families at home, and he told his corps NSFOs to convince the soldiers that they must put their trust in the leadership of the Wehrmacht and the party.¹¹

By September 1944 the German army began to man the West Wall (the so-called "Siegfried Line") on the German border; in Italy the western allies had cleared much of the peninsula; and in the east the Soviet Army had pushed the Germans behind the line they had occupied before the invasion of the U.S.S.R.--the battle for the Reich itself was about to begin, and Reinecke tried to polish up the tarnished image of the NSFO.

Apparently, Reinecke had heard that even high officers sometimes referred to NSFOs as "NS-Fohse" (a simple play on the NSFO initials which indicated that NSFOs were "wet behind the ears") or "NS-Null" (NS-Nothing).¹² On September 6 Reinecke informed each service NSF Staff that the Führer had ordered the designation "NS-Leadership Staff of the High Command of the Wehrmacht" changed to the more

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 480.

¹¹ NAM, T314, Roll 80, Frames 17-22.

¹² BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 137, Hans Kröber to "Lieber Hermann," August 7, 1944.

independent and important sounding "NS-Leadership Staff of the Wehrmacht." In addition, he announced that the common use of the short titles "NSFO," "NS-Leadership Officer," or "NS-Leadership" caused people to lose sight of the importance of NSF for the war effort. Therefore, the Chief NSFO requested that the armed forces use these abbreviations only in telegrams, teletype messages, and in internal Wehrmacht communications. In all other cases, to include all printed literature even within the armed forces, the full titles would be used. A copy of the directive, with "NS-Leadership Staff" on the letterhead, was sent outside the Wehrmacht to the Party Chancellery!¹³ Thus, the NSFO initials themselves became important. While Reinecke dealt with the trivia of names and titles, he was fast losing his control over the Armed Forces NSFO program, and nazis like Himmler were moving much faster toward the goal of nazification of the armed forces.

The SS Chief was moving rapidly toward toughening the spirit of his army forces and mobilizing a people's army representative of the German nation. He had apparently learned from Röhm's mistake of 1934. He would not build a revolutionary army around the cadres of an elite group; instead he would fall back on an idea which incorporated Prussian traditionalism. In a speech to area and

¹³BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 151, Abschrift, Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, NS-Führungsstab der Wehrmacht, September 6, 1944.

school commanders of the Replacement Army on September 21, 1944, Himmler explained his ideas. First, he took the commanders to task over the softness of their units. In this speech, Himmler freely admitted that he was a "barbarian" when necessary, and he implied that a soldier had to be barbaric at times in order to be hard. If a company commander ran away from his men, he told his distinguished audience, that troop leader should be told that as a result he could earn either death or the Knight's Cross in battle or else face a court-martial. Then Himmler incorporated his own version of Prussian traditionalism into his ideas. War could not be conducted gentlemanly as in the past; it had to be brutal and built on the tradition bequeathed to Germany by "Old Fritz," Frederick the Great. The Prussian king's example of 1813, he claimed, was now being followed through the creation of the Volkssturm (People's Defense Units). Only this time, the old and the young--from sixteen to sixty--would arise from the nation itself and would fight a partisan war in Russian fashion; they would fight with everything they could lay their hands on, to include flintlocks and improvised weapons. The SS Chief declared that the enemy would have to reckon on meeting and killing every German man and woman in order to win. Besides, the allied coalition was shaky, he avowed, and it would collapse within the next twelve months.¹⁴ Himmler

¹⁴NAM, T84, Roll 175, Frames 1544164-84.

was dreaming--not only about a great popular arousal of the Prussian people in 1813, but also concerning the reality of Germany in 1944.

Daylight travel in Germany was impossible in many places,¹⁵ and furthermore, reports circulated of civilians not understanding what was going on or why Himmler's vaunted Volkssturm was being called up.¹⁶ In December a great number of the old and young who were supposed to arise from the nation itself failed to answer the call-up.¹⁷ Another report described how it took one area four weeks to receive its mobilization order because of the chaotic communications.¹⁸ At the same time nazi files bulged with reports of increasing defeatism in the officer corps,¹⁹ and many of the cures employed in such circumstances were pathetic since they did not alleviate the basic problem, which was the appearance of the first signs of chaos. For example, the most original thought in one division of Himmler's Replacement Army in October was for its headquarters to give blanket permission to NSFOs to inspect courses of instruction on nazi education without prior warning.²⁰

In August 1944, with the Reich under direct enemy threat, Hitler had finally ordered total mobilization.²¹

¹⁵Ibid., Frame 1543770.

¹⁶Ibid., Frame 1543774.

¹⁷Ibid., Frame 1543802.

¹⁸Ibid., Frame 1543866.

¹⁹NAM, T78, Roll 40, Frames 6001800-1807.

²⁰NAM, T84, Roll 160, Frame 1527112.

²¹William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third

Two months later he proclaimed a leveé-en-masse, created Himmler's vaunted Volkssturm, and instituted the Wehrwolf (a formation of partisan fighters which existed only in Hitler's imagination).²² At least Hitler had an eye for history--the Volkssturm, composed of old men and young boys, resembled the Landsturm of the days of the Prussian War of Liberation (ca. 1813). The mission of the Volkssturm, like that of the old Prussian Landsturm, was home defense and, if necessary, partisan warfare.²³ In this atmosphere of an impending fight to the finish, seniority of rank began to count less while "nazi efficiency" and belief meant more. On July 20, 1944, Hitler had promoted Major Ernst Remer to Colonel (and later major general) as his reward for putting down the attempted coup in Berlin that day,²⁴ and later in the battle for Berlin a young NSFO named Kaether suddenly became a general because of

Reich: A History of Nazi Germany (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. 1087. See also Alan Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny, Harper Torchbooks, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964), p. 757.

²²Goerlitz, German General Staff, p. 421.

²³For information concerning the Landsturm see Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army: 1640-1945, a Galaxy Book (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 60-69.

²⁴John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945, Viking Compass ed. (New York: The Viking Press, 1967), pp. 655-57. See also "Playboy Interview: Albert Speer," Playboy, June 1971, p. 193.

"the glow of his National Socialist convictions."²⁵ The atmosphere was also conducive to thoughts on more concrete matters. In view of the impending disaster facing the Third Reich, the Party Chancellery had to take a hard look at the NSFO program.

At the end of October or the beginning of November 1944, Ruder's work group held a conference in order to evaluate the NSFO program. Ruder led off with an assessment. He believed that unclear orders had impeded the work. Although the Führer Order should have given clear direction, of course, the desired results had not yet come about; therefore, someone was at fault. Now Ruder's guns shifted from their former aim at the army's NSF staff to a cannonade against the NSF Staff of the Wehrmacht. Ruder placed much of the blame for the NSFO's failure on Reinecke's staff which he declared had not used all of its "intellectual capacities." Thus Reinecke was destined to become the party's scapegoat for the failure of the NSFO program. The army, on the other hand, was now conducting systematic work, and its nomination of NSFOs, although it could be improved, was "good." Nevertheless, he estimated that at division level, only 50 per cent of the assigned NSFOs were suitable; the others gradually had to be replaced. He conceded that commanders impeded the nomination of officers

²⁵Goerlitz, German General Staff, p. 498. Assumedly this was Colonel Kaether of the NSF Staff of OKH.

since they did not want to give up qualified men and he even singled out Himmler's Replacement Army as demonstrating "a certain aimlessness." Ruder typified those living in the nazi dreamworld as they teetered on the edge of catastrophe; he pinned his hopes on the coming generation. Future armed forces leaders he said, should be selected only from impeccable political and ideological individuals such as former Hitler Youth members who had proved themselves as leaders in combat. This idea concerning the army of the future must have served as Ruder's basic assumption when he showed his willingness to accept a somewhat less than dominant position of the party vis-à-vis other party offices and the Wehrmacht. Ruder was beginning to accept the reality of the present.

Ruder also assessed his own staff and stressed that it must cooperate strongly and continuously with the other party offices. Other party offices had to be brought in on planning early and should not be informed of accomplished facts later by the armed forces. If the Wehrmacht was to ever become politically activated, he correctly asserted that it must not see the party as something which handed out instructions on political leadership "from above." Rather, the party should create "the material" and then place it at the disposal of the military. Party members had to realize that the NSFO work stood in its infancy and that the military services would not be

politically activated by just political instruction or lectures. Still Ruder saw that the commanders had to be won over to the nazi cause. Then the nazi troop leader had to introduce a new spirit in the troops, and the "Landser [the term used for the German soldier] must have the possibility to report grievances to higher echelons through the NSFO." After criticizing several pieces of well-known instructional literature, Ruder said that greater emphasis had to be placed on the courses at Krössinsee since general staff officers--"this up to now uninfluenced category of officers"--could be influenced when they attended the courses there.²⁶ The picture of a traditionalist Ruder which emerges here can be very misleading. In this assessment he appeared to back off and further the concept of the Wehrmacht having supremacy in its own sphere while the party stood by as a helpmate to furnish it ideological and political material. This can only be viewed in context. Ruder looked to the future when the armed forces would be thoroughly nazified, and only with this assumption having become reality would he have been willing to place the party in an equal if not inferior position to a nazi Wehrmacht. In the meantime, however, the party would have to move slowly and depend on its ability to sell itself through its propaganda.

²⁶BAK, Sammlung Schumacher 367, Entwurf, Arbeitstagung der Gruppe IIF, November 2, 1944.

Hatred, Fear, and Propaganda

The nazi propaganda machine had been in full swing for some time in order to scare Germans into resisting the enemy, but in the last few weeks it poured out in a torrent. The January 1945 issue of "The Political Soldier," published by NSF/OKW, told the soldiers that the enemy hated them because Germany was building an orderly state. That was why the enemy wanted to "liberate" Europe. American "liberation" aimed at gaining control of phosphorous and iron works and robbing art treasures in Italy; the United States only wanted a market for her wares. The propaganda sheet then listed quotations from the enemy press. The October 1943 edition of Popular Science urged that Germany's industry had to be dismantled and distributed to her neighbors--the clock had to be set back fifty years. William Barkley was quoted as saying in the May 16, 1944, edition of The Daily Express ". . . if a strongly reduced German people have to scratch their food from the soil without technical help or machines . . . then perhaps they can be happy in idyllic ways." Other statements and questions included: "Does the bolshevist hangman follow the American soldiers?"; "Americans let negroes fly in the terror attacks on our culture in Munich"; and "We are all damned to the pity of God if the Americans come into Germany. But if we are soldiers it won't happen."²⁷ On

²⁷NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frames 1526123-34.

February 15, 1945, NSF/OKW published a list of enemy atrocities for the information of NSFOs. It listed rapes, shootings of catholic nurses, and murders of children. Major Klähn, who signed the directive, asserted that the information should be suitable for inspiring hatred.²⁸

On February 23 Himmler, as C-in-C of Army Group Weichsel on the eastern front, issued a rousing appeal to his NSFOs. He proclaimed:

The goal of the entire ideological and political work at the present time must be to bring every individual to the realization that only through struggle, aggressiveness, and mental attitude, can he defend his family, his relatives, and thus his nation and his own future from bolshevist bloodthirstiness.

After a few overworked slogans and emotionalism, Himmler told the NSFOs: "Don't glue yourself to a desk, but get out with the troops!" He also told them to place the sharpest demands on party members in uniform. If any refused these requirements, he demanded that they should be reported at once to the Army Group NSFO.²⁹

On March 5 an NSFO in Wehrkreis X (Hamburg) tried to lift the spirits of soldiers with quotations from newspapers. An article in the American Hearst Press had allegedly stated: "If our losses at Iwo Jima go on, there

²⁸NAM, T84, Roll 160, Frame 1527334.

²⁹BAK, Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer SS, NS 19/neu 750, Oberkommando der Heeresgruppe Weichsel, VIa/NSF, Richtlinien für die Arbeit des NSFO, February 23, 1945, signed: H. Himmler.

is the danger that the US troops will be finished before they reach the critical Japanese areas at all." The NSFO added that U.S. losses in Europe were similar, and then he quoted the Washington Daily News: "We must reckon on at least one dead American soldier for each German prisoner." He pointed out that extensive labor problems had grown in the United States, and added that the American regime had had to threaten to draft the strikers into the army to get them back to work. The U.S. Senator Wheeler in a radio speech, the NSFO continued, had spoken about the Yalta Conference and charged that the policy of extermination against Germany was psychological madness because it would cost tens of thousands of American lives. He wrote that the troops would be interested in what an English war correspondent wrote about the German troops in the west. The correspondent allegedly reported that German artillery surmounted everything on the battlefield and that the English troops met the most stubborn resistance conceivable; he called the German soldiers young, fanatical, and disciplined fighters. If England had not capitulated after Dunkerque and Russia had not quit after Leningrad, why should the Reich give up, asked the NSFO. Besides, he prophesied, England did not want a Soviet Europe.³⁰

³⁰NAM, T77, Roll 1039, Frames 6512763-64.

On March 7 the LXXXII Army Corps NSFO pointed at the outrages in East Prussia by the "Red beasts" and said that instead of causing anxiety and fear, it should stir hate, fanaticism, and the will to fight harder. Occupation of German soil by the Anglo-Americans would be no better, the Corps' battalion NSFOs were told, because the Soviet Union would dominate and bring hunger, death, and misery. The goals of the plan cooked up by Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin at Yalta, supposedly in "their own words," were:

Demolition of German Industry. 30,000,000 German men and women as slave workers in Siberia. Destruction of the German Wehrmacht. Military occupation of Germany until the year 2000. Dictation--no negotiation. Biological extermination--sterilization. Women and girls exported overseas. Death of the German nation.³¹

On the same day, the XIII Army Corps NSFO called Yalta a "new Wilson-trick for Germany" and said the Reich would not fall for a second Versailles. In his "Data for Troop Information" of March 7, he quoted an officer on the East Prussian front as telling his grenadiers: "The hour before dawn is always the darkest. Think of that and fight like a lion. Victory will still be ours. Our Führer and beloved Germany live!" Since the beginning of the current Soviet offensive on January 12, the NSFO reported, the Soviets had lost a third of their infantry and three-fourths of their tank forces, and their losses would

³¹NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frame 1525945.

climb higher. He concluded that only ideas and those who fight for them could win wars.³²

The NSF Staff of OKH put out the same type of propaganda and demanded that those who could not handle the current crisis should at least hold their tongues and maintain their composure. The staff called on NSFOs in the army to discuss relevant measures for the strengthening of NSF and to report their recommendations to NSF/OKH by April 10, 1945.³³ This admission of a lack of its own ideas showed a bankrupt policy in OKH. Henceforth, it would be at the mercy of those who did have ideas and would only direct minor NSFO changes and react to initiatives from other places.

In Search of Ideas

Obviously new ideas were needed, and Hitler led the way. On November 25, 1944, he ordered that any troop leader who believed he could no longer lead his unit in the manner the Führer expected should query first his officers, then his noncommissioned officers, and finally even his enlisted men as to whether one of them fulfilled the requirements of command and would willingly lead the unit in combat; if so, the commander should turn over his command to this individual--without concern for rank--and

³²Ibid., Frames 1525941-42.

³³NAM, T77, Roll 852, Frames 5597522-31.

the new leader would command the unit with all the rights and privileges which went with the job.³⁴ This Führer Order directly attacked traditional army custom, but at least it allowed the commander himself to designate his replacement.

On December 9, 1944, in connection with the end of the thirteenth course at Krössinsee, Party Member Beringer submitted a pessimistic report to Ruder on the status of the NSFO program. No doubt, he began, the courses at Krössinsee had been very fruitful, but since Lieutenant Colonel Herschel had been transferred from his position as commandant, the reputation enjoyed by the courses had dwindled; despite repeated recommendations from the work staff, the NSF Staff/OKW had failed to find a suitable replacement for him. Further some changes were needed among the Work Group Leaders--some of them had never experienced combat, and others who were combat veterans had stayed at Krössinsee so long that Beringer feared they would forget how to put their knowledge into practice.

Beringer believed that the failures of General Reinecke and the command structure both caused the NSF program to move rather slowly. His criticism of Reinecke

³⁴Walter Hubatsch, ed., Hitlers Weisungen für die Kriegsführung, 1939-1945: Dokumente des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 1965), doc. no. 68, pp. 343-44.

reflected those previously expressed by other party and military people--the old man had not seen combat but once, and that had been over thirty years previously. Further, the general had selected "impossible people" for his staff who should be cast aside since they only stood in the way of the work of the party. Beringer did not see how the work staff could put up with Reinecke much longer, and he pondered whether it would be better to replace him with a better man or to work directly with the NSF Staffs of the three services. As opposed to Reinecke, he credited General von Hengl and his staff with the good results achieved by the army. Apparently the strong criticism previously leveled against Radke, Sprengel, and Lersner had been forgotten. The army, he reported, stood way ahead of the navy, and as far as the air force was concerned, Beringer had nothing good to say since he felt that the Luftwaffe received very little guidance from its chief (Göring). Turning to the command structure, he complained that there were still "a great number of commanders" who, through mistrust, opposed the political activation of the armed forces and wanted to hear nothing of a "'political commissar.'" He charged that many high commanders did not really support the NSF program with their whole hearts. Too often the party work staff, outnumbered by the military, had to be content when commanders merely let their NSFOs work unhindered, and frequently, he reported, the NSFO had

insufficient rank to make himself felt within the staff. However, the main problem with the program was the NSF selection process on which it stood or fell.

Even after the publication of the Führer Order of December 22, 1943, Beringer claimed, commanders in many cases appointed people based on their civilian occupations or who had the same politically neutral attitudes as themselves. As a result, a disproportionately high number of professors and teachers became NSF0s regardless of their political experience or beliefs. Frequently, B.O.s who were former members of the Stahlhelm and the German National Party (the D.N.V.P.) had been carried over to the new NSF0 positions, and as late as the spring of 1944 a pastor had appeared at the NSF0 course at Krössinsee. Beringer blamed Reinecke for wanting to send "an unwarranted great number" of physicians and officers from the noncombat support services to the course and said that as yet none of the three military services had provided a complete list of NSF0s to the party. If only these lists could be obtained, he added, the work staff could reject the unqualified NSF0s after running a check through all the District Leaders.

According to Beringer, the lack of professional officers created a major problem in filling the goal of one-third regular officers in the NSF0 program. General von Hengl had stated recently at a conference in Potsdam

that the army was short about 300 Main Office NSFOs, and at the most, only twenty officers could be assigned directly from the course at Krössinsee to make up this shortage. So far party offices had reported a total of 12,928 prospective NSFOs to the work staff which then culled out 1097 to recommend to the NSF Staff/OKW. Nevertheless, only a small number of these were actually employed as NSFOs or had ever been sent to Krössinsee. Beringer could not help but think that the adverse situation resulted from either an "enormous paralysis" or "malevolence." He observed the rather conspicuous fact that some 75 per cent of the higher NSFO positions were filled with former SA leaders. Pondering the reason, he theorized that this might have occurred because of the former close cooperation between the armed forces and the SA or that the military placed higher value on SA leaders than it did on leaders of other nazi formations. He warned that the work staff had to prevent this tendency.

In conversations with participants in the Krössinsee courses, Beringer had received many complaints. For example, he had learned that commanders had so shackled regimental and battalion NSFOs with other duties that they could not adequately perform their NSFO work. It took an especially strong personality, he observed, to overcome such restraints. In his opinion, the NSFO positions at regimental level should become Main Office positions; this

had already been done several times in Himmler's Replacement Army, he noted. He had also heard that NSFOs were nearly overwhelmed with propaganda literature. They wished that the periodical, Officers of the Führer, would follow a more clear political line, but he reported that unit commanders considered The Political Soldier as an excellent basis for NSF instruction. Nevertheless, they would like to see definite guidelines in the latter publication which they could easily follow in setting up instructional programs; they claimed that they had too little time to do this on their own. Beringer berated this attitude and said that it only showed how inefficient these complainers were.³⁵ Beringer's criticisms were aimed directly at the officer corps, but the troops soon came in for their share too since after all, it would have been heretical to blame Hitler and the N.S.D.A.P. for Germany's impending defeat.

Criticisms leveled at the troops by party officials usually concerned the soldiers' unwillingness to continue fighting. One such report in early February was from a party member named Schönwälder who was serving as a Major of Reserves in the army. Criticizing army troops on the eastern front who had fled to the rear, he said that young, strong boys with the best of armaments, in sloppy dress and

³⁵ BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 360, Vermerk für Pg. Ruder, Betrifft: Überblick über den Stand der NS-Führungsarbeit in der Wehrmacht. Ihr Vermerk vom 23. Nov. 1944, December 9, 1944, IIF, signed: Beringer.

with cigarettes hanging from their mouths, took items from stores without paying for them; they told shopkeepers that the war was over. Newly activated troops also lacked the will to fight and had no interest in what was going on; this proved to Schönwälder that ideological training had failed. The first war, he declared, was lost at home, but this one would be lost at the front.³⁶ Another February report was from a Walter Roesner who informed a Gau-leiter of conditions on the western front. He cited soldiers who, even in the presence of known party members, openly stated that they did not intend to retreat when the Americans came. On the contrary, they were happy that for them the battles and privations would soon be over. They thought that since the war was already lost, the nation's leadership elicited useless sacrifice. Therefore, when the next occasion presented itself, they would either surrender or desert. When party members tried to change a man's mind about surrendering at the next opportunity, it did no good. Defeatists cited the cases of towns which had been retaken from the Americans in which the civilians told the soldiers how decently the Americans had treated them; they only laughed at newspaper articles about mistreatment of German soldiers in American prison

³⁶ BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 135, Krämer to Dr. Naumann, Betrifft: Bericht des Pg. Schönwälder M.d.R., March 6, 1945, with enclosure: Schönwälder to Reichspropagandaleitung, Abteilung Aktive Propaganda, February 17, 1945.

camps and called it loathsome propaganda. The narrator of this tale blamed soldiers from Austria and the eastern part of Upper-Silesia for all the defeatist talk since they were not defending their immediate homeland.

No doubt the bad supply conditions were responsible for the defeatism that was permeating the German army, but Roesner, although he described these conditions, failed to link the two together. With the infantry soldier it was especially bad. There was no leather to repair worn out boots while everywhere hides of cattle and horses laid around. The medics had few resorts, not even for rashes and diarrhea. Therefore, whoever was sick could not count on treatment in his unit; he went at once into the hospital. On the other hand, many wounded men died because means of transportation failed; they had to be carried by hand or horse litter for hours through snowstorms and bitterly cold weather to the receiving station or hospital. Soldiers seemed to have given up. It presented a similar picture, he claimed, to the earlier retreat in Normandy--weapons, ammunition, rocket launchers, articles of clothing, and other equipment were strewn along roadside ditches and in the forests while no one seemed to care or interfered. To make it worse, rifles, carbines, and machine guns were often in a desperate condition because of rust and dirt. The fuel situation was also very bad. One artillery battery with five guns and four tractors had no

fuel at all. Repeatedly, when ordered to fall back units had to blow up guns and tractors; sometimes, but only with great difficulty, they could be saved by using horses and manpower to move them. One time the guns could only be secured from capture by the pressing enemy with carbines since there was no artillery ammunition available. Entire regiments with tanks and guns of all kinds stood on access roads without fuel. Tankers often had to shoot up what ammunition they had and then blow up the tanks because they could not be moved. At the same time "many, much too many" automobiles were driving around. As for the horses, they had not had sufficient fodder for weeks, and they perished daily from exhaustion. The civilian population parted with nothing, and their supplies had already dried up completely.

There was also a systematic hue and cry against the SS. After some SS men had been billeted in Hammerhütte bei/Rodtkyll, some silver spoons had come up missing in the town. Another time the SS came in the middle of the night, and since a young boy had not answered the door immediately, they had severely reviled him and threatened to blow his brains out. The inhabitants of one community complained that their village, which was 70-80 per cent destroyed, had been bombed because of the SS. The Black Order troops had had a radio station there and had shot at low flying airplanes; in retaliation the airplanes had bombed and strafed

the town. As it burned, the SS men disappeared instead of helping the people save their furniture and belongings. The incitement of soldiers against Himmler's men was open, and many common soldiers refused to occupy quarters on the same premises with them.³⁷ Despite all this the nazis expected the NSF0s to instill a will to fight in the German soldiers.

Consequently, in February 1945 NSF/OKH called for "Revolution against Revolution." NSF0s pointed out to the troops that German armies in late spring 1941 had driven as close to Moscow as the end-station of the streetcar network and that Russian soldiers had learned from this experience, thanks to German soldiers, that the significance of Moscow to the Russian was as strong as Berlin for the German. Germans must defend Berlin as obstinately as the Russians defended Moscow, said the NSF0s. They made clear to German soldiers that the U.S.S.R. did not conduct war, but revolution, and they cited the bolshevist "will," together with the Russian masses and huge quantities of materiel, as the reason for the Soviet successes. Noting that in 1940 Germany had eliminated the bourgeois armies of the western continental powers from the war, the NSF0s declared that only a people who had undergone a revolution of their own could withstand the bolshevist assault;

³⁷Ibid., Abschrift, Walter Roesner to "Lieber Gauleiter," February 7, 1945.

without the nazi revolution, Germany would have long ago succumbed. Against the enemy masses, they continued, Germany had mobilized millions of German civilians into the Volkssturm where they would sacrifice their lives as necessary to halt the surging force of bolshevism. German industry, the NSFOS preached, would win over Soviet materiel because of the German creative spirit and superior culture. Summoning the entire force of nazism to battle against the revolutionary will of the enemy, the NSFOS called for the spirit of the barricades and declared that the nazi revolution had arisen out of the highest value of the Teutonic race. Even in the darkest days, the nazis expected that perpetually new forces would always arise from nazism and that only the side which felt its obligations the deepest would survive.³⁸

From this call to revolution it is difficult to prove whether the party was pursuing Röhm's goal of translating nazi ideology into practice (concerning the SA Chief's attempt in 1934 to make the brownshirts the core of a national socialist people's army) or whether Hitler's actions signified a desperate attempt to stave off defeat. His statement after the SA purge about masking the continuation of the revolution suggests the former, but Hitler's words cannot be trusted fully. The call to revolution may have represented either a logical result of the nazi

³⁸NAM, T79, Roll 80, Frames 570-71.

thinking or an opportunistic move to galvanize all Germans to the defense of the fatherland, or both. It may have been a Hitlerian smokescreen when he allegedly told party intimates in 1940 that his goal was a revolutionary army, but he made decided moves in that direction when he saw his nazi Reich directly threatened by invasion. On the other hand every move by Hitler--strong efforts to nazify the army, contempt for military tradition, creation of the Waffen-SS, establishment of para-military forces, and the institution of the NSFO--could signify his constant ideological adherence to Röhm's goals of 1934. Needing the support of professional generals, the Führer may have merely denounced Röhm's ideas to them while intending to move step by step toward achieving the dead SA Chief's fancies as the situation allowed. As his power grew steadily stronger against weakening but still significant resistance, he may have used each opportunity to move closer to an ideological goal, but he may also have been trying to simply increase his personal power and place the German nation more firmly in his grasp. Furthermore, by this time Himmler's power over much of the army, over the German people, and in his Waffen-SS had nearly reached its zenith. Thus, more party control over the army through the NSFO to balance off Himmler and Bormann fit neatly into the Hitlerian method. Seen in ideological context and as a part of an overall goal of a revolutionary army, the NSFO

presents a problem. But not knowing the true intent of the nazi Führer, these questions cannot be answered conclusively except to state that Hitler did make his moves at appropriate times and that they did fit into the nazi ideological pattern. They were definitely opportunistic in the midst of a desperate situation, but they did not necessarily oppose the so-called nazi ideology. In any event, the call to revolution continued, but as far as good nazis were concerned, the propaganda hardly helped.

During the evening of February 27, 1945, Lance Corporal Helmuth Vogel, 9th Panzer Division, appeared in Section IIW of the Party Chancellery to talk to Party Member Stosch. He told Stosch that his commander, Hauptmann Michelsen, had expressly ordered him to report to concerned offices in Berlin on his experiences and impressions regarding the western front. His commander held the view that reports through channels had no purpose since they did not arrive in the proper hands, and the troops often feared that Hitler did not really know what was going on. Therefore, Vogel had been commissioned to procure indoctrination material published by the Propaganda Ministry and at the same time take advantage of the situation by pouring out his heart directly to the P-K.

The political leadership of the troops, Vogel told Stosch, was still deficient. The unit commanders were willing and did their best to instruct the troops concerning current events, but they lacked guidance material, and

the NSFO so far had not been very noticeable. Vogel felt that superiors and staff officers often seriously hindered the NSFOs; their ranks were too weak and they needed stronger and fuller powers to offset this command and staff resistance. Here and there the Wehrmacht Report was posted, but most of them were pretty old. Newspapers and mail arrived after a three or four month delay, and soldiers received moderate amounts of news only through rumors, enemy broadcasts, and enemy propaganda leaflets. Vogel felt that there was not enough done to contradict or confront the destructive attempts of the enemy or various "Schweinehunde" (dirty dogs) soldiers who had no character. With a typical combat soldier's attitude toward troops in the rear, he thought most of the Schweinehunde were behind the lines.

The rear areas were especially shaky, Vogel said. Combat units wanted to fight even if they knew that the enemy had superiority, but they expected draconian measures against every shirker in the rear. Allegedly, staffs were too concerned with their own comfort and were thereby derelict in troop leadership. It was mainly in the rear areas, he claimed, where defeatist remarks were heard. Behind the front, Vogel claimed, soldiers ran around by the hundreds from one place to another and avoided doing their jobs all day long without any fear of punishment. Moreover, offices in the rear were over-manned. As an example, this combat soldier cited a newly organized

front-line company which only had an aggregate strength of 120 men while the supply company in the same organization had 180. The people in the rear often considered combat as none of their affair, he said, and their premature flight to the rear was the rule when enemy breakthroughs occurred. Vogel thought it was necessary to set up groups of enthusiastic nazis behind the front with powers of police intervention to control the rear area. At this point Stosch informed him that such units were already active in the east and as a precaution they were being established in the west. (This, of course, was in reference to Sondereinsatz.)

Vogel added that the common soldier often felt that his officers could no longer think clearly; this feeling had arisen because of the apparent lack of planning on their part and the chaos which resulted. As an example Vogel cited traffic plans--two parallel roads which were close together each had two way traffic, and the resulting congestion presented a field day for enemy fighter bombers. The establishment of one-way traffic, he said, could have improved the situation immeasurably. Further, entirely too many automobiles scurried here and yon behind the front, and the common soldier failed to understand why these cars could run around in abundance while a tank had to be blown up for lack of fuel. Obviously Vogel aimed most of these charges at the officer

corps, and he also reported on the officer-enlisted man relationship.

Although the soldiers at the front normally felt very close to their officers, Vogel said, the troops nevertheless believed that the officer corps still had forces at hand which sabotaged many things. The most often heard remark was that the "20th of July" had not yet been overcome. As one possible solution to this problem, Vogel recommended that convinced nazis, regardless of age or rank, must quickly assume important positions of leadership because the lack of confidence between troops and officers had resulted in a breakdown of the reporting and grievance system. The common soldiers, however, were resigned to the situation; they reported nothing and considered that anyone who did was stupid. Another possibility which common soldiers often posed was for Himmler to take over the army entirely; it would be the most reasonable solution, Vogel said. Despite these problems, however, he reported that the spirit of the combat troops was generally good. On the plus side, they had no fear of the Americans and of their material superiority. On the other hand, however, they were concerned over the air attacks on the homeland, and this distress over the welfare of their families burdened their fighting value. The troops also felt that replacements, many of whom had never even mastered the carbine, went into battle too soon. Thus, high

losses occurred.³⁹ Although Vogel's comments revealed a strong element of pessimism, they also contained traces of optimism. Most devoted nazis during this critical period shared these mixed emotions, and it was the trace of optimism which spurred the search for ideas.

Vain efforts to improve the NSFO program and stir the soldiers continued. As part of the effort to improve the status of the NSFO, Ruder informed Bormann on March 1, 1945, that he had induced the three service NSF Staffs to issue appropriate regulations requiring commanders to bring their NSFOs to political consultations and conferences.⁴⁰ That same month the Army Personnel Office finally directed that the Sub-office positions at regimental level would henceforth be Main office positions.⁴¹ These were certainly weak measures, but on March 14, one week after the Americans had breeched the Rhine at Remagen, at a time when the Russian army fought only forty miles from Berlin, and eight months after Hitler's demand for a separate NSFO reporting channel, the Führer finally published a watered down version of the Führer Order which Reinecke

³⁹BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 135, Aktenvermerk, Betrifft: Mündlicher Bericht des Gefreiten Helmuth Vogel, 9. Pz. Div, Feldpost nummer 19980A, March 2, 1945, IIW, signed: Stosch.

⁴⁰BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 140, Vorlage, March 1, 1945, IIF, signed: Ruder.

⁴¹NAM, T84, Roll 159, Frame 1525929.

had ensnarled in red tape by sending it to commanders-in-chief for comment.

The tone of Hitler's decree showed the desperate determination of the nazi leader, but it also revealed that perhaps his control of events had slipped. Proclaiming that tactical expertise no longer stood as the most important duty of troop leaders, Hitler made commanders directly responsible to him for "the political activation and fanaticization of the troops." Furthermore, he stressed that the NSFO shared this responsibility and ordered the NSFO to be the tactical assistant to the troop leader. This indeed opened new horizons for the NSFO-- up to this time he had only concerned himself with ideology and inducing a will to fight. In addition, Hitler struck a heavy blow at the traditional staff structure. With this one order he practically destroyed one of the traditional staff responsibilities since heretofore the Ia--not the NSFO--had advised his commander on tactical affairs. Hitler may have seen that it was too late for tactics; perhaps faith in ideology, or himself, could now save the Reich. Previously the Führer had declared that the nazi weltanschauung was as important as tactics, but he now pronounced it all important. Pure necessity now appeared to stimulate Hitler, but his order also showed the results of the confusion which Reinecke and Hengl had managed to give it. If any NSFO knew exactly what to do

on receipt of this order, he must have been clairvoyant. Hitler declared that "there is no special national socialist leadership channel of communication"; however, he also ordered the NSFO to forward a monthly written activity report to his own troop leader and to furnish copies to both the NSFO of the next higher headquarters and to the Chief of NSF/OKH. Thus, in defining the reporting system, Hitler in fact affirmed the existence of a special NSF channel while simultaneously denying it. Although the Führer claimed the NSFO still remained subordinate to the troop leader, he now announced that the NSFO shared equally in any ideological criticism leveled at the troop commander. At this late date Hitler himself admitted the lack of qualification of many NSFOs when he found it necessary to say again that only fighting, fanatical nazis could work successfully as NSFOs and since he directed the replacement of those who did not fill these conditions. This order showed that even the Führer of Germany either could not or would not convert the NSFO into a Politruk, but the party saw it as a step forward anyway.

Although Hitler's order caused confusion, at least some people in the P-K saw its potentialities. Party Member Derr told Party Member Herrmann that at least the order left open "the possibility" for an independent reporting system. The eventuality stood so near that Derr believed

the NSFO no longer had to take part in mixed commissions; if NSFOs still continued to attend the deliberations of these commissions, it would be only to ensure that grievances they had already reported would not be ignored.⁴²

By early March it appeared that mutual trust between the party leadership and the Wehrmacht had deteriorated because of party "gossip about sabotage and failures, etc." in the armed forces. General Reinecke sent a proposed regulation to the P-K work staff which was intended to fortify party-Wehrmacht trust in each other. Both Friedrichs and Ruder thought that Reinecke's wording was too negative, but they conceded that a joint regulation, signed by Bormann and Keitel, might improve party-armed forces relations.⁴³ Whether the joint regulation ever saw the light of day is unknown to the author, but within this atmosphere of mistrust ideas continued to pour forth.

Goebbel's representative on the P-K work staff, Dr. Rügheimer, thought of a new way to use the NSFO. On March 17 he recommended to First Lieutenant Noack, also working in the P-K, that division NSFOs might get soldiers who were condemned to face a firing squad to volunteer for

⁴²BAK, Sammlung Schumacher 367, Vermerk für Pg. Herrmann, III STK, Betrifft: Überprüfung der Wehrmacht, Waffen-SS und Polizei; Beteiligung der NSFO an den gemischten Kommissionen, March 26, 1945, IIF, signed: Ruder.

⁴³Ibid., Vorlage, March 7, 1945, IIF, signed: Dotzler.

suicide units. Referring to death sentences for desertion, cowardice, and pillage, he said men were shot without their deaths meaning anything. He believed that some of these men might be allowed to salvage their honor, but not their lives. Relatives of executed traitors usually received no welfare payments, and sometimes, "within limits," they were subject to the extremes of family responsibility for the traitorous deed. The division NSFO should talk to such men, Rügheimer urged, and pointing out these facts, he should try to discover whether a condemned man had a "good heart." Nordic men were destined to be doers of violence, he said, but a good heart was often present, and only through lack of discipline could it be "blocked up." In view of this metaphysical nonsense, Rügheimer philosophied that at least to some extent the tenderhearted and the milk sops could be led back to what remained of their "manly attitude" if they were at all susceptible to values and ethical demands. The NSFO could try to call forth positive expressions from the past lives of these condemned men and could suggest that they volunteer for "Self-sacrifice Units" (Selbstaufopferungs-Einheiten). The NSFO could make it very clear that each man so honored would serve his family through a last respectable deed and that he could thus secure for himself a creditable memory.⁴⁴ Again, the further

⁴⁴BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 135, Dr. Rügheimer, Der Beauftragte von Reichsleiter Dr. Goebbels im Arbeitsstab

history of this suggestion is unknown to the author, but not all ideas during this period were like Rügheimer's. The files of the P-K, dating from February 1945, actually bulge with the many criticisms of the lack of spirit, discipline, and the will to fight of the German soldiers as well as remedies recorded in reports to the P-K from both soldiers and officials of the party.⁴⁵ There is little doubt that these reports were an indication of what was brewing in the P-K at that time.

für NS-Führungsoffiziere, to Oberleutnant Noack, Partei-Kanzlei, Betrifft: Feldpostbrief, March 17, 1945, with enclosure: Aktennotiz from Rügheimer to Pg. Krämer, Betrifft: Einsatz von zum Tode verurteilten Soldaten.

⁴⁵See the other documents in BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 135.

CHAPTER XI

TOWARD A PARTY TAKEOVER

Reinecke Discredited

An April 4, 1945, note from Party Member Bürgel to Party Member Walkenhorst revealed either the confusion which existed within party circles or else affirmed that Bormann normally kept his own counsel; portions of the note reflected rumor, but some of it was true. Bürgel stated that Party Member Plumb had informed him that a planned takeover of the NSF program by the Party Chancellery could not succeed because of strong "counter currents" in the Führer's headquarters. Willy Ruder, he said, had told him about the planned change, and he pleaded with Walkenhorst to try to resume the broken-off negotiations with Bormann because of the emotional status of the troops. He believed that soldiers, if correctly addressed, would readily give their lives, but if they knew their commanders were politically unreliable or inadequate, they would not sacrifice themselves. He said he had observed the work of NSFOS at every level and noted that it unnerved him when he saw how little authority and

means the political officers had to do their jobs. It had shocked him to observe that an NSFO of a field army had to wait in an anteroom to see his commander on even the most minor things. If an entirely different method for activating political work in the Wehrmacht could not be found, Bürgel expected only the most meager results for the future. There had never been a better time than the present, he said, to introduce fanatical nazis into the armed forces with full powers to capture the troops from all opposition and to "produce fighters again." He stressed that nazification of the troops should become stronger as the burden at the front became greater. Daily examples existed, Bürgel wrote, where qualified men modestly assumed leadership and achieved what others thought impossible. As an example of the effects of stirring words, he cited the case of Kreisleiter (County Leader) Schulte who had addressed five hundred civilians on Easter Sunday; as a result of the "rousing words," all five hundred voluntarily joined the Freikorps Adolf Hitler (a volunteer unit of the Volkssturm). The correctly spoken word at the right moment, he said, could arouse the weakest man. In closing, Bürgel urged Walkenhorst to tell Bormann about the thoughts in his letter and to take every measure to subordinate the NSF Staff to the party since only the party could decisively carry on NSF work.¹

¹Waldemar Besson, "Zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialistischen Führungs Offiziers (NSFO)," Vierteljahrshefte

Bürgel had many of the facts right, but he also had an erroneous view of the course of events. The actual story is confusing and complicated even in the minds of the participants. To fully understand what really happened, an insight into Bormann's state of mind is helpful. On January 28, 1945, he wrote his wife that he was disturbed over the signs of disintegration of the eastern front.² On February 4 he complained about the material superiority of the Soviet forces against which even the strongest resistance was powerless.³ And on February 18 he admitted to a feeling of desperation because the German soldiers no longer held their ground against the enemy as they could and should.⁴ These remarks to his wife picture a man who felt a frustrating combination of desperation and hope, along with the determination to win. This was a man dealing with a situation which he hoped to

für Zeitgeschichte, doc. no. 15 (January 1961), pp. 115-16. Walter Goerlitz in History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1953), p. 493, claimed that in the final days of the war, Hitler decided to replace the NSFO by a new organization under Bormann as "the triumph of ideology rising out of the ruins of the Army." He further claimed that on March 15, 1945, Hitler dissolved the NSF organization and created the new party organization. Neither Bürgel nor Goerlitz knew the real story.

²H. R. Trevor-Roper, ed., The Bormann Letters. The Private Correspondence Between Martin Bormann and His Wife from January 1943 to April 1945, trans. R. H. Stevens (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1954), p. 163.

³Ibid., p. 170.

⁴Ibid., p. 184.

be able to change in spite of all the odds but who would resign himself to helplessness when he saw that the game was indeed over. Here is the way it happened.

On February 16, 1945 Ruder wrote a long memorandum to Bormann. He reported that the NSF Staff of the Wehrmacht had done nothing since the beginning of the Soviet offensive to take measures to activate the troops and to raise their resolution and morale. He believed that Reinecke's staff thought only of getting out of Berlin (to Weimar) and that it was making preparations to do just that; instead they should work up a political and tactical plan in which NSF would hold a central place. Ruder placed the fault squarely on General Reinecke; because he lacked experience in the last war and because he was too inflexible, the NSF work had "not grown." Reinecke had not met with the Führer, he told Bormann, since August 1944, and he simply could not understand how a man responsible for the political activation of the troops could do his job without speaking to Hitler for months on end. Furthermore, since taking over the job, the general had "not one single time" called the chiefs of the service NSF Staffs together to speak to them about their duties, nor had he supervised the uniformity of the work of the three services as required by Hitler's order of December 22, 1943. Because of Reinecke's failures, Ruder felt it was time to deal a "final blow" to the NSF Staff/OKW and its chief. In solving

the problem, however, a decision had to be made concerning who would replace Reinecke and what changes would be necessary to improve the situation. He saw several possibilities.

Himmler could take over as Chief of the NSF Staff of the Armed Forces. One advantage to this solution, Ruder thought, would be that a well-known nazi personality would stand at the pinnacle of the NSF system. The SS Chief already commanded the Replacement Army and the Volksgrenadier divisions (the Volkssturm) whose numbers grew daily; thus he already had an ideological influence over an important part of the army. Also, his personality was strong enough to "guarantee" uniformity of political training in the Wehrmacht even in the face of navy and air force opposition. Ruder also saw a disadvantage. If perchance the Reichsführer SS should delegate these duties to an SS Obergruppenführer, Berger for instance, the NSF work might deteriorate instead of improve. The Chief of the P-K work staff had little use for the manner in which ideological training in the SS was conducted; he thought that if the armed forces handled NSFO work like it was done in the Waffen-SS's VI Sections (Section VI in Waffen-SS units was the SS equivalent of the NSFO section in the armed forces), the influence of the NSFO would decrease. Even if "the entire force of the party and the experiences of the Wehrmacht in political leadership were exploited,

undoubtedly the work would be set back." He had observed many Waffen-SS leaders, Ruder declared, who did not show any great understanding for the political leadership of troops, and often they had no appreciation for the situation in the Wehrmacht. If Himmler should become chief of the NSF Staff of the Armed Forces, he would have to act in his capacity as a party leader rather than as SS Chief and work in close cooperation with the Leader of the P-K. Further, if Himmler wanted to delegate the duties, Bormann should have a veto over the appointment of any of Himmler's assistants. In any event, the P-K would have to assign a liaison man to the SS Chief. Almost as an afterthought, Ruder listed one other advantage to this solution. Himmler had ordered a great number of "technical measures" in the SS unit "Kurt Eggers" which, when joined with the NSFO system, might prove advantageous. (He failed to specify the measures.)

Ruder saw the second possible choice as a revolutionary one which would have to have a "positive foundation." In this solution, the Führer could charge Bormann himself with the supervision of the political activation of the Wehrmacht, and the P-K Chief could then exercise his power through an amenable general. This solution had a special advantage, he theorized, in that the party would "finally" have a direct hand in the political training of the armed forces. The front man would be duty-bound to

follow Bormann's instructions in order to ensure the party's control, and the big NSF Staff in OKW could disappear. Ruder recommended General von Hauenschild for the job. Hauenschild had shown special qualifications for political training and leadership tasks as an armored troops commander in combat and wore many high decorations; also he was sufficiently well-known to assert himself in the job. Ruder failed to specify an obvious disadvantage to this solution. The Wehrmacht as well as high party leaders, such as Himmler, feared such a solution; Hauenschild, under the recommended conditions, would have appeared as nothing more than a super Politruk. It is no wonder that Ruder termed it a revolutionary solution. The third solution was even more revolutionary, yet Ruder did not label it such and gave it the least space of any of his recommendations. Maybe this was why Bormann liked it.

The third solution was simple--the NSF Staff would be axed, and Bormann himself would issue orders directly to the three service NSF Staffs. Ruder preferred this alternative "to retaining the [existing system] since the NSF Staff in its present make-up only burdens the NS Leadership work." In order to eliminate discussion over basic questions between the Wehrmacht Leadership Staff and the three services, Bormann could offer suggestions directly to Hitler for decision, and then the Führer could issue

his orders directly to the three service NS Leadership Staffs. Now Hitler was to be Bormann's front man!

The next solution was simply to fire Reinecke, but Ruder could not think of any suitable general to replace him. He preferred Hengl by far over Reinecke; Hengl was a good man, well thought of by NSFOs, and he worked well with the party. But he was not politically oriented. Hauenschild also cooperated with the party, but even he would assign a definite limit to the NSFO's activities. It seems that even those generals who cooperated best with the party placed a limit on party influence in the military realm.

Of the several solutions Ruder recommended the second--the so-called revolutionary one--since it provided the basis for the greatest party influence. In the event Bormann did not care for this suggestion, then his second choice was the appointment of Himmler, provided the continuing influence of the P-K was guaranteed.⁵ The next day Ruder talked to Bormann about the recommendations. Bormann told him that Reinecke could no longer retain his present job, and Hitler refused to give Himmler any more additional duties. Hauenschild was out--he was needed for the defense of Berlin--so the P-K had to formulate a plan and discuss the idea of direct contact

⁵BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 140, Vorlage, Betrifft: NS-Führungsstab der Wehrmacht, February 16, 1945, IIF, signed: Ruder.

between the P-K and the service NSF Staffs with General Burgdorf of the Army Personnel Office. The P-K Leader approved the concept of strengthening and improving the status of the NSF0, and this too should be discussed with Burgdorf. In any event, Bormann declared that he did not intend to renounce political power in favor of the Wehrmacht.⁶ This left only two possible solutions; Bormann would take over himself, or he would find a new general. Considering Ruder's ideas on the latter solution, the former loomed as the most probable. How to do it was another problem. Ruder put his staff to work, and on February 20, he submitted his ideas to Bormann.

Again Ruder blamed the Chief of NSF of the Wehrmacht for everything and declared that Reinecke's unclear instructions had in great measure hindered the uniform structure of the three services. The armed forces needed a shake-up, Ruder said, to include the establishment of clearer authority. At the same time, the party's methods in dealing with the military had to change. In the past the P-K had made only suggestions or requests. This was not good enough for Ruder; the party had to have a deciding influence and should instruct the armed forces on matters of political leadership and training. In questions of basic politics, the party had to retain the

⁶BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 144, Aktenvermerk, Betrifft: Vortrag bei Reichsleiter Bormann (am 17.2 [handwritten]), February 19, 1945, signed: Ruder.

right of decision. It seemed also that the days of denouncing the NSF Staff of OKH were over, and it was now OKW's turn to receive the P-K's ire. Ruder, who had strongly criticized members of the NSF Staff/OKH in the past, now believed that the army had gone much further in its NSF work than either the navy or the air force. The reason for this, he said, was because the army's NSF Chief answered directly to Hitler, and he suggested the same arrangement for the other two services so Bormann could give orders and instructions to all the service NSF Chiefs in the name of the Führer. To help Bormann, Ruder recommended the establishment of a new NSF Staff of the Wehrmacht directly under the Leader of the Party Chancellery. In such an event, Keitel would have to act as the prime mover in dismantling the present staff in OKW since he would have to decide what should be done with the General Armed Forces Office, a part of the NSF Staff. It should remain as part of OKW, and Ruder suggested that Reinecke's Domestic Section (Amtsgruppe Inland) should again fall under its jurisdiction. In the event that Bormann approved of his suggestions, Ruder enclosed a draft Führer Order which incorporated his ideas on the new staff and its relationship with the three NSF service staffs.

Ruder's first draft of a Führer Order would have:

- a) placed the Chiefs of the service NSF Staffs directly

under Hitler who would personally give orders on political-ideological leadership and training; b) empowered Bormann, after consultation with the Commanders-in-chief of each service, to issue instructions and orders for "political activation and the building of an NS will" to the Chiefs of the NS Leadership Staffs; c) authorized Bormann to establish his own NSF Staff to carry out these measures; and d) directed Bormann to issue regulations to carry out the program.⁷

The next day Ruder became confused. Several versions of draft Führer Orders were circulating, and Hitler had approved one of them, at least in concept. On February 21 Ruder forwarded a draft order to General Burgdorf which he stated was the last concept known to him; he asked the general to let him know what changes had been made to it and which final draft the Führer had approved.⁸ Within two days Burgdorf clarified things; the Army Personnel Chief concurred in the draft originally proposed

⁷BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 140, Vorlage, Betrifft: Nationalsozialistische Führung in der Wehrmacht, February 20, 1945, IIF, signed: Ruder, with enclosure: Entwurf eines Führerbefehls. This document is also in NS6 vorl. 144. Another loose draft followed the document in NS6 vorl. 144 of the P-K records. It left out the words "after consultation with the Commanders-in-Chief," and it stated that the P-K Leader would utilize the NSF Staff of OKW. A question mark which looked like it was made by Ruder's pen and in his handwriting followed the latter statement. One can surmise, therefore, that Ruder was not too sure of how the takeover should be done.

⁸BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 144, Ruder to Burgdorf, February 21, 1945.

by Ruder and approved by Bormann. Now the work staff chief recommended that Bormann and Burgdorf should meet with Dönitz and Göring to clear up the part about the status of the navy and air force Commanders-in-Chief. Ruder thought that the concurrence by the service leaders for the NSF Chiefs to report directly to Hitler only involved "a vote of confidence between party and Wehrmacht." Then came some more clarification. Burgdorf had given Ruder the draft of an entirely different Führer Order which concerned an entirely different idea regarding the political activation and status of NSFOs. Its original source was not explained, but this was the one which had been presented to Hitler and approved by him. Himmler had also concurred, but it could not be published, Burgdorf pronounced, because General Reinecke had not participated in the meeting in which the decision was reached. The wording of this order, Ruder told Bormann, was designed so as not to make the NSFO appear as a commissar, and the full responsibility of the commander remained fully preserved, even for political leadership. However, this order contained points which Bormann had previously wanted: the NSFO would "participate" in pronouncing judgment on the suitability of individuals for their jobs, and he would have a direct line to the NSF Staff of his service; also each soldier would have the right to report grievances to the NSFO if he found "no appreciation" from his unit leader.

Ruder asked Bormann to approve of this new NSFO Führer Order and at his next meeting with Hitler to obtain a decision on the originally proposed order for the dissolution of Reinecke's staff. Burgdorf had already informed Keitel of the proposal, he reported.⁹ At this point a slight divergence from the P-K is necessary in an attempt to track down both the seed and the harvest of the elusive NSFO Führer Order.

A possible source for the order was the Unreconstructed Nazi referred to in Chapter IX. He claimed that once in 1944 he spoke before an audience of some 100 high officers of different branches of the armed services, SS and police officials, and diplomats on the need for various sectors of the government and the military to work closely together so as not to hinder each other from reaching a common goal. Because of its import, at the end of the year his commander directed him to deliver the same speech to the NSF Staff of OKH. On that occasion he held a conversation with a highly decorated colonel in which he declared that, because of the dire war situation, the NSFO should be granted powers to remove unfit individuals of all ranks from their jobs. He claimed that the colonel reported this to General Reinecke who in turn relayed the

⁹Ibid., Vorlage, Betrifft: Entwurf eines Führerbefehls, February 23, 1945 (IIF-Ru/Tp. 82/459), signed: Ruder. Ruder's memorandum to Bormann stated that copies of both Führer Orders were enclosed, but the allegedly approved NSFO order was not present in the P-K files.

statement to Hitler. After two days, Reinecke allegedly returned and told him that Hitler wanted no commissars in the German armed forces--each German officer had to be his own Politruk. But some four weeks later, he maintained, the Führer approved his proposal.

On being questioned by this author, the former NSFO admitted that he had never actually seen the order as such, but that he had heard of its approval. Another former army officer who definitely disagreed with many of the Unreconstructed Nazi's views, especially those about his present devotion to the nazi memory, was present at the interview; he explained that such situations frequently happened. Published orders, he said, often failed to reach the troops; they were either lost in the chaotic communications situation, or anti-nazi staff officers ensured that the troops would never receive them. The former NSFO stated that he himself had on one occasion asked for the removal of a company commander, and that the request was granted. Upon questioning, however, he admitted that this occurred before the publication of the alleged order. He also cited NSFO friends of his who had done similar things based on the elusive order. Of course, there could have been a lapse of memory on the part of the former NSFO after twenty-eight years. It could have been his interpretation of the confusing order of Hitler's concerning the establishment of a quasi-official NSFO reporting

channel, or it could have concerned Super NSFOs on "special assignment" (Sondereinsatz). Perhaps he had heard a rumor that NSFOs might receive special powers and, believing he had originated the idea, had taken it as fact. Or else the elusive order may have been only for his area of the war. In any event, he was convinced the order was factual. When told about Hitler's order in late 1944 which directed that the NSFO henceforth shared responsibility with the unit commander for political leadership, he disclaimed any awareness of it. He also denied knowledge of Hitler's order in March 1945 that the NSFO must be the tactical assistant of the unit commander; however, he believed that such orders could easily have been given since it was in character of the times and of Hitler. "I did not hear of it myself; it may be that the order did not get to my office." Concerning these orders, he also stated that Hitler and Himmler were certainly obeyed "in most cases," but that toward the end of the war they were not obeyed so much any more since morale diminished with the continuance of the conflict.¹⁰ If the story of the Unreconstructed Nazi is true, he may indeed have been the seed, or one of them, for the elusive NSFO Führer Order which may have been sabotaged, lost in the communication

¹⁰Major of Reserves P, a.D., Letters, February 14, 1973 and March 28, 1973, and interview April 18, 1973. The former NSFO also disclaimed knowledge of Hitler's infamous Commissar Order for the invasion of Russia.

chaos, or carefully removed from all records. The most likely answer, however, is that it was a combination of sabotage and chaotic conditions which caused the order to slip through the cracks of the crumbling nazi structure. In this chaotic situation one wonders why the dictator failed to knock heads together, but Hitler's own condition toward the end must receive consideration in connection with his failure to assert himself during this latter period.

The Führer's Condition

The physical and emotional condition of Hitler during the first half of 1945 leaves some doubt as to his ability to control himself, let alone the events around him. On January 16, 1945, the Führer returned to Berlin where he spent most of his time in a bunker fifty feet beneath the Reich Chancellery building--a place in which he finally committed suicide. His physical condition was deteriorating. In February his head wobbled, his left arm was practically useless and his hand trembled considerably; he gave the appearance of a senile and completely exhausted man.¹¹ On February 13 the Supreme Commander got into a

¹¹William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. 1109. The description of Hitler was given by Captain Gerhardt Boldt who saw Hitler in February for the first time. Cited from Gerhardt Boldt, In The Shelter with Hitler (London: n.p., 1948), chap. 1. See also Alan Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny, Harper

fierce two-hour argument with Guderian over the situation on the Russian front, and the Army Chief of Staff described how the Führer lost complete control of himself.¹² In early April the Führer and Goebbels resorted to horoscopes to determine the hour of German victory; one was of Hitler drawn up on the day he became Chancellor, and the other concerned the Weimar Republic. Both forecasts of the future predicted temporary German successes in late April and peace in August.¹³ On April 22 Hitler blew up at the daily military conference, and all surviving witnesses testified that he again lost complete control of himself, screaming that this was the end--it was all over; he would stay in Berlin and meet his fate.¹⁴ That night Keitel and Jodl were questioning whether the soldiers would fight for Göring if the air force leader should take over direction of the Reich. Hitler, showing a remarkable sense of realism, questioned the word "fight" and admitted that little

Torchbooks, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 767.

¹²Ibid., p. 1103. Cited from General Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader (New York: n.p., 1952), p. 343. See also Bullock, Hitler, p. 773.

¹³Ibid., p. 1109. Cited from Count Lutz Schwerin von Krosigk, Es geschah in Deutschland (Tübingen: n.p., 1951), n.p. See also Bullock, Hitler, pp. 780-81.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 1113. The author stated the conference took place on April 20 but provided no source. Bullock, in Hitler, p. 783, maintained that this conference took place on April 22 and cited as his source Karl Koller, Die Letzte Monat (Mannheim: n.p., 1949), p. 31, diary entry of April 23.

of it remained for Germany.¹⁵ At the time, Himmler thought the Führer was finished; the SS Chief claimed that Hitler, alternating between long silences and rage, blamed everyone for deceiving him.¹⁶

On the other hand, Albert Speer claimed that Hitler's authority in the party itself had waned as early as September 1944. The Führer's closest associates, such as Bormann and Goebbels, allegedly ignored his authority or simply violated his directions whenever they chose to do so. The context of Speer's statement was in relation to the nation's economy, but if the Führer could be so uninterested in such a basic factor of making war, there is a strong probability that a similar situation existed in other areas as well.¹⁷ In the last few weeks of the war, Speer noted that the courtesy toward Hitler had slipped noticeably. Previously, everyone had risen when the Führer entered a room, and they remained standing until the Nazi chief had sat down. Now they hardly paid him any attention at all. They continued talking, often loudly and with no

¹⁵Ibid., p. 1114. Cited from U.S., Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, 8 vols. and 2 supps. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), supp. B, pp. 1275-79. See also Bullock, Hitler, p. 784.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 1114. Cited from H. R. Trevor-Roper, The Last Days of Hitler (New York: n.p., 1947), pp. 124, 126-27.

¹⁷Albert Speer, Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Avon Books, 1971), p. 507.

inhibitions; they did not stand, and those under the influence of alcohol fell asleep in their chairs in the presence of the august one.¹⁸

All accounts of Hitler's last days show his physical and mental state while living in the unhealthy atmosphere of his bunker and tell how he lost complete control of events, gave orders to non-existent armies, and how former followers flagrantly disobeyed or deserted him. These few examples show that he probably lost the ability to make rational decisions and that he had resigned himself to total defeat. In fact Speer maintained that the Führer's emotional make-up began to change with the totally unexpected disaster at Stalingrad and that he withdrew within himself. As disasters continued, he lived more and more in a dream world, and without a doubt, Speer claimed, mental disintegration took place in the nazi leader from 1942 to the end. Speer attributed some of this deterioration to Dr. Theodor Morell who injected vitamins, hormones, minerals, and various matter taken from animals, plants, and human excretions into Hitler's body. Historians too numerous to mention have also commented on Morell's quack injections. Speer saw Hitler on April 22, 1945, and remembered him as a walking dead man,¹⁹

¹⁸Ibid., p. 597.

¹⁹"Playboy Interview: Albert Speer," Playboy, June 1971, pp. 96, 168, 190, and 198.

and the Führer's secretary reported that as early as the Supreme Leader's return to Berlin in January his conversations became entirely self-centered.²⁰ Considering the mass of evidence, Hitler at this time may not have cared whether or not the NSFO should ever become a Politruk, or he may have considered the question as only a minor detail of form. In fact he may not have thought about it at all. Many eyewitnesses to the last weeks of Hitler's life have testified to his despair, and his suicide reflected the ultimate manifestation of human despondency. Such a mind could not have made a rational decision concerning any disagreement between the military and the party over the fate of the NSFO except in periods of lucidity, which some witnesses claimed he had. Whether he was able to make a coherent decision concerning the proposed Führer Order during this period can only be a matter of conjecture since the evidence is lacking. At least Bormann would not have dared to take over the NSFO Staff even at that late date without Hitler's blessing. During this period (beginning March 19) Hitler believed that the German people fully deserved their fate,²¹ and he may not have cared one way or the other about

²⁰Bullock, Hitler, p. 776. Cited from A. Zoller, Hitler Privat (Düsseldorf: n.p., 1949), pp. 230-31.

²¹Ibid., pp. 774-75. Cited from Speer's evidence at Nuremberg: The Trial of German Major War Criminals. Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal Sitting at Nuremberg, 22 parts (London: H.M.S.O., 1946-50), part XVII, p. 35.

the NSFO. In the struggle for power, however, neither Himmler nor Bormann won. The former fell into lethargy when Hitler appointed Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz as his successor, thus bypassing the SS Chief who had attempted to surrender German armies in the west to the British and Americans, and Bormann supposedly died in Berlin while on his way to join the newly appointed Führer. The game was obviously over, and at this late date it made no difference whether the NSFO was a Politruk or if he even existed at all. Nevertheless, the nazis still believed in their final victory, and they conducted business as usual right up to the end.

What's the Use?

Unaware of efforts by the P-K to abolish the NSF Staff of the armed forces, some nazis continued to offer suggestions on how to use the NSFO system under OKW's leadership to somehow win the war. One of these was a Dr. Metzner who served as a civilian official in northern Italy. On February 28, 1945, he wrote Party Member Koch complaining about the status of the NSFOs. Metzner, who said he had a high opinion of the NSF work, had observed that NSFOs, even old party members and active and energetic men, could not always make headway against their superiors. One reason was that they, as young officers (lieutenant or at the most major), were always in a subordinate position and that they had to respect their superiors who were

colonels and generals. Many of these older gentlemen were either reactionaries or else they belonged in retirement, he said, and this was why the NSFOS could not make any direct headway. He concluded that it was probably a mistake when NSFOS were placed under a military superior. Metzner thought it might be better to create an independent organization of NSFOS responsible only to OKW while avoiding calling them "Commissars." He suggested that perhaps "Peoples' Deputies" (Volksbevollmächtigter) or something similar might be a more appropriate title. The name was less important to Metzner than the fact that the organization would function directly under Hitler (specifically OKW) and act independently of all other service offices. He commented further that the new organization was not needed so much in the frontline where the soldiers were splendid as in the communication zone behind the front. Finally he asked Koch to present the idea to his superiors.²² Meanwhile, the proposed Führer Order which would have allowed Bormann to establish his own NSF Staff was encountering difficulties.

On the surface, however, the problems appeared minor. By March 4 General von Hengl knew about the proposed Führer Order, and he concurred. He only asked for it to be toned down somewhat so that Bormann would be

²²BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 135, Ministerialrat Dr. Metzner M.V.--Abteilungschef Mil. Verw. Gruppe Verona--to Parteigenosse Koch, February 28, 1945.

authorized to issue Anordnungen instead of Befehle. (Both words mean "orders," but the former is considered somewhat weaker than the latter.) The next day Ruder pointed out to Bormann that the proposed Führer Order contained nothing about the dissolution of Reinecke's staff, but he did not think it advisable to mention this in the order since those "on the outside" might get the impression that the entire NSF program had been axed. Further, because of the attitudes of some commanders and even Commanders-in-Chief, such an interpretation might have to be faced if the dissolution was mentioned. If Hitler approved the order, Ruder reasoned, Keitel could then work out an internal OKW order to disestablish the NSF Staff and especially to order some of its members to duty in the P-K. He therefore pressed Bormann for an early decision to abolish Reinecke's staff since it constantly hampered the NSF work.²³

By March 10, the order appeared to be running into a few more difficulties, so Ruder recommended some changes. He suggested that the navy and air force NSF Chiefs should remain under their Commanders-in-Chief. If the party retained influence in other points, this concession would not be too important. The offsetting factor was that the NSF work in all three services would have to result in full

²³BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 144, Vorlage, Betrifft: Entwurf eines Führerbefehls, March 5, 1945, IIF, signed: Ruder.

conformity with the principles handed down by the party leadership. Ruder did not believe that Admiral Dönitz, for example, would object to these two changes since he was ready to acknowledge the subordination of the service Commanders-in-Chief to the party, at least in principle.²⁴ These changes seemed to put Ruder at ease because two days later, he told one of his co-workers, Party Member Walkenhorst, that Bormann and General Burgdorf would present the proposed Führer Order to Hitler within the next few days. Confidently, he asked Walkenhorst for his support in obtaining Major Hess, Lieutenant Ihlert, and Party Members Griesmayr and Noack for the new P-K NSFO staff.²⁵ To Ruder, the little skirmish appeared over.

Walter Goerlitz, in his study of the German General Staff, claimed that on March 15, 1945, the NSFO organization was dissolved and that its reconstitution was entrusted to Bormann.²⁶ However, Goerlitz was mistaken and Ruder's confidence was misplaced. On that day the Führer Order was still in draft form. On March 14 Keitel had met with Bormann in the Reich Chancellery where they had decided to lift the lid of secrecy somewhat and finally notify Reinecke of the impending dissolution of his staff

²⁴Ibid., Vorlage, March 10, 1945, IIF, signed: Ruder.

²⁵Ibid., Ruder to Walkenhorst, March 12, 1945.

²⁶Goerlitz, German General Staff, p. 493.

and his position as chief of that staff. On March 16 Keitel notified Bormann that he had told Reinecke who already knew about it; Ruder had informed him. The Field Marshal said that Reinecke was too good a nazi to see the loss of his position as anything but a necessity arising from circumstances and added that Reinecke was ready to talk to Bormann about arranging for the transfer of his officers to the P-K. Keitel, unlike Ruder and Bormann, belatedly rallied to Reinecke's side; he said the general's tireless efforts were responsible for the "present efficiency" of the NSF program. Then Keitel, perhaps because of Hitler's deteriorating condition, demonstrated a newly found independence; he announced that he would retain a small NSF Staff in OKW and requested that Bormann keep this staff informed of all his direct dealings with the service chiefs.²⁷

Within a few days Bormann's frustration began to show, and Ruder, who was still over-confident, was the direct recipient of the party boss's wrath. On March 19 Ruder had written a memorandum to Bormann recommending new concepts of a minor nature and asking for his boss's approval of the transfer of certain individuals to positions in the proposed new NSF Staff in the P-K; he proposed that: a) Major Hess, who had been an NSFO under

²⁷BAK, Partei-Kanzlei, NS6 vorl. 144, Keitel to Bormann, March 16, 1945.

Model, Harpe, and Schörner, head Section 1 (Political Leadership); b) First Lieutenant Ihlert, an SS Standartenführer and a member of Reinecke's staff, should be Chief of Section 2 (Personnel and Organization); c) Section 3 (Schooling) should be directed by Oberbannführer Griesmayr; d) Oberbannführer Noack, already representing the Propaganda Leadership on the work staff, should head Section 4 (Propaganda); and e) the Commandant of the NSFO School at Döberitz, Colonel Weller, should hold the responsibility for Section 5 (Teaching Staff). On the 20th Bormann scathed Ruder in the margins of the memorandum. Next to Ruder's proposed changes to the Führer Order, he wrote, "I wait 8 days, I again receive a corrected draft," and "Dreadful and dreadful ineptitude--psychologically stupid wording!" Concerning the personnel recommendations, he scribbled "Wagnerian music!! Have you spoken to General Reinecke??" and "I refuse--I said it already simply enough --to handle these kinds of questions as long as the order is not signed!"²⁸ Bormann was clearly agitated.

Reinecke, however, was currying favor. On the 19th Ruder had also belatedly informed his boss that he had talked to Reinecke a few days previously. Reinecke, he reported, asked him to tell Bormann that he had seen the

²⁸Ibid., Vorlage, Betrifft: Führerbefehl über Bildung eines NS-Führungsstabes beim Leiter der Partei-Kanzlei, March 19, 1945, IIF, signed: Ruder, with Bormann's marginal comments.

development coming and that he thought it was absolutely correct. The general hoped that the P-K Leader's attitude toward him had not changed because of all this, and as the future Chief of the General Armed Forces Office he would need Bormann's acceptance. Accordingly he wanted to talk to the Leader of the P-K, but meanwhile he assured Bormann that he would not stand in the way of the reorganization and that he would support it fully. Concerning Keitel's intent to retain his own NSF Staff, Reinecke said that he had advised the Field Marshal against it. Reinecke stood ready to disestablish his own staff and arrange for Bormann to take over some of his officers.²⁹

If Reinecke was cowed, Hengl was not, and it appeared that the army's NSF Chief was beginning to play the same game he had played with the proposed Führer Order for an independent NSFO reporting channel. On March 20 Hengl, backed by Burgdorf, attacked the latest proposed Führer Order. He said it was superfluous in places and was liable to cause confusion. However, he offered no concrete recommendations and did not submit a new version. He also added that General Burgdorf agreed with his point of view.³⁰ The staff action involving this Führer Order had now been going

²⁹Ibid., Vorlage, Betrifft: Auflösung des NS-Führungsstabes der Wehrmacht. Rücksprache mit General Reinecke, March 19, 1945, IIF, signed: Ruder.

³⁰Ibid., Vorschlag zum Entwurf Führer Befehl, March 20, 1945, signed: von Hengl, with handwritten comments.

on for over a month. Burgdorf had appeared as a strong supporter at first, but now, under Hengl's influence, he seemed to be retreating. Perhaps both were playing a double game which involved apparent cooperation and covert sabotage. We could now probably add anger to Bormann's list of problems, and to increase the P-K Leader's difficulties, Alfred Rosenberg re-entered the fray after a long silence.

On March 23 Rosenberg sent Bormann a telegram charging that the P-K had been discussing questions of ideological schooling and training as part of its NSFO work. As "Deputy of the Führer for the Safeguarding of the National Socialist Weltanschauung," he requested that Bormann's Staff Chief brief him before any definite conclusions were reached so as to prevent double work. Adding that a purely ideological piece of literature published by the NSF Staff of OKW, "The Völkisch Ideal," had not been submitted to him for comment, he asked Bormann to instruct his subordinates to clear materials of definite ideological content with him.³¹ Five days later Rosenberg conversed with Bormann about another subject, but in the course of the conversation he again expressed displeasure over "The Völkisch Ideal" which was written by Griesmayr. He intimated that Griesmayr, because of his deficient article,

³¹Ibid., Telegram, Rosenberg to Bormann, FS 2056, March 23, 1945.

should not be a member of the planned new staff in the P-K; Rosenberg, of course, wanted to put one of his own men there. Apparently, he no longer mentioned that he wished to be kept informed of events as to prevent double work, and one could suspect the telegram was a cover for a different purpose; he wanted an inside man on Bormann's new staff and Bormann saw right through it.³²

Meanwhile, developments proved the duplicity of Reinecke. While making overtures to Bormann, he actually felt strongly embittered because Keitel had shown the Führer Order to him in "final form" without having previously informed him about what was developing. Pässe told Friedrichs that he thought it had all been handled poorly. After Reinecke's many years of working with the P-K, this affair could have at least been handled more openly with Reinecke; as a minimum he could have been informed. Friedrichs, of course, passed this on to Ruder, one of the principals in the affair.³³ By now then, there was a rift growing in OKW between Keitel and Reinecke; members of the P-K were criticizing each other (and indirectly Bormann himself); but leading figures in OKH (Hengl and Burgdorf) had drawn together with the apparent goal of sabotaging the Führer Order.

³²Ibid., Aktenvermerk Für Pg. Ruder, Betrifft: NSFO, March 28, 1945, signed: Bormann.

³³Ibid., Vermerk für Pg. Ruder, March 26, 1945, IIP, signed: Friedrichs.

On March 29, 1945, the army's attack began. Major Hess of Reinecke's staff informed the P-K that Colonel Kaether of the army's NSF Staff had called OKW at 4:30 P.M. It seems that the air force had transmitted the Führer Order to its field units without comment, and Kaether asked that the order should not be published at this time without implementing regulations. It is unclear from this whether the air force had made a horrendous mistake, Hitler had signed the order, or whether sabotage was involved. Nevertheless, Kaether reported that General Ritter von Hengl proposed a conference of the three service NSF Chiefs to be held within the next few days under Ruder's chairmanship.³⁴ From all evidence it seems that Hengl had struck again! The proposed conference would further delay the staff process, and if he got together with his navy and air force counterparts, he could conceivably delay things a little longer and perhaps convert them to his way of thinking. Preparing and coordinating the necessary regulations would also cause considerable delay, and asking Ruder to chair a tri-service conference would automatically increase Reinecke's bitter attitude toward the party

³⁴Ibid., Vorlage (sent telephonically by Hess), Betrifft: NS-Führung der Wehrmacht.. Führerbefehl vom 13.3.45. Auflösung des NS-Führungsstabes beim OKW. (The date of 13.3.45 [March 13, 1945] cannot be construed as the date the order was published because as late as March 20, Hengl had attacked the draft order. There were so many versions of the proposed order that dates were assigned to keep them straight.)

--a factor which would certainly not help the speedy processing of the Führer Order; also it would further undercut OKW and increase the authority and status of OKH. With the end of the war in sight, just a little delay could mean that even in defeat the honor of the officer corps might be salvaged. All of this is conjecture, of course, but it fits neatly with General Albert Praun's comment in Chapter X that his good friend Hengl "took care of it." Additional justification for this theory was offered by Major Hess.

Hess said that as long as the planned Führer Order remained unissued, General Reinecke did not feel that he was the proper person to publish any implementing regulations since only the P-K appeared to be competent now in this sphere. Moreover, Hess believed that an "interregnum" now existed because Reinecke's authority had been subverted, and the P-K, since Hitler had not signed the order, did not yet have the authority to issue regulations for NSF work. This situation had to be righted soon, Hess said, since the three NSF Staffs remained without guidance, but he agreed that regulations were needed to explain properly the authority of the Leader of the P-K since the Führer Order was too vague on the subject. It did not even suffice as a skeletal order for establishing uniformity in the three services, he added. Hess proposed that Ruder chair the conference as suggested by Hengl on the following Sunday evening so that it would not be necessary to

ask General Reinecke to get back into the NSFO business. He added that the publication of the order was a pressing issue. Obviously, Hess was either an innocent tool of Hengl's or else he was involved in the delaying action, and Bormann's comments on the margin of this report, dated March 29, are highly significant.

In fact, Bormann's comments meant the end of the attempt to replace the NSF Staff of the Wehrmacht with a P-K NSF Staff. The party chief wrote: "I request that General von Hengl leave this order alone." As for the recommended conference, he wrote: "This meeting will not take place." Next to Hess's comment that an order could not go out without implementing regulations, he telegraphically noted:

Therefore, leave it alone! In the present situation--tanks at Korbach/Hessen, at the Bavarian border, Raab front broken through in Upper Silesia, heaviest fighting and deep penetrations. It would be nonsense if we change our organization and talk about it would no longer get to the troops who are everywhere on the move! To give orders which cannot get to the troops at this time is useless!³⁵

This effectively killed the whole issue. Bormann's frustration and pragmatism, buttressed by resignation, overrode his hope and determination. His was a "What's the Use?" attitude. Hengl's latest delaying effort was not even necessary because Bormann and the allies saved what remained of the tarnished honor of the officer corps! On

³⁵Ibid.

April 2, 1945, Bormann wrote his wife about the despair which gripped everyone and said that no one saw any sense in further resistance.³⁶ Some people, however, could not quit yet. Lieutenant Colonel Ihkert of Reinecke's staff wanted to talk to Bormann about his boss who had given up and "now did nothing whatsoever."³⁷ This was not exactly true; Reinecke did do something.

On April 9 Reinecke, still the Chief of the NSF Staff of the Armed Forces, told the Wehrmacht NSFOs that the fateful hour had come. They could now forget instructions from higher headquarters and the "paper war"; only deeds were now important, and anyone who could walk and shoot had to fight. Finally, he placed the fate of Germany in the hands of the NSFOs,³⁸ but the prevention of party domination of the army in the final days of the war, except for posterity, represented a final but useless victory of tradition over nazism.

In December 1938 General Fritsch, with complete resignation, had told Hassell that Hitler was Germany's destiny for good or evil, and that if he fell into the abyss, he would drag everyone else down with him.³⁹ In

³⁶Trevor-Roper, Bormann Letters, p. 197.

³⁷BAK, Sammlung Schumacher 367, Vorlage, Betrifft: NS-Führung in Heer, Luftwaffe und Marine, April 10, 1945, II, signed: Walkenhorst.

³⁸NAM, T77, Roll 783, Frame 5511297.

³⁹Hassell, Diaries, p. 23, entry of December 18, 1938.

the spring of 1945 Hitler and the German army did go into the abyss together, but the army which disappeared did so without a nazi Politruk at the helm. Prussian/German military traditionalism won the fight, but it was useless. Nazism died quickly, and the German army, led by its commanders, marched into the allied prisoner of war cages. A few short years later, the German military tradition would live again--but without nazism. In May 1945 the German army ceased to exist and the allies assumed responsibility for the Prisoners of War and for Germany.

CHAPTER XII

EPILOGUE

Prisoners of War

Even before the German defeat, the U.S. Army conducted surveys based on Prisoner of War interrogations and questionnaires. These studies confirmed many of the thoughts party members had of soldier morale, defeatist thinking, and the effect of the NSFOs on the troops. At the same time, however, they showed that the nazis were often dead wrong.

A statistical opinion poll, based mainly on systematic analysis of front line interrogations of POWs and later detailed psychological interviews in rear areas, was cross-checked against captured enemy documents, reports of secret agents, recaptured allied military personnel, and observations of front line combat observers. This poll showed conclusions which tend to support present-day witnesses on the NSFO. For example, until March 1945, a majority of the prisoners held strong loyalties to Hitler personally, and the German soldier generally remained steadfast in combat. It was not until the failure of the Ardennes Offensive in late 1944 that the psychological

reserves of the German army became exhausted. Still, no large-scale surrenders took place until February and March 1945. Shortly after the Normandy invasion in June 1944 by Anglo-American forces, the allies fixed hardcore fanatical nazis--those who believed wholeheartedly in nazi ideals--at only 10 to 15 per cent. This rate subsequently proved accurate. Even when soldiers despaired of ultimate victory, resistance continued at least partly because of trust in Hitler rather than a fanatical belief in the nazi party. Faith in secret weapons only captured a minority.¹ Another interesting factor was that defeatism was more widespread at higher levels than at lower.² These findings confirm those of present-day witnesses.

Another study also determined that desertion and surrender by individuals or groups remained insignificant in the west until the very end when no other choice remained. The authors of the study believed that this fact was caused, not by nazi convictions, but rather because of the demands of the social organization of the army. When this organization met the soldier's primary social needs, little disintegration occurred. When the primary

¹M. I. Gurfein and Morris Janowitz, "Trends in Wehrmacht Morale," in Propaganda in War and Crisis: Materials for American Policy, ed. Daniel Lerner (New York: George W. Stewart, Publisher, Inc., 1951), pp. 200-206.

²Richard H. S. Crossman and others, "Standing Directive for Psychological Warfare Against Members of the German Armed Forces. June 1944," Propaganda in War and Crisis, p. 247.

social group held together, allied propaganda largely failed, but when communications broke down, leaders were lost, personnel were depleted, and serious breakdowns of the food supply and medical care occurred, last ditch resistance crumbled. Deserters were mainly those who could not adjust to the primary group. This was more important than any political dissidence, and most deserters were "Volkdeutsche" (Austrians, Sudeten Germans, etc.), Poles and Russians in the German army, or men who had shown anti-social behavior in civilian life or had criminal records. The conclusions showed that German soldiers had little inclination for politics or strategy. Most of the deterioration took place in hastily formed units--thirty-five men from one battalion who were interrogated came originally from fifteen different units! Further, most defeatist talk among soldiers arose from fear for the welfare of families, not politics. One soldier told his interrogator that since the allies had occupied his hometown, he no longer had any reason to fight. This also showed that the centuries-old trend toward particularism had not died in Germany. Many men stayed loyal because of "honor," and they eagerly accepted domination by their officers. Suppression of their superego allowed the primary group to function, and the traditional military code had a considerable impact on their thinking.

According to the study, much depended on the personality of the leader, and pep talks and indoctrination

counted for little. The leader was a father figure--both a model to emulate and a protector; in the eyes of the soldiers he was supposed to be all-powerful and benevolent. Despite nazi efforts at social leveling, the soldiers hardly ever commented on the differences in privileges between officers and men. As for the influence of officers above the company level, they were just too remote to play any significant role on the attitude of the common soldier. Except for the small hard-core, most of the soldiers had little interest in the nazi political system. They were apathetic toward the NSFOs or thought them a joke. However, even those who denounced nazism had something good to say about Hitler. They attributed his errors to dishonest advisors who kept the truth from him. Older men who had lived through the inflation and depression of the Weimar period praised Hitler for providing gainful employment while those between twenty and thirty-five praised him for his strength and masculinity. Younger men tended more toward fanaticism and saw Hitler as a father figure who restrained their dangerous impulses. Most of the soldiers claimed that they either slept through NSFO indoctrination periods or paid little attention.³ These findings confirm many of the statements by present-day witnesses as well as views of several party officials during

³Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht," Propaganda in War and Crisis, pp. 365-404.

the war, and there can be hardly any doubt that ultimately nazism fought a losing battle against military traditionalism. As Field Marshal Erich von Manstein wrote of the German soldiers in his book, Lost Victories, ". . . the tradition of self-denial and comradeship could withstand the hardest of tests,"⁴ and "The German fighting troops, convinced of their superiority as soldiers, stood their ground in the most desperate situations, and their courage and self-sacrifice did much to compensate for the enemy's numerical superiority."⁵ Because of the Prussian/German military tradition, the NSFO never became an outright party commissar empowered to dictate or veto the military actions taken by commanders.

⁴Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, Lost Victories, trans. Anthony G. Powell (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1958), p. 357.

⁵Ibid., p. 441. Since Field Marshal Erich von Lewinski gen. von Manstein died in June 1973, his son, Rüdiger von Manstein, graciously permitted this author to quote from his father's excellent book.

CHAPTER XIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The German officer corps showed a duality in its thoughts on nazism. Willing to support the nazi state and commit the Reichswehr to the nazi cause, the army's leaders did not want nazism to dominate their traditional preserve. They held Prussian traditions higher than nazi principles, yet army custom encouraged political and spiritual indoctrination in order to increase the military effectiveness of the soldiers. Still the army prided itself on political noninvolvement and considered itself the rock upon which the state was built. Before 1914 honor stood as the highest principle for officers, but during World War I obedience became even more important. During the Weimar period Seeckt turned obedience into the highest principle of the Reichswehr, and the aristocratic-thinking officer corps even more so than before was thoroughly nonpolitical. Before the national socialists came to power, however, the nazis had already made considerable inroads into the ranks of the officer corps because Hitler offered the officers

the lure of nationalism, a powerful army, and a return to German greatness.

When Hitler became Chancellor, he held an advantage over the nonpolitical and obedient officers. By allowing the army to continue to consider itself as the pillar of the state and in return for subduing the lawless elements of the party through the SA purge, the Chancellor had a good chance of retaining the officers' continued support. When Hitler assumed supreme power and army members swore a personal oath to him, the Führer benefited from two of the highest traditions of the officer corps--unconditional obedience bound by an officer's honor through the sacred oath. Hitler realized the army's power, so he bided his time while allowing the officers' duality of thought to further the cause of nazism as much as possible. Thus both sides compromised, and divisions within the officer corps worked to Hitler's advantage. The generals believed they held more power than the party, and, therefore, many thought the army could remain immune from undue nazi penetration. However, admirers of the Führer helped the nazis, and others allowed sufficient nazification to promote esprit de corps or to show Hitler that the army supported the nazi state. Thus, while Hitler expanded the armed forces, passed out promotions, tore off the "shackles of Versailles," and refrained from interfering in military affairs, nazification moved onward. When checked, the

party halted, but when resistance faded, it advanced. Hitler told his friends during the war that he had always intended to avoid conflict with the army until he had permeated it with nazism and said that his purge of the SA masked his revolutionary plans for Germany. He lulled the generals into thinking the reign of the party had ceased after the SA purge while expansion of the army began to change the political and social composition of the junior officer and enlisted ranks, members of which, unlike many of the generals, identified themselves more closely with nazism. The generals, meanwhile, underestimated Hitler and the party until 1938 when they abruptly discovered their lack of real power.

In 1938 Hitler began the subjugation of the officer corps while his prestige soared in Germany. He sacked the Defense Minister and the Commander-in-Chief of the Army on flimsy pretexts, personally assumed command of the Wehrmacht, and purged top-ranking officers. His diplomatic victories and the doubts of some generals concerning the reliability of the troops checked their plans for revolt, and his knack for diplomatic success and military conquest in spite of their advice made them look ridiculous even in their own eyes. As a result the new Commander-in-Chief could now intimidate the army's leaders, and he no longer hesitated to cast aspersions on their traditions. It appeared that control of the armed forces, under Hitler's

direction of course, could go to either Himmler or the Party Chancellery. In fact it began to gravitate to both. The Waffen-SS began to expand and the party penetrated deeper into the army.

The invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 opened new opportunities for the SS and the party with equivalent loss of influence and prestige for the army. While the SS got the best of German youth, the army became implicated in SS criminal action. Hitler declared nazi ideology all important in the struggle with the communist-dominated Soviet army, and traditional theories and ideals began to fall by the wayside while some members of the officer corps continued to plot against the Führer. Hitler, counting on obedience, took full, personal responsibility for violations of international rules of warfare; because of the barbaric methods employed in the U.S.S.R., the Prussian chivalry, honor, and morality of the German army was undermined. However, obedience reached a new high. When the army in Russia began to meet reverses, Hitler blamed the generals, assumed personal command of the German army, and established a new nazi method of command. The possession of nazi spirit now became essential for commanders.

In 1942 the army established the Wehrgeistige Führung program, and Hitler purged generals who failed to satisfy him in combat. In February 1943 the Soviet army annihilated the German 6th Army at Stalingrad, and other

disasters in North Africa and Sicily quickly followed. Bombs fell in increasing numbers on Germany while the SS carried on its grisly business of human roundups, incarceration, and extermination. In an atmosphere of fear and defeat, the Betreuung Offizier of the Wehrgeistige Führung program became important both for improving morale and for nazifying the army. However, resistance to nazification continued in spite of the work of B.O.s and nazi fanatics like General Schörner who established the concept of uniting tradition and nazism. The nazi enthusiasts used this theory in an attempt to win over those who resisted nazification, but Hitler, influenced by the SS, party, and the army's own example, saw a need for greatly strengthening nazi ideology in the Wehrmacht and personally ordered the institution of NSFOS.

Hitler instituted the NSF system in December 1943 in order to make every soldier a nazi and to develop a will to victory by means of political indoctrination by the NSFOS. The Führer established a special staff structure to handle the program and placed supposed nazi generals in charge. The party and Bormann received an inordinately large share in the development and control of the NSF system, but the responsibility for nazification of the army remained in the hands of the commander. Bormann held final authority on what went to Hitler for decision concerning NSF, but the military insisted that the NSFOS would not become a

Politrुक. The commander, who had the total responsibility, used the NSFO as his political advisor and as a nazi propagandist. Resistance, confusion, and sabotage marked the program until the end of the war, and regardless of directives on prerequisites, selection, position, and duties of NSFOs, Hitler and the hierarchy repeatedly had to call for the replacement of unsuitable NSFOs and frequently had to redefine their position and duties. The armed forces with party help set up schools to train NSFOs, and great propaganda efforts took place to win over the officer corps to the support of NSF. The propaganda attempted to show that historically nazism grew out of the Prussian tradition and that the German officer, therefore, combined in himself the best of the past and the present. However, these efforts largely failed, and party members either fumed and complained or expected the death sentence or the passage of time to stop the army's resistance. While the nazi bureaucrats showed their wariness of and frustrations at the army's resistance to party domination, they expected the NSFO to break through it. Having contempt for the military traditions, party members nevertheless cooperated with the Wehrmacht at all levels since they expected the NSFO to bring the army into line.

After an abortive coup by disgruntled officers on July 20, 1944, which included the attempted assassination of Hitler, the NSF concept began to change. NSF/OKW

believed the last resistance to the NSF program had ceased with the July 20th aftermath, but this staff would end its days discredited. Hitler himself made most of the changes, but Bormann always stood in the background. The Führer established a confused special channel for NSF work which went beyond the sphere of the immediate commander, and he instructed those troop leaders who believed they could no longer lead as the Führer expected to find an individual of any rank who believed himself capable and to appoint him troop leader. The NSF system summoned the army to wage a nazi revolution against the Soviet revolutionaries. Hitler even appointed the NSFO as the tactical assistant of the commander, placed ideology above tactical considerations, and made the NSFO co-responsible with the commander for the ideological battle. However, these actions made little difference. In the last days of the war when the party attempted to take one last giant step toward controlling the NSF program, army leaders, in an atmosphere of confusion and recrimination, managed to scuttle the attempt. Surprisingly, it was Bormann who finally called off the political battle against the officer corps, and the army of the Third Reich surrendered under commanders who retained their traditional authority.

Conclusions

The permeation of the German army with nazism progressed steadily from 1933 to 1945. Assisted by the duality

of thinking within the officer corps, the custom of indoctrination of soldiers, the desire for spirited soldiers, and obedience to Hitler bound by oath, the party had little difficulty in beginning its infiltration of the army. As the Führer outmaneuvered the generals and gained in prestige, he increasingly subjugated the army to his will as many of the generals vacillated or withdrew into the background. Some supported him wholeheartedly; some accepted their fate with resignation; others bogged down into indecision; but many resisted in either active or passive ways. Most officers, even when they were nazi supporters or NSFOs, believed in traditional military concepts. Even when the reason for resistance meant only the desire to prevent interference in the military sphere by the unprofessional party politicians, opposition to nazism found its *raison d'être* in upholding traditional Prussian/German military methods and ideals. Thus the struggle always signified one of tradition versus nazi ideology, or the military versus the party rather than the officer corps necessarily against Hitler. Within this context the military hierarchy compromised to the extent it had to, and used the concept of spiritual leadership to improve morale and the will to fight. The NSFO represented such a compromise, and he was touted as exemplifying the merger of tradition and nazism and was expected to win over the officer corps to the nazi cause. However, this largely failed because the response

from the officer corps was a double procedure--an official program and an unofficial one. The corps paid lip service to the official line while many commanders went their own way--ignoring the NSF system, appointing political officers who thought as they did or who would do as they were told, or in some cases sabotaging the program. Meanwhile, the majority of the soldiers were simply not interested. Mostly apathy marked their response even when they approved of Hitler or nazism in principle. Thus a lack of unified support for the NSFO ensured his lack of success. Ultimately, the soldiers' loyalties were to Hitler himself as Chief of State and Supreme War Lord and to tradition.

All the moves toward subjugation and nazification of the army, whether by Hitler or the party, were made opportunistically or as drives for personal power, but they were within the hazy ideological concepts preached by the nazis. Prior to Stalingrad these moves were designed to win over the last bastion of resistance to the nazi state--a force which could if it wished put a quick halt to nazism; after Stalingrad these moves, to include the establishment of the NSFO, were desperate attempts to win the war. Having encountered disasters to German arms, Hitler needed something to put a fighting spirit back into his soldiers. Terming the war with the Soviet Union an ideological fight to the finish, Hitler found the use of Soviet methods appropriate, but even he could not force a

Politruk down the throats of members of the officer corps. He created a pale imitation of the Politruk, and mollified the officer corps by allowing the commander to remain supreme. Then he used the NSFO to peddle nazism thereby attempting to forge an army determined to follow his own will for the sake of defending the homeland from the ideological enemy. Hitler capitalized on this by allowing the NSFO to stand as the great merger of tradition and nazism--the union of the old and the new in an ideological war--but this failed owing to the resistance of the traditionalists. The nazi hierarchy pitifully overestimated its abilities to capture the minds and hearts of millions in the armed forces and grossly underestimated the talents of alleged nazi generals and officers in frustrating its designs. Even party members frequently showed an aversion toward upsetting age-old traditions, and the worst of them, Heinrich Himmler, showed a certain reluctance to the establishment of Politruk methods. When the final choice came to tradition or nazism, the officer corps and even some high nazis opted for the former, even if it was too late. At this point some conjecture can be added. The nazis blamed the collapse of the home front for the defeat in 1918, and the comment by the nazi (Major Schönwalder, Chapter X) who said that this time the war would be lost by the officer corps at the front showed that had not nazism been thoroughly discredited, a new "stab in the back" legend might have been fostered for

"another go" at it later. In fact such a legend does exist. Several former officers have told this author that one of the reasons for defeat was that portions of the officer corps betrayed their country by defeatism, sabotage, and the "20th of July." This attitude suggests that if only the officer corps had put its faith in Hitler and had cooperated with the NSFO, things might have been different. It also demonstrated that the NSFO program indeed enjoyed some scattered successes and perhaps considerable support, to a point, but overall the NSFO was a grandiose failure. The odds against his success were against him from the beginning.

The NSFO, of course, could have been a Politruk from the beginning. However, the Reich in December of 1943 did not yet seem, to Hitler at least, to be verging on total defeat, and the Führer may have seen such a step as unnecessary. A drastic measure flaunting all German military tradition might have alienated even those generals who wholeheartedly supported him as it seemed to do in February and March 1945. In the midst of a world war, Hitler needed his professional officers more than ever, and he would certainly not push the army into opposition by one extraordinary act which would have even violated his own Führer Prinzip. The army still retained the power to topple him if it had the courage and the will to do so as some members of the officer corps demonstrated in the

near-successful coup seven months later. Full powers for the NSFO would also have given Bormann excessive power which could have endangered Hitler's own position, but retention of the traditional supremacy of the commander with a toe-hold on him by the party neatly balanced army, party, a growing SS, and Göring's military formations. From the army's viewpoint, the NSFO represented no immediate or great danger as long as the commander retained full control, but to the party, led by Bormann, the political officer signified an important step toward party domination of the German army. When the status of the commander or traditional staff concepts finally became endangered, army leaders belatedly managed to undermine the party's efforts.

After July 20, 1944, Hitler believed he had smashed the army's resistance, and under the pressure of events--attack on the Reich itself and the possibility of defeat--he gave more power to the NSFO, increased Himmler's authority, and created para-military formations under the dual control of Himmler and Bormann. These opportunistic acts fitted neatly into the power juggling exercise and signified further nazification of the army during a period of lessening, but not disappearing, resistance from the proponents of tradition, and Hitler assumedly retained control of events until near the end.

When the party made its final move to gain full powers for itself (or Bormann) and thus accomplish its

desired sway over the army, Hitler was fast losing control of events because his emotional condition had begun to remove him from the position of supreme arbiter. In the chaos of Germany in March and April of 1945, "counter currents" in OKH, confusion everywhere, and Bormann himself then gave the coup de grâce to the planned party takeover. The basis of the nazi philosophy--emotion--finally lost to tradition and pragmatism. Tradition won a useless victory. The only consolation the German military traditionalists may have had was in witnessing the death of nazism and the later rebirth of a German army free of the nazi party and tied to much of the old tradition.

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- March 14 "Marxism and Bolshevism"
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1/LT Ellenbeck
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P.M. Gohdes
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- March 18 "The Piratical State--the U.S.A.,
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- "England the enemy of Europe"
P.M. Pfeffer
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 P.M. Kundt

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 P.M. Gross

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Note: "P.M." stands for Party Member.

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