The Imperial German Army Between Kaiser and King

Monarchy, Nation-Building, and War, 1866–1918

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For Tracy, my love, and Naomi, our little one

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October 2022 Toronto

Contents

About the Author

Gavin Wiens is a historian of modern Germany and war and society. He completed his PhD at the University of Toronto in 2019 and has taught courses on the history of modern Europe, modern Germany, and the Holocaust at the University of Toronto, York University, and Toronto Metropolitan (formerly Ryerson) University. His research interests include the intersection of politics and military affairs in imperial Germany (1871–1918), national and religious minorities in European armies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the link between monarchical authority and military power up to the end of the First World War. He has contributed essays to journals and edited volumes on a range of topics related to the German army, and has been awarded grants and fellowships from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC); the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD); the Central European History Society; the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC; and the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto.

Abbreviations

Abt.	Abteilung
BA MA	Bundesarchiv, Abteilung Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau
BayG	Bayerische Gesandtschaft
BayHStA	Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich
FO	Foreign Office
GLA	Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Generallandesarchiv, Karlsruhe
GStA PK	Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin-Dahlem
HA	Hauptabteilung
HG	Heeresgruppe
HStA S	Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Hauptstaatsarchiv, Stuttgart
KA	Kriegsarchiv
MA	Ministerium des Königlichen Hauses und des Äußern
MdA	Ministerium der auswärtigen Angelegenheiten
MilBev	Militärbevollmächtigter
MKr	Kriegsministerium
NA CP	National Archives, College Park
ÖStA HHStA	Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna
PA	Politisches Archiv
PA AA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin
R	Reichsbehörde
RG	Record Group
SHStA	Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, Hauptstaatsarchiv, Dresden
TNA	The National Archives, Kew

List of Figures

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In the summer of 1876, the United States representative in Berlin, John Chandler Bancroft Davis, provided an overview of the organization of the German Empire's armed forces for the State Department in Washington, DC. The German army, he explained, was actually made up of contingents drawn from the empire's federal states. These states could be divided roughly into three groups: those that had fully integrated their armies with that of Prussia, Germany's largest state and the driving force behind unification in 1871; those that had negotiated special treaties with Prussia that gave their leaders certain, though largely ceremonial, military rights; and those that had "assumed an independent position" within Germany's military structure. It was clear to Davis that Prussia stood at the centre of this structure and that "a similarity of ideas and a common esprit de corps" had developed throughout the entire army since the end of the Franco-Prussian War some five years earlier. He was still quick to add: "[A]lthough the constitution places the force, when erected, under the command of the King of Prussia as Emperor of Germany, his control over [each]

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contingent varies."[1] Insights like these would come in handy four decades later. In May 1918, Allied aircraft dropped thousands of leaflets over trenches in the Champagne region of northeastern France held by soldiers from the South German kingdom of Bavaria. As the empire's second-largest state, Bavaria fell squarely into the third group outlined in Davis' report, with its contingent having enjoyed almost complete autonomy within the German army since unification. With this in mind, and aware that enormous casualties at the front and food shortages at home had heightened tensions between northern and southern Germany, the Allied leaflets called on Bavarians to turn their backs on their Prussian comrades and thereby hasten an end to the First World War.[2]

Readers, especially Anglo-American ones, can be forgiven for suffering from a little confusion so soon after opening this book. Was it not true, they might ask, that the Prussian Minister-President Otto von Bismarck—better known as the "iron chancellor"—founded a unified nation-state following three short wars against Germany's neighbours between 1864 and 1871? Why then would the German emperor, or Kaiser, not have had control over the entire German army? What would have led Allied leaders to believe that soldiers from one region of the German Empire would abandon their comrades from another region, even at the end of a lost war? Surely, it was the armies of the British empire on the other side of no man's land with their myriad of peoples that were hamstrung by contrasting viewpoints and long-standing animosities, not their stolid German adversaries. Indeed, the popular understanding of the imperial German army, or *Reichsheer*, differs greatly from the one depicted by Bancroft Davis in the summer of 1876 and taken advantage of by the Allies in the spring of 1918. This army more frequently conjures up images of monocle-wearing aristocratic Prussian officers with upturned moustaches who might have stepped out of the pages of the satirical magazine *Simplicissimus* or of common soldiers in spiked helmets who, like the young Paul Bäumer in Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, had been

[1] Bancroft Davis to the U.S. State Department, August 5, 1876, NA CP, RG 59, vol. 16. See also Bancroft Davis' report to the U.S. State Department from April 30, 1877, NA CP, RG 59, vol. 21.

[2] Report of the Bavarian military plenipotentiary at General Headquarters, May 14, 1918, BayHStA, Abt. IV KA, MKr 1832/1.

taught from the time they were schoolboys that it was glorious to die in the service of Kaiser and Fatherland.

Historians have worked hard to correct this simplistic view of the imperial German army. Research has shown that the army was an institution caught between tradition and modernity. To be sure, aristocratic values shaped attitudes and behaviours in the officer corps, even as the sons of middle-class bankers, doctors, and lawyers entered regimental messes in greater and greater numbers during the nineteenth century.[3] New weapons systems, most notably the machine-gun and quick-firing artillery, at the same time sparked heated debates over the most effective use of increased firepower, the merits of close-order assault columns, and the viability of a tactical doctrine based on envelopment.[4] Moreover, and in the view of Stig Förster, two competing strains of militarism shaped the German army's force structure in the decades before the First World War: while the

[3] The literature on the imperial German army's officer corps is extensive. See Steven E. Clemente, *For King and Kaiser! The Making of the Prussian Army Officer, 1860–1914* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992); Karl Demeter, *The German Officer Corps in Society and State, 1650–1945* (New York: Praeger, 1965); the essays in Hanns Hubert Hofmann, ed., *Das deutsche Offizierkorps 1860–1960* (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Bolt, 1980); Martin Kitchen, *The German Officer Corps, 1890–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Ulrich Trumpener, "*Junkers* and Others: The Rise of Commoners in the Prussian Army, 1871–1914," *Canadian Journal of History* 14 (1979): 29–48. For the adoption of aristocratic values, especially paternalism, by junior officers during the First World War, see Alexander Watson, "Junior Officership in the German Army during the Great War, 1914–1918," *War in History* 14 (2007): 429–53.

[4] Eric Dorn Brose, *The Kaiser's Army: The Politics of Military Technology in Germany during the Machine Age, 1870–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Antulio J. Echevarria II, *After Clausewitz: German Military Thinkers Before the Great War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000); Daniel J. Hughes, "Schlichting, Schlieffen, and the Prussian Theory of War in 1914," *The Journal of Military History* 59 (1995): 257–78; Steven D. Jackman, "Shoulder to Shoulder: Close Control and 'Old Prussian Drill' in German Offensive Infantry Tactics, 1871–1914," *The Journal of Military History* 68 (2004): 73–104; Bernd F. Schulte, *Die deutsche Armee 1900–1914. Zwischen Beharren und Verändern* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1977); Dennis E. Showalter, "Army and Society in Imperial Germany: The Pains of Modernization," *Journal of Contemporary History* 18 (1983): 583–618. Focusing on the period of the First World War, Dennis Showalter has also concluded that the imperial German army's greatest asset was its ability to improvise in response to changing circumstances on the battlefield. Dennis Showalter, *Instrument of War: The German Army, 1914–18* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2016).

conservative officers in the Prussian war ministry placed an emphasis on improving levels of training and integrating new equipment and technology, the General Staff demanded large-scale increases to the standing army as a means of narrowing the numerical gap between Germany and its likely opponents in a future war.[5] Scholars have meanwhile made it clear that not all German soldiers were motivated by a sense of patriotism and civic duty. There were some, like the Poles of Prussia's easternmost provinces, the French speakers from Alsace-Lorraine, and the Danes of northern Schleswig, who had little affection for either the Kaiser or the empire, with the presence of these men in the ranks in turn convincing senior generals that discriminatory measures were necessary to ensure military cohesion on the battlefield.[6] Some historians have gone one step further and explored the divisions that existed between ethnic German soldiers. The army, they point out, was organized much like Bancroft Davis outlined in 1876: unlike the imperial German navy, command of which rested with the Kaiser throughout the entire history of the German Empire, the army consisted of contingents that were raised in, and administered by, the individual

[5] Stig Förster, *Der doppelte Militarismus. Die deutsche Heeresrüstungspolitik zwischen Status-Quo-Sicherung und Aggression 1890–1913* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1985); Stig Förster, "Ein militarisiertes Land? Zur gesellschaftlichen Stellung des Militärs im Deutschen Kaiserreich," in *Das deutsche Kaiserreich 1890–1914*, ed. Bernd Heidenreich and Sönke Neitzel (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2011), 157–74. By contrast, Oliver Stein argues that political considerations had a greater impact on the army's force structure before 1914. See Oliver Stein, *Die deutsche Heeresrüstungspolitik 1890–1914. Das Militär und der Primat der Politik* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2007); Oliver Stein, "Das Kriegsministerium und der Ausbau des deutschen Heeres 1871–1914," in *Das ist Militärgeschichte! Probleme – Projekte – Perspektiven*, ed. Christian Th. Müller and Matthias Rogg (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2013), 48–62.

[6] For example, see Claus Bundgård Christensen, "Fighting for the Kaiser: The Danish minority in the German army, 1914–18," in *Scandinavia in the First World War: Studies in the War Experience of the Northern Neutrals*, ed. Claes Ahlund (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2012), 267–82; Alan Kramer, "*Wackes* at war: Alsace-Lorraine and the failure of German national mobilization, 1914–1918," in *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, ed. John Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 105–21; Alexander Watson, "Fighting for Another Fatherland: The Polish Minority in the German Army, 1914–1918," *English Historical Review* 126 (2011): 1137–66.

states, ensuring that Prussians, Bavarians, and others served alongside, but only rarely with, men from other parts of the empire.[7]

This book builds upon this last group of studies, taking as its starting point that the imperial German army was not only a diverse institution characterized by competing views and loyalties, but also a collection of state-based contingents. Yet, rather than exploring, as has been done previously, the influence of Prussia over this peculiar military structure, the independence of one or another of its contingents, or the relations between the soldiers of these contingents in wartime, it takes a view of the German army that is broader both chronologically and thematically. The picture that emerges is far more complex than that in the popular imagination or even in the existing literature. Between 1866 and 1871, Bismarck oversaw the creation of what can best be described as a system of military federalism. German unification had only been possible by making significant concessions, including in the sphere of military affairs, to the kingdoms of Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg. Soldiers from these three states—the second, third, and fourth largest in the empire, respectively—thereafter served in locally based units, while their clothing, feeding, housing, arming, and training remained the responsibility of independent war ministries in Munich, Dresden, and Stuttgart. The power to command these men, often referred to as *Kommandogewalt*, was likewise divided up among Germany's leading monarchs. The imperial constitution of 1871 and the military agreements that had been negotiated with the smaller German states during unification placed wartime command of the entire army in the hands of

[7] Curiously, much of this research has taken the form of doctoral dissertations. See Frederick Francis Campbell, "The Bavarian Army, 1870–1918: The Constitutional and Structural Relations with the Prussian Military Establishment" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1972); Tony Cowan, "A Picture of German Unity? Federal Contingents in the German Army, 1916–1917," in *The Greater War: Other Combatants and Other Fronts, 1914–1918*, ed. Jonathan Krause (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 141–60; Jan Hoffmann, "Die sächsische Armee im Deutschen Reich 1871 bis 1918" (PhD diss., Technische Universität Dresden, 2007); Harald Rüddenklau, "Studien zur Bayerischen Militärpolitik 1871 bis 1914" (PhD diss., Universität Regensburg, 1972); Friedrich-Christian Stahl, "Preußische Armee und Reichsheer 1871–1914," in *Zur Problematik "Preußen und das Reich,"* ed. Oswald Hauser (Cologne: Böhlau, 1984), 181–245; Robert Thomas Walker, "Prusso-Württembergian Military Relations in the German Empire, 1870–1918" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1974). On the imperial German navy, see the classic study by Holger H. Herwig, *"Luxury Fleet": The Imperial German Navy, 1888–1918* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980). The Kaiser's authority over the navy was laid out in Article 53 of the imperial constitution of 1871, which is printed in Ernst Rudolf Huber, ed., *Dokumente zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte*, vol. 2, *Deutsche Verfassungsdokumente 1851–1900* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1986), 396.

the Kaiser, who was simultaneously the King of Prussia. In peacetime, however, the Kings of Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg continued to appoint, promote, or dismiss their own officers, transfer their own regiments from one garrison to another, and determine if and how their own soldiers would be punished. Bancroft Davis was therefore right on the money when he wrote that the emergence of "a similarity of ideas and a common esprit de corps" within the imperial German army was only part of the story. This institution was also defined by a tension between Kaiser and King, and this tension would remain one of its hallmarks until Germany's collapse at the end of the First World War.

In making these arguments, this book contributes in three ways to our understanding of the imperial German army and the German Empire (Fig. 1.1) more broadly. First, it re-examines the role of the Kaiser in military decision-making. The heads of the House of Hohenzollern, who wore the crowns of both Prussia and unified Germany between 1871 and 1918, were the very definition of "military monarchs." They considered themselves to be the commanders-in-chief of the armed forces and, in the decades after unification, they took advantage of the limited powers of the Reichstag (imperial parliament) to shield matters of command, such as personnel decisions and military justice, from civilian oversight.[8] Perhaps no Hohenzollern ruler was more committed to preserving the army's position as a "state within a state" than Kaiser Wilhelm II. The last German emperor almost always appeared in public in glittering military uniforms, and he surrounded himself with an entourage consisting of army and navy officers.[9] When Germany went to war in August 1914, Wilhelm II hastened to accompany his army to the battlefield. Yet he played only a marginal role in decision-making during the First World War, becoming in the view of many historians a mere "shadow emperor," especially after the

[8] See especially Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 217ff.; Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk. Das Problem des "Militarismus" in Deutschland*, vol. 1, *Die altpreußische Tradition (1740–1890)* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1954), 207ff. The best history of Prussia and its dynasty is Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

[9] Wilhelm Deist, "Kaiser Wilhelm II in the context of his military and naval entourage," in *Kaiser Wilhelm II, New Interpretations: The Corfu Papers*, ed. John C.G. Röhl and Nicolaus Sombart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 169–92; Isabel V. Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1888–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 175–235; John C.G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II: The Kaiser's Personal Monarchy, 1888–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 159–66.

Fig. 1.1 Map of the German Empire, 1871–1918. (© German Historical Institute, Washington, DC/James Retallack, 2007; cartography by Mapping Solutions, Alaska; with kind permission)

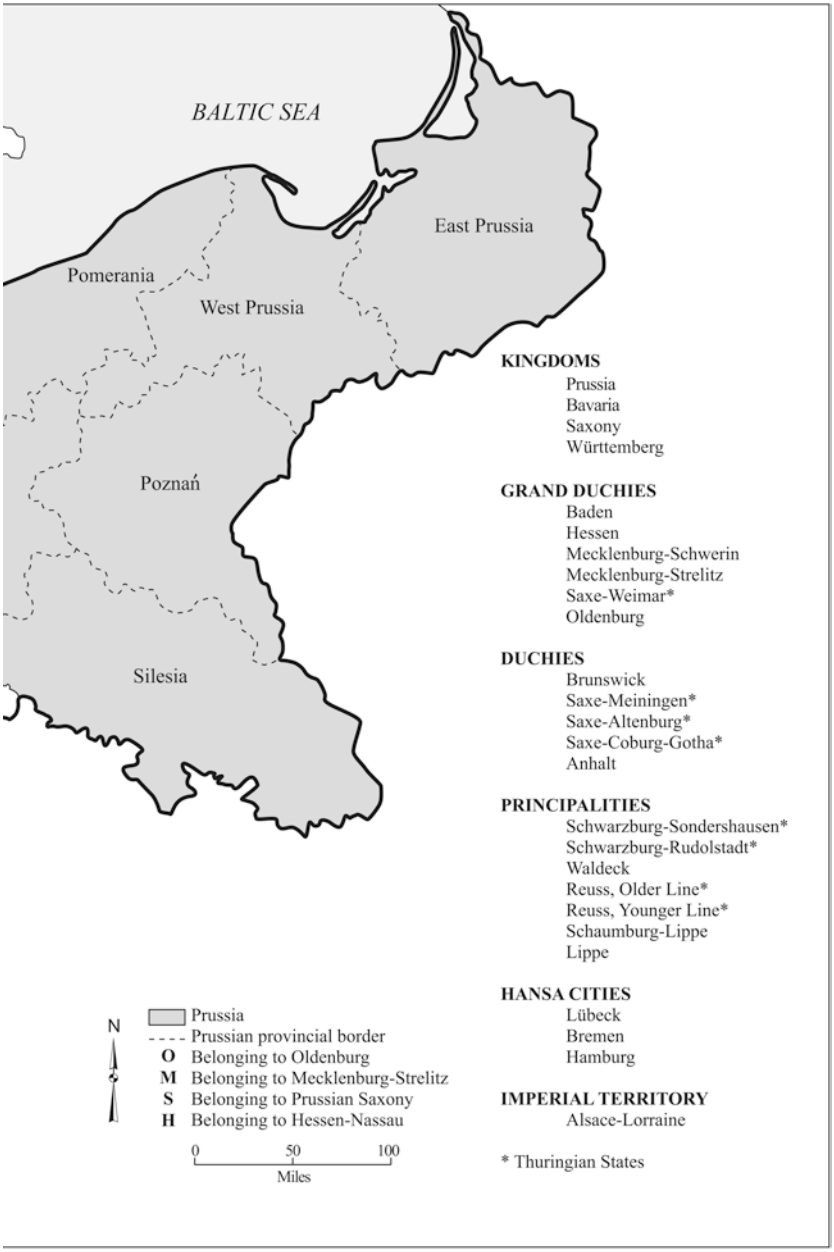

Fig. 1.1 (continued)

appointment in 1916 of Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff—Germany's "silent dictators"—to the *Oberste Heeresleitung*, or Supreme Army Command.[10] This book nevertheless shows that the Kaiser's influence over military affairs and his control over the German army were limited long before the summer of 1914. The concessions that Bismarck had made to the non-Prussian kingdoms during unification meant that Wilhelm II and his predecessors shared command authority with the empire's other leading monarchs. In short, the Kaiser's *Kommandogewalt* was far less absolute than is often assumed.

Second, it adds to an expanding body of literature on the evolution and perseverance of monarchical institutions during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Over the last few decades, historians have explored the ways in which Europe's crowned heads and their families worked to maintain their relevance in an age increasingly defined by popularly elected parliaments, responsible governments, and extreme nationalism. Hereditary rule, conservatives believed, was threatened with extinction, and it was necessary for monarchs across Europe to abandon absolutism and integrate themselves into constitutional orders. There were several ways to do so. Some adopted new and unfamiliar roles, such as mediators between political parties or symbols of national integration.[11] Many also

[10] Wilhelm Deist, "Kaiser Wilhelm II. als Oberster Kriegsherr," in *Der Ort Kaiser Wilhelms II. in der deutschen Geschichte*, ed. John C.G. Röhl (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1991), 25–42; Isabel V. Hull, "Military culture, Wilhelm II, and the end of the monarchy in the First World War," in *The Kaiser: New Research on Wilhelm II's Role in Imperial Germany*, ed. Annika Mombauer and Wilhelm Deist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 235–58; Martin Kitchen, *The Silent Dictatorship: The Politics of the German High Command under Hindenburg and Ludendorff, 1916–1918* (London: Croom Helm, 1976); John C.G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II: Into the Abyss of War and Exile, 1900–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1108ff. For the Kaiser's continued ability to shape wartime decision-making, albeit in a limited way, see Holger Afflerbach, "Wilhelm II as Supreme Warlord in the First World War," *War in History* 5 (1998): 427–49.

[11] Martin Kirsch, *Monarch und Parlament im 19. Jahrhundert. Der monarchische Konstitutionalismus als europäischer Verfassungstyp – Frankreich im Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); Dieter Langewiesche, *Die Monarchie im Jahrhundert Europas. Selbstbehauptung durch Wandel im 19. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2013). For the pitfalls that accompanied the "nationalization" of monarchy, in particular the House of Hohenzollern, see Martin Kohlrausch, *Der Monarch im Skandal. Die Logik der Massenmedien und die Transformation der wilhelminischen Monarchie* (Berlin: Akademie, 2005); Martin Kohlrausch, "Loss of Control: Kaiser Wilhelm II, Mass Media, and the National Identity of the Second German Reich," in *Transnational Histories of the "Royal Nation,"* ed. Milinda Banerjee, Charlotte Backerra, and Cathleen Sarti (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 87–107.

placed a greater emphasis on the upbringing of their heirs, who were now expected to receive a well-rounded education and prove themselves as competent rulers before they ascended the throne. Armies had a major role in these public relations campaigns. Not only were monarchs eager to be seen by their publics as the foremost protectors of their realms by attending military parades and troop manoeuvres, but they insisted that their male relatives enter the officer corps of their armies or navies.[12] This book shows that the German Empire's lesser crowned heads took these military duties seriously, with the Kings of Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg not content simply to play the part of a military monarch. They viewed their command authority over their contingents as the last vestiges of their former sovereignty, and exercising this authority to its fullest possible extent and thereby preserving the martial image of their dynasties formed a crucial element in their efforts to justify their continued existence in the aftermath of unification. In other words, the Hohenzollern monarch was not the only "warrior king" in the German Empire.

Third and finally, this book broadens our knowledge of nation-building in Germany after 1871. Historians have suggested that a German identity emerged alongside, but never replaced, regional and state-based attachments during the nineteenth century. The latter were in large part the products of decades of state-building undertaken by governments that were eager to solidify their control over newly acquired territories and their populations following the Napoleonic Wars.[13] To be sure, Germany's integration proceeded rapidly after 1871. The crowning of an imperial monarch—the Kaiser—and the establishment of the Reichstag, whose members were elected on the basis of universal male suffrage, created common political symbols and institutions for the empire, while the 1870s

[12] Frank Lorenz Müller, *Royal Heirs in Imperial Germany: The Future of Monarchy in Nineteenth-Century Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Frank Lorenz Müller, *Die Thronfolger. Macht und Zukunft der Monarchie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Siedler, 2019); Miriam Magdalena Schneider, *The "Sailor Prince" in the Age of Empire: Creating a Monarchical Brand in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[13] Abigail Green, *Fatherlands: State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Abigail Green, "How did German Federalism Shape Unification?" in *Germany's Two Unifications: Anticipations, Experiences, Responses*, ed. Ronald Speirs and John Breuilly (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 122–38.

witnessed considerable progress towards breaking down the formidable economic and legal barriers that had long divided Germans.[14] It proved more difficult to wipe away small-state loyalties, however, and, as Celia Applegate and Alon Confino argue, Germans continued to understand the nation primarily through the lens of *Heimat*, a word that can be loosely translated as locality.[15] Even though one scholar has recently—and correctly—pointed out that the imperial German army was "anything but the army of a German nation-state," the historiography on nation-building in Germany following unification has largely ignored the significance of the empire's system of military federalism, in effect assuming that the army functioned as a "school of the nation" capable of transforming Bavarians, Prussians, Saxons, and Württembergers into Germans.[16] This assumption is wide of the mark. One of the central arguments of this book is that the German army's federal structure and the command authority of the non-Prussian monarchs ensured that dual loyalties coexisted among the men who served in its ranks. These dual loyalties, much like those of the German Empire's Alsatians, Danes, and Poles, were a thorn in the side of the Kaiser and his advisors until the end of the First World War.

[14] Katharine Anne Lerman, "Bismarckian Germany," in *Imperial Germany, 1871–1918*, ed. James Retallack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18–39, especially 31–34; Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany. Volume II: The Period of Consolidation, 1871–1880* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 149–53.

[15] Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990); Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Alon Confino, "Federalism and the *Heimat* Idea in Imperial Germany," in *German Federalism: Past, Present, Future*, ed. Maiken Umbach (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 70–90.

[16] Jorit Wintjes, "German Army Culture, 1871–1945," in *The Culture of Military Organizations*, ed. Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 100–20, especially 104–6. That decentralization has far more often than not characterized German military affairs is also one of the core arguments in Peter H. Wilson's recent—and sweeping—military history of German-speaking Europe since the sixteenth century. Peter H. Wilson, *Iron and Blood: A Military History of the German-Speaking Peoples since 1500* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2023). By contrast, scholars have questioned the German Empire's commonly accepted status as a nation-state. See, for example, Edward Ross Dickinson, "The German Empire: An Empire?" *History Workshop Journal* 66 (2008), 129–62; Philipp Ther, "Imperial instead of National History: Positioning Modern German History on the Map of European Empires," in *Imperial Rule*, ed. A.I. Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 47–66.

This book draws on source material in German archives. Among the most important sources that appear in the footnotes to the following pages are reports written by the envoys who were stationed in the German Empire's *Residenzstädte*, or court cities, between 1871 and 1918. Even after unification, and much like under the Holy Roman Empire and the German Confederation, relations between Germany's federal states continued to be the responsibility of professional diplomats. The extent of this sub-national diplomatic network was largely determined by geographical proximity and political necessity. Neighbouring Bavaria and Württemberg exchanged envoys with one another until the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. Saxony meanwhile preferred to conduct its relations with the distant Grand Duchy of Baden through its representative in Munich for much of the period covered in this study. By contrast, most states sent envoys to Berlin, where they simultaneously served as delegates to the *Bundesrat* (federal council), while Prussian diplomats could be found in state capitals across Germany.[17] Of equal importance for this book is the correspondence of the Bavarian, Saxon, and Württemberg *Militärbevollmächtigte*, or military plenipotentiaries, who were assigned to Berlin from the spring of 1867 onwards. In the absence of an imperial military administration, the non-Prussian governments tasked liaison officers with facilitating communication between the empire's four independent war ministries. If necessary, these officers were also expected to remind the Kaiser and his advisors that their monarchs had not renounced all their military authority during unification. The Prussian military attachés who were sent to Munich served a similar purpose. They were the link between the German army's two largest contingents and a symbol of the wartime power of command of the *Bundesfeldherr* (federal commander-in-chief) over Bavarian soldiers.[18]

Scholars have long recognized the importance of these sources. Because most of the Prussian army's records were destroyed during Allied bombing raids at the end of the Second World War, the reports of the Bavarian,

[17] Hans-Joachim Schreckenbach, "Innerdeutsche Gesandtschaften 1867–1945," in *Archivar und Historiker. Studien zur Archiv- und Geschichtswissenschaft zum 65. Geburtstag von Heinrich Otto Meisner*, ed. Staatliche Archivverwaltung im Staatssekretariat für innere Angelegenheiten (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1956), 404–28, especially 404–7. For the exchange of envoys between the empire's federal states, see Tobias C. Bringmann, *Handbuch der Diplomatie 1815–1963. Auswärtige Missionschefs in Deutschland und deutsche Missionschefs im Ausland von Metternich bis Adenauer* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 2001).

[18] Heinrich Otto Meisner, *Militärattachés und Militärbevollmächtigte in Preußen und im Deutschen Reich. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Militärdiplomatie* (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1957), 43–48.

Saxon, and Württemberg military plenipotentiaries—held in the state archives in Munich, Dresden, and Stuttgart, respectively—have provided historians with a window into the military affairs of the German Empire. Analyses of, for example, the "war council" of December 1912, where German leaders allegedly agreed to begin preparations for a continental war, as well as the mood among high-ranking German officers in the opening weeks of the First World War have greatly benefitted from the survival of these officers' reports.[19] The correspondence of Germany's envoys has also left scholars with a large collection of invaluable source material. The emergence of mass media and popular politics during the nineteenth century meant that diplomats had access to more information than when decisions had been made behind closed doors by a small group of royal advisors. Their reports therefore touched on a wide range of topics, including military affairs, while improvements in communications and transportation enabled them to write far more often to their superiors.[20] The observations of Germany's envoys, as well as those of Austria-Hungary and Britain, who likewise retained their posts in Munich, Dresden, and elsewhere, and whose insights are also scattered throughout this book, have been used to shed light on government decision-making, the mood of public opinion, the tone of the press, and the private attitudes and beliefs of ministers and monarchs across the German Empire.[21]

[19] Scholars who have made extensive use of these reports include Fritz Fischer, *Krieg der Illusionen. Die deutsche Politik von 1911 bis 1914* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1969), especially 232–41; John C.G. Röhl, "An der Schwelle zum Weltkrieg. Eine Dokumentation über den 'Kriegsrat' vom 8. Dezember 1912," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 21 (1977): 77–134; Bernd F. Schulte, "Neue Dokumente zu Kriegsausbruch und Kriegsverlauf 1914," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 25 (1979): 123–85. For an older example, see Karl Demeter, "Politische Berichte Ludwigs Frh. von Gebsattels, des Bayerischen Militärbevollmächtigten in Berlin 1905–1911," *Preußische Jahrbücher* 231 (1933): 24–39, 116–33.

[20] Markus Mösslang and Torsten Riotte, "Introduction: The Diplomats' World," in *The Diplomats' World: A Cultural History of Diplomacy, 1815–1914*, ed. Markus Mösslang and Torsten Riotte (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1–20.

[21] For example, see Hans-Jürgen Kremer, *Das Großherzogtum Baden in der politischen Berichterstattung der preußischen Gesandten 1871–1918*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1990–1992); Hans Philippi, *Das Königreich Württemberg im Spiegel der preußischen Gesandtschaftsberichte 1871–1914* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1972); James Retallack, "Reform or Revolution? British Envoys to Germany and the Culture of Diplomacy, 1816–1905," *German History* 31 (2013): 550–78; Karl Josef Trauner, "Das Großherzogtum Baden im Spiegel österreichisch-ungarischer Gesandtschaftsberichte (1870–1918)," in *Baden – 200 Jahre Großherzogtum. Vom Fürstenstaat zur Demokratie*, ed. Paul-Ludwig Weinacht (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2008), 153–62.

These sources have been used in conjunction with often-cited documentation, such as the memoranda and personal letters of senior military and political figures, to construct a detailed picture of the German Empire's system of military federalism. Chapter 2 looks at the origins and creation of this system during the Wars of Unification. The Prussian victory over Austria at the Battle of Königgrätz in July 1866 dramatically changed political realities in German-speaking Europe. Gone was the German Confederation, which had stood as a bulwark against French expansion ever since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, while the smaller states of northern Germany were either annexed by Prussia or compelled to join the new—and Prussian-dominated—North German Confederation. The states located south of the Main River were spared the same fate, though their governments soon signed secret alliances with Berlin that would see their armies placed under the King of Prussia's command in wartime. Despite the bleakness of their situation, the monarchs of Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg were unwilling to sell their sovereignty cheaply. The Saxons took advantage of their kingdom's status as the second-largest member of the North German Confederation to negotiate a military convention that preserved a portion of King Johann's *Kommandogewalt* and ensured that Saxon soldiers would serve together within the new North German army. Bavaria and Württemberg had even more room to manoeuvre, and their ministers were able to forge ahead with Prussian-style military reforms while at the same time refusing to consider closer ties with the North until the popular enthusiasm that accompanied the common German victory over France gave them no other choice. Even then, Bavarian and Württemberg leaders were far more determined than those of the smaller South German states to wring military concessions from Bismarck. The series of agreements that were reached at Versailles in November 1870 therefore completed the framework for a contingent-based army that would endure until the collapse of the German Empire at the end of the First World War.

Chapter 3 takes a closer look at the system of military federalism that was created as part of Germany's unification in 1871. By recognizing the Kaiser as *Bundesfeldherr*, the imperial constitution resolved one of the key problems that had dogged military affairs in the old German Confederation. The Kings of Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg nevertheless enjoyed the title of *Kontingentsherr*, or royal commander of a contingent, and they thereby retained the right to appoint their own officers, determine the garrisons for their own regiments, and design their own soldiers' uniforms. Their contingents were also self-contained: with a few exceptions,

German soldiers completed their time "with the colours" close to home and alongside men who spoke the same regional dialect, ate the same food, and possessed the same allegiances and prejudices. Because an imperial war ministry was never established, and since independent military administrations in Munich, Dresden, and Stuttgart looked after the welfare and ensured the combat readiness of Bavarians, Saxons, and Württembergers, communications between the army's contingents were handled by military plenipotentiaries, who also functioned as guardians of their monarchs' remaining *Kommandogewalt*. Military federalism even shaped the army's festive culture. In the decades following unification, a common set of symbols and practices emerged among German soldiers, with the Kaiser's birthday becoming an important date in the festive calendar of not only Prussian, but also Bavarian, Saxon, and Württemberg regiments. Yet each of the four contingents also developed its own festive culture centred around the anniversaries of battles in which their soldiers had played a crucial role, while the military authority of the non-Prussian kings, in particular their right to appoint ceremonial colonels, or *Regimentschefs*, allowed these monarchs to remain at the forefront of a tradition that had the potential to overcome the institutional divides between Prussian and non-Prussian soldiers.

Military relations between Prussia and the non-Prussian kingdoms form the subject of Chap. 4. Some Prussian leaders were less than satisfied with the division of military authority that had been agreed upon during unification, and there were periodic attempts to consolidate the Kaiser's peacetime control over the non-Prussian contingents after 1871. The reactions of the non-Prussian governments varied. The Saxons, all too aware that their military convention rested on shaky constitutional ground, raised few objections while consciously avoiding any and all discussion of their monarch's *Kommandogewalt* with their Prussian counterparts. It seemed unwise, they argued, to enter into negotiations that would quite probably result in the kingdom losing more of its military autonomy. Because their kingdoms had retained more of their military independence, leaders in Munich and Stuttgart were more willing to rock the boat. The result was a series of confrontations between Berlin on the one hand and Munich and Stuttgart on the other, as Prussian proposals to set up imperial military structures, exchange officers between the state-based contingents, and introduce a common military justice code for the empire provoked fierce responses from south of the Main River. Bavarian and Württemberg opposition did not mean that Berlin was in the end forced to abandon these projects. In fact, Bismarck was able to secure Bavarian

acceptance to the appointment of Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm as inspector-general of southern Germany. Two decades later, Kaiser Wilhelm II and his namesake, King Wilhelm II of Württemberg, met at a hunting lodge and agreed to create a single seniority list to regulate officer promotions in their two contingents. Yet military centralization was in every case bought with concessions to Munich and Stuttgart. In other words, within Germany's system of military federalism, decision-making was not characterized by imperial decrees issued by the Kaiser, but rather by the finding of common ground between the empire's *Kontingentsherren*.

That Germany's lesser monarchs were determined to preserve their martial reputations is clear from Chap. 5. Over the course of the "long" nineteenth century, ruling houses across Europe found it necessary to search for new ways to justify their positions in societies that increasingly considered hereditary power and privilege to be anachronistic, with military service playing a crucial role in these monarchical public relations campaigns. However, by the second half of the nineteenth century, it no longer seemed advisable for sitting monarchs to lead their soldier-subjects into combat. Maintaining the image of the "heroic monarchy" therefore fell to these same monarchs' brothers, nephews, and sons. Placing these "warrior princes" in the upper echelons of the German army was not without its difficulties. The approval of the King of Prussia, as Kaiser and *Bundesfeldherr*, was required for most of the army's senior command positions, and he could name his own male relatives to the rank of inspector-general or corps commander with relative ease. He was less willing to do the same when it came to members of non-Prussian ruling houses. These men, Kaiser Wilhelm II and his advisors were convinced, represented a danger to the German army's cohesion. Not only might non-Prussian warrior princes be unwilling to obey the *Bundesfeldherr*'s orders, but they could also convince the men under their command to do likewise, especially if those men belonged to their own contingents. Unsurprisingly, Wilhelm II's reluctance to further the military careers of Leopold of Bavaria, Albrecht of Württemberg, and Friedrich of Baden created considerable ill-will at the courts in Munich, Stuttgart, and Karlsruhe. His eventual consent to the appointment of the Bavarian and Württemberg—but not Badenese—warrior princes to some of the German army's most important command posts at the same time left little doubt that a hierarchy existed within the empire's system of military federalism.

Chapter 6 looks at how military federalism encouraged fears about dual loyalties throughout the German army. The Kings of Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg were not the only German monarchs to have wrung

concessions from Bismarck during unification. In the years after the Austro-Prussian War, some of the empire's smallest states had also negotiated military conventions that guaranteed their rulers certain military rights. To be sure, the rulers of these states, which included Baden, Hesse-Darmstadt, Oldenburg, and others, were forced to surrender their *Kommandogewalt* to the King of Prussia, while their armies thereafter became regiments, divisions, and corps in the Prussian contingent. Germany's grand dukes, dukes, and princes nevertheless retained a voice, albeit a limited one, in military decision-making, especially when it came to the administration of military justice and the location of garrisons for units recruited within their own states. Even this limited voice was enough to cause concern in Berlin, and in the decades after 1871, Prussian leaders feared that soldiers from their own contingent—which, in many ways, resembled a contingent of contingents—possessed greater loyalty to their own monarchs than to the *Bundesfeldherr*. Religious and small-state loyalties in the Bavarian and Saxon contingents presented an even greater problem for leaders in Berlin. Military federalism had placed limits on the Kaiser's peacetime *Kommandogewalt*, and there was little that the Prussian authorities could do to prevent perceived "enemies of the empire"—Catholics, Jews, and Hanoverians—from undermining the loyalty of their comrades-in-arms. With limited means to pressure Dresden and Munich into modifying their personnel policies, Prussian leaders were forced to simply wait and hope that their non-Prussian counterparts would eventually come around to their way of thinking.

How this army of contingents fared during the First World War is the subject of Chap. 7. In August 1914, Bavarians, Prussians, Saxons, and Württembergers went off to the battlefield in self-contained units and, for the most part, under the command of officers from their own kingdoms, some of whom were warrior princes. Once at the front, German soldiers were periodically visited by monarchs who were determined to perform their role as *Kontingentsherren* despite having temporarily transferred their command authority to the Kaiser. The scope and intensity of the fighting nevertheless placed enormous strain on the army's federal structure. Non-Prussians complained about the arrogant attitudes and callous behaviour of their Prussian comrades, while the Bavarian, Saxon, and Württemberg military plenipotentiaries encountered difficulties when carrying out their duties as guardians and go-betweens behind the front. More seriously, the efforts of the Supreme Command to replace enormous casualties and respond to rapidly developing situations in distant theatres led to the "mixing" of the contingents, and it appeared as though

the crucible of war was at last forging a genuine "school of the nation." Yet pressure from Munich, Dresden, and Stuttgart soon dovetailed with concerns about the morale of the soldiers in the trenches to produce a change of course. In the autumn of 1916, and as Germany sought to navigate one of the most serious crises of the war, the newly appointed deputy chief of staff, General Erich Ludendorff, put a halt to the mixing of the contingents and promised to restore—as far as possible—the army's federal structure. Ludendorff thereby calmed fears across non-Prussian Germany that wartime exigencies would pave the way for military centralization once peace returned. As a result, when German leaders began discussing changes to the army's organization in the last two years of the war, few went so far as to advocate for an imperial war ministry. Instead, and until defeat and revolution led to the "de-crowning" of the empire in the fall of 1918, this debate focused on the extension, rather than abolition, of the empire's military federalism.

This book is not a traditional military history. Readers expecting to find lengthy discussions of campaigns and engagements, detailed orders of battle, or in-depth analyses of tactics and weapons should look elsewhere. It instead re-examines the ideas, individuals, and structures that shaped Germany's military affairs between the Wars of Unification and the end of the First World War. In the process, it challenges the image of the imperial German army as a monolithic institution, as the personal instrument of the Kaiser, and as composed of men who thought, felt, and acted solely as Germans. Reality, as always, was more complicated.

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