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GERMAN WAR VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR MEMBERSHIP

The following report reflects the opinion and the thinking of the several veterans' organizations and of various Federal Government officials interested in veterans' affairs. The factual data have been obtained from the organizations themselves, the Blank Office, and the Ministry of Interior, Office for the Protection of the Constitution. It is to be noted that exact membership numbers were in most cases unavailable since the organizations themselves are unsure of their exact number and are inclined to exaggerate it. The government has been unable to obtain correct figures and has made round estimates on the basis of information at hand.

TRADITIONAL SOCIAL FACTORS

In considering the veterans' associations in Germany, it is necessary to understand some of the social forces behind them in order to more properly estimate their growth and importance. Western Germany with a population of 50 million has 30 million of her people in cities and towns with populations of 50,000 and under. In this population majority are hundreds of smaller towns of varying size, and it is in the 'Ortschaften' of 10,000 and under where the 'Kriegerverbände' (veterans' associations) derive their greatest strength.

For generations before the last war in all these 'Ortschaften' of rural and suburban Germany, as well as in small cities, a man, if he were not entirely unacceptable socially, was a member of one of the traditionally social organizations; the 'Feuerwehr', (volunteer fire department); the 'Schutzverein', ( Rifle clubs); (or 'Turnverein', gym clubs, depending on the locality); or the 'Kriegerverband', (veterans' association). Of these organizations, the veterans' group was one of the most important and in some regions certainly the strongest. The 'Schutzverein' and the 'Turnverein' distribution was influenced somewhat by religious denomination, and membership was also more expensive. The 'Feuerwehr' was, of course, specialized and thus restricted, whereas the veterans' organization enjoyed a greater overall membership and basked in the glory of a military state where, even in the complex and rigid German social structure, a 2nd Lieutenant was on a social par with the 'Oberbürgermeister'. Their membership growth during the 120's and early 30's was, however, restricted as a result of the abolishment of conscription in the Weimar Republic.

At the present time there is an apparent lack of interest in veterans' associations on the part of the rank and file ex-soldier since, with the

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GENERAL TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS

Veterans' organizations in Western Germany may be grouped into three categories, namely:

1. General, over-all veterans' organizations,
2. Traditional soldiers' organizations,
3. Special interest organizations and welfare groups.

General, over-all type

Under the general, over-all type of veterans' organizations are the following:

1. Verband Deutscher Soldaten, Bund ehemaliger Wehrmachtangehöriger und ihrer Hinterbliebenen (VDS/BvB), League of German Soldiers/Association of former members of the army entitled to pensions and their surviving dependents.

Membership: 100,000 (VDS figures)  
 Chairman: Admiral v.D. Gottfried Hansen, Kiel, VDS, HQS Bonn  
 Periodical: "Die Deutsche Soldatenzeitung" (edition A & B see below)

2. Reichskriegerbund "Kyffhaeuser", Reichs Veterans Organization Kyffhaeuser

Membership: 50 - 60,000  
 Chairman: General v.D. P. Reinhard, HQS Wehrmacht  
 Periodical: Der Kyffhaeuser (Presently out of print but to begin soon)

3. Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontkämpfer (Steel Helmet) Organization of Front Soldiers

Membership: 42,000  
 Chairman: Professor Dr. Lehmann, HQS Bonn  
 Periodical: Der Stahlhelm (Presently out of print)

4. Deutscher Frontkämpferbund, German Front Soldiers Association

Membership: small - insignificant  
 Chairman: General Fritz Geyr von Schweppenburg, Munich  
 Capt. Cavalry Rittm. Seegers, Hamburg-Blankenese

Aside from fostering comradeship and assisting each other, the above organizations have as their broad goals some or all of the following aims:

1. Release of German soldiers sentenced by War Crimes Courts excepting those which German courts would acknowledge as definite war criminals.
2. Payment by the Government of the professional soldier's pension.

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(Only 20%-30% of the full amount is now being paid and that only to those who are unable to work.)

3. Obtain positions in new German army contingent for former professional soldiers.
4. Eliminate the defamation of the German soldier.
5. Promote EUC and campaign for army for defense against East.

Traditional Organizations

No exact membership data can be obtained on the traditional organizations, but the government estimates that the divisional groups number approximately 2 - 5,000 members each and the regimental groups number about 1,000 each. Nevertheless, all the traditional organizations together do not exceed the total membership of the VDS and the Kyffhaeuser Bund. There are also many dual memberships among the two categories. Some have been like street fires which flared into existence after the war and have become extinct just as quickly.

The traditional soldiers' organizations which endeavor to unite veterans who served together or had common interests during the war are the following:

1. Grossdeutschland  
Maj. a.D. H. Spethar, Essen ✓  
Gen. a.D. v. Mantuffel, Neuhagen/Weser ✓  
Membership: 3 - 5,000
2. Afrika Korps  
Gen. a.D. Cruwell, Essen-Stettwald ✓  
Gen. a.D. v. Eisebeck, Iserlohn ✓  
Membership: 4 - 8,000  
Periodical: "Die Gasse"
3. Verband der Fliegerkorpsangehörigen  
Kehrenberg, Lüneburg ✓
4. Verband der Kraftfahrtruppen  
Gen. Gutzeit, Hamburg-Ohlstedt ✓
5. Verband der technischen Truppen  
Oberst a.D. Langhans, nad Reichenhall ✓  
Langhans, Hermann (see page 207)
6. Verband der Nebeltruppen  
Gen. v. Blumher, Celle ✓

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7. Kameradschaftsbund der Wehrmachtskraftfahrer

W. Jonske, Hamburg, Blankenese

8. Notgemeinschaft ehemaliger Jagdflieger

G. P. Eder, Frankfurt/Main

9. Vereinigung ehemaliger Verwaltungsbeamten, Association of former Administrative officers

R. Bobbe, Landau/Pfalz

10. Zentralverband der Berufsunteroffiziere, Central Association of professional non-commissioned officers

Elsenschank, Siebstadt

11. Gemeinschaft Deutscher Ritterkreuzträger - "Hilfswerk Ritterkreuz", Association of German Knights' Cross Bearers "Knight's Cross Relief Work"

Membership: 50 at its height - now defunct

12. Bund der Träger der Waffen-technik, Association of military technicians

13. Fallschirmjäger

Oberstleutnant Lauri Hoppe, Witten a. d. Luhe,

Membership: 4 - 6,000

Periodical: "Die grünen Hähne", Hamburg "Der Deutsche Fallschirmjäger"

14. Kameradschaftsbund ehemaliger Eisen-Artilleristen

Gen. Spiess, Passau, Sp. Artillerie, C.P.

Feldwebel H. Wedel, Hamburg

15. I. Panzer Division

Gen. Pape, Düsseldorf

16. II. Panzer Division

Gen. v. Wietersheim, Frankfurt/Main

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WAFER SS ORGANIZATIONSWAFER SS

The Waffer SS is in a much more favorable position now than it was right after the war when the Nuremberg War Criminals Tribunal declared it a criminal organization. In the first post-war years the former leaders and members of the SS, if not in Allied internment camps, kept quietly in the background. After 1949 they cautiously started a rehabilitation campaign, directly and indirectly. Their policy and development advanced in the following stages:

1. Campaign for the rehabilitation of their "honor" and against the alleged "degradation". This was done by rightist papers as well as by the veterans' organizations, i.e., the VDS, whose organ, the "Deutsche Soldatenzeitung", is published by former SS General Steiner. Their arguments were largely identical with those used in the "release-the-war-criminals campaign":

- a. The so-called "Korva Argument", that certain phases of war make drastic measures against guerillas necessary.
- b. Allies vs. Bolshevism - The SS were the first to erect a bulwark against Bolshevism.
- c. SS were first to practice unity of Europeans.
- d. Difference between Waffen SS and the "Allgemeine SS" stressed. Thousands were conscripted into the SS and had no choice as to service.

They have been trying to obtain the same treatment in respect to jobs, pensions, and status as civil servants as the other Wehrmacht veterans and professional soldiers who are accorded under Article 131 of the Basic Law. The SS was exempted in the first legislative act on the settlement of claims under Article 131. An amendment to this exemption is now being sought.

The Blank Office estimates that during the war there were 950,000 Waffen SS, of which approximately 300,000 fall or are still prisoners of Russia which leaves about 600,000 scattered around Germany. They have organized the HIAG, derived from *Hilfsgemeinschaft Auf Gegenseitigkeit*, (mutual benefit association). The HIAG consists of various centers in larger cities where former Waffen SS can come for assistance. The largest of these is in Munich and Hamburg. It is estimated by the government that of these remaining 600,000 only about 5,000 are organized in the HIAG.

The Federal Government has already given them some recognition, as have other veteran associations, and is concerned particularly about the younger SS members, because overtures are constantly being made to them from the East Zone to become East Zone Volkspolizei, and some have gone over. The Waffen SS has a periodical called the "Wiking-Ruf" published in Hannover and whose main purpose is reportedly



for supporting the missing persons search service and relief work. Recently meetings by Waffen SS showed new tactics of showing "loyalty" which seems to be their "Realpolitik". They do not want to be known as extreme rightists and hope to be considered for jobs in the future army. Charges that they were in contact with the Haumann group and his Nazi Fuhrungsring were denied by SS Generals Gille and Hauser.

## II. Fuhrungsring Ehemaliger Soldaten

The Communist efforts to infiltrate veterans' organizations and to win them for the "Ohne mich" movement started right after Korea. A Communist-front veteran organization was founded called the "Fuhrungsring ehemaliger Soldaten", (Leading Ring of Former Soldiers). Their influence has not been any too great and is decreasing in the same proportion as the support of the Government by the veterans is increasing. At its height it had only a few hundred people who appeared publicly and no exact figure is known.

### MEMBERS TO UNITE

At the present time the more important veteran organizations of all three groups have already formed a loose, working committee which meets regularly to discuss problems, mutual aims and working procedures. This loose confederation founded in 1953 is called "Die Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Kriegsofer und Kriegsbeschadigtenverbände" (Working Association of War Invalid and War Veterans' Organizations). Member organizations of this "Arbeitsgemeinschaft" are the Afrika-Korps, VdV, BRKK, Kyffhauser, VDS/EwW, RAD and the Jagdflieger groups. The Stahlhelm has applied for entrance into the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft" but has been refused until it can prove its non-political character.

The "Arbeitsgemeinschaft" has issued public statements that it is not a preparatory step to an overall "roof" organization for veterans' societies, nor will it become one under an assumed name. At its last meeting the members set out as their mutual tasks the following:

1. Support the relief of war invalids, late returnees and professional soldiers through their respective organizations.
2. Use all means to bring about and hasten the return of war prisoners and unjustly sentenced war criminals.
3. Support the German Red Cross missing persons search service.
4. Support the grave care service.

In a previous meeting this organization also dropped from their aims the task of removing the so-called defamation from the German soldier.

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