

**Alaric Searle: Wehrmacht Generals, West German Society, and the Debate on Rearmament 1949-1959, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers 2003, XVIII + 316 S., ISBN 0-275-97968-7, GBP 52,00**

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During the First World War, Georges Clemenceau is reported to have remarked that "war is too important to be left to the generals." To paraphrase the former French prime minister, one might describe Alaric Searle's thesis as "rearmament is too important to be left to the politicians." A revised manuscript of his doctoral dissertation submitted to the Freie Universität Berlin, this work explores the role and key influence of former Wehrmacht generals and admirals in the rebuilding and rearming of the Federal Republic's armed forces in the decade between 1949 and 1959. Employing a chronological and thematic approach the work focuses on the role of former Wehrmacht generals, institutional and organizational structures, pressure groups, the press, and legal trials to trace the development of military and political policy associated with rearmament from the perspective of the Generalität as well as the public reception of this issue within West German society.

The impetus for the study appears to be two-fold. On the one hand, Searle notes that the military and political discussion surrounding West German rearmament "is a chapter of German history that has remained largely concealed from the view of Anglo-Saxon historians" in large part based on the availability of "few English language works" on the topic. (1) In contrast, he notes the extensive German language treatment of this topic, including most prominently the work of the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt or MGFA. On the other hand, Searle's work is not intended to provide merely an English language version of existing interpretations, but rather to offer a new interpretation by emphasizing the critical contribution, both formal, and, especially, informal, of former Wehrmacht senior leaders in the process of German rearmament and the creation of the Bundeswehr. The contributions of the generals emerged from numerous sources including the Blank Office, the Gehlen Organization, veterans groups and Traditionsverbände, their public proclamations, and the legal trials of former Wehrmacht senior leaders (for example Otto Ernst Remer, Ferdinand Schörner, and Hasso von Manteuffel).

In a clearly outlined introduction, Searle states that the work's three-fold purpose is to examine the role of former Wehrmacht generals in the political and military debates surrounding rearmament, their role in military planning, and the perception of the generals and their involvement in this process by West German society. As the title implies,

the former Wehrmacht generals take center stage in this account, but the political realities of Allied occupation and the widespread feeling within German society illustrated by the slogans "ohne mich" and "nie wieder Krieg," forced the generals to avoid the spotlight and instead to act behind the scenes. In his examination of the Generalität, he posits three questions for investigation. First, "How much unity existed in the General Officer Corps on the rearmament issue in the formative years of the Federal Republic?" Second, "Did the General Officer Corps reject military reform, try to avoid political control, and reassert its interests in opposition to democratic practice?" Third, "What role did the generals play in the debates on the National Socialist past within the Officer Corps and society in general?" According to Searle, the issue of rearmament was the red thread and the overarching issue informing the answers to each of these questions.

The central actors in Searle's account include almost thirty former field marshals and generals, mostly from the Army. It is these military men, especially Hans Speidel, Adolf Heusinger, Reinhard Gehlen, Franz Halder, Hasso von Manteuffel, Count Gerhard von Schwerin, and Baron Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg, and not politicians that emerge as the lead players. They are a group of men linked in part by shared experience in the postwar period as prisoners of war, a common antipathy to Bolshevism, a belief in the necessity of German rearmament, as well as a traditional sense of belonging to a closed fraternity. Searle provides an excellent overview of a group of men faced with a pragmatic imperative demanding the outward display of unity, but divided internally along generational lines between the "apolitical" generals of the Reichswehr and the 'young guns' who achieved flag rank under the National Socialist dictatorship. At a further level, experiential issues separated "desk generals" from those who had served at the front, while the subject of the oath to Hitler and the representation of the men of July 20th 1944 as 'traitors' or 'men of honor' provided a further source of division and disagreement. In this respect, the picture that emerges of the Generalität is one of a group of men bound together more by a sense of Burgfrieden than that of Nibelungentreue.

Despite their internal differences, the majority of the generals are united in their beliefs concerning the necessity of rearmament based on their real or imagined fear of the Soviet threat. While most historians agree that Konrad Adenauer viewed security issues and rearmament as a necessary step in securing German sovereignty and integration into the western community, Searle shows that the generals viewed the issue in terms of a bargaining chip for resuming their professional careers, and, perhaps most importantly, for "solving the war criminals question, and the ending of the defamation of the German soldier" resulting from the Wehrmacht's activities during the Second World War. (64) In the case of the last, this issue had psychological and social implications for generals ostracized from post-war German society as well as direct material ramifications for pensions and future employment. If both Adenauer and the generals recognized the potential leverage offered by German rearmament for achieving their objectives, then this still does not answer the question as

to whether Adenauer, despite his well acknowledged disdain for the military, manipulated these men to achieve his political goals or was manipulated by them. Searle's account clearly leads the reader to the latter conclusion, but a more direct discussion of this issue would certainly strengthen the argument as would an expanded discussion of the role of the political parties, especially the SPD, in the rearmament debate. In a minor point, Searle identifies a "subtle shift" in the position of the Allies towards favoring rearmament after May 8, 1950 and prior to the invasion of South Korea by the North on June 1950, but does not explore the rationale behind this shift in Allied attitudes. (54)

For most historians, the contributions of Heusinger and Speidel to the formulation of military policy will come as no surprise; however, their relationship with Reinhard Gehlen and his intelligence organization and the significant role played by Gehlen behind the scenes in the formulation of rearmament policy and in the fall of Schwerin are two key contributions of Searle's work. In fact, Searle highlights the close relationship enjoyed by Gehlen and key members of the Generalität, especially with the "triumvirate" of Heusinger, Speidel and General der Infanterie Hermann Foertsch. Similarly, the function of former generals with the Operational History (German) Section (later Control Group) in providing the Blank Office with copies of their studies provides an additional perspective on the importance of this group and their indirect influence on the formulation of military policy after the founding of the Federal Republic.

Searle also provides a revealing discussion of the dispute between Geyr and Foertsch in 1950/51, an event he sees as being a key exemplar in the debate about responsibility for the crimes committed under National Socialism and an affair largely overlooked in other histories. Likewise, he addresses the "undisguised hostility" of the majority of generals for Schwerin and their role in his eventual dismissal by Adenauer. Both discussions provide important insights into the moral and ethical fault lines among the generals with respect to the crimes committed during the Third Reich. (52) In fact, throughout Searle's account, the figure of Geyr von Schweppenburg emerges as a prominent voice in contesting the views of generals who he associated with a "neo-Nazi" or a "neo-fascist line." (153-154) Therefore, one might question Searle's conclusion concerning the rehabilitation of the generals under democracy, especially of Hasso von Manteuffel, and his statement concerning their "change in values" as overly optimistic. (282) For example, Searle's contention that "there were at least as many basically pro-democratic generals opposed to the Frießner-Guderian group as there were supporters" underplays the pragmatic rationale for opposition while the phrase "basically pro-democratic" offers less than a ringing endorsement. (175) In addition, the use of comments by Franz Halder describing Frießner as "an ambitious and cunning type of Nazi General" loses some of its impact when one finds that the footnote refers to Halder's comments in a U.S. Army Counter Intelligence Corps file without an indication to whom this statement was made. In fairness to Searle, based on the evidence provided, it is clear that most of the generals adapted themselves to the realities of a democratic system, but whether they embraced the values of

this system is quite another issue, especially for generals who wondered as late as August 1953 whether they might be allowed to keep the swastika on medals they earned under National Socialism for public wear.

In the final analysis, Searle provides an important examination of the role of former Wehrmacht generals in the seminal event of early post-war German history, the rearmament of the Federal Republic. While one may question the degree of influence exerted by the generals, one must recognize Searle's contribution in bringing this issue to center stage and providing an important additional perspective for judging the manner in which West Germany went from pariah to partner a mere decade after the most destructive war in European history. If the Hauptmann von Koenig established the image of a militarized Prussian society whereby a social underling becomes a man of importance simply by donning a reserve officer's uniform then it is perhaps fitting that Searle's work offers the anti-thesis to this trope in which ex-Generals are forced to wear business suits and act covertly behind the scenes in order to influence policy. This is a work that deserves a wide readership among historians of modern Germany as well as among political scientists concerned with the influence of interest groups and organizational behavior on the development of government policy.

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