



German History in Documents and Images

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Decree by Reich Minister of War and Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht Werner von Blomberg on Political Education and Instruction for the Wehrmacht (January 30, 1936)

During the Weimar Republic, the national-conservative leadership corps of the Reichswehr had successfully resisted every attempt to democratize the armed forces. Hitler initially enjoyed broad support within these military circles, since his anti-democratic, anti-Bolshevist program promised to do away with the Versailles Treaty and thereby allow for rearmament and military expansion. In this respect, it is hardly surprising that Germany withdrew from the League of Nations and the Geneva Disarmament Conference in 1933 at the behest of then-Reichswehr Minister Werner von Blomberg (1878-1946). It is important to note, however, that Hitler's foreign policy goals depended on his absolute control of the military. To this end, Hitler had the Reichswehr swear an oath to him personally on the very day of Hindenburg's death (August 2, 1934). A year later, he issued the "Law for the Restoration of the Wehrmacht," which introduced mandatory military service. At the same time, he appointed himself Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht and gave Blomberg the new subordinate title of Reich Minister of War and Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht. Blomberg's new title reflects a number of name changes that occurred in 1935, when the Reichswehr (which can be translated as the Defensive Land Forces) became the Wehrmacht (the Armed Forces), and the Reichsmarine (Reich Navy) became the Kriegsmarine (War Navy). With these changes, the last vestiges of the Reichswehr, which had been conceived as a purely defensive army, were eliminated, and Hitler's goal of building an aggressive, offensive army became perfectly clear.

Starting in 1934, members of the army were given political instruction, the aim being to spread National Socialist teachings, particularly among the young officers. The following decree shows that Blomberg wanted to institute uniform standards for political-ideological education and to make it mandatory for the entire army. Externally, this new politicization of the military was made visible by the new Reich eagle, which now held a swastika in its talons. Members of the army were obliged to wear it.

Berlin, January 30, 1936

The Reich Minister of War
and Commander-in-Chief of
the *Wehrmacht*

RE: Political Education and Instruction for the *Wehrmacht*

To
the Commander-in-Chief of the Army,
the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy,
the Reich Minister of Aviation and
the Commander in Chief of the *Luftwaffe* [Air Force]

The officer corps of the *Wehrmacht* can only fulfil its task of leadership in the nation and State if it adopts the National Socialist ideology which gives direction to the life of the German nation and State and appropriates it intellectually totally and with conviction. Thus, I consider the uniform political education and instruction of the officer corps of all three sections of the *Wehrmacht* to be particularly important.

To ensure that it is carried out I hereby issue the following regulation for the implementation of political instruction:

(a) In the War Colleges of the Army, the Air Force Colleges, and the Naval College at least two hours per month will be devoted to political instruction within the context of the part of the course dealing with defense organization (Army organization, service matters). Furthermore, every opportunity which occurs in the course of duty or instruction must be seized to deal with the interrelationships between people, State and [the Nazi] movement.

Those officers detailed to carry out political instruction will be sent on short combined courses for the three sections of the *Wehrmacht* at suitable moments (during breaks in the instruction) and will receive regular guidance on course structure and literature.

As a supplement to this instruction there will be special political lectures by outside personalities.

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Source of English translation: Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds., *Nazism, 1919-1945*, Vol. 3: *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001, p. 33.

Source of original German text: MGFA (Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt)/DZ: W01-5/185; reprinted in Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *Das Heer und Hitler: Armee und Nationalsozialistisches Regime 1933-1940*. Stuttgart, 1969, pp. 618-19.